Dissent in social work: Troubling the status quo

Dissent, as the right and capacity to disagree, challenge orthodox views, and articulate alternative ways of seeing and knowing, is the cornerstone of an open society. Dissenting analysis troubles the status quo by questioning the official truths which favour vested interests and perpetuate structural inequality. As the retiring Auckland law professor, Jane Kelsey, reminded us in her recent valedictory address, the liberal legal and political system is built around a particular distribution of rights and freedoms consistent with capitalist social and economic relations.

The common law system, and doctrines of family, taxation, contract, criminal or constitutional law, serves a hegemonic function to normalise and sustain unequal power relations. And while ideological conventions of "equality before the law", "due process" and the "rule of law" mitigate the excesses of raw power, they also legitimise and institutionalise those inequalities (Kelsey, 2022).

Social workers interact with people who experience oppression in various shapes and forms. They have the opportunity, at least at times, to advocate and agitate for systemic reform: to speak truth to power. This function has become both more challenging and more important as welfare programmes have contracted and political settings have shifted, in various forms, to the political right in contemporary times.

Uncertainty has escalated in the face of global pandemic threat, environmental degradation and geopolitical conflict. This climate of insecurity tends to foster simplistic, racist and, in some instances, neo-fascist prescriptions for social and political reform. It is important to identify the deceptive appeal of far-right ideology in this context and to recognise it for what it is: a mix of regressive and fear-driven ideas that does not serve the interests of those who are drawn to it.

Narrow and distorted populist beliefs can be comforting in the face of overwhelming angst, but such dogma merely serves the interests of those who produce and market it: it is a product of deception and disinformation as opposed to dissent in the sense of the critical democratic right to name, and explain, social injustice. The articles in this Special Issue speak to the issue of dissenting social work voices in a variety of important areas: consent and dissent and the fracturing of political forces; dissent against public health responses to Covid-19 and populism; our challenging history in social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand; social work dissent about the politics of professional regulation; confronting the climate crisis; arguments about the end of social work; and operationalising of dissent to challenge the "hostile environment" for migrant children and families.

We start this issue with an invited commentary. In 2021, the *International Journal of Social Welfare* described Paul Michael Garrett as "probably the most important critical social work theorist in the English-speaking world". For many years, he has been a member of the editorial collective of the socialist, feminist, and anti-racist journal *Critical Social Policy*. In 2021, he published an important new book, *Dissenting Social Work: Critical Theory, Resistance, and Pandemic* (Garrett, 2021a). He is a member of the Royal Irish Academy. We are delighted to include Paul's introductory words for this themed issue.

In a study of the views of executive directors and managers of social services in a large

Canadian city, Donna Baines describes how practices that engage with social justice can emerge within systems that are otherwise hostile to social solidarity. She suggests that dissent is resilient to neoliberalism and that narratives of dissent can contribute to the de-legitimatisation of oppressive social structures and the promotion of emancipatory ways of working. In the context of the growing recognition of historic harms committed against Indigenous children by the Canadian Residential School system, Baines highlights how the process of indigenisation—"in which Indigenous knowledge systems are brought together with Western knowledge systems in order to transform spaces, places, and hearts"— can be understood as a core component of decolonisation, a practice that is increasingly central to dissenting social work, especially in the context of settler colonial states like Canada, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Joe Whelan's article shifts our focus to the climate crisis. In "From dissent to authoritarianism: What role for social work in confronting the climate crisis?" Against a backdrop of huge environmental and political challenges, Whelan poses two questions. Firstly, "what sustainable social policies should social work align with?" The answer to this locates climate justice as core to the task of social work. The second question builds on the answer to the first and asks, "does arriving at an adequate response require dissent?" Whelan examines the possibility of dissent alongside the potential for an authoritarian turn in the context of social work. He presents these ideas as tentative and intended to prompt conversation and debate as the climate crisis requires the profession to have some important and urgent conversations.

In "Pūao-te-Atu-tu and dissenting voices of change at New Zealand's oldest school of social work", Tamati Cairns and Leon Fulcher reflect on the learnings that can be taken from their intimate lived experience of Māori-centred, Ngāi Tūhoe endorsed, social

work education initiatives developed at the Victoria University School of Social Work. It is argued that teaching and curriculum reforms arising directly from the ground-breaking Pūao-te-Atu-tu of 1986 represented a deeply dissenting approach to the then status quo. It is further argued that vital lessons for current and future education practice, particularly for Māori, can be taken from the innovative nature of this programme and from the process by which it was eventually shut down, particularly in relation to a lack of appropriate fidelity to the relationship with Ngāi Tūhoe.

In "Social Work England: A regulator that has earned or collective dissent", Joe Hanley critiques social work regulation in England. It is argued that regulatory developments, spanning over a decade, have been ideologically driven and focused on narrowing the focus of the profession. Critical emphasis is directed at the make-up, mandate and performance of the current regulator: Social Work England (SWE). It is argued that this body has favoured an individualised interpretation of social problems and social work. Examples of the regulator seeking to manufacture consent and to appropriate professional representation are set out. Specific criticism is directed at the distorting effect of prescribed continuing professional development (CPD). Hanley proposes that widespread discontent could be mobilised into collective dissent in order to challenge the destructive influence of politically motivated regulation.

Christian Kerr and Nick Watts explore the very practical application of dissent in practice in "Against a bitter tide: How a small UK charity operationalises dissent to challenge the 'hostile environment' for migrant children and families". In the context of the work of a small UK Charity, Together with Migrant Children, the authors apply key facets of the theoretical basis for dissent, using case studies and practice-based reflections on challenges in practice under a very hostile immigration policy. Kerr and Watts explore both the challenges

and opportunities for dissent in social work practice, whether in statutory, non-statutory and wider community development settings. They explore, through practical examples, how dissent can bring *wins* situated in an approach of "cumulative structural and tactical change" that favours dissent as essential to democracy and human rights.

The commentary by Liz Beddoe highlights the complexity of the concept of dissent, noting that it can manifest in forms of resistance to state action founded on populist neoliberal, individualism. The example she explores is the opposition to vaccine mandates introduced by the Aotearoa New Zealand government in August 2021. Beddoe argues that, while mainstream social work values embrace and support collectivist public health measures that offer social protection, social workers must also try to make sense of the angry, anti-vaccination/anti-mandate protests and occupations that emerged in 2022. She mobilises social theory to explore how two different neoliberal tropes were at play during the pandemic: a government-led, pro-science, social democratic version that was as much about protecting the economy as the population; and another more populist, libertarian, anti-authoritarian version—mixed with some far-right, Neo-Nazi and religious zealots—that argued for freedom and human rights enveloped in a mass of public health disinformation. At the same time, in the context of the settler colonial state of Aotearoa New Zealand, Beddoe also consders why some Māori people may have been caught up in the anti-vaccine movement. Beddoe's commentary is a wake-up call to social workers, not only to cleave closely to the progressive, collectivist, social work values that define us, but also to stay alert to the continuing challenge of a far-right, fundamentalist populist movement that may emerge in other sites of social struggle.

In a viewpoint piece, Caroline McGregor explores what we mean by *social work* and by *dissenting social work*. The context for her commentary includes the recent debate between Maylea (2021) and Garret (2021b) concerning whether social work has passed its shelf life as a progressive profession, "… is beyond repair and must instead be pushed into the sea" (Maylea, 2021, p. 773), or whether it can be reframed as a *dissenting profession*, committed to social justice and social change (Garret, 2021a,b). McGregor's position is to argue against what she sees as an unhelpful bifurcation between *radical* and *traditional* accounts of social work practice which she views as oversimplistic and misleading. Instead, she argues (borrowing from Philp, 1979) that we need to frame social work as *mediating the social* in a way that recognises the intimate connectedness between micro-level individual and family issues, and macro-level issues of social structure. In this way, she considers, social workers can also elucidate the connection, and maintain the balance, between the necessary work of social regulation (such as in child protection domains) and more rights-based practices.

In the second part of this issue, we present three additional articles and two research briefs. In an engaging article, the voices of social workers with criminal convictions are heard. In "Social workers with criminal convictions navigating the social work profession", Suzette Jackson and Ian Hyslop report on a 2019 study where 11 social workers with one or more criminal convictions were interviewed about their experiences with gaining registration in Aotearoa New Zealand. A consistent aspect of participant accounts was the need for clarity and consistency in the way social work education programmes, employers and the Social Workers Registration Board approach educating, registering, and employing people with criminal convictions.

We are pleased to include two very useful articles on the need for improvements in supporting autistic people in Aotearoa New Zealand. Both article authors note that the Aotearoa New Zealand literature on social work with autistic people is fairly sparse.

In "Environmental accessibility for autistic individuals: Recommendations for social work practice and spaces", Megan Malcolm presents a focused review of the literature to explore the role of social work with autistic individuals, and what is known about autism-friendly approaches, and accessible architecture. Malcolm uses the social model of disability and critical disability theory to make a case for social work advocacy for environmental accessibility for autistic individuals. Malcolm presents *The Environmental Accessibility Infographic* which aids the development of a built environment that is accessible for autistic people and others with sensory processing needs. Malcolm contends that accessibility strategies have the potential to positively impact social workers' practice with autistic people as they can guide change that will ensure their practice is autism-friendly and anti-oppressive.

In "The impact of individualised funding on the wellbeing of mothers raising an autistic child in Aotearoa New Zealand", Racheal Priestley, Polly Yeung, and Lareen Cooper present findings from a qualitative study of seven mothers in 2020 who were interviewed about their experiences of raising autistic children and how individualised funding has impacted on them. Key findings indicated that caring for an autistic child has an ongoing negative impact on mothers' overall wellbeing and the individualised funding did not seem to ease the stresses of caring. Priestly and her colleagues found that mothers raising an autistic child in Aotearoa New Zealand face complex funding systems. Current disability funding frameworks which focus on individuals rather than the family as the unit of care create barriers to support and family wellbeing. Priestly and colleagues urge social workers and policymakers to support more flexible and holistic support systems to meet the unique circumstances of each family.

In the first of two research briefs addressing aspects of self-care, "We need to talk about self-care (but not in the way you think)",

Allison Berkowitz explores the current literature for what it reveals about the frequency and methods by which social workers and students are engaging in self-care. Berkowitz discusses the benefits of, and barriers to, self-care. Through this review, a research gap is highlighted regarding the thoughts and feelings of social workers and students about self-care. Berkowitz urges the profession to talk more about self-care but it must also address the barriers faced by students and practitioners that may prevent full engagement in self-care, and the systemic reasons that lie behind these circumstances.

In a research brief, "The wounded social work student: A strength-based enquiry of personal loss experience and its impact on social work students' professional practice", Kathrin McInnerney and Sarah Wayland report on a phenomenological study that explored the *wounded healer* concept amongst Australian social work students who had experienced the death of a loved one. Using semi-structured interviews, final-year social work students were asked to reflect on the positive and negative impacts of their personal loss experience on their emerging professional social work practice. McInnerney and Wayland report a lack of understanding among social work students on how to safely navigate their own loss and suggest responses to address a current gap in the Australian social work curriculum.

Finally, Liz Beddoe reviews a new research text, *The Politics and Ethics of Representation in Qualitative Research: Addressing Moments of Discomfort*, edited by The Critical Methodologies Collective which consists of nine, early-career feminist researchers.

Ian Hyslop

Liz Beddoe

Neil Ballantyne

Emily Keddell

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Introduction to the special section on dissent in social work

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It is an honour to be asked to write a short introduction to this special section. Last year, I wrote the book, *Dissenting Social Work: Critical Theory, Resistance and Pandemic* (Garrett, 2021), in which I tried to challenge the idea that social work educators and practitioners ought to serve as handmaidens of capitalism and the institutional orders that it requires. However, I also maintained that it would be mistaken to valorise all forms of dissent, because it can also be associated with politically and professionally retrogressive tendencies and movements. Alert to the definition of social work provided by the International Federation of Social Workers and critically drawing on a range of theoretical approaches, I tentatively outlined how "Dissenting Social Work" (DSW) might be constituted in relation to a range of themes and across several, potentially interlinked, activist sites.

Clearly, the areas I identify are far from exhaustive and are a foundation for discussion rather than a bombastic "manifesto". Underpinning the arguments I made was my sense that if there are no sustained attempts to generate more expansive and dissenting forms of thinking and acting, then "social work" is at risk of being emptied out of socially benign content. In contrast, DSW interrogates dominant ways of understanding the social world within the discipline. It might, therefore, be interpreted as a form of neo-social work, adding to those efforts bent on pushing back against moves to curtail progressive possibilities for educators and practitioners. Dissenters need, therefore, to try to get a sense of our present conjuncture and the serial interlocking crises that confront us. What are some of the key factors shaping

the world, our lives and, after Bourdieu, the "field" that we inhabit? Seeking to decipher what is significant, albeit in very general terms, is crucial in enabling us to calibrate the prospects for DSW.

In a number of countries, there are moves to re-orient social work and, from above, to remake it. This was starkly illustrated in Ireland, for example, by the actions of the profession's regulatory body, CORU. In its revised *Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics*, the organisation deleted mention of the phrase "human rights": a rather extraordinary redaction given the International Federation of Social Workers' (IFSW) definition of social work situates the aspiration to safeguard and promote human rights as central. In short, CORU is the perpetrator of an act of symbolic violence against the ethical base of social work.

Inspired by the work of Gramsci, we might argue that we are at an "interregnum" in which the course of history is manifestly uncertain. In the book I emphasised issues relating to forced migration, the threat of neo-fascism, surveillance culture, neo-colonialism, the Black Lives Matter resistance movement and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. Ian Hyslop and his comrades and friends in Aotearoa New Zealand have been keen to generate discussion on these and related themes. This has been clear across a number of innovative spheres of comment and intervention—for example, within the Reimagining Social Work Collective. Indeed, this range of activities reflects very practical and vital attempts to create oppositional "structures within structures" aiming to provide solidarity and direction within social work's often stultifying

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institutional domains. What is more, this special section of *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* productively extends this work. For me, what is tremendously important is the willingness to explore, define and champion forms of dissent which are rooted in the struggle to combat racism and to decolonise economies, social structures and ways of *thinking* and *doing* social work. Readers have much to gain by reading, debating and acting on the issues raised.

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"Without losing what we know": Dissenting social work in the context of epochal crises

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: This article builds on Fraser's (2021, 2019) argument that the overlapping crises of social reproduction, climate, economy, and public health have resulted in a splintering of the hegemony of dominant groups. This generates a "wilding of the public sphere" in which groups urgently seek counter-hegemonic storylines and alternative solutions to interwoven crises (Fraser, 2021, n.p.). This article further theorises consent and dissent in social work practice and workplaces.

METHODS: Data were collected using qualitative interviews and a convenience sample of ten executive directors and managers of social services in a large city in Canada. Data were analysed using a constant comparison method involving multiple readings of the field notes and transcripts, until patterns and themes could be discerned.

FINDINGS: The article analyses three themes, namely, dissent as: 1) working on the edges of the state; 2) working on decolonisation including what it means to be a settler; and 3) critical reflection. The themes are then discussed together under a final interwoven theme that is argued to reflect new hegemonies, in particular political world-making, building new emancipatory knowledges, theory, practice and hegemonies.

CONCLUSION: Social-justice-engaged practices can emerge within systems hostile to social solidarity, suggesting that dissent is resilient to neoliberalism though it may sometimes operate quietly and at the level of individual practice. This resistance and the nascent, shared, dissenting narratives can contribute to the de-legitimatisation of oppressive social structures as social workers search for, and build, more emancipatory approaches.

KEYWORDS: Decolonisation; anti-oppressive practice and theory; critical reflection; critical social work; social work and the state; Nancy Fraser

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While they may hold disputing views, for the most part, employees are presumed to consent to their working conditions and the type and quality of services they deliver (Ackroyd & Thompson, 2022). In the social work world, dissenting views are not uncommon with critical and anti-oppressive approaches fostering critical reflection, resistance and comprehensive social change (Garrett, 2021; Maylea, 2021; Morley et al., 2017). This suggests that, in social work workplaces that are less than optimal, employee consent may be partial, provisional or dissenting and take the form

of opposition to policies and practices. While some studies have explored the extent to which critical approaches to social work have been enacted in social service workplaces, most conclude that managerialism and other effects of neoliberalism curtail and constrain the expression of social justice themes in the work of social workers (Garrett, 2019; Hyslop, 2018; Lawler, 2018). Other studies focus on micro-analyses (Smith, 2017) by examining the critical practices of individual workers, while still others focus on a meso-analysis of anti-oppressive organisational change (Barnoff, 2017). All point to critical social workers inspirationally positioning themselves as agents of social justice within and outside of their workplaces, but significantly restricted by neoliberalism and other systemic forces.

The challenging contemporary contexts of neoliberalism, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and global inequity suggest further theorising of consent and dissent in social work practice and workplaces is required. Building on Gramsci's (2000) concept of epochal crisis, Fraser (2019, 2021) argued that the overlapping crises of social reproduction, climate, economy, and public health have resulted in a splintering of the hegemony of dominant groups. This generates a "wilding of the public sphere" in which the centrist political consensus can no longer hold, and instead, groups on the left and the right urgently seek counter-hegemonic storylines and alternative solutions to interwoven crises (Fraser, 2021, n.p.). Considering the growing disillusionment with the Canadian government's handling of Indigenous issues and the recent discovery of mass unmarked graves at former Residential Schools for Indigenous children, Canada now faces an additional profound crisis. This crisis focuses on the fragmenting of support for centrist approaches to redress colonial travesties, and in their place, increasing calls for far-reaching Indigenisation, decolonisation, and reconciliation (Pete, 2016).

The balance of the article analyses strategies that some critical social workers use to withdraw consent to working within the neoliberal state form, and instead build new emancipatory knowledges, theory, practice and emergent dissenting hegemonies. For the purposes of this article, emancipatory knowledge, theory and practice will be understood as part of the critical tradition in social work, involving anti-oppressive, Indigenous, feminist, anti-racist, Marxist, green, human rights, critical post-structuralist and other liberatory approaches (Kennedy Kish et al., 2017; Sinclair, 2016; Tascon & Ife, 2020). Indigenisation will be understood as part of decolonisation in which Indigenous knowledge systems are brought together with Western knowledge systems to transform spaces, places, and hearts (BC Campus, 2020). This article will contribute to a further theorisation of dissent in social work practice and workplaces.

The balance of the article briefly discusses contexts and theory before moving on to the study from which the preliminary analysis is drawn. The article then explores the three strongest themes found in the data followed by contributions to dissenting and counter-hegemonies. The article wraps up with further discussion of dissent and conclusions. Though the article is based on the Canadian experience, the commonalities of colonialism and neoliberal capitalism provide a shared context and dilemma for dissenting social workers in other regions and contexts, while the dissenting practices and resistance may provide useful for many.

Contexts and theory

This section of the article will briefly engage with the literature on the interlaced contexts of: managerialism and neoliberalism; social work's relationship to the state; and the current context in decolonisation and Indigenisation.

Managerialism and neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is now a four-decade old system that valorises the private market as the solution to all social and economic issues (Peck & Theodore, 2019). The downsizing and contracting out of public goods and services accompanies neoliberalism and produces a hollowed-out system of human services in which those who cannot afford private services are left to cope as well as they can in an underfunded, targeted and residual system (Peck et al., 2018). Neoliberalism is not a monolithic system; various countries, regions and sectors have resisted its integration resulting in patchy adoption and uneven impacts, and occasionally bringing services back into the public sector (Plehwe, 2016).

To manage contracted-out and the remaining public services, most countries adopted a neoliberal-compatible management system known as New Public Management (NPM) or managerialism, in which the explicit goals of efficiency, accountability and cost savings were thought to be achieved through the tight measurement of "outcomes" and employee performance (Baines & Cunningham, 2020). These NPM mechanisms standardised work processes, removing or reducing practices that eluded easy metrics and scripting. The reduced and removed practices were often those associated with social connections and open-ended processes such as building and retaining respectful relationships, mobilising communities around their own issues, service user participation in policy and planning development, and working towards shared goals such as equity, inclusion and social justice (Garrett, 2019; Morley et al., 2017). In social service workplaces, NPM acted as a conduit for neoliberalism, reshaping social services agencies and social work practice, in part by legitimising narrow, measurable, individualised, pro-market responses to social problems (Harris, 2018; Hyslop, 2018; Spolander et al., 2015.

Social work's relationship to the state

Reacting to #BLM's (Black Lives Matter) widespread call to defund the police, a significant discourse asserts that social workers should replace police in non-violent community roles that were previously filled by human services until multiple rounds of austerity and funding cuts displaced them (Rubenstein, 2020; Sherraden, 2020). While some see this as an opportunity to regain lost ground and return these services to a more supportive format, others argue that, unless these services are fundamentally reorganised and democratised, social workers will simply become the soft cops of the carceral state (Baines, 2021). The increasingly controlling and sometimes coercive role social workers play for the neoliberal state and the constraints placed on social work practice in the context of managerialism and NPM, suggests that anti-oppressive and decolonising practice will find little space or possibility within state-mandated, funded and rationalised workplaces (Maylea, 2021). Given that neoliberalism saturates most aspects of social life (Hysop, 2018; Lawler, 2018), it is difficult to operate outside the state's influence even for organisations not receiving state funding, hence autonomy will always be somewhat circumscribed and an ongoing site of struggle.

The current Canadian context of decolonisation and indigenisation

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada delivered its report on the "truth of Survivors, their families, communities and anyone personally affected by the Residential school experience", a government system administered by churches operating from the 1880s to the 1960s that forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families with the goal of assimilation and separation from all aspects of Indigenous culture (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The report contained Ten Principles for Reconciliation and 94 Calls to Action aimed

at all sectors of Canadian society, including child welfare and human services. The report also included warnings from Survivors that mass graves of children could be found at the former Residential schools. In 2021, the first unmarked gravesite was discovered in Kamloops, containing the small bodies of 215 unidentified children; at the time of writing, 1300 unmarked graves have been discovered across Canada (Mosby, 2021). Though the crimes of the Residential schools have appeared in the news periodically since their creation in 1880s, alongside calls for reform, these issues were quickly replaced in the news cycle by other social and political concerns (Norris, 2021). Baskin (2021), an Indigenous social work scholar, argued that the recent outpouring of grief and indignation on the part of non-Indigenous Canada must be turned into concrete actions if this crisis is not to fade into the background of un-kept promises and colonial justifications, genocide and assimilation once again. This article will now turn to ways that anti-oppressive, non-Indigenous social work leaders are seeking and finding spaces outside the state in which to dissent and to practise anti-oppressive, decolonising social work (for an analysis of decolonisation and social work in Aotearoa/New Zealand, please see McNabb, 2019, in the South Pacific, see Mafile'o & Vakalahi, 2018, and in Australia, see Green & Bennett, 2018).

The study

The larger study from which the data analysed in this article is drawn started before the discoveries of unmarked graves of Indigenous children. It aimed to contribute to the project of decolonisation and Indigenisation by engaging Indigenous and non-Indigenous anti-oppressive practitioners in dialogue on what emancipatory, decolonising practice should entail, what factors inhibit its development and use in the social services workplace and what factors nurture and support it. The data explored in this article come from a very early analysis

of field notes and 10 semi-structured, qualitative interviews with non-Indigenous anti-oppressive social work leaders (executive directors, senior managers, senior social workers) in the non-profit social services sector in a large Canadian city (five women, five men – five non-Indigenous racialised and five White participants). This article draws on extensive field notes taken during interviews. Data analysis is described below. After close consultation with Indigenous scholars and community members in Canada, it was decided that, due to the crisis of the unmarked children's graves at former Residential schools and resulting overload in emotional and community work, Indigenous leaders and organisations would not be contacted for interviews at this point in the study. Instead, Indigenous research participants in Canada will be involved later in the project should demands on their time permit.

All but one research participant had social work degrees, and all but one had graduate degrees. Participants had worked in social services for 3–30 years with a median of 17 years. Using a convenience sample, the interviews were 35 minutes to 1.25 hours, audio recorded and transcribed, and used an interview guide. The convenience sample was assembled by asking social work academics and practitioners to suggest names of social workers practising from an anti-oppressive and/or decolonising lens. The potential participants were then contacted by email to request their participation. In the interviews, the participants were asked about the main challenges facing their organisation; whether they used critical, anti-oppressive and/or decolonising practices; what changes in their work and workplace might enable them to make meaningful changes; and if they undertook critical reflection and/or advocacy as part of their everyday work.

The organisations in which the research participants were employed all focused on marginalised and oppressed populations.

With the exception of one agency – which served immigrant and refugees – the agencies provided services for populations dealing with the overlapping crises of homelessness, trauma, poverty and harmful use of substances, particularly opiates. With the exception of the agency serving immigrants and refugees, 30–35 % of service users were Indigenous people.

Two organisations received no government funding – one was faith-based and received the majority of its funding from its generally left-of-centre congregation and the other was funded by private fundraising and foundations. The agency that served immigrants and refugees received the majority of its funding from government. The seven other agencies held a few government contracts but depended largely on private funding and foundations.

Data were analysed using a constant comparison method involving multiple readings of the field notes and transcripts, until patterns and themes could be discerned (Carey, 2017). Ethics approval was provided by the university involved. Limitations of the study includes the relatively small sample size, possible bias in convenience recruitment strategies, the compressed time for preliminary analysis and the qualitative method itself which generates rich insights that may be applicable in other contexts but is not aimed at generalisation.

Themes

Although more data exist to support the analysis, exemplar quotes will be used to discuss the three strongest themes in the data, namely dissent as: 1) working on the edges of the state; 2) working on decolonisation including what it means to be a settler; and 3) critical reflection. These themes contribute to holding a larger view of social work as being based in social justice that values activism and the ongoing building of emancipatory practice. Findings are reported ethnographically weaving the

voices of the research participants with parts of the literature (Starfield, 2015), including literature, analysis and preliminary contributions to theorising. Although the themes overlap and interweave, they will be discussed separately for purposes of analysis. They will then be discussed together under a final interwoven theme that is argued to reflect new hegemonic narratives, in particular political world-making.

1) Working on the edges of the state

A striking aspect of the research participants was that, with the exception of one, they all worked for organisations entirely or partially funded by charitable foundations (for example, the law foundation) and private fundraising. This placed them on the edges of the government structure and reporting regime (though some government reporting existed for tax purposes and compliance with employment relations and charitable or nonprofit status). The autonomy to develop innovative, anti-oppressive, decolonising services outside of funding constraints was noted by one longtime director, "I think that one of our successes has been nobody cared: nobody in the government gave us money, nobody cared, so we were pretty free. We could do what was needed."

At various points, all the organisations had experienced government social service contracts and their compliance requirements, and some still received a portion of their money from government contracts (and, as noted earlier, the immigrant and refugee service received the majority of its funding from government). They reported that requirements were far less intrusive and burdensome for foundations and private funders; moreover, they were not required to adopt NPM or other managerial structures. A senior manager noted the difficulty in practising from a social justice perspective when the organisation took on government contracts, "though the core of

[the organisation's name] is anti-oppressive practice, external forces are so strong – corporate structures, colonialism, the business model – they threaten our existence and undermine belief in the participation of people."

In terms of the reporting regime, some non-government funders adopted what was called "low barrier" reporting where narratives and photographs could be used in place of the extensive statistics and outcome metrics required by government contracts. In other cases, statistics were required by non-government funders, but without the NPM-associated documentation of outcome targets that exacerbated heavy staff workloads and standardised services with an eye to efficiency and cost savings. This provided greater latitude and innovation in the services provided to highly marginalised and oppressed service users and communities.

Less restricted by government regulation of service delivery, the organisations were also able to develop structures and practices outside (or at the edge of) the state form including member-driven services (or community-driven, service user-driven), low barrier service, and services that were deeply compassionate and inclusive. Most of the organisations were member-driven, where the programme and service priorities were decided by people who were also those who most used and needed services. As one research participant noted, "a member is anyone who uses the service. We accept people as they are. Everyone has a place. Everyone can be part of strategic planning and setting priorities." Other organisations used terms such as *community-driven* or *service user-driven* to describe similar dynamics inviting close participation of those using the services in prioritising which services should be developed and retained. This inclusive, participatory practice stands in contrast to government run and funded organisations that tend to be operated by highly credentialed individuals who draw

on other experts to set priorities and deliver programmes and rarely draw in the voices of those most impacted by programmes and services (Baines, 2017; Harris, 2018).

Low barrier (Here to Help, 2019) also meant a commitment to continuous improvements in service delivery. As one participant noted, "if someone drops into our service frequently but never stays, we have started asking them, 'what would it take for you to use our services'. We want to remove all barriers." This extended to identifying the operation of power in the workplace and the organisation as a whole. In the words of a longtime executive director, "we work to reduce and remove things that create power differentials in the organisation, and instead share our power so that our service users feel they can really be part of this community." Though under-served populations frequently have significant needs for clinical support, clinical services (medical, social work, psychotherapy, physiotherapy) presented particular dilemmas to organisations working to remove barriers and share organisational power. As observed by a number of research participants, "Things have gone more clinical which are very important services for community members but also very disempowering in terms of knowledge sharing and decision making between staff and community members. We have a lot of work to do on sharing power in clinical care."

Another participant provided a similar comment, "clinical skills are something that we need down here but like you actually have to have humility and respect for those with lived experience of oppression." Another participant agreed, adding, "we need to be humble in the face of lived experience and have great compassion; clinical skills are not transactional." Other participants emphasised similar approaches, noting "staff work from a position one of great compassion, always saying, you know, "how can we work together with the community to meet needs because that

would be in everybody's best interest." These thoughts are consistent with the literature; Bennett and Gates (2019) emphasised the importance of twinning humility with compassion in working with Indigenous, LGBTQI+ and other groups that have been oppressed.

Research participants also noted downsides to working at the edge of the state and with less or no state funding. This included: precarious funding (including short grants); a revolving door of donor priorities that rarely met the priorities of community members; never enough money to meet all service needs or to cover important things like anti-oppressive and decolonizing training for staff and community members; inadequate time for more than crisis management particularly in context of the COVID pandemic, and insufficient funding for building and sharing critical knowledge and skills. These concerns echo those funded by government contracts (Harris, 2018; Kennedy Kish et al., 2017). Though none were willing to give up their relative autonomy from the state, similar to those receiving government funding, the participants spoke wistfully of the need for dependable and adequate funding.

Despite the latitude to think creatively about more respectful and inclusive services, some of the participants longed for the space to do more than provide higher quality, more accessible care. One longtime director and activist argued that the "mandate of most social services is too narrow. Our mandates preserve our services rather than finding ways for us to come together working for larger social justice." Another participant argued that "the world is made up of programs. This doesn't build community or social justice. It builds programs." This participant and others argued that a "community development model has been lost. Social policy and social transformation [are] seen as a luxury by direct practice people and narrow services."

2) Decolonisation/accepting one's self as a settler

In terms of being positioned at the edge of state control, research participants spoke of the latitude to, in the words of one longtime activist social worker, "revolutionize our Eurocentric approach and do social justice in our jobs." Decolonization was a strong theme throughout the interviews with participants outlining steps the organisations had taken to advance the recommendations of the aforementioned Truth and Reconciliation Commission, particularly to decolonise one's self, as well as the organisation's leadership and staff, services, practices, policies and knowledge. Identifying the tension between Euro-based emancipatory perspectives (Connell, 2014) such as critical and anti-oppressive social work and the need to decolonise all knowledge and practice, including critical perspectives, one participant asked, "how do we authentically adapt Indigenous and liberatory settler approaches and save the best of both?" Another participant added, "we know [how] to keep the complexity but how do we recognize ourselves with integrity as flawed by a system of colonization and move beyond that system without losing the steps we have made towards social justice?" Accomplishing decolonisation and larger social-justice-engaged transformation was a theme that repeated itself throughout the interview data. A number of research participants emphasised the need to "undertake ongoing actions and activism" as part of decolonisation and to "support Indigenous initiatives in the community."

The process of decolonising one's thoughts and practice was challenging, as one participant noted, "It's painful to accept that I'm a settler, and to accept that I have to decolonize myself in order to help others." This same participant argued that decolonisation:

> Starts with modelling respectful listening, awareness and affirming the experience of Indigenous peoples. Settlers cannot go

in trying to make change without first listening to the anger and the experience of Indigenous people, but also the hope. Then we will to begin to understand the church and the government as instruments of colonialism, and be able to decolonize ourselves, our thinking and our actions.

Another research participant asked:

Why would Indigenous people embrace the church or the government given the history of both? As settlers and beneficiaries of unearned privilege, we need to undertake the tasks that Indigenous peoples have asked us to. Education is a big thing that Indigenous people have asked us to take on, educate ourselves and others. We just need to keep doing it while simultaneously moving from education into action, purposeful action aimed at social justice.

A third participant agreed with this strategy, arguing that decolonising one's self includes "Deep soul searching. Setting aside my ego, my opinions and trying to make decisions based on what we hear from Indigenous peoples. Learning, listening, openness and nurturing the involvement of other settlers in this process." Adding greater depth to this analysis, one participant argued that decolonisation involves "bringing into our awareness, our unconscious colonization and challenging it."

In the words of one research participant, at the organisational level this involved:
1) expressing a willingness to learn;
2) adopting an attitude of humility and admitting culpability; and 3) providing a willingness to be relationship with others seeking far-reaching change. Decolonising social service organisations tended to start with educating leadership, followed by educating frontline employees, reviewing policies and practices for decolonising change, and extending service users' and community members' understanding of

reconciliation and decolonisation. The education itself focused on developing a deeper understanding of Canada's history of colonialism that involved "bringing in Elders and knowledge keepers as well as working through this tough content on our own." Participants were keenly aware of the importance of inviting the participation of Indigenous peoples, and at the same time taking responsibility to educate one's self and each other. One research participant articulated a strong tension in decolonising education, namely that:

Settlers have to be responsible for their own education rather than placing all the work and responsibility on Indigenous people but at the same time Indigenous people have rightfully asserted their right to lead decolonisation, including the re-education of non-Indigenous people about Indigenous beliefs and knowledge. It is complicated to work out how to do both things successfully and without reinstating colonialism. We need to keep talking about it.

One research participant who worked in an agency serving immigrants and refugees noted the importance of sharing the experience of Indigenous peoples with newcomers to Canada. This research participant also emphasised the importance of starting with educating the leadership of the organisation and frontline staff. The organisation had recently worked with a consultant who helped them develop decolonising *educationals* that they planned to also use with service users. Another research participant, with many years of experience in the government, as well as in the non-profit and activist sectors, argued that:

We need knowledge and history, we need to take international standards such as the UNDRIP [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples] into our lives and our practice, and organisations need to adopt a community development model so that people can

make good policies a reality and take steps closer to emancipation.

Noting the constraints and possibilities of government funding, one longtime executive director noted that, until recently, when "the government finally seriously started funding reconciliation projects, decolonisation didn't weave into everything we did because we had a business model that had to be sustained and it [decolonisation] wasn't part of the business model. We hadn't found a way to make to make it sustainable" through private funders or foundations. She continued, "Maybe now, with there being a much more global perspective on colonisation and the strength of the Indigenous people, the question about sustaining this work really won't be off the table, instead *it will be the work* (emphasis in the original)."

3) Critical reflection

The rushed and overloaded context of neoliberal workplaces makes it difficult for social workers to find the head space to critically reflect or to draw in others to identify problems, take action and improve things. Morley et al. (2017) argued that critical social workers need this space to undertake constructive criticism of their own and other's connections to oppression as well as to integrate emancipatory practices and systems in the complex contexts in which they work. This multi-level reflection allows reflexivity to have critical and transformative potential (Fook & Askeland, 2006) and provides a fertile ground for social workers to use their lived experiences to develop and refine theory, knowledge and practice (Morley et al., 2017; Tascon & Ife, 2019). Finally, critical reflexivity provides a way for social workers to maintain a degree of independence and relative autonomy from neoliberal state, institutional and social discourses and, in the process, generate a space in which to support individual and collective resistance and to nurture widespread social change and justice.

Research participants who had previously worked in the public sector noted that they now had time for critical reflection, "When I worked in [healthcare social work] with a caseload of 300, there was no time for reflection. Now I have a small caseload and there is always hope and always time to reflect." Similarly, another participant noted that her agency undertook collective reflection, "We always debrief and reflect. This includes looking at hard things like our high level of death and overdose but it also includes looking at our successes and how we can do better." A participant working for a progressive church-based service noted wryly, "The Church currently does an awful lot of reflection. It's a good place for it."

Others noted that in the context of the COVID pandemic, "We don't have the privilege of reflecting, it's just go, respond to a crisis." A second participant asserted that "[a]dvocacy and reflection basically stopped in the pandemic. The need for direct services was too high and too urgent. All our resources went there." This suggests that, while services at the edge of government restrictions and managerial models can consciously create spaces for critical thought and reflection, these spaces are easily lost in the context of the crises that frequently occur in the context of late neoliberalism.

4) Emergent counter and dissenting hegemonic threads

Earlier in this article, Fraser (2019, 2021) was cited for her work on the overlapping epochal crises of social reproduction, climate, economy, and public health, generating fissures in the hegemony of dominant groups. This fragmentation produces a "wilding of the public sphere" where groups on the left and the right creatively build counter and dissenting hegemonies and alternative solutions (Fraser, 2021, n.p.). Despite the reduced space for critical thought noted in some agencies during the pressurised time of the pandemic, the data suggest that working outside, or at the edges

of, the state permitted some organisations to generate a space in which larger social transformation could become thinkable and do-able. These emergent, dissenting hegemonic threads included the following components: political world-making; working at the margins of the state provides anti-neoliberal possibilities; the importance of being humble and deeply compassionate; and selling a good narrative to get the public on board.

Even though working at the edges of the state may be seen by some as consistent with neoliberal undermining of the public good and social solidarity, the research participants presented themselves as working outside or at the edges of the state in order to be involved in what one research participant called "political world-making". This political world-making was robustly anti-neoliberal, insightfully combining collectivist (public good and social solidarity), inclusive and equitable (low barrier and member-driven, humble and compassionate), and transformational (decolonisation and anti-oppression practice, community-engagement and participation) practices and goals. Critical reflection provided a ballast to these initiatives and a source of ongoing analysis of practice, policy and the possibilities for far-reaching social change. The participants did not focus their change goals exclusively on their workplaces and service delivery but sought deep-seeded social justice change across society. As one participant put it, "the question is how to sell a good narrative to Canadian society."

This dissenting hegemonic line finds resonance in various critical literatures. For example, anti-carceral (Atallah et al., 2019) practice models emphasise two equally important components: 1) respect for the first-hand experience of those exploited and oppressed by existing structures and taking leadership from these groups; and 2) holding on to a radical social analysis and building services that foster far-reaching social change. Similarly, Green and Baldry (2008) argued that Indigenous and anti-oppressive theory both explore the intersecting oppressions that underlie the social relations of injustice and colonialism, and work to expose and positively intervene in these dynamics at the systemic, policy, organisational and individual levels. They argued further that both perspectives have emancipation and social justice as their end goals (Green & Baldry, 2008; see also Baines, 2017).

Clarke (2004) argued that acts of resistance to neoliberalism are a form of expanding the social (see also Aronson & Smith, 2009). The analysis above reveals strategies aimed at building inclusive, low barrier, community or member-driven services and fostering dignity and respect among service users. In effect, these strategies build new social relations within and through their struggle, and generate new practices and social analysis. As such, they expand the social and spaces for liberatory possibilities. In short, the counter-hegemonic practices and processes analysed earlier may contain the seeds and the substance of the new, more equitable social relations required to build a more democratic, socially just and participatory society.

Discussion and conclusions

This article addressed the question of what strategies some critical social workers are using to withdraw consent from working within the neoliberal state form, and instead to build new emancipatory knowledges, theory, practice and emergent hegemonic threads. Drawing on a preliminary analysis of qualitative interview data, this article has argued that some anti-oppressive, decolonising social work executive directors, managers and senior social workers are building new, more liberatory services at the margins of the state and of social work. By working at the edges of the state, workers and organisations are in effect withdrawing their consent to neoliberal state practices that target and constrain service delivery,

and provide rushed and thin services to those in need. This withdrawal of consent is theorised as a form of dissenting, inclusive (low barrier, humble and compassionate), social justice-engaged (decolonising, anti-oppressive) social work.

In this case, rather than exclusively a place of deprivation and exploitation – as a less regulated and managerialised space – these margins can be theorised as a site of resistance and trench warfare. Gramsci (2000) argued that trench warfare, or a process of undermining the hegemony of the oppressive state, is possible by building alternative social structures and social relations that incrementally claim greater social legitimacy, replacing inequitable and oppressive practices. These dissent-based relations and structures can then emerge as a new and eventually dominant, collectivist, democratic, participatory model (Gramsci, 2000). The practices analysed in the article operated at the edges of the state and dominant social relations while simultaneously building new, low-barrier, membership or community-driven, decolonising, and anti-oppressive practices and services. As such, these organisations and practices remained apart and somewhat autonomous from the state form and larger state apparatus. In this relative independence from the state, the organisations and the people they employed were sufficiently autonomous to generate new critical and non-consenting forms of engagement and social-service-engaged change.

This article contributes to the theorisation and practice of dissent in social work workplaces by identifying practices that contributed to an expansion of the social imaginary in which social justice practice is thinkable and do-able. These practices included: 1) working on the edges of the state (as noted above); 2) working on decolonisation including what it means to be a settler; and 3) critical reflection. The article also contributed to a further theorisation of dissent through its analysis of dissenting

hegemonic threads and the possibility of an emerging counter-hegemonic narrative interweaving the new practices in a process of political world-making. The dissenting practices analysed and the potential for further political world-making seem to have been resilient, though in some cases greatly reduced during the overlapping epochal crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, public health and political economy. The question remains as to whether these dissenting practices can expand beyond organisations working at the edge of the state to the more established and government-funding reliant and managerialised nonprofit and public social service sectors.

Though Fraser (2019, 2021) argued that far-reaching democracy is not possible under the structures of capitalism and Snelgrove et al. (2014) note that the structures of settler colonial capitalism limit possibilities for inclusive emancipation, some evidence exists to suggest dissenting practice can expand to public and mainstream social services. For example, two of the research participants had worked decades in the public sector before moving to work on the margins. They reported that, while overwhelming caseloads, government regulations and neoliberal caprice were everyday aspects of exhausting and often depleting public sector practice, they and their colleagues found small spaces to develop shared counter-narratives to the dominant storylines valorising the private market and social neglect. In the workplace and outside it, they also developed individual and collective identities as workers committed to social justice, social care and resistance and undertook social activism and practice change. These suggest that the seeds of new, more social-justice-engaged identities and practices can bubble up even within a system hostile to social solidarity and collective responsibility. This further suggests that dissent is resilient to neoliberal governance and managerialism though it may sometimes operate quietly and at the level of individual

practice. However, the data and analysis confirm that it occurs even in highly restrictive and managerialised contexts. This resistance and the often nascent, shared, dissenting narratives and identities have the potential to contribute to the de-legitimatisation of hegemonic storylines, and oppressive social structures as social workers search for, and build, more emancipatory approaches.

Acknowledgments

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From dissent to authoritarianism: What role for social work in confronting the climate crisis?

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: As the environmental crisis deepens and the effects begin to emerge in the form of disruptive and destructive climate events, more nation-states have ostensibly committed to carbon net zero by 2050. Achieving this target will require a major reconstitution of economies, societies and, thus, the lived realties of peoples. This reconstitution or shift will need to occur most forcibly and rapidly in the developed economies of the global north whom, since about 1850, have been responsible for approximately 92% of surplus global emissions. Social policies, therefore, will need to be reworked and reimagined so that, in practice, they are aligned with "planetary boundaries". Recent geopolitical summits, such as COP 26, have, arguably, resulted in lacklustre and vague commitments rather than any serious attempts at creating agreement on how to reconstitute the economies of the global north. Moreover, a model of economy predicated on continuous, and exponential growth and thus the continued metabolization of the natural environment, still appears immovable despite the threat it poses.

APPROACH, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: It is against the backdrop of the global context described above that two questions are posed. The first is concerned with creating a focus for social work and asks: "What sustainable social policies should social work align with?". The answer to this is presented as a means of progressing the task of social work in the context of climate justice. The second question builds on the answer to the first and asks, "Does arriving at an adequate response require dissent?"

KEYWORDS: Climate; climate justice; social justice; dissent; social work; social policy; welfare states.

Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth, they are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations...

(Karl Marx, *Daz Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 3)

In attempting, to explore the questions posed in this contribution, I find myself confronted by a veritable, and growing, smorgasbord of commentary, research and literature—much of which crosses both jurisdictional boundaries and disciplinary lines. For expedience and efficacy's sake, I primarily confine my analysis, therefore, to the liberal welfare states of the anglosphere, and my corpus of literature to the disciplines of social policy and social work in the main, particularly where both the former and the latter encounter the concept of environmental sustainability. In doing so, I

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aim to explore the following two questions: "What sustainable social policies should social work align with?", the tentative answer to which is presented as a means of progressing the task of social work in the context of climate justice. The second question builds on the answer to the first and asks, "Does arriving at an adequate response require dissent?" In attempting to begin to answer the first of these, and after looking briefly at some social work literature which has explored the issue of climate change, I synthesise some select contributions from an emerging social policy literature which has begun to explore questions of environmental degradation and its potential repercussions, along with solutions to the former and the latter in the context of welfare states and policy responses. I base my suggestions for what social policies social work should seek to align itself with on both how social work is globally defined and on what social policies overlap with, and encapsulate, the social work value base. To answer the second question, I open up a brief and explorative discussion which examines the possibility of *dissent* or the potential for a turn toward authoritarianism in the context of social work. What is presented is undoubtedly tentative and therefore intended to prompt conversation and debate. It is intended to be instructive without being authoritative. Importantly, what is written here responds to a prompt which asks us to consider the role of dissent in the context of social work. This is important because a fulsome response to the climate crisis may well require either dissent from the bottom or authoritarianism from the top. Just what role social work has, or will have, in either facilitating or thwarting dissent, remains an open question.

The global picture: Rampant growth and rampant inequality

In the first instance, and at the outset, it is necessary to confront the truth that the current growth model of economy in the global north is unsustainable from the perspective of human and planetary survival

(Bailey, 2020; Fanning et al., 2020; Gough, 2017, 2022; Koch, 2021; Walker, 2012). It, therefore, either has to change or lead to our destruction, there is no in-between and this is not and should not be taken as polemic. The current model of economy is based on exponential growth and so makes demands upon production and consumption, and therefore upon the natural environment, that are impossible to satisfy. Aligned with this model of economy, welfare states in the global north are predicated on ensuring production and consumption (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021; Koch, 2021). One way to illustrate the phenomenon of the exponential curve is to consider the wheat and chessboard problem. This may be familiar yet it remains powerfully illustrative and so is worth including briefly:

> There are 64 squares on a chessboard. If you place one grain of wheat on the first square and then double the amount of wheat for each subsequent square so that 1 becomes 2, 2 becomes 4, 4 becomes 8 and so on, by the time you get to square 64, there are over 18 quintillion grains of wheat on the board.

This power of the exponential has never been unknown. As far back as 1772 (Price, 1772, p. 19), Richard Price, whose words were later taken up by Marx in his own contribution to political economy, spoke of the power of exponential growth as being the effect of long-term compound growth when he noted that:

> Money bearing compound interest increases at first slowly, but the rate of increase being continuously accelerated, it becomes in some time so rapid, as to mock all the powers of the imagination. One penny, put out at our Saviour's birth to 5 per cent, compound interest, would, before this time, have increased to a greater sum, than would be contained in a hundred and fifty millions of earths, all solid gold.

When illustrated like this, it must become obvious that sustaining exponential growth at the rate and in the manner described by Price as far back as 1772 is an unthinkable economic proposition. Furthermore, when we think about what this means in real terms, it is also unsustainable from a human and environmental perspective. Viewed from a human perspective, growth rates measured by things like GDP tell us absolutely nothing about people's general well-being, leaving the need for inference in the context of the unknowable (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021). Conversely, a rate of growth such as that described earlier tells us much about the effect this can, and must have, on the natural environment. If humans make of nature a commodity in the general sense, the rate at which we do so reveals Marx's metabolic rift (Burkett, 1999). The environment is continually metabolised to create capital through cycles of production and consumption thereby causing tremendous harm. Orthodox, liberal economics, founded on a model of more and continuous growth, not only continues this harm but exacerbates it (Gough, 2021; Laruffa et al., 2021). In the face of this harm, we must also ask who this situation benefits as it does not appear to benefit the poorest in our societies in any tangible way. A recent report by Oxfam (2022) entitled "Inequality kills" and which looks at global social conditions since the onset of COVID-19 aptly demonstrates this by noting that:

> The wealth of the world's 10 richest men has doubled since the pandemic began. The incomes of 99% of humanity are worse off because of COVID-19 (Oxfam, 2022: n.p.).

Bearing out the thesis presented here, the report further notes that:

> These issues are all part of the same, deeper malaise. It is that inequality is tearing our societies apart. It is that violence is rigged into our economic systems. It is that inequality kills. (Oxfam, 2022, p. 8)

Finally, in explicitly apportioning blame for environmental degradation alongside denoting the beneficiaries of the current global economic system, the report also notes that:

> Twenty of the richest billionaires are estimated, on average, to be emitting as much as 8000 times more carbon than the billion poorest people. (Oxfam, 2022, p. 17)

It is clear then, that the people whom social work are most likely to encounter are not the beneficiaries of the current global economic system. Furthermore, it is clear that many of the world's poorest are actually harmed by it and that this has been exacerbated by circumstances wrought by COVID-19. As climate breakdown proliferates, this harm is likely to be further exacerbated still. Given social work's overt commitment to the realising of social justice through the obliteration of inequality, these are global circumstances which are deeply incongruent with the values at the core of the profession and have been for a long time.

Sustainability and social work: Where, how why?

Climate change and environmental sustainability are issues which have begun to capture the social work imagination across both scholarship and practice and an array of contributions made in recent years demonstrates this (Boetto et al., 2020; Harris & Boddy, 2017; Holbrook et al., 2019; Lucas-Darby, 2011; Lynch et al., 2021; Noble, 2016; Philip & Reisch, 2015; Ranta-Tyrkko & Narhi, 2021). These are just some examples over a number of years; see also a recent policy document from the International Federation of Social Workers (2022). In a recent and passionate editorial in the *British Journal of Social Work*, Maglajlic and Ioakimidis (2021), reacting in part to the lacklustre outcome of the COP26 summit in Glasgow, call for

climate justice to be placed squarely on the agenda of the global social work community. In doing so they point to the already developing effects of the climate catastrophe from the creation of climate refugees due to wildfires in Greece to the effects of devasting flash-floods in the German regions of Rhineland Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia. Through drawing attention to both of these examples, they illustrate the very real practice of social workers acting and reacting in the face of conditions created by climate change. However, they also note that:

> …environmental justice had not been a central theme in social work practice and scholarship. (Maglajlic & Ioakimidis, 2021, p. 2870).

This assertion is undoubtedly true. The reasons for this truth are arguably less clear than the truth of it but must, in part, devolve upon the nature of social work in residual welfare states of the global north where social work is largely administered as a reactive, bourgeois, profession as part of the repressive state apparatus (Whelan, 2022a). However, it could also be argued that a further, and perhaps more central reason for why social work has been slow to encompass climate work and climate justice comes down the simple proposition of "not knowing how", that is, not knowing how to confront the overwhelming nature of a global and wholly existential phenomenon. Social work, of course, is a multi-dimensional entity meaning that an adequate response is required in multiple contexts including in social work practice, in social work education and in social work scholarship and activism. Where sustainability-based, green, practice responses have found a way into *socialworkesque* activities, early research has shown that these have tended to be individualising, (de)moralising and potentially stigmatising, effectively aiming to *greenwash* the poor by shaming them into sustainable behaviour, thus eschewing the fundamentally structural nature of

the climate challenge (see Malier, 2019 for example). With respect to social work education, early research has shown that the inclusion of environmental issues as part of the curriculum for social work programmes, while growing, is patchy at best (see Dominelli, 2014; Drolet et al., 2015; Harris & Boddy, 2017; Holbrook et al., 2019; Lynch et al., 2021; Teixeira & Krings, 2015) meaning that future practitioners are unlikely to incorporate climate issues into existing frameworks where they do at all. Finally, where social work scholarship has attempted to tackle issues of climate and climate justice, the response, while spirited, has ultimately been disjointed through lacking a singular focus or cohesive mission. Space here does not permit for issues across practice, education and scholarship to be fully and meaningfully engaged with and so, though what follows will ideally have implications for each, it is to the latter issue, the issue of how social work scholarship might attempt to forge a path forward with respect to matters of climate and climate justice, that attention is now turned. The method I employ for charting this path is to look toward what social policies and what policy programmes social work should seek to potentially take up, champion and align with on the basis of what is sustainable and also with due regard to an already established social work identity, present in how the profession is defined and in its value-base. Through aligning social work with social policies which tick these boxes, we potentially give ourselves something to aspire toward, to engage in activism for, to shape our practice and to educate our future partitioners alongside giving us meaningful alternatives through which to frame dissent.

Sustainable welfare: Social policy responses

Having earlier established that the current model of economy in the global north must change in order to ensure planetary and species survival, the question of what role social policies and welfare states will play

against this backdrop remains. Interestingly, if not altogether fortuitously, the still very live and evolving COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic, and the global, social and economic crisis it has wrought, potentially tells us something here. There can be no doubt that the onset of the pandemic saw the idea of welfare and the role of welfare states come into sharp focus virtually overnight (Whelan, 2022b). In the face of the global developments arising out of the pandemic, the social contract was rapidly rewritten, and the social safety net rapidly expanded as emergency welfare payments were rolled out across jurisdictions (Hick & Murphy, 2020). This tells us that welfare, in the form of a social safety-net necessarily forms a major part of responses to social and economic crises. However, the crisis wrought by COVID-19 may ultimately pale in comparison to the social and economic crisis that climate change will undoubtedly precipitate and so, some thinking about long-term and necessarily structural welfare state changes is not only necessary but a matter of pressing concern. In this respect, a literature in the context of social policy has begun to emerge. This literature is a literature of ideas and alternatives. In a recent special themed section of *Social Policy and Society*, many of these ideas come to the fore and so I draw on a number of these contributions here. In doing so I suggest a number of policy areas with which the value base underpinning social work is arguably naturally aligned and through which social work scholarship, but also practice and education, might chart a way forward in the context of setting a new green agenda.

An overarching framework: A capability approach

In an entry which acknowledges that welfare states in the global north are now sharply confronted by the ecological crisis and in need of reform as a result, Bonvin and Laruffa (2021) propose a capability framework approach to the delivery of social services in a way which eschews

the necessity for growth and, in doing so, calls for a debate about (and a potential re-evaluation of) the meanings of quality of life and human well-being. In doing so, they echo much of the thesis of destructive growth presented by these authors:

> The present circumstances suggest that alternative views to this economic growth-led welfare state have to be designed. There is indeed a growing consensus that the economic growth model is reaching its limits, both in terms of environmental sustainability and intergenerational justice. To put it briefly, the pursuit of economic growth on the present terms risks depleting planetary resources, thus putting at risk environmental sustainability. (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021, p. 2)

The idea of a capability framework is not new and Bonvin and Laruffa (2021) draw on a growing body of literature (see Bonvin, 2012; Burchardt & Hick, 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018; Laruffa, 2020, for some examples). The capability framework Bonvin and Laruffa proposed also draws inspiration from the work of Amartya Sen (1985, 1987, 1999, 2004, 2009) and they argue that by following a capability approach, social policy, as a driver of the sociological experience, can move beyond the need only to ensure and support material well-being toward a focus on expanding the capabilities of persons in a way that values their freedom to live valuable and fulfilling lives. In doing so they suggest that:

> … the capability approach allows rejecting the identification of social progress with economic growth, opening instead a democratic debate on the concrete meaning of wellbeing and quality of life and on the best ways to promote them. (Bovin & Laruffa, 2021, p. 10)

The capability approach is presented here as an overarching idea that aligns well with

social work values and there are specific ideas within this idea which I will turn to further on. As an overarching idea, and while others (see Koch, 2021) have written in a way which illustrates the complexity of meaningfully aligning social policy with sustainability in practice, it nevertheless has the potential to go in different directions in terms of the policy and policies it ultimately begets. Crucially, as an overarching idea, it must be noted that taking a capability approach to the welfare of people in this way chimes resoundingly with the social work value base and with how social work is globally defined wherein it is suggested that "social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing" (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2022, n.p.). If it is possible, through a capability approach, to uphold this aspect of the global definition while also promoting sustainability, then such an approach must be given serious consideration within the social work community.

Universal basic services

If a capability approach which draws inspiration from the work of Sen (1985, 1987, 1999, 2004, 2009) is an overarching idea, it must necessarily be realised through discrete social policies. Let us say, with one eye to the social work value base, that, at its core, the idea of a sustainable capability approach means organising societies around the following key principles:

- Value people and their inherent human rights;
- Develop social policies which are aligned with an ethic of care and not with capacity for production;
- Promote an idea of well-being that is not reliant on production, consumption, or the means to achieve these through the market;
- Encourage people to look after themselves, each other and the natural environment.

The next question necessarily becomes "How do we begin to go about achieving or actioning these ideals?" There are many potential responses here which encapsulate a plethora of ideas and go across many ideologies. I will focus on two, universal basic services (UBS) and participation income (PI) both of which naturally align with the ideals of social work and both of which have the potential to be pivotal in the fight against climate change. I begin with the former and I draw here primarily on Coote (2021) along with Coote and Percy (2020) who have explored the concept of universal basic services with an eye to environmental sustainability.

In considering the function and purpose of welfare states as part of the post-war settlement, Coote (2021) noted the collectivist ideals and pooling of resources at the heart of the ideas of that time. However, in doing so, she has also noted the steady decline of these ideals and the practices which underpin them through the pervasive effects of a neoliberal, market-based, ideology. The implicit suggestion here then is that, we need, to some degree, to turn the clock back to reconsider the idea of a welfare commons consisting of things like health services, education, adequate housing provision, transport, childcare and income maintenance. Coote (2021, p. 2), puts this in the following terms:

> The normative goal of UBS is to ensure that everyone has access to life's essentials – the things that every individual needs to participate in society and lead a life they value.

In other words, the basic essentials that persons need to do and to be well. As with the idea of a capability approach, the fundamental idea of universal basic services as a protected and guaranteed minimum is not new, indeed, it builds of the ideals of Beveridge and FDR among others (Coote & Percy, 2020). However, Coote's (2021) analysis also proposes to move the

clock forward to take account of planetary boundaries so that resources are pooled collectively, yes, but also sustainably. The key to the success of UBS as a sustainable social programme is that, through removing the competition of the market, it combines universal entitlement with sufficiency thus providing a secure social foundation for all within planetary boundaries (Coote, 2021). Using the examples of food, housing and childcare, and drawing on earlier work, Coote (2021, p. 9) illustrates this in the following way:

> Childcare, housing and food occupy different points on the collective-individual spectrum for securing life's essentials. Together, they illustrate the inescapable logic of exercising collective responsibility to meet human needs in ways that are universal and sufficient. Applying the UBS framework to provide in-kind benefits can bring substantial gains in terms of equity, efficiency, solidarity and sustainability.

For the purposes of this article, and in terms of sets of social policies which align with social work and with the social work value base, Coote (2021) notes that UBS really only represents one side of a coin, the other side necessarily being income based. Specifically, she names participation income (PI) as being on the other side of that coin and so I take this idea up here. In doing so, I draw attention, in particular, to an article by Laruffa et al. (2021) whose own contribution revises Atkinson's (1996) concept of PI with one eye toward the potential for environmental sustainability. Again, I argue that, particularly when coupled with the idea of UBS, PI is an idea that is sustainable and that works in the context of social work and aligns with the social work value base.

Participation income

Setting their sights on a *post-productivist* social landscape wherein an ethic of care allows for the primacy of social reproduction over and above economic reproduction, Laruffa et al. (2021) revise Atkinson's blueprint of a participation income to incorporate the idea of a *green conditional basic income*. The conceptualisation of a green conditional basic income, not unlike the notion of sustainable UBS, requires a sort of double movement consisting of a shift away from workfarist, sanction-based conceptualisations of income support (McGann, 2021; Whelan, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2022b) and toward policies that would:

> … re-shape the focus of social policy on individuals' capability to 'take care of the world', thereby shifting the emphasis from production and employment to social reproduction and environmental reparation. (Laruffa et al., 2021, p. 2)

The first aspect of this double movement is again, a movement *back*, that is, back towards the ideals of collective welfare in the form of a welfare commons (Whelan, 2021d). This, the authors argued, will, in the first instance be efficacious in removing the taint of stigma from human welfare, a taint which has long been empirically evidenced and has garnered much scholarship in recent years in the context of austerity capitalism (see Baumberg, 2015; Bolton et al., 2022; Patrick, 2017; Whelan, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). The second aspect of this double movement requires a fundamental shift in thinking about how and why income support as a form of welfare is administered. Laruffa et al. (2021) stop short of calling for a wholly universal basic income and so conditionality remains a feature of their conceptualisation of a green conditional basic income. However, where conditions *do* attach these are very much based on the concept of coproduction which involves an:

> … enabling approach that relies on appealing to claimants' intrinsic motivations through the quality of participation options available. (Laruffa et al., 2021, p. 513).

This immediately, and obviously, aligns with a wide range for social work values from client self-determination to working in partnership and with a host of social work practice approaches, from strengths-based perspectives to empowerment approaches. Moreover, taken alongside the introduction of UBS and couched within a capability approach, such social programmes offer a platform for social work to coalesce around and to advocate for and agitate toward. The next then must be, how do we get there?

How do we get there? Dissent or authoritarianism…

Social work has found itself often on the wrong side of history. It has, as a profession, played a part in causing great harms to a great number of peoples and there are myriad examples of this (see for example the racial oppression of First Nations communities in Australia (Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), 2004), Aotearoa New Zealand (Gray, 2019), Canada (Czyzewski & Tester, 2014), USA (Jacobs, 2009) Apartheid-era South Africa (Smith, 2014)). There is no guarantee that, in the struggle for climate justice, social work will not find itself on the wrong side of history again. In fact, given the current residual and reactive nature of social work in the global north (Whelan, 2022a), there is every chance that it might. In this final part of the contribution, I want to make what may, at first, seem like a jarring suggestion to suggest that ultimately, social work as a global force must, in deciding what side of history it wishes to be on, choose either authoritarianism or dissent. Authoritarianism in this instance means enforcing the climate mandate of the state, whatever that mandate may be, and whoever it may hurt and affect, potentially contributing to creating a "state of exception" as given by Agamben (1998) wherein the political life, or *Bios* of service users and the population in general is suspended, and bare life or *Zoe* of persons is closely policed. As a part of an authoritarian

approach, the governance of bare life begets a type of biopolitics in which human life, the human body and human habit become the target of the organisational power of the state which governs at the level of population but in ways that filter down to the level of the individual by measuring, examining, calculating, recording and potentially punishing. Dissent, on the other hand, will require social work to agitate and advocate for a just transition, underpinned by sets of social policies such as those introduced here in earlier paragraphs. This is a broad proposition and, like all aspects of conceptualising the climate emergency as the extinction event that it is, it requires imagination. We must confront then, that through climate change, we *do* now face an extinction event and a cliff-edge over which we are bound to lurch if we do not seek to recruit our imaginations to think of and subsequently action alternatives and so I hope that in finishing this piece, imaginations are inspired.

Turning first to authoritarianism, there is surely truth in the assertion that, in order to ensure planetary and species survival, forms of undemocratic and authoritarian governance, the creation of a "state of exception" may ultimately be required; particularly where democracy fails to provide easily agreed upon solutions. To flesh out this point, I cross disciplines to take in political science and I draw on the recent work of Mittiga (2021). In his essay, Mittiga (2021) probes the question of whether or not the wielding of authoritarian power can ever be legitimate, particularly as it appears to run counter to fundamental tenets of rights-based democracy. However, the question, which may seem to evoke an instinctive answer at first, is qualified by the notion that governments are tasked with ensuring safety at times of emergency. To bear this out, Mittiga (2021) pointed to the many steps taken in what would be considered liberal democracies to keep people safe during the various stages of the Coronavirus pandemic. These were often steps which

may not have been what some of *the people* wanted, yet they were arguably steps that were nevertheless what the whole of the people needed. These were exceptional steps taken in a state of exception. He brings this analysis forward to ask, *could* and, indeed, *should* government power be similarly wielded as a means of beginning to take the necessary steps to allay the climate crisis. In doing so he first notes that…

> As the climate crisis deepens, one can find a cautious but growing chorus of praise for "authoritarian environmentalism". (Mittiga, 2021, p. 1)

…before going on to suggest that:

> … it is undeniable that nearly all wealthy democratic states have failed to respond adequately to the climate crisis. By contrast, various less affluent authoritarian regimes have been successful in implementing stringent climate policies. (Mittiga, 2021, p. 1)

In posing the problem in the way that he does and in attempting to explore under what circumstances authoritarian climate governance might be conceived of as legitimate, Mittiga (2021) inadvertently poses a dilemma for social work in the context of the climate challenge. It is well documented that, both as a charitable endeavour and as part of a state apparatus, (Whelan, 2022a) social work has often been as much about ensuring social control as it has been about striving for social justice and it this respect, it is a profession that is arguably ideally placed to *do* the social control and the *soft-policing* that may be required in myriad ways as the climate crisis deepens (see Robinson et al., 2021; Dillon et al., 2021, for contributions on how social work adapted in potentially problematic ways during the Coronavirus pandemic). It may even be that if social work (as an entity operating across the domains of practice, education, scholarship and activism) does not take meaningful steps to confront climate justice as a real,

pressing and central concern, it will evolve without requiring much evolution to begin administering the mandate of the state in a climate context. It will not really need to morph to do so, so much as it will need to merely continue to exist in its current form. Social work must confront then, the looming authoritarianism that it may soon be expected to help enforce.

Yet, despite the number of harms that it has helped perpetrate, and undoubtedly there are many, social work has a long and strong history of critical thought (see Brake & Bailey, 1980; Corrigan & Leonard, 1978; Ferguson, 2008; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Fook, 1993; Galper, 1980; Healy, 2000; Ife, 1997; Lavalette, 2011; B. Mullaly, 2002; R. Mullaly, 1993; Turbett, 2014, for just some examples). Various authors have also recently called for a reconstitution through dissent (Garrett, 2021), through disruption (Fieldman, 2021) or through a return to "ideas lying around" (Whelan, 2022a). There are also many fine examples of social work practice that affirm a commitment to social justice (for diverse examples, see the PAP [Poverty Aware Paradigm] in Israel (Krumer-Nevo, 2016); Promise Scotland, 2021 [Plan 21–24] and the Child Welfare Inequalities Project (Bywaters & Featherstone, & The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team, 2020), see also Fieldman, 2021 for numerous examples of social workers using "disruptive power" as a form of dissent in various contexts). Garrett (2021), for his part, has called for a re-alignment of social work through the introduction of a type of *neo-social work* which contests and problematises the idea that educators and practitioners should enforce the mandates of the state. As one part of calling for a dissenting form of social work, Garrett (2021, n.p.) suggests that social work should seek to "eradicate the harms caused to humans, other species and the planet by capitalism" denoting a strong consciousness of the need for social work to develop its green credentials in doing so. One way to arguably begin to achieve the

eradication that Garrett (2021) wrote about is for social work to align with sustainable social policies while advocating and, where necessary, agitating for their introduction and implementation as per the thesis at the heart of this contribution. Garrett's (2021) project is one which fundamentally challenges a managerialist conception of social work under neoliberalism and so builds on the radical foundation laid down by other scholars over many decades (see above) while also taking up the more recent work which has sought to accentuate the human rights component of the social work identity (see Fronek & Chester, 2016; Hyslop, 2018; Ife, 2018, for examples). In charting a similar path and through introducing the concept of disruptive social work, Feldman (2021, p. 15), while remaining conscious of the institutional challenges' social workers face, reminds us that:

> Social workers are committed to social justice and human rights and they have an ethical responsibility to engage in *political action* [my emphasis] that contributes to the promotion and realisation of the profession's stated mission.

Engaging in political action may otherwise be interpreted as engaging in dissent. A core tenet of the mission Feldman (2021) references, particularly if we are to uphold an espoused and core mandate of social work, is now, surely, deeply intertwined with the need to react to the looming spectre of climate change. A telling piece of the global definition of social work, referred to in part here earlier, notes that the profession "engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing" (IFSW, 2022, n.p.). A key word in this very important sentence is the word *structures*. Social work, as a global entity, across practice, education, scholarship and activism must quickly and forthrightly seek to engage with and attempt to change structures as part of a response to the climate emergency. Indeed, it must become a central

and expressed goal of the global social work community to seek to reimagine and understand our critical interconnectedness as part of charting a path away from authoritarianism and toward dissent. Organising around a set of social policies which align well with both the fundamental values at the heart of social work and with a sustainable and just transition in the context of climate change is suggested here as being an effective starting point.

Conclusion

The method employed in this contribution has been based on tentatively exploring and attempting to answer two questions. The first asks "What sustainable social policies should social work align with?" and the answer to this is presented as a means of progressing the task of social work in the context of climate justice. The second question builds on the answer to the first and asks, "Does arriving at an adequate response require dissent?". In answering this latter question, it is suggested that an adequate response may ultimately devolve upon either authoritarianism or dissent and that therefore, social work, as a global force, should, through a dissent which advocates and agitates for sustainable social policies, ensure its place on the *right side of history*, a place where it has not always been found. To return to the first question, the central thesis at the heart of this contribution suggests that, in order to permit a degree of focus, in order to place climate justice and the environment squarely on the social work agenda in a real, coherent and meaningful way across practice, education, scholarship and activism, aligning social work with sustainable social policies which naturally speak to the social work value base, provides a natural starting point. In terms of actual policies, I have suggested that a capability approach which encompasses universal basic services and a participation income have much to offer social work and fit naturally with the broad mission of the profession. Importantly, an

endorsement of sustainable social policies also provides a focal point for social work and, if needed, for dissent. If social work is to dissent, it must dissent *from* something. In this instance, social work may need to dissent in the context of how the climate challenge is managed, particularly if it is to avoid slipping on a type of *autopilot* basis into enforcing an authoritarian mandate on behalf of the state. However, dissent is, in reality, only one side of a coin and so, in order to meaningfully dissent, social work must also be prepared to offer alternatives. In this respect, advocating for rights-based and sustainable social programmes, arguably, naturally addresses what has previously been a theoretical, conceptual and practical lacuna.

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Pūao-te-Ata-tū and Dissenting Voices of Change at New Zealand's Oldest School of Social Work

Tāmati Cairns and **Leon Fulcher**

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: The Ministerial Advisory Committee Report on a Māori Perspective for the New Zealand Department of Social Welfare (1986) offers an historic reference point from which to examine education and training reforms initiated at Aotearoa New Zealand's oldest school of social work and designed to better address the needs and aspirations of Māori and those working with Māori. Pūao-te-Ata-tū is an internationally unique example of social research facilitated by distinguished Māori leaders and senior government officials using indigenous methods. The Vice Chancellor of Victoria University was approached in 1986 along with its new Professor of Social Work about becoming drivers of Pūao-te-Ata-tū Recommendation 10(c) to "assess the extent to which tertiary social work courses are meeting cultural needs for those public servants seconded as students to the courses". The early passing of alumnus-Elder John Rangihau, shortly after Pūao-te-Ata-tū was published, left a legacy—acknowledged posthumously by the Council of Victoria University in 1989—when a senior Te Rangihau Scholar teaching and research position was established with Ngāi Tūhoe. A decade of reform in social work education and research at Victoria University saw important movement towards supporting and promoting Māori perspectives in the delivery of community social services in three New Zealand regions.

IMPLICATIONS: Five lessons learned about partnerships from the Victoria University experience are highlighted as issues that promote cultural responsiveness in support of Māori whānau, tamariki and rangatahi. The Wellington programme closed at the start of the new millennium without addressing the VUW Council relationship with Ngāi Tūhoe, highlighting broken promises.

KEYWORDS: Bi-cultural social work; ethnocentric practices; cultural racism; institutional racism, Pūao-te-Ata-tū

CORRESPONDENCE TO:
Tāmati Cairns

*Tukuna ahau kia korero ki taku Koroua
Tui noa, tui noa nga maunga whakahi ki te riu
o te whenua, ki a koutou ra ka ngaro ki te Ao.
Nga manu whitua ka wehe i roto o nga iwi,
nga Pou Tokomanawa o nga Whare Maire o nga
matua tipuna.
Nga Marae Kura, nga Whare Kura,
te Puao aitanga o te ata huakirangi,*

*i huakina ai nga tatau maha o Tikitiki o Rangi,
I unuhia atu ai ra koutou, te hunga mate ki te
hunga mate,
te Tapu o Tuawhakarere.
No reira taiahaha! Taiahaha!
Te tai e pari nei ketekete mai ketekete atu.
Te tai e pari ki whea,
e pari ana ki Tawhiti nui ki Tawhiti roa ki
Tawhiti pamamao.*

*E pari ana ki te awa o te aake aake,
ki te hau purongo o te kauheke kaumatua, he
Tipua, he Atua.
E pari ana ki Hawaiki nui, ki te hunanga atu ra o
te tangata hokinga kore ki muri,
Tihei Mauri Ora!
E Koro ee, e Koro ee!
E te Tumu Whakarae o te iwi, te whakaruruhau o
te Hapu, te toka tu moana o te whānau.
Te manu tioriori, te korokoro Tui, te taumata o
te whakaaro nui, te Tohunga o te whakaniko i te
takoto o te kupu i rangona ai te wairua o te tangi
a te ngakau.*

*Kai te rongo tonu taku ngakau, taku hinengaro,
aku taringa I te tangi a o kupu tohutohu i te
huarahi anga whakamua, e puta ai te tangata ki te
whai ao ki te ao marama,Tuatahi, ko te whakaiti,
Tuarua, ko te whakaiti, Tuatoru ko te whakaiti*

*I roto i nga tohe ki te Karauna, i roto tonu hoki,
i nga nohanga a whānau, kua marama haere ake
te tino hohonutanga o te whakaaro kai roto i enei
kupu iti, ahakoa iti, he pounama. Kaua e noho
i roto i te wairua whakahihi, e noho i roto i te
wairua mahakimanaki i te tangata.*

*E Kakati tonu ana nga paparinga o te kanohi i
te rere o nga roimata hokinga mahara, hokinga
whakaaro mou, mo o mahi ma te iwi e eke ai te
korero a te toa o te iwi a Te Whenuanui "E kore
au e hoki i te waewae tutuki engari ma te upoko
pakaru ra ano.*

*E Koro, he hokinga mahara ki te kohinga kaupapa,
ki te whakatakotoranga whakaaro a te Ao Maori, i
taria ai te pukapuka hopu i nga korero, ka huaina
tona ingoa ko "Puao o te Atatu", hai pupuri,
hai Pou here i te Mauri pupuri i te wairua o
nga korero, a nga whānau a nga hapu a nga
iwi huri noa i te mote, e rangona nei nga pari
karangaranga o Puao o te Ata tu.*

*I tapaina ai e koe te ingoa, a "Puao o te Atatu,"
kupu whakaari, whakatauaki, enei kupu whakato
mauri, paihere kaupapa ki te ao turoa, ki a
Ranginui e tu iho nei, ki a Papatuanuku e takoto
nei. E kore hoki te tangata e ora tonu mena kaare
e "Puao te tu mai a te Ata," e wehe ai te po, e
ao ake ai te awatea, ia ra, ia ra. E ora tonu ai te
tangata.*

*Katahi te mea ataahua rawa atu ko tena. Ahakoa
pehea te roa ka mana tonu nga korero, I herea
hoki ki a Ranginui e tu iho nei, I tuia ki a
Papatuanuku e takoto nei. Taria te wa e tinana ai
te mauri o te tumanako.*

*E koro, i roto i nga tumanako whakatinana ake
i nga kaupapa whakatika i nga nawe, tekau
ma toru nga Pou Tikanga i whakaturia hai
whakairitanga i nga kaupapa.*

*Ko te Pou Tikanga nui rawa i manakohia e korua,
ko te Minita o te Tari Toko i te Ora , ko te Pou
Tikanga Tuangahuru. (tekau) Ko tera, ko te
whakato, whakatu, whakamaranga ake i a Puao o
te Atatu i roto i te Tari Toko i te Ora o te Whare
Wananga o Wikitoria ki Poneke. Nau e koro,a, na
te Rangatira o te Tari Toko i te Ora John Grant, na
te Minita o te Kawana na Anne Hercus, na te Vice
Chancellor o te Whare Wananga na Les Holborow,
a na te rangatira o te Tari Toko i te Ora o te Whare
Wananga o Wikitoria, na Professor Leon Fulcher
i whiriwhiri, ka tu te kaupapa. Ko te kauru ko te
Pou herenga kaupapa ako I nga purongo toko i te
ora i taua Tari, ko Puao o te Ata tu.*

*Tino, ko te Tari Toko i te Ora i te Whare
Wananga o Wikitoria anake, te kaupapa ako Toko
i te Ora i Aotearoa nei mai I nga tau rima tekau o
tera rau tau. Ko Professor John Mcreary tetahi o
nga rangatira i tera wa.*

*Ko koutou ma nga akonga o tera wa, i puta, ko
Anne Delamere, ko Nevelle Baker, ko Wishie
Jaram, he maha koutou. I ora ai te Ao Maori i a
koutou te arahi i nga kaupapa huhua o roto I nga
Tari taka rawa mai ki tenei wa.*

*E Koro, ka tohua e koe maku hai arahi nga
kaupapa maori i roto i te tari Toko i te Ora i Te
Whare Wananga, engari, ko ta koutou whakatau,
me matua haere rawa ki te iwi o Ngāi Tūhoe ma
ratau marika e whakatau, e whakaae, e whakau te
kaupapa.*

*Ka haere ngatahi nga tira haere kawe i te kaupapa
ki a Ngāi Tūhoe.*

*Ko te tira o te Whare Wananga, ko tona kaiarahi
ko te Vice Chancellor, ko Les Holborow me nga
apiha tokorima o te Whare Wananga.*

Ko te tira tuarua, ko te Hekeretari General o te Tari Toko i Te Ora, ko John Grant me tona tira tokowha.

Ko te tira tuatoru ko nga kaimahi me nga rangatira o te tari maori.

Ko te tira tuawha ko nga kaimahi katoa, me nga rangatira o te Tari Toko I te Ora.

Ka haere ngatahi nga Tira nei, ka timata ki Waikaremoana,ka oti, ka haere ki Ruatahuna, ka oti ka haere ki te Waimana, ka oti, ka tatu ki Ruatoki.

I Ngahina Marae ki Ruatoki te hui whakamutunga te hui whakatatu, te hui whakapumau i te kaupapa, mena e whakaae ana a Tūhoe, ki tonu te Whare nui. Nau i arahi te kaupapa e koro, mai i tona timatanga ki te mutunga e matau ana koe, e mohio ana koe e Koro ki nga whakaritenga.

Na te Rangatira tonu, o Ngahina Marae, na Tekari Waaka i whakatau, i whakatatu, i whakapumau te kaupapa whakaae a Ngāi Tūhoe, ko ahau te tangata hai kawe i te turanga. Ka kawea nga karakia whakapumau, ka oti. E wha nga ra e hikoitia ana e nga tira mai i tona timatanga, ka tatu

Ka hopu ake a maumahara i nga korero whakamutunga a tenei o aku koroua, i muri tata o tana korero whakatau whakau, whakapumau i te kaupapa.

"E tama, kaua e wareware ki te hokihoki mai ki te wa kainga"

Pūao-te-Ata-tū and Aotearoa New Zealand social work education reform

Two decades after closure of the social work programme at Victoria University, two key leadership figures at the time—Tāmati Cairns and Leon Fulcher—recall and reflect on their perceptions of the Pūao-te-Ata-tū era of social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand. While the two of us, previous senior Victoria University and State Services administrations, as well as many former students understood and valued the increased Māori content, it is clear that others felt the course overall failed to adequately prepare social workers for professional roles in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Furthermore, the Māori content was not considered important enough to invigorate the aims and content of the social work programme. We do not seek to use this article as a base from which to contest decisions recommended by the review team. Rather, our intent is to describe—from our points of view—some of the features of New Zealand's oldest social work programme, in the event that others might consider some learnings may be of use for the future. In light of the continuing and never-ending pleas from Māori—as expressed during their time at Victoria University and for decades before and since—we share memories of how we interpreted this once exhilarating period of our professional lives and how it came to an end. We have sought to maintain a positive approach to this paper, focusing specifically on the role played by Māori—in the hope that our failure to ensure the course survived might provide grounds for others to thrive.

A dissenting voice of change in Aotearoa New Zealand social work education and research was promoted at Victoria University of Wellington from 1986, when agreement was given to implement a Pūao-te-Ata-tū (Daybreak) informed curriculum for mature students seconded by government departments (Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986). Important changes were made to the curriculum to create a more culturally responsive professional qualification in social work with active hapū and iwi-Māori support. Pūao-te-Ata-tū—The Daybreak Report—was an internationally unique example of social research resulting from a systematic consultative process guided by indigenous research methods and facilitated by

distinguished Māori leaders. In addition to community meetings at Department of Social Welfare offices and institutions throughout the country, a sample of iwi and hapū-Māori participants was engaged by the Pūao-te-Ata-tū research team, and oral contributions were collected from 34 Whare Tipuna strategically located throughout the country.

Indigenous sampling methods—with recorded narratives and transcripts—were created for this oral archive (Te Whāiti et al., 1997), much of which focused on the extent to which institutional racism was operating to the disadvantage of Māori children and young people. Reform of child protection and youth justice legislation and services was highlighted as a priority after the release of Pūao-te-Ata-tū and new legislation was passed 2 years later with the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act (1989) heralding the introduction of Family Group Conferences aimed at family participation in decision-making about the care and supervision of children and young people. The Pūao-te-Ata-tū Report found, "At the heart of the issue is a profound misunderstanding or ignorance of the place of the child in Māori society and its relationship with whānau, hapū, iwi structures" (Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective, 1986, p. 7). Pūao-te-Ata-tū Recommendation 1 sought: "to attack all forms of cultural racism in New Zealand that result in the values and lifestyle of the dominant group being regarded as superior to those of other groups, especially Māori" (p. 9). For reasons unknown to these authors, a 10-year embargo was imposed on the Pūao-te-Ata-tū Archive until 1996, thereby ensuring that the evidential voices and knowledge base of two generations of Tipuna Māori (elders) about the care, protection and supervision of Māori children and young people across 34 hapu and iwi-specific communities throughout Aotearoa were not heard.

Pūao-te-Ata-tū and Victoria University of Wellington

In 1986, Social Welfare Chief Executive John Grant and Pūao-te-Ata-tū Chairperson John Rangihau identified Victoria University with its recently appointed New Zealand-born Vice Chancellor, Les Holborow, and the anticipated appointment of a new Professor of Social Work as potential drivers of Pūao-te-Ata-tū Recommendation 10(c): "assess the extent to which tertiary social work courses are meeting cultural needs for those public servants seconded as students to the courses" (Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective, 1986). During the second year of the Pūao-te-Ata-tū consultation, Vice-Chancellor Holborow and his Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Tim Beaglehole, recommended the appointment of Leon Fulcher to the Chair of Social Work at Victoria University bringing more than a decade of social work practice, teaching, administration, and research experience from Scotland/UK, the USA and Canada.

Within days of taking up his post in August 1986, Professor Fulcher was invited by the Chief Executive of the Department of Social Welfare, John Grant, to meet Pūao-te-Ata-tū Review Chairperson, John Rangihau, known in the wider Māori world as Te Rangihau. A rigorous 2-hour *viva voce* examination with Te Rangihau followed, highlighting Māori and Departmental expectations and wishes. A verbal commitment was made at the end of that meeting to support a Pūao-te-Ata-tū Māori curriculum at Victoria University, offering 2-year professional Diploma and MA (Applied) degree pathways towards a professional qualification in social work for mature entrants with life and work experience. Such an expectation was consistent with New Zealand university regulations that provide access to postgraduate studies for mature entrants in selected subjects, a norm also for accredited UK social work programmes.

Historically, professional programmes of study for social work in Europe have

Figure 1: Times Higher Education Supplement Don's Diary Column, 5 May 1989

targeted adult learners with post-experience learning at professional Diploma level. North American and Australian programmes, by contrast, build around a 4-year Bachelor of Social Work degree, commonly involving younger students, or a 2-year Master of Social Work degree. Mature students with life and work experience help to ensure that entry-level social workers are more readily able to engage purposefully with families than young adult graduates with limited life experience, a theme highlighted in the Pūao-te-Ata-tū transcripts. Te Rangihau nominated Te Whāngai o Tūhoe, Tāmati Cairns, as the Pae Ārahi of Māori Social Work at Victoria University with a reconfigured Diploma in Social Work programme for mature entrants. Te Rangihau had been amongst the first Māori to complete the VUW Diploma in Social Sciences (later Social Work) on secondment as a Trainee Social Worker from the Department of Māori Affairs, so was familiar with the existing programme. In 1986-1987, Te Rangihau engaged kaumātua in Ruatāhuna, Waikaremoana, Waimana and Rūātoki to support and hold Te Mauri of the Pūao-te-Ata-tū Kaupapa and guide the Pae Ārahi working alongside Professor Fulcher and the Victoria University Social Work Programme to make the curriculum more culturally responsive to all New Zealanders.

A Te Rangihau Scholar at Victoria University

The early passing of Te Rangihau left a legacy formally acknowledged posthumously by the Council of Victoria University in 1989. A senior social work post was created on the recommendation of Vice-Chancellor Holborow and Director-General of Social Welfare, John Grant, after kanohi-ki-te-kanohi consultations with elders in Waikaremoana, Ruatāhuna, Waimana and Rūātoki. Ngāi Tūhoe endorsed a Te Rangihau Scholar Kaupapa and Tāmati Cairns, whāngai of Tata Hoata Marae, Ruatāhuna, was put forward as the inaugural appointment. DSW Director-General Grant and Vice-Chancellor Holborow's consultations with Tūhoe elders ensured that Wellington-based powers-that-be deliberately and actively demonstrated their respect for Māori elders by leaving their capital city offices and making the effort to meet Māori on their own whenua. It was a rare event for a New Zealand University Vice-Chancellor and Departmental CEO to have made such personal and institutional commitments to supporting Iwi Māori and social work and details of that occasion were documented in the *Times Higher Education*

Supplement, Don's Diary narrative published in May 1989, shown below.

A Wāhine Māori Lectureship was subsequently established to support the Te Rangihau Scholar, with first Te Ripowai Higgins and then Waereti Tait-Rolleston of Ngāi Tūhoe appointed to support the Pūao-te-Ata-tū kaupapa. Parallel Tāne and Wāhine Māori Lectureships were later established with the appointment of Harry Walker and Riripeti Reedy of Ngāti Porou. Because of the high level of demand from Māori, State Services and NGO managers and staff for inclusion in the VUW course, invitations to offer the Pūao-te-Ata-tū Curriculum in the top of the South Island with Nelson Polytechnic and in the Bay of Plenty with Waiariki Polytechnic were endorsed by Deans Beaglehole and Hamer and approved by Vice-Chancellor Holborow and the Senior Management Group of Victoria University through 1998. Social work was offered through distance education between 1993 and 1999, in the top of the South Island and in the Tairāwhiti and Bay of Plenty regions. Strategic partnerships were quickly endorsed by these two partner institutions and both courses filled rapidly.

A Decade of Pūao-te-Ata-tū Social Work Curriculum at Victoria

A decade of social work education and research reforms at Victoria University saw important movement towards taking real account of Māori perspectives in the delivery of community social services. In drawing comparisons between social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand and developments in Canada, the United States, Australia, or the United Kingdom, it is worth noting that in 1986 fewer than one in five Aotearoa New Zealand social workers held a professional qualification (K. Mason, 1992). Between 1950 and the mid-1970s, roughly two dozen qualified social workers graduated each year from Aotearoa New Zealand's only qualifying course for mature entrants with work experience as unqualified social workers. Post-graduate education in

social work was introduced in the mid-1970s, and from 1988 both first-degree holders with limited experience and non-graduate entrants with experience as unqualified social workers were taught together. Academic work was assessed to separate standards (degree holders were expected to address essays with enhanced academic rigour), expectations concerning practice competencies were the same for both groups. The modular teaching format, introduced in 1993, took account of teaching and learning themes required for professional accreditation and made the programme portable.

In a modular programme designed specifically for adult learners, candidates engaged in an intensive 27 to 30-hour module offering wananga and activity-based learning opportunities around core knowledge and practice themes. Each block of classroom teaching was followed by a supervised practicum or research fieldwork in which mature students practised learning and completed assignments relating to specific modules. With a modular curriculum, the timetables for a traditional 'school week' and 'academic year' were changed from 1-hour and 3-hour teaching sessions each week of the university semester to a pattern in which adult learners were immersed for an entire week in studies relating to one particular theme. Learners were introduced to new theoretical and research content, explored the significance of this material for social work practice through structured learning exercises, then developed personal learning plans to complete assigned work after each module. With Aotearoa New Zealand accreditation standards inactive at the time, UK accreditation standards were used for the award of a professional qualification in social work. Candidates were required to satisfactorily complete the equivalent of 2 years' full-time study (each involving 220 classroom contact hours), plus 2 periods of supervised practice (each lasting 70 days), and a research project or thesis which integrated learning from across the combined programme of studies (Fulcher, 1988).

Three of 16 modules in the Victoria University Social Work programme were taught in partnership with Māori hapū in indigenous learning environments. Between 1987 and 1998, three Ngāi Tūhoe kaumātua attended and participated in the marae-based learning modules: Koroua Whitu Waiariki and Koroua Joe Tākuta—who, along with Te Rangihau—were Māori Battalion veterans. Working together with Hohepa Kereopa (Moon, 2003), these Tohunga held Te Mauri of the Pūao-te-Ata-tū Kaupapa and associated tikanga. Students were offered marae-based teaching and learning opportunities in hapū 'classroom learning environments' in which Māori cultural practices, tikanga and language were routines of daily life. Students reviewed prior learning about Māori perspectives and aspirations, and practised rituals of encounter between Māori and others who came to New Zealand during 19th- and 20th-century migrations (Year 1, Module 2). At the end of Year 1, students extended their learning about rituals of bi-cultural engagement in social work practice and research (Year 1, Module 8).
Then, by the end of their second year, graduates were expected to demonstrate minimum competency to practise cultural safety, knowledge and skills in a Māori setting, as required of any Aotearoa New Zealand social worker (Year 2, Module 8) (Tait-Rolleston et al., 1997).

In her follow-up study with 47 rehabilitation case managers who shared some modular teaching and learning with students in social work modules, Leberman found that "the key factor facilitating the transfer of learning from the classroom to the workplace for adult learners is a course design that employs experiential and activity-based learning which incorporates both personal and professional development opportunities" (2006, p. 63). One participant said:

> The Marae stay had the most effect on me personally. It developed my self-awareness and that of other people. It made me think a lot about me, where I am at, where I am going and gave me a working definition of cultural safety, which starts with me! (Leberman, 2006, p. 63)

Between 1986 and 1997, almost two out of five of the 499 graduates of Victoria University's Social Work programmes were Māori, while about one in ten were of Pasifika ancestry. A total of 53% of social work students during that decade identified as European/Pākehā, 37% Māori, 8% Pasifika, and 2% Asian. Graduates ranged in age from 23 to 60, with most aged between 28 and 35. Roughly two-thirds of candidates had 2 or more years of work experience as unqualified social workers, gaining admission to advanced professional studies through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the delivery of social work services. It is worth noting that Victoria University Social Work programmes had the highest proportion of Māori graduates anywhere in

Table 1. Ethnic Composition of 1997 Social Work Students Compared with all Victoria University Enrolments

Ethnic Group	Across University	Social Work
Pākehā/European	70%	36%
Māori	9%	54%[1]
Pacific Island	3%	8%[2]
Asian	11%	0%
Other	3%	0%
Uncoded	4%	2%

the university, except for the School of Māori Studies, as shown in the Table below.

Māori enrolments in Victoria University Social Work programmes started to increase following publication of Pūao-te-Ata-tū in 1986 when only 10% of graduates were Māori and 80% identified as Pākehā-European. By 1997, each group comprised over 40% percent of graduates. It was not simply a matter of increasing the number of Māori students enrolling in university courses. Reform involved establishing a new curriculum, developing new teaching material for adult learners, and recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced faculty. Curriculum reforms sought to create learning environments in which prospective social workers could learn what cultural safety means in practice with clients on a day-to-day basis, and in working with colleagues as members of professional teams. Through exploring the meaning of cultural safety (Ramsden, 1997) and rituals of encounter between Māori and other New Zealanders as fellow students in a professional course of study, students said this helped them to explore what is required of social work exchanges across other cultural boundaries (Leigh, 1998). Our learning for cross-cultural social work practice highlights the importance of both personal and bi-cultural learning. Learners are invited to explore opportunity moments and differences of experience that may exist between our cultural practices and those of another.

The End of a Pūao-te-Ata-tū focus at Victoria University

In 1998, a recruitment agency played a key role in the appointment of a new Australian Vice-Chancellor from the Sunshine Coast with little experience of working with Māori peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. A new Dean of the Arts Faculty was also appointed after the untimely death of Dean David Hamer in the post. The new Dean had minimal involvement with the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective Review or the Pūao-te-Ata-tū Social Work

curriculum. Endorsed by the new Vice-Chancellor, the new Dean initiated a formal Review of Social Work to be carried out in 1999 with a Review Panel that included a Professor of Māori Studies from Auckland University, an experienced New Zealand social work educator from Auckland, and an Australian social work professor. No formal report or summary of this formal review of the department and its programmes nor the review methodology was ever released by Victoria University, nor was it ever shared with the authors of this statement.

It is unknown which Wellington-based students and placement supervisors the Review Panel met during their review, but neither students nor placement supervisors were included from the top of the South Island or the Bay of Plenty programmes offering VUW Social Work courses. Without reference to the history of social work at Victoria University of Wellington and the Pūao-te-Ata-tū curriculum and its Māori orientation at Victoria University, the new Vice-Chancellor and Dean used the Review to announce closure of the VUW Social Work programme. Within two years, the Victoria University Social Work programme and its Pūao-te-Ata-tū curriculum was shut down after 50 years of professional education and growing demand for places on its courses.

We seek to highlight the effect that decision had on listening to, respecting, and supporting Māori social workers to provide higher quality care and supervision services for Māori during the first two decades of the 21st century. It is true that the VUW curriculum contained differences in content and methods to other tertiary education courses in New Zealand, but those differences reflected the age, maturity, and prior experience of VUW students and a deliberate focus on the needs of indigenous people in Aotearoa. It would appear that the formal position and status of the Te Rangihau Scholar and the VUW relationship with Ngāi Tūhoe have never been addressed by the Council of Victoria University.

Learning Partnerships for Cultural Responsiveness

Five types of educational partnership became apparent in promoting a more culturally responsive education and training programme for Aotearoa New Zealand social workers, in keeping with Pūao-te-Ata-tū Recommendation 10. A challenge throughout was to maintain learning environments characterised by cultural safety while ensuring that professional rigour was applied to all supervised social work practice learning.

Complementary Tāne and Wāhine roles: The first type of partnership involved the complementary Tāne and Wāhine roles within traditional Māori culture performed by male and female educators connected by whakapapa. This helped maintain cultural safety as a principle of adult learning (Ramsden, 1997) giving much-needed support for indigenous faculty as new entrants to university teaching. It is not simply a matter of making appointments with brown-faced men and women to university teaching positions with a recognised higher degree. Such mistakes have been commonly made by white administrators throughout the colonised world. Indigenous language and fluency with regional cultural practices are rarely considered by university committees recommending appointments. Indigenous faculty are sometimes expected to perform like Euro-American teachers. University administrators need to acknowledge that, in order to remain effective, indigenous faculty must continue playing an active role in their own tribal affairs, including social work practice with their own people. This takes time and frequently involves travel away from their place of employment. Advances in virtual technology as a bi-product of the Covid-19 pandemic have gone some way towards making it possible to attend 'Zui' sessions or hui using Zoom or Teams technology. Indigenous faculty are also expected to participate in numerous university committees to help give a 'culturally responsive face' to monocultural institutions. Promotional prospects rarely take account of these wider pressures when institutional criteria normally applied involve a hierarchy of institutional performance expectations around research and publication, teaching, administration, and community service. Indigenous knowledge is commonly dismissed or minimised in the face of colonial, Western, and Global North expectations around merit, teaching and learning epistemologies, and cultural obligations (Moon, 2003).

Intergenerational relationships: A second, and related, type of partnership involved intergenerational relationships that linked children, through parents, uncles and aunties, to the elders who carry the traditions of tribal peoples. Māori teaching staff at Victoria were supported and nurtured by their old people (Rangihau, 1981), the very Tohunga (elders with specialist traditional knowledge) that the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907 sought to destroy. These are the keepers of knowledge to whom indigenous people commonly turn for advice, guidance, and counsel, linking each teacher to sources of traditional knowledge and providing guardianship for such knowledge passed down through generations (Pere, 1992, 1993; Rangihau, 1981). Partnerships such as these require that universities remain open to scrutiny as host environments. This is vital for indigenous social workers seeking to gain access to Western knowledge while living with the risks of accommodation at the expense of indigenous concepts, beliefs, and worldview (J. Bradley, 1997; R. Bradley, 1997; Tapiata & Ruwhiu, 1995; Walker, 1995). Indigenous knowledge requires acknowledgement within university settings. Change initiatives all too easily fail because of scholarly arrogance around higher degrees, expectations that indigenous staff will implement a monocultural curriculum, or misappropriation of traditional knowledge by others in publish or perish university environments.

Whānau participation: A third type of partnership was highlighted in the way

that students frequently brought young children and teenagers to class or attended complete modules. Such practices influenced the attitudes that whānau had about their family member engaged in university study. Partners, siblings, cousins, and others also stopped in to 'check out' what their family member was up to at 'school', since it did not sound much like the schooling that they themselves had experienced. Very special occasions occurred when students brought a parent or elder to class as a source of support or as a means of introducing that person to the material they were addressing during the course of their studies. This third type of partnership was influential in increasing the number of Māori students enrolling in Victoria University Social Work programmes through support of whānau, hapū, and iwi.

Tribally based teaching and learning opportunities in rural areas: Educational partnerships between Māori and tertiary institutions can provide tribally based teaching and learning opportunities for students in different parts of the country. This fourth type of partnership resulted in programmes of professional education for social work being made more readily available and more culturally responsive to the needs and aspirations of social workers practising in Aotearoa New Zealand's rural areas on the East Cape with support from Ngāti Porou, and in the Central North Island supported by Ngāi Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Tuwharetoa, Te Whānau-a-Apanui, and other iwi in that region. Not surprisingly, many social workers operating in rural areas of the North Island are Māori. Important lessons were learned in a classroom of adults when the ratio of indigenous people to students of immigrant ancestry changes. When three out of four students in a learning group are of indigenous ancestry, several traditional assumptions about tertiary education need reviewing. Previously, teaching staff rarely acknowledged how threatened Māori students felt about being in a university classroom, especially mature students once punished for using their own language in the native school playground.

In this new situation, there were times when white teachers or students felt threatened—a new situation for them and a new learning opportunity. Team teaching that included both indigenous and non-indigenous teachers went some way towards addressing this issue.

Come-from-away educators: In Canada's Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the local people use the term 'come-from-away' for anyone who does not come from their Island. That term helps to describe a fifth type of partnership between 'come-from-away' educators and particular indigenous peoples. If one accepts Freire's (1970) notion that information is power and that knowledge of the tertiary education system is critical to the successful introduction of change in any social work curriculum, then it follows that white educators and administrators often have enormous influence over decisions about appointments, allocation of resources and teaching duties, as well as curriculum design in university programmes. Unless 'come-from-away' faculty and teaching staff support cultural responsiveness in the education and training of indigenous social workers working with their own people, then university education offers little more than intellectual colonisation and marginalisation for a people whose culture is already endangered.

Institutional Racism Silences Pūao-te-Ata-tū

Like many before them, New Zealand Commissioner for Children, Andrew Becroft, and his successor, Judge Francis Elvers, have called for care and protection for Māori children by Māori. "Pūao-te-Ata-tū invited radical change of our care and protection system", Commissioner Becroft has said, "but successive governments have resisted transformation, instituting only incremental change. Sadly, that has ended up serving the protection of the system rather than the needs of children and young people – especially mokopuna Māori"

(Becroft, 2021, n.p.). These calls echo the kōrero of Te Rangihau and efforts made with Puao-te-Ata-tū towards bi-cultural social work education and training with Victoria University over 3 decades earlier.

In the late 1990s, dissenting voices within Aotearoa New Zealand's oldest School of Social Work and others supporting the school, were silenced through a rejection of indigenous social work knowledge and practices. Dissenting voices about gender and race are prominent themes in contemporary social work discourses everywhere (Crenshaw, 2019; Davis, 1983). The same was true in the VUW Social Work programme where feminist challenges and indigenous challenges were ever-present. As elsewhere within human service agencies, it is not uncommon in such debates to hear women of colour challenge arguments made by white women claiming to speak for them (Cairns et al., 1998; Moretown-Robinson, 2002).

Pūao-te-Ata-tū and the five-volume Report of the New Zealand Royal Commission on Social Policy published in 1988 were quickly made redundant by a new Director General of Social Welfare whose mission was to break the department into disconnected business units. A new 15-page, Te Punga (Department of Social Welfare, 1994) publication reframed statutory social work values into management output classes. The new General Manager of a renamed NZ Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service was a former engineer at the Port of Wellington who was joined by a former General Manager of Subaru NZ and a former Policy Manager of Internal Affairs heading up the Community Funding Agency. Under a new Minister of Social Welfare, corporatisation of the state began in earnest (personal communication, Bradley, 2022). Ethnocentrism enabled the Finance Minister's (Richardson, 1991) 'Mother of All Budgets' to strip funding from the newly introduced Family Group Conferences, a prominent feature of the

Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 (Fulcher & Ainsworth, 1994). State bureaucracy stripped funding with nuclear family justifications that silenced the voices of wider whānau networks whose involvement is critical to good decisions with, and for, Māori children and young people. Whānau participation in decision-making is undermined when nuclear family perspectives are used to determine the care and protection, or supervision of Māori children and young people.

What was Ignored During the 1999 VUW Review of Social Work?

Challenges facing the Department of Social Welfare in 1986 are alive and not-so-well with Oranga Tamariki in recent years (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2020a, 2020b; Office of the Ombudsman, 2020; Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020). Challenges laid before the VUW Social Work programme in 1986 were considerable, but directions taken were responsive to, and supported by, both the Department of Social Welfare and the university administrators at the time. The need to listen and respond to Māori was central to the programme but took the professional education programme away from tertiary education curricula and timetables found elsewhere in New Zealand. Decades later, that need to listen and respond to Māori voices and new leadership remains. Calls intensify for the state to provide different Child Welfare and Youth Justice services (Cheng, 2020; Moxon, 2020; Radio New Zealand, 2021; Television New Zealand, 2019). With its limited history of professional education, the impact of institutional racism in New Zealand universities was particularly challenging at Victoria University. The Review of Social Work was never released to those who were most impacted by its conclusions and recommendations for social work teaching, administration, and research at Victoria University. The VUW Social Work programme was closed, and faculty posts terminated.

The Te Rangihau Scholar position was established by the Council of Victoria University in 1989 after VUW Vice-Chancellor Holborow met with Ngāi Tūhoe people in all four valleys of their rohe. This senior Māori teaching and research position, focusing on Māori child welfare, remains unfinished business with Ngāi Tūhoe and Te Rangihau's whānau who once endorsed recognition of their father's legacy as an outstanding alumnus of Victoria University. A 40-minute documentary produced by Jonathan Mason *Towards a Culturally Responsive Social Work Practice for Aotearoa,* 1999 (available via this YouTube link: https://youtu.be/ZLQ7Y3m7QfI) included strong support from Canadian Social Work educators with experience of working with indigenous social workers, and who were familiar with the Victoria course. The video also included feedback from students and former students from the Wellington programme, the top of the South Island and the Bay of Plenty about their learning and preparation for professional careers in social work in New Zealand.

Conclusion

To conclude, we acknowledge collective responsibility for failing to sustain dissenting efforts that sought to re-shape and sustain a Pūao-te-Ata-tū curriculum for mature entrants, especially Māori, at Victoria University. Our view is that intellectual colonisation has operated in the Aotearoa New Zealand educational curriculum—including tertiary education—since 1840. Intellectual colonisation has been especially important for tribal peoples now living amongst 'come-from-away' New Zealanders who brought their own world histories to Aotearoa and enshrined these in the nation's curriculum. We argue that intellectual colonisation played a part in the way that Victoria University managed the Review of the Pūao-te-Ata-tū curriculum for social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand: (i) through a 20th century determination that Māori Studies and Social Work were distinctly

separate disciplines; (ii) through a rejection of indigenous knowledge and the keepers of indigenous knowledge about adult learning for social work practice with Māori; and (iii) through a failure to listen to Māori and Pacific graduates and iwi about their experiences of personal and professional learning for social work practice with the Victoria University programme. We find it ironic that Pūao-te-Ata-tū, the shortest Ministerial Review Report in New Zealand history, focused attention ever so briefly on cultural racism in the care and supervision of Māori children and young people. Some 36 years later, the statistics for Māori children and young people in Oranga Tamariki care and in New Zealand young offenders' institutions are worse than ever before. Cultural racism identified in the Pūao-te-Ata-tu archive has arguably evolved into more sophisticated forms of institutional racism operating in the state bureaucracy. Sealed away in the national archives of time, Pūao-te-Ata-tū still draws attention to a legacy of dissenting voices about the care, protection, and supervision of tamariki and rangatahi Māori. The Pūao-te-Ata-tu voices now represent little more than a footnote in the contemporary education and training of Aotearoa New Zealand social workers and do not feature in applications for recognition of international social work qualifications for practice in contemporary multi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand.

It is a source of great sadness for many that a social work course—established and supported by the most senior members of the Department of Social Welfare, with Iwi support, while being promoted, applauded, and monitored for many years by some of the most senior members of Victoria University—should have been shut down abruptly with little transparency for the decision taken. It is a source of even greater sadness that both Māori and non-Māori social work students were deprived of opportunities to learn more about, and be better prepared to, work in te Ao Māori. The greatest sadness of all will be felt by whānau whose tamariki and rangatahi have been

deprived of supports that could have been available to them by mature social workers working with better understanding and with greater capacity to proactively assist them.

He tukuna roimata e Koro, he hokinga mahara. Okioki mai, i roto i nga manakitanga a te wahi ngaro i roto hoki i nga kupu a to tatau Atua.

"He honore, he kororia, he maungarongo ki runga i te whenua, he whakaaro pai ki nga tangata katoa"

Notes

1 Social Work enrolled six times the VUW average number of Māori enrolments with enhanced EFTS funding.

2 Social Work enrolled nearly three times the VUW average number of Pasifika enrolments.

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Social Work England: A regulator that has earned our collective dissent

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: In December 2019, Social Work England (SWE) officially took over as the regulator of the approximately 100,000 social workers in England. This article explores the foundations and first two years of SWE, suggesting that, as a regulator, it has earned the collective dissent of social workers.

APPROACH: Initially, a brief history of social work regulation in England is provided, before moving on to explore the founding of SWE and the makeup of the organisation. The regulator's standards and rules, approach to consultation and representative role are also discussed.

DISCUSSION: This culminates in a discussion about the dissent that many social workers in England have already started to demonstrate towards SWE, with a particular focus on the new continuing professional development (CPD) requirements. The potential to translate this largely individual dissent into collective action and mutual support is explored.

Keywords: Social work; regulation; Social Work England; continuing professional development; dissent

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In December 2019, Social Work England (SWE) officially took over as the regulator of the approximately 100,000 social workers in England—the third such regulator for social workers in just seven years. There were those who argued when social work regulation was initially introduced in the UK under the Care Standards Act 2000 that it was a move that would gradually erode both professional discretion and social work values (Rogowski, 2020). This article argues that many of the developments around SWE could be seen as these predictions coming to fruition. Following a brief history of social work regulation in England and circumstances that led to the creation of SWE, various aspects and activities of the new regulator are reviewed: the makeup of the organisation; rules and standards; manufacturing

consensus; and the appropriation of social worker voice. The article then focuses on the ways social workers have already started to demonstrate their dissent in relation to SWE, and how this, largely individualised, dissent could be translated into collective action and mutual support.

Brief regulatory history

In 1970 the Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers (CCETSW) was established in the UK with a specific remit to promote the quality of social work training and education (Rogowski, 2020). The CCETSW remained in place until the passing of the Care Standards Act 2000, legislation that required, for the first time, all social workers in England to be registered,

and thus obligated them to abide by the standards and rules of the new regulator: the General Social Care Council (GSCC). This was seen by the government of the day as an important step in modernising the social work profession, and three additional nation-specific regulators were also established in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, a regulatory split that remains today (Rogowski, 2020).

Following the intense media and political scrutiny of social workers in England that followed the death of 17-month-old Peter Connelly (Baby P) in 2007, the Social Work Task Force (2009) was appointed by the government to review the profession and recommend reform. While highly critical of the GSCC on areas like quality assurance and clarity of role, that task force did not actually recommend a change of regulator. However, there were several other influential developments at the time. These included the dismissal of GSCC Chief Executive Mike Wardle in 2009 following a report into the handling and backlog of professional misconduct cases (Brindle, 2009), and the introduction of austerity measures following the financial market collapse of 2008 that included the shutting down of several public organisations perceived to be overly expensive (Jones, 2019). As a result, in 2010, the government announced its intention close the GSCC and shift regulatory responsibility for social workers to the Health Professions Council, an existing regulator that covered a range of professions including physiotherapists, occupational therapists and paramedics, and would be renamed the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (Department of Health, 2010). The central justification provided when this change was announced was that the current arrangement was "anomalous" because the GSCC was the only professional regulator directly answerable to the Secretary of State for Health (p. 21). Therefore, in 2012, the HCPC took over regulatory responsibility for the profession, and would maintain this until the founding of SWE.

This relatively short and linear exploration of social work regulation in England belies a much more complex history. For example, Purcell (2020) presented research that suggested the frequently repeated narrative of high-profile child deaths leading to major reforms oversimplifies, and that these deaths are actually more likely to be utilised to justify pre-planned government initiatives. A more in-depth exploration of this regulatory history can be found in several places (for example, Purcell, 2020; Rogowski, 2020; Worsley et al., 2020a).

Justifying the new regulator

In the 2016 report *Children's Social Care Reform: A Vision for Change,* the Department for Education (2016) announced their intention to create a new regulatory organisation for social workers in England that would come to be SWE. Justifications provided for his new regulator included the need for a social-work-specific regulator to "develop an in-depth understanding of the profession", a perspective that seemingly ignored that the GSCC, holding such a remit, had only recently been abolished (Department for Education, 2018, p. 9). However, the primary focus of government discourse around the new regulator centred on claims that this change was needed to address poor-quality social workers, and in particular education providers who were seen to be "producing poor quality trainees" (McNicoll, 2016). In order to make these arguments, the government relied on several reports they had commissioned into the profession, most notably, the Narey (2014) report. The author of that report, Martin Narey, was a frequent advisor to the government with a background predominantly in prison services. Narey raised concerns about social work qualifying education, critiquing the quality of placements and the literacy of students (p. 16). However, the report's methodology was based primarily on "a large number of private interviews", and there was minimal engagement with existing research or

alternative perspectives (p. 3). The Narey report, and the influence it has had on SWE, are discussed in more detail later.

The focus on *quality* of social workers also points to another potential motivation for introducing the new regulator: to accelerate a programme of reforms that have been narrowing and restricting social work knowledge and practice in England, particularly over the past decade. Tunstill (2019) points to several interlinked projects and processes that form part of this programme, including the introduction and rapid expansion of the social work fast-track qualifying provider Frontline, an organisation established to recruit and train "high-quality" social workers (MacAlister et al., 2012, p. 3). Concerns with the Frontline organisation and model have been widely documented elsewhere, and include high costs, poor retention, perpetuating inequality, concerning business connections and (somewhat ironically), the poor quality of their training model (Hanley, 2021a; Jones, 2019; Tunstill, 2019). However, despite all of this, the government continue to back Frontline and habitually increases the value and number of their contracts. In one critique Murphy (2016) even goes so far as to suggest that a key catalyst for replacing the HCPC was that they were too challenging of Frontline and its proponents. As evidence, he notes that the head of the HCPC had challenged claims that social work courses were producing poor-quality social workers, highlighting that those making these claims had failed to provide a single piece of evidence. Murphy (2016) also describes how the HCPC obligated Frontline to make extensive changes to their programme in order to meet its approval criteria. In contrast to this, Frontline have reported that SWE ended their first inspection of them a day early "as the regulator had already found sufficient evidence to recommend Frontline approval" (Frontline, 2021, p. 5).

What is Social Work England?

SWE was initially proposed in draft legislation to be an executive agency under the Department for Education, a very unusual proposal for a profession that had only four years earlier seen the closure of the GSCC justified by the need to move further away from government (Department of Health, 2010). These initial proposals for SWE were supported by some very prominent figures, including the Chief Social Worker (CSW) for children and families in England, Isabelle Trowler, a registered social worker and consultant who had played a key role in designing Frontline's curriculum, and was appointed by the Department for Education to provide leadership for the profession (Jones, 2019). However, concerns about the lack of independence that approach would have created were raised by many in the sector, including the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), the largest professional association of social workers in the UK (Jones, 2019). Under the weight of these objections, the plans were eventually watered down and, under the Children and Family Act 2017, SWE was created in terms not dissimilar to the GSCC, being an arms-length body. However, among the wide range of maintained powers, the Secretary of State for Education still holds veto/modifying rights over any SWE rules, appoints the Chair and approves the appointment of all chief executives. The founding of SWE also brought with it a £26m government investment, a large sum at a time when social workers were regularly reporting the negative impact of underfunding on services (Ravalier et al., 2021).

To better understand SWE and how it functions as an organisation, it is vital to look at those who make up the organisation, as well as those who do not. For example, while the initial board of SWE included a consultant, a finance director and a member of the House of Lords, it took almost two years and substantial pressure from the profession for SWE to appoint any registered social workers as board members (Smith, 2021). Furthermore, a 2021 internal audit found that only 13% of the SWE workforce were qualified

social workers (Smith, 2021). Considering government claims that SWE was set up in part to develop an in-depth understanding of the profession, this marginalisation of social workers seems counterintuitive (Department for Education, 2018). The Chair of SWE, Kamlesh Kumar Patel, and the Chief Executive Colum Conway, do both hold social work qualifications; however, neither is a registered social worker in England (Conway is registered in Northern Ireland, Patel does not appear on any UK register). Furthermore, in line with SWE's regulations, both individuals were appointed directly by the Secretary of State for Education at a time of increasing concern about government bias in public appointments (Cathcart, 2022; Dunton, 2020). Patel holds a number of prominent political and business roles and, despite being only one of his 22 disclosed interests, SWE alone pay Patel a salary of £70k (SWE, 2021a).

The marginalisation of social workers within their regulator can be further seen by looking at more micro-level activities of SWE. For example, under their Fitness to Practise (FtP) rules, SWE has a legislative responsibility to investigate concerns raised about social workers whose ability to practise may be impaired (SWE, 2019d). When SWE introduced these rules, it was clear that reform in this area was needed. Research had shown that social workers were more likely to find themselves subject to FtP investigations than other professionals, as well as being more likely to be removed from the register as a result and less likely to be able to engage effectively with the process (Kirkham et al., 2019; Worsley et al., 2020b). However, social work perspectives have once again been marginalised in this process, with no requirement for either case investigators or case managers who are overseeing these investigations to have any experience, or even knowledge, of social work (SWE, 2019a).

Furthermore, since SWE took over responsibility the number of FtP referrals received, and the length of time it takes

to reach an outcome, have both increased (Preston, 2021a). SWE have also faced questioning about the legality of their FtP processes. This included a proposed power to impose interim orders without offering a hearing, a proposal that was eventually scrapped following legal scrutiny (Stevenson, 2018). Less than a year after the new rules were implemented SWE also had to suspend its voluntary removal process under pressure from their own regulator, the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) (Samuel, 2020a). The PSA have also raised their concerns about a growing backlog of FtP cases at SWE, and in particular that SWE is failing to identify and prioritise FtP cases that could represent a serious risk to the safety of service users (Preston, 2021a, 2021b). Notably, these difficulties around risk prioritisation and the size of the case backlog are both very similar to those experienced by the GSCC in 2009 that led to a public inquiry, the dismissal of their chief executive, and shortly thereafter, the announcement that the GSCC was to be abolished (Brindle, 2009). However, for SWE the government instead opted to provide them with a £2.3m funding injection to help clear the backlog (Preston, 2021b).

Further demonstrating the deficits in SWE's approach to FtP are the revelations that black and ethnic minority social workers are overrepresented in the cases they adjudicate (Samuel, 2020b). This finding is potentially indicative of a more fundamental problem with representation and diversity in the organisation, as a 2020 equality audit of SWE found that only 2.7% of their staff are Black, compared to 12% of children's social workers and 15% of adult social workers (Samuel, 2020c). Furthermore, 67% of SWE's executive leadership team are male, while only 17.5% of social workers are male (SWE, 2021a). There are also arguably some fundamental equality issues present in the standards and rules implemented by SWE, including listing lived experience of receiving social work services alongside having a criminal conviction as a potential reason for rejecting

student candidates (SWE, 2021b). These rules and standards will now be discussed in more depth.

Contentious rules and standards

Prior to taking over regulatory responsibility, SWE introduced a number of rules and standards that would shape its functioning. In line with Tunstill's (2019) analysis, these rules and standards could be seen as yet another aspect of the narrowing and restricting of social work knowledge and practice in England discussed earlier. For example, the Professional Standards (SWE, 2019b) that outline what all social workers in England must know, understand and be able to do, are all prefaced by either "I will" or "I will not", representing an individualised, rather than collectivist, conceptualisation of social work, and one seemingly designed to promote self-governing and predictable subjects (Garrett, 2021a). Some indicative examples include:

- Standard 1.7: "I will recognise and use responsibly, the power and authority I have when working with people, ensuring that my interventions are always necessary, the least intrusive, proportionate, and in people's best interests."
- Standard 3.15: "I will recognise and respond to behaviour that may indicate resistance to change, ambivalent or selective cooperation with services, and recognise when there is a need for immediate action."(SWE, 2019a)

The wording of each of these, and indeed of most of the professional standards, are also arguably relevant only to frontline local authority contexts, excluding those in charities, academia, policy, activism, and community development.

However, perhaps more concerning than what is included in these rules and standards are the omissions. For example, there is a distinct lack of emphasis placed on structural and societal oppression, and there is not a single mention of poverty in any of the professional standards (SWE, 2019b). In the context of contemporary England, where, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, poverty was rapidly rising (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2020), and research increasingly shows those experiencing deprivation are also more likely to experience social work involvement (Bennett et al., 2021)—this omission should be unacceptable. There is, similarly, no engagement with international issues like climate change and migration, contexts that increasingly impact on social work practice in England (Palattiyil et al., 2019). These developments put SWE at odds with the Global Definition of Social Work as developed by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), with its emphasis on collective responsibility and social justice, a point that will be returned to below (IFSW, 2014).

Manufacturing consensus

Before introducing its rules and standards, SWE undertook a public consultation seeking views and opinions from stakeholders (SWE, 2019c). The consultation ran over 10 weeks in early 2019 and, in addition to online and written submissions, public consultation days were held across England. The consultation process was widely publicised, including through industry news outlets and social media. In this way, SWE was not only obtaining feedback, but was publicly seen to be obtaining this feedback. Providing stakeholders with access to extensive, but heavily controlled, consultation opportunities in this way can act to manufacture a feeling of consent, consensus and legitimacy, while ultimately serving to reproduce existing power relations (van Dijk, 1993). This is, in part, because dominant participants still determine all structures and systems for engagement, and in doing so can restrict the scale and scope of involvement.

There were significant ways that SWE strictly controlled both input and output in the consultation process. The online consultation forms included very specific questions about individual sections of the texts, rather than asking respondents for feedback on the areas that they felt were most important to them. As an example, the consultation questionnaire related to the FtP rules included questions about only 16 of the 51 proposed rules (SWE, 2019d). Further limiting the scope of the consultation, there were word limits on the online feedback forms, and no place to list sources or references. This suggests that there was minimal interest in longer responses that had the opportunity to fully develop and provide clear corroborating evidence.

All consultation respondents were also asked to give their general agreement with each of the proposed rules and standards documents, weighted from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The relatively positive average response to these questions (ranging from 4.4/5 for the Professional Standards to 3.5/5 for the FtP Rules) was a major focus of the consultation feedback presented by SWE, allowing them to claim consensus even while acknowledging that there remained high levels of disagreement with specific sections (SWE, 2019c). SWE would later use the same type of scaling questions in a consultation on changes to their continuing professional development (CPD) model (to be discussed more below) (SWE, 2021c). Respondents to that consultation were significantly less positive about these new changes. A proposal to require social workers to reflect on CPD related to a particular theme received an average agreement of only 2.5/5, and a proposal to require social workers to discuss their CPD with a peer was agreed with by only "a third (32%) of respondents" (no reason is given for presenting this finding as a fraction/percentage rather than out of 5) (p. 6). In each of these cases, SWE declared its intention to implement these changes regardless.

The limited information that SWE does provide about settling disagreements raised in their consultations suggests that they rely heavily on the advice and views of individuals and organisations with existing leadership authority in social work. For example, one of the most contested changes brought in by SWE was the new requirement for a mandatory "statutory" placement for all social work students or, by SWE's definition, a placement that involves "high volume, high-risk work", and must involve prescribed legal interventions based on specified legislation (SWE, 2020, p. 3). While the consultation response from SWE recognised that there were various opinions expressed in relation to this change, the decision to retain the new requirement was described in the consultation response as being made based on non-specific "feedback from the Chief Social Workers" (SWE, 2019c, p. 58). This is one of four times that the opinions of the CSWs are referenced in this way, and in each instance, the SWE accepted their suggestions.

This primacy of statutory placements for social work students in England has been shown to have gradually been perpetuated through discourse in government policy and reports and could therefore also be seen as forming part of the aforementioned programme of reforms narrowing and restricting social work knowledge and practice (Bald & Howells, 2019; Hanley, 2021a). The Narey (2014) report, for example, recommended that any university that is unable to provide at least one statutory placement per student should not receive regulatory endorsement. However, in contrast there is a large and growing body of research that suggests that statutory placements are not superior to other placements, and there is arguably more evidence for the value of non-statutory placement opportunities for social work students (Bald & Howells, 2019; MacDermott & Campbell, 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2015; Perry & Hughes, 2021; Scholar et al., 2012). Unfortunately, this body of research has yet to receive any public consideration from SWE.

Appropriation of social work voice

Despite limited social work representation within the organisation, SWE frequently presents itself as a voice for the profession. This is most clearly seen when representatives of SWE claim outright to be "representing social work (Turner, 2019). SWE are, however, quick to relinquish that representative role when facing challenges— particularly from social workers—and instead highlight their role in "public protection" (SWE, 2021a, p. 4). In maintaining this dichotomy, SWE rely on the complex and confusing state of social work leadership in England made up of an ever-increasing number of professional and educational institutes, regulators, senior civil servants and opaque networks, allowing these organisations and individuals to claim leadership responsibility when it suits them, while also skirting blame by abdicating this leadership role when facing scrutiny (Scourfield, 2020).

Through this selective approach to representation, SWE could also be seen to be marginalising organisations that have traditionally represented the profession. This includes organisations like BASW which, for over 50 years, has acted as a professional association representing social workers in the UK and, as noted earlier, were critical of the original plans for SWE. This marginalisation also impacts on emerging organisations like the Social Work Action Network (SWAN), a network of social workers founded in 2004 based on a mutual concern about dominant trends in the profession. SWE acting as a representative for social workers allows the government to exclude these organisations from key events and decision making, while still claiming to be listening to the voice of social workers through engagement with the regulator. This was particularly apparent at the 2021 launch event for the national Children's Social Care Review, where SWE was the only social work organisation invited (Berridge, 2021). Notably, that review was chaired by Josh MacAlister, founder and long-time CEO of Frontline. The government

did set up The College of Social Work in 2012, a national college with the specific remit of providing a professional voice for social workers. However, in 2015, a year before SWE was announced, a decision was made to close that college (Jones, 2019). The closure of the national college in favour of an arms-length regulatory body, alongside the marginalisation of organisations like SWAN and BASW, raises questions about the government's genuine interest in listening to the voice of the profession.

Another way that SWE appropriates the voice of social work is through media production. SWE has started a podcast, "This is Social Work," a title that implies their role in dictating the parameters of the profession, and they produce a regular newsletter that, among other things, claims to present "voices from the sector." Two senior representatives of SWE were also members of the initial editorial board of *My Social Work News*, a newly launched magazine in 2020 that explicitly professes to represent the "voice of the social worker" (*My Social Work News*, 2021). Perhaps the most revealing way that SWE has appropriated the voice of the profession has been through the co-option of World Social Work Day, a global event started in 2007 by the IFSW to promote international solidarity and cooperation (IFSW, 2020). Since taking over as regulator, SWE has appointed itself a lead role in dictating how this day is celebrated in England, a role that no previous regulator held. In doing so, SWE has expanded the day to introduce a week-long national Social Work Week, relegating World Social Work Day to a single day within that week (SWE, 2022). Social Work Week has its own theme, which for 2022 was "Social Work and Me", a highly individualistic theme compared to the 2022 World Social Work Day theme of "Co-building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind". As part of their self-appointed role, SWE requires all events for Social Work Week to be submitted to them for approval and has set strict criteria for the events they will endorse. Once again,

the influence of the Narey (2014) report can be seen in these developments, where the IFSW definition of social work was described as "thoroughly inadequate" for highlighting social justice and liberation of people rather than child protection (Narey, 2014, p. 13). In contrast, Garrett (2021a) suggests that the IFSW definition of social work should be a vital source for guiding dissenting social work, which may explain why SWE have made attempts to marginalise it in the face of growing dissent.

Dissent

There is increasing evidence that many social workers in England recognise the concerns with SWE that have been outlined here. For example, in a study that was commissioned by SWE, social work educators and practitioners described the regulator as bureaucratic, distant, representing more of the same, controlled by "elite" technical experts, and lacking social work representation (Pentaris et al., 2021, p. 72). Social workers have also started to demonstrate their dissent in the ways that are available to them. This can be seen particularly in how social workers have engaged (or not) with new mandatory CPD requirements introduced by SWE. One of the six SWE professional standards is to "maintain my continuing professional development", and significantly it is the only standard where social workers have to provide evidence in order to maintain their registration (SWE, 2019b, p. 9). The model SWE has devised to enforce this requires all social workers to electronically upload evidence of CPD activities annually; however, only 2.5% of these CPD records are actually audited by SWE (SWE, 2019e). This approach, requiring all professionals to upload evidence regardless of whether it will be audited, is a major departure from comparable regulators, both nationally and internationally. For example, the HCPC audits 2.5% of the professionals they regulate annually, but only those who are chosen for audit are asked to provide this evidence (HCPC, 2018). Social work regulators in other jurisdictions who

adopt a similar model also contact only those chosen for audit to provide CPD evidence, including in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Social Care Council, n.d.), Scotland (Scottish Social Services Council, 2016), Wales (Social Care Wales, 2019), Ireland (CORU, 2019), South Africa (South African Council of Social Service Professions, 2019) and Aotearoa New Zealand (Social Workers Registration Board, nd).

In introducing these new CPD requirements, SWE seemingly overlooked or discounted the impact they would have on workloads, particularly given the crisis of high workloads and poor working conditions that social workers were experiencing at the time (and continue to experience today) (Ravalier et al., 2021). These issues were already known to be negatively impacting CPD, and two local government association (LGA) health checks, undertaken the year before SWE became regulator, found that only 31% of adult social workers and 14% of children's social workers were able to attend all or most of their planned CPD activities (LGA, 2019a, 2019b). Research also demonstrates that mandated and prescriptive CPD requirements like those introduced by SWE tend to shape organisational cultures around CPD towards performativity, at the expense of reflection and personal development (Beddoe & Duke, 2013; Brady, 2014). Unsurprisingly then, there is already evidence that the SWE model is creating a "box-ticking" culture around CPD (YouGov, 2021, p. 6). Therefore, as with their rules and standards, SWE's model of CPD, rather than improving the professional development of social workers, could more accurately be described as shaping social workers into compliant and homogenised self-governing subjects (Garrett, 2021a).

If SWE did want to improve CPD for social workers, there is no lack of challenges that they could have addressed instead—in particular, high workloads and poor working conditions. Another major issue that SWE could have addressed is the marketised system that, influenced by austerity and

restricted local authority budgets, relies on providers competing for contracts and a heavy emphasis on lowering costs (Rogowski, 2020). SWE could also have looked at resurrecting the Post-Qualifying Social Work (PQSW) framework, a nationally recognised and university accredited pathway to professional development that was once popular amongst social workers, seeing 33,217 enrolments from 2003–2006 (Moriarty & Manthorpe, 2014). However, following the closure of the GSCC, and the linked impact of austerity measures, local authorities became increasingly reluctant to support their professionals to attend these courses, opting instead for cheaper options available in the growing marketplace of social work CPD (Rogowski, 2020). However, Moriarty and Manthorpe (2014) undertook a scoping review of CPD in England and found that, while this more flexible model of CPD was likely to be favoured by employers for financial reasons, there was limited evidence to support CPD models for social work outside of the PQSW framework.

SWE (2021d) suggests that it is "good practice" for social workers to upload CPD evidence to their electronic system quarterly (p. 9). However, SWE have struggled to get social workers to do even the bare minimum required to maintain registration which, for the first two years, was a single piece of CPD evidence. The lack of engagement with the process has been regularly reported on in the industry media. For example, just over a month before the first deadline, only 44.3% of social workers had met the minimum requirement (Carter, 2020). Rather than looking at this low level of engagement as an opportunity to reflect on the potential deficits of their approach, SWE instead launched a national campaign to encourage compliance. While this campaign would later win a government award (SWE, 2021a), social workers have described the tone of the campaign as lacking understanding and even "threatening" (YouGov, 2021, p. 55). Most social workers did eventually upload their CPD evidence in time to ensure they were not deregistered, and as Garrett (2021b)

highlights, the threat of losing livelihoods usually leads to this type of "grudging compliance" (p. 9).

Research commissioned by SWE found that the reasons for this slow engagement were manifold and included the impact of high workloads and the Covid-19 pandemic (YouGov, 2021). However, that research also found that those who disagreed with SWE's approach to CPD were less likely to have uploaded their CPD promptly, suggesting a link between this slow uptake and dissenting opinions. Refusing to promptly engage with these CPD mandates may seem a modest form of dissent, but Carey and Foster (2011) previously undertook research that showed that social workers may be more inclined towards this type of pragmatic, individualistic and small-scale resistance when disillusioned with policy mandates and reform, or what the researchers dubbed "deviant social work" (p. 576). Incidentally, we are not talking about small numbers of social workers choosing to do the bare minimum at the last minute, but tens of thousands, and indeed, the specific figures afforded by SWE's approach to CPD may provide us with concrete data about the extent of deviant social work for the first time—data that could help transform these individual actions into a collective movement of resistance.

Social workers have also expressed their dissent towards SWE elsewhere. For example, in the comment sections of the news articles covering the difficulties SWE have had with its CPD model, social workers regularly voiced their dissent, ranging from their disapproval of SWE's CPD model to declaring their intention to leave the profession as a result of the new regulator. While online comments are obviously a poor metric for gauging the general mood of a population, the volume of comments was such that SWE felt the need to respond in their own article, titled "How Social Work England responds to criticisms of CPD recording", an article that elicited another slew of negative comments about the regulator (Blackmore & Hallam,

2020). Furthermore, SWE's own research shows that less than half of social workers found the CPD recording process beneficial (YouGov, 2021).

Conclusion

There are additional, ongoing developments that look likely to expand the regulatory powers of SWE soon. These include a Department for Education (2022) consultation on a revised regulatory framework that would, amongst other things, allow SWE to review and overturn any FtP they deem necessary to achieve "fairer outcomes" (p. 14). The Children's Social Care Review has recently made recommendations to expand the regulatory powers of SWE, including extending their role into other professions (MacAlister, 2022). Of particular note to the discussions around dissent and CPD, SWE has announced that they will shortly be moving from a random CPD audit approach to a "more intelligent approach" based on "targeted sampling" of specific groups (SWE, 2021c). Each of these developments is likely to increase the reach of the regulator over the profession. However, we have also seen that many social workers are willing to engage in action (or inaction) contrary to the edicts of SWE. As SWE expands its role and remit, this dissent could be further explored, engaged with and encouraged towards more collective action and mutual support as a foundational step towards resisting the concerning developments outlined here. International networking and support, through organisations like IFSW or SWAN, could also be explored to build solidarity and realign social work in England as a global profession built around social justice and collective responsibility (IFSW, 2014). As highlighted by Garrett (2021a), in order to influence change, social work dissent needs to be a collective, rather than individualistic, endeavour.

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Against a bitter tide: How a small UK charity operationalises dissent to challenge the "hostile environment" for migrant children and families

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Dissent is currently under political and ideological assault in the UK and immigration has long been a target for those looking to quell dissenting practices. At the same time, dissent appears increasingly out of place in the contemporary social work context in England. Yet, as the authors argue, dissent is codified within the professional and ethical standards that social workers in England must adhere to.

APPROACH: This article introduces the work of a small UK Charity, Together with Migrant Children, and applies to it key facets of the theoretical basis for dissent through case study and practice-based reflections on challenges in immigration policy and opportunities for dissenting practice.

IMPLICATIONS: The authors set out the challenges and opportunities for dissent in practice in statutory, non-statutory and wider community development settings, illustrating how dissent can bring individual 'success' that is located within a cumulative structural and tactical change that points to dissent and its practice as a necessary feature of democracy.

KEYWORDS: Dissent; social work; migrant rights; charity sector, undocumented children

This article describes how a small UK charity, Together with Migrant Children, uses community action and legal literacy in the form of socio-legal casework and rights-based education to challenge at local and national level oppressive policies and practices in immigration and welfare systems in the UK. The authors discuss the theoretical and legal underpinnings of the charity's work in operationalising dissent in the service of anti-oppressive and emancipatory practice with migrant children and families facing a "hostile environment" aimed at forcing "returns," using an anonymised case study as an illustrative example. The

authors are practitioners and educators in social work and community development in England, one of whom is a Director at Together with Migrant Children.

The charity

Together with Migrant Children (hereafter TwMC) was set up in November 2016 to respond to the growing need of children and young people subject to immigration control in the UK. It is a small charity consisting of five core practitioners from social work, community development and family support backgrounds. TwMC is

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funded by grants from trusts and donations and has adopted a policy of not accepting government funding, which is critical to the charity's independence in light of funding often tied into collaboration with the hostile environment (Taylor, 2019). The charity operates throughout England and Wales, with the bulk of its work concentrated in the Southeast of England. It supports around 350 children each year through assessment, access to justice projects, anti-destitution advice and casework, child and family casework, groupwork, and rights education. TwMC operates in multiple practice areas including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, children whose age is disputed, and families.

Migrant children in the UK and the "hostile environment"

In 2017, it was estimated that there were around 215,000 undocumented migrant children in the UK (Jolly et al., 2020). In 2011, this number was estimated at around 120,000 (Sigona & Hughes, 2012), suggesting a significant increase of undocumented migrant children in the UK. In addition, 21,308 applications to the Home Office for the right to remain on private and family life grounds since 2012 has meant large numbers of children live in households with "Limited Leave to Remain," a form of temporary leave on which can be attached conditions that limit people's access to the welfare safety net (Jolly et al., 2020). Limited leave to remain can put families on a 10-year route to settlement, with multiple renewals needed at significant cost to families. These applications, however, represent a small number of the total estimated undocumented children in the UK. At TwMC, around 70% of its casework concerns undocumented children, many of whom (around 80%) have a human rights basis according to the immigration rules on which to regularise their immigration status in the UK.

Undocumented children and children in households with limited leave to remain

face unique challenges due to being caught in immigration and welfare policies which work together to create what is known as the "hostile environment." The primary aim of these policies is to make life in the UK extremely difficult for those without status (York, 2018). As stated by the then Home Secretary, Teresa May, in 2012: "The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants" (Elgot, 2018). These policies include charging for, and restricting access to, health care, which is universal and free at the point of access for UK citizens (Worthing et al., 2021); exclusion from welfare, housing and benefits systems (Guentner et al., 2016) through "No Recourse to Public Funds" (NRPF) (Farmer, 2021); and a restriction on other forms of support available to children, such as that provided under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (Jolly, 2019). This is in addition to the "everyday bordering"—the widening of immigration control into communities, such as the requirement of landlords to check the immigration status of tenants (the "right to rent") (McKee et al., 2021) and data sharing between public bodies such as the NHS and immigration enforcement representatives (Worthing et al., 2021). These policies contribute to a "shadow" border enforcement within communities, extending the reach of the hostile environment into people's basic rights and entitlements. This extension has increased over time, penetrating the work of some charities who have been complicit within this hostile environment agenda through joint working with immigration enforcement, sometimes with a financial incentive (Taylor, 2019), particularly in the areas of returns enforcement and rough sleeping (Walawalkar, 2021).

Statutory social work has also become increasingly complicit, with everyday bordering pervading local authority (LA) services (Humphries, 2004) such as through data sharing with the Home Office. Perhaps more worryingly, cultures of hostility appear to have developed in some local

authorities. For children and families subject to NRPF and therefore without access to the welfare safety net, Section 17 Children Act 1989 is the only alternative source of support (Jolly, 2019). However, there is emerging evidence of cultures developing within children's departments that encourage gatekeeping, hostility, low levels of support and inadequate accommodation (Project 17, 2019; Jolly, 2018a, 2018b). Taken together, these factors represent a deliberate act of state violence against migrants, designed to inflict harm on those considered "other" in their immigration status, with the aim of forcing people to "return" (York, 2018).

This hostile policy landscape harms the welfare of this group of children. Far from the intended aim of driving returns, these policies force children, many of whom have been born in the UK or who have grounds on which to remain in the UK (Jolly et al., 2020), into destitution (Dickson & Rosen, 2021; Jolly & Thompson, 2022). In TwMC's casework in 2020–2021, 81% of 194 families who contacted the service had an income of under £6,000 a year. The children experience emotional distress not only as a result of enduring poverty but also due to the policies and processes ostensibly aimed at alleviating these difficulties (Project 17, 2019) but which, in effect, lead to the enforcement of "everyday borders" in their daily lives. From the earliest stages of life, these children face significant barriers to accessing services to support their health and development such as maternity care and early years health services and support (Ellul et al., 2020). Anitha (2010) highlights key barriers to migrants being safeguarded from domestic abuse, such as the fear of losing leave to remain when based on a spouse's application and the severe lack of shelter beds for women with NRPF. These barriers are reflected within TwMC's casework: in 2020–2021, 17% of 312 children the charity supported were not registered with a GP, 6% were not registered with a school, 31% were living with domestic abuse and 58% were

described as regularly missing meals or not having enough to eat.

The theoretical basis of "dissent"

In order to establish what is meant by dissent in this context, and in social work in general, the authors have decided to take as starting points concepts of dissent drawn from Margaret Ledwith's (2016) interpretations and extensions of Paolo Freire's (2000) "critical pedagogy". Ledwith (2016) coins the phrase, "critical dissent dialogue"— "engaging in questioning lived reality in order to understand the contradictions that are taken for granted" (Ledwith, 2016, p. xi). For Ledwith (2016, p. 37), "[b]ecoming critical involves understanding how power discriminates *and acting together to change the source of that power*" (emphasis added). Key components of dissent are being unpacked here: being critical, which is tied to understanding how power operates in societies; and actively working in concert with others to challenge and shift power (by implication in favour of those whom it discriminates against).

At its most basic level, dissent is about saying, "No, I/we do not accept this." Further, if we remain silent, as we too often do, we may be construed as acquiescing (Thomas, as cited in Ledwith, 2016). Dissenting voices that "[question] lived reality in order to understand the contradictions that are taken for granted" (Ledwith, 2016, p. xi) interrupt the collective silence, exposing it as a *"nonsense* rather than *common sense"* and shining a light on unjust systems and practices (Ledwith, 2016). In doing so, dissenters "hold up a mirror to their governing apparatus and thereby demonstrate their noncompliance" (Falk, 2009, p. 245).

This invites us to consider both the form and function of dissent. The function of dissent at its most basic level involves questioning and disrupting the status quo (Falk, 2009; Freire, 2000 [1968]; Ledwith

2016) that maintains and advances unequal and unjust power imbalances in societies (Kemmis, as cited in Ledwith, 2016). In doing so it activates, deepens and strengthens democracy (Ledwith, 2016). If democracy is a process through which the expression of different interests and voices is enabled and legitimised, then dissent should be viewed as a vital and valuable component of a healthy, functioning democracy (Ledwith, 2016). In the face of collective silences that support and uphold the unjust status quo, "tell[ing] unwelcome truths" (Kemmis, as cited in Ledwith, 2016, p. 149) opens up spaces for a better future to take root.

The ability to dissent and the ability to bring about social change are inextricably linked (Patel, 2021). There is no democratic social change without dissent, for without it societies would default to hegemonic power resulting in totalitarianism, dictatorships and despotism. Therein lies the danger to societies in which dissent is "off the table." Without dissent, there is no democracy.

Dissent challenges the strict hierarchy between the rulers and the ruled (Falk, 2009). For Falk (2009), dissent is successful if it yields "tactical results and tangible change" (p. 248). Additionally, instances of successful dissent become instructive cases for future generations about the function and value of diverse viewpoints and noncompliance in society (Patel, 2021). Dissidents leave their marks in the historical sands of healthy, functioning democracies. But with the ebb and flow of societal attitudes and preoccupations, these marks are all too easily obscured, or even erased. The authors argue it is vital that dissent is operationalised as an ongoing project in the service of democracy.

Dissent in social work: The radical tradition

Meaningful discussion about dissent in social work must acknowledge social work's radical roots. In brief, radical

social work seeks to address the structural and political causes of social ills. The rise of neoliberalism, managerialism and professionalisation in social work presents increasing challenges to social workers concerned with the structural causes of social ills (Briskman, 2013; Williams & Briskman, 2015). Speaking to the Australian context, but nevertheless with significant relevance to the UK context, Briskman (2013) argued that the radical tradition has increasingly been subsumed within the arguably more palatable wider critical social work tradition. Further, this has been increasingly framed as a human rights focus. Human rights practice most often has reference to the realm of legalism and is therefore, unlike radical social work, seen as not overtly political. This perceived waning of radical social work appears in step with the implicit repudiation of the political in contemporary social work in favour of a focus on technical competency within an ongoing project of professionalisation. To counter this, Ife (1997) has argued for the "mainstreaming" of radical social work. Ife (2001, p. 6) also argued, "a human rights perspective can strengthen social work by providing a moral basis for practice at a range of levels including day-to-day work with 'clients', in community development and in policy advocacy and activism." This suggests the human rights perspective is a practical-moral framing encompassing relational (micro-level) work, community (meso-level) work and political (macro-level) activism. This is not at odds with Ife's call for the de-marginalisation of radical social work. Rather, a radical perspective is a tool in the box of the contemporary practitioner faced with ever more complexity in a world characterised by the fast pace of political and environmental change.

Statutory and non-statutory social work: Divergences and commonalities

All of this is bound up in assumptions about divergences between local authority (LA),

or statutory, social work and third sector/ charity, or non-statutory, social work. The over-arching assumption is that the former is constrained by hyper-accountability, proceduralism and bureaucracy wrought by neoliberalism and the New Public Management, which has led to social workers constantly having to justify decisions and expenditure in increasingly resource-poor environments. The latter is held to be liberated from such constraints due to its location outside of such systems and seen as more creative and politically radical (Robinson & Masocha, 2017). Further, due to its oft-times function as a coercive arm of the state, LA social work is co-opted into the surveillance and control of migrants and in doing so colludes with and implements racist policies (Collett, 2004; Hayes, 2013; Humphries, 2004). Third sector social work is more positively framed as an emancipatory, countervailing force, far more unambiguously vocal in its advocacy for migrants' human rights (Cemlyn & Briskman, 2003). However, Robinson and Masocha (2017) found that practitioners in both settings expressed disconnect between their desire to practise emancipatory social work with migrants and the realities of what their respective roles actually required them to do. A common theme is frustration with the curtailment of rights which limit or delay access to assistance, such as when supporting parents to find work and enter education, which forces families into destitution due to paltry subsistence payments from the state. Further, charities and third sector agencies are increasingly called on to provide more direct services as a result of the rolling back of state support. This outsourcing of what were previously state functions and the concomitant competition among charity and third sector organisations for government funding leads to concern that charities' crucial political role (Alcock & Craig, 2009) and capacity to mount meaningful structural challenge are compromised, illustrated by the examples of several rough sleeping support organisations assisting with forced

returns (Taylor, 2019). Collusion with state coercion can be found in the activities of several third sector organisations under the guise of "support" (Southall Black Sisters, 2018). The strict no-government funding policy of TwMC, while presenting a constant challenge in securing funding from other, highly competitive funding application streams, preserves the integrity of the charity's ethical responsibility to independently challenge unjust, interlocking immigration and welfare policies.

The case for "moral outrage"

[A]ddressing contraventions of human rights and social justice issues demands an emotional connection with the nature of injustice. (Williams & Briskman, 2015, p. 3)

Within Western, rationalist epistemologies such as positivism and neoliberalism, emotions are viewed as anathema (Williams & Briskman, 2015). Neoliberalism has succeeded in "removing discontent and outrage from the streets [and] subduing grassroots resistance via incorporation into the bureaucratic logic and the control of funding streams" (Williams & Briskman, 2015, p. 6) leading to attacks on the validity of moral arguments spurred by emotional responses to injustice. Yet, if we are not motivated by moral outrage (Williams & Briskman, 2015) at the treatment of migrants subject to inhumane policies and hostile environments that actively harm them, how can we uphold the espoused values and codes of the international social work profession, which is founded on a bedrock concern for social justice? Moral outrage is the visceral spur to concerted, considered individual and collective action aimed at disrupting and subverting a status quo that consolidates and advances the privilege of those with most power, and harms the people and communities that social workers hope and aim to support.

Codified dissent in social work's regulatory frameworks

> Social justice dissent involves objecting to unjust policies and practices that lead to prejudicial outcomes. (Ledwith, 2016, p. 158)

The Global Definition of Social Work (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014) states:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work…

The above quote carries the strong implication of dissenting action. If there is a need for a profession that consciously and explicitly upholds and defends "[p]rinciples of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities" then these things are, by definition, challenged for less empowered people and groups due to the actions of more powerful people and groups, and the structures that maintain the status quo in their favour. The first step to successfully challenging these prevailing orthodoxies is to say, "No, I/we do not accept this." This is the starting point of dissenting action.

In the UK, social work is a registered profession founded in adherence to the professional standards of the regulatory body, Social Work England. These include the following:

- Recognise differences across diverse communities and challenge the impact of disadvantage and discrimination on people and their families and communities.
- Promote social justice, helping to confront and resolve issues of inequality and inclusion.

(Social Work England, 2020, 1.5-1.6)

Again, this speaks to a profession that must challenge disadvantage and discrimination, and confront inequality, all of which must start with the dissidents' refrain: "No, I/we do not accept this."

In order to demonstrate suitability for registration and re-registration, social workers in England must engage in and record their continuing professional development against the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (British Association of Social Workers [BASW], 2018) at the appropriate level, across nine interlinking domains. For qualified social workers who have completed their first year in employment, these capabilities include the following, drawn from some of those domains:

- demonstrate confident application of ethical reasoning to professional practice, rights and entitlements, questioning and challenging others using a legal and human rights framework
- recognise discriminatory practices and inequality and develop a range of approaches to appropriately challenge service users, colleagues and senior staff
- promote strengths, agency, hope and self-determination in people using services, carers, families and communities and support them in raising their own challenges and finding solutions to inequality, social injustice and rights violations.

(BASW, 2018)

Again, we can see that there are explicit professional requirements for social workers in England to effectively practise dissent through challenging and tackling discrimination, injustice and rights violations, including through using legal and human rights frameworks.

Further, social workers in England are also guided by the BASW Code of Ethics (BASW, 2021). This code is non-binding outside of membership of BASW, which is

voluntary, although it is very often cited within educational institutions and by social work employers and therefore does have considerable status and influence in UK social work. The code includes the following under the section, "Social Justice":

- Social workers have a responsibility to challenge oppression on any basis....
- Social workers should demonstrate a clear commitment to anti-oppressive practice such as pro-active anti-racism and promoting the rights of all people experiencing discrimination, structural inequality and marginalisation.
- Social workers are expected to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where resources are inadequate, and/or where distribution of resources, policies and practice are oppressive, discriminatory or otherwise unfair, harmful or illegal.
- Social workers, individually, collectively and with others, have a duty to challenge social conditions that contribute to oppression, social exclusion, stigma or subjugation, and work towards an inclusive society.

(BASW, 2021)

Even if the word itself is never used within these regulatory, professional and ethical frameworks, it is clear that dissent is a key requirement of contemporary professional social work in England. The authors argue, therefore, that it is not possible to practise as a social worker in accordance with the above regulatory, professional and ethical frameworks without practising dissent, while also recognising this is increasingly challenged in the context of increasing legal and ideological assaults on dissent as a component of a functioning healthy democracy. In the UK today, as in other Western, late capitalist societies, inequalities are increasing while human rights, civil liberties, social movements, trade unionism, democratic protest and other forms of collective action—of which dissent is both

purpose and product—are under attack. Notable examples from this jurisdiction include the Nationality and Borders Bill, which criminalises and punishes asylum seekers based on their method of arrival and intensifies the existing hostile environment; the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which seeks to severely curtail the right to peaceful protest; not to mention proposed reform of the Human Rights Act and the government's rhetorical assaults on activist lawyers and the judicial review process. The purpose and overall effect of all these is to deny opportunities to dissent, to remove it from the agenda and to effectively render it a *dirty*, even *illegal*, word and concept.

The current trajectory means that dissent, and the activism it necessitates in order to be meaningful, is increasingly seen as an annoyance and somewhat out of place in contemporary society (Huish, 2013). However, if we move away from the concept of activism as mere placard-waving or civil disobedience and view it as "a process of communication, where the governed can engage the governors, [we make] it possible to position the narrative of activism as intrinsic to civic democracy" (Huish, 2013, citing Tully 2005). The impact of activism is cumulative, creating "moments of dissent" (Huish, 2013, citing Tully, 2005) that, together, lead to wider social change.

Challenging the "hostile environment"—The charity's methods and approach

TwMC uses a socio-legal approach in casework that combines traditional methods of family support with legal approaches, often in collaboration with other projects. This includes using legal processes such as judicial review, a type of court case used to challenge the lawfulness of a public body's decision. An example of a successful judicial review in immigration law was R (CO & Anor) v LB Lewisham (2017) which challenged the lawfulness of an LA assessment of a family left to sleep

in a hospital waiting room because the LA refused to support them (Connor, 2017), which led to judicial confirmation of the on-going duty to assess children's needs. Cuts to legal aid for immigration cases—another key plank of the hostile environment—has led to the development of access to justice projects which support families to access Exceptional Case Funding to enable access to advice and support from immigration advisors in relation to individual cases and appeals (Public Law Project, n.d.).

In its work, TwMC seeks to build trust with impacted communities through safe spaces, in legal, physical and temporal senses. Safe spaces are of critical importance to migrants facing creeping encroachment of immigration enforcement into the communities in which they live—the everyday bordering of their daily experience. TwMC uses outreach and community partnerships as a primary tool to engage people, alongside strict policies on information and data sharing. This includes working with other organisations to build trust in communities, working directly with communities and working with universal settings like schools to offer advice and support them to become safe havens for migrants. TwMC aims to provide wrap-around support founded in principles of anti-discriminatory practice (Tedam, 2020) including psychosocial support with a named keyworker, groupwork aimed at fostering community solidarity, socioeconomic approaches such as grant seeking and hardship funding, advocacy and education, accessing healthcare and socio-legal casework already described. Key to delivery of this support are partnerships or rather, solidarity, with other organisations in the sector that share the charity's value base.

The charity's ethos is rooted in the radical tradition of addressing structural issues. TwMC works individually but also collectively alongside other organisations, lawyers, journalists, as well as, crucially, families, children and young people. This

has led to, for instance, the production of a guide for families accessing support from LAs (Hackney Migrant Centre et al., 2019), a collaboration between families with lived experience and organisations. The ultimate aim is to provide children, young people and families affected by the issues opportunities to get involved in campaigning for change. The charity's user groups meet with user groups from other organisations to look at wider policy change. The aim is to create a wider network of collective solidarity and resistance in which lived experience drives the development of the charity and its future agenda. This challenges the prevailing orthodoxy around campaigning (which privileges professional perspectives) and, instead, focuses on shared and co-produced knowledge, skills development and rights education. This work has included delivering workshops on upholding children's rights with direct reference the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child, as well as protest arts workshops, campaigning groups and wider network collaboration.

Barriers to inclusion and participation of people most affected

A perennial challenge is providing routes for long and bonded participation in the charity for people with differential immigration status. This is particularly and poignantly the case for the groups and communities the charity support due to their liminal (or lack of) status, which limits the degree to which they can get involved and be remunerated for their involvement. People who lack status, or have differential status, can engage in the charity through groupwork and joining campaign groups, but are prevented from inclusion within the governance structure of the charity, such as through being appointed a trustee or taking paid employment. The length of time involved in regularising the status of people the charity supports so that they can have central roles in the governance and running of the charity is a key barrier to their inclusion. Also, at a

fundamental level, people who are subject to immigration control are, by definition, locked out of the democratic process, which speaks to the urgent necessity for those who can partake in the democratic processes and mechanisms of challenge and accountability to take a stand and access those systems on behalf of people with differential status. They do not have a say. All of this speaks to key dichotomies and problems of power in the migrant charity sector (Tedam, 2020) which can lead to the people most affected being denied opportunities for meaningful inclusion. It remains a key priority for TwMC to continue to work to break down those barriers.

Migration and supporting migration as acts of dissent

"[I]llegal" migration is speech of necessity – there is no other way for [the excluded] to be heard [on the question of immigration exclusion]. Protest speech occurs every time a migrant crosses a border without permission and every time a noncitizen chooses to overstay a visa...

(Morales 2017, as cited in Morales, 2020, p. 258)

The very act of migrating in a hegemonic society is an act of dissent. Multiplied by millions, this constitutes a transnational social, as well as literal, movement of people(s), albeit one that coheres around a specific act rather than a common goal, save perhaps the goal of seeking a better tomorrow for themselves and their families.

In addition, legal practitioners, in challenging immigration decisions, operationalise and formalise acts of dissent, using the law to carve out legally empowered spaces, the cumulative effect of which is a substantial contribution to more progressive immigration law and policy (Morales, 2020). Such legal challenges offer the spectacle of successful dissenting

performances "as regular and important parts of the political and legal pageant that is the rule of law" (Burgess, 2013, p, 213) which, like democracy itself, needs both consent and dissent to maintain its healthy functioning. Indelibly etched in the public record, these marks are not so easily erased from the sands of history, although their effects may be weakened or rolled back by subsequent developments in law. At the very least, in the face of governments that increasingly create, promote and maintain hostile environments for migrants, this legally empowered immigration dissent serves to stem a cruel and oppressive tide.

Case study

In presenting a representative real-world example of TwMC's work, the authors' aim is to "provide insight into the events and situations prevalent in [the] group from which the case study has been drawn" (Kumar, 2019, p. 196) to yield insights and meanings beyond the reach of other methods in an area characterised by high complexity and a poignant, human-experiential aspect.

Adi (not his real name) is a 14-year-old boy who uses a wheelchair due to multiple health issues. Originally from West Africa, he has been in the UK since he was three. Despite this, Adi, his siblings (aged 18 and 16) and his mother had no status to remain in the UK. Consequently, Adi was denied access to important aspects of healthcare—those deemed "not essential", which included household aids and adaptations such as a chair and a hoist—and was experiencing destitution. The family approached the LA for help which led to them being accommodated in a room on the second floor of a run-down shared house, with no lift access or other suitable adaptations, and accessible only via a small staircase. This made it virtually impossible for Adi to leave the house and placed his mother and siblings at risk due to the necessity of supporting Adi's mobility in an unsuitable environment without proper equipment, including

moving Adi and his wheelchair up and down the stairs. This led to him no longer attending school. As a result, the LA then placed Adi on a child protection plan under Section 47 Of the Children Act 1989. Later, it became apparent (through information gained from subject access requests made to the LA) that social services were in regular communication with the Home Office about expediting the family's removal from the UK. The family were referred to TwMC by a community organisation.

Taking a rights-based approach, TwMC identified numerous relevant factors to be take into consideration in the context of their claim to leave to remain, including the length of time the family had resided in the UK, their connections and ties to people and places formed during that time, and their right to a private and family life. Adi's disabilities prompted the question of whether it would be in his best interests to return to his country of origin: Would the appropriate treatment, care and education be available to him there? Numerous issues with the LA's approach were identified, including that the "need" for a child protection plan arose as a direct result of the LA not providing appropriate support. The ongoing, discreet communication between LA social workers and the Home Office was troubling, strongly suggesting the LA's focus was on immigration enforcement at the expense of properly meeting their duties and obligations in respect of the rights and interests of Adi and his family, exemplified by the lack of support provided by the LA to help them access legal advice on their options and the lack of assessment of the impact on Adi's human rights.

In order to address these issues, TwMC worked with another charity to make an application to the Home Office for Adi and his family to remain in the UK. TwMC provided an assessment to support the application, based on Adi's needs, wishes and feelings as well as undertaking direct work with Adi and his family to help them

understand their rights and entitlements, and ensured they were kept up to date on what was happening. The charity also worked alongside another group of solicitors to challenge, via judicial review, the inadequacy of the accommodation and support provided by the LA, whilst at the same providing advocacy for the family in the child-protection process that had been set in train. This work was introduced in a graduated fashion, starting with advocacy and direct work, then, when the desired change was not achieved, on to legal challenge via court proceedings. As a result of this work, appropriate accommodation was secured for Adi and his family, as well as appropriate health and care-related support, including disability aids and adaptations. This enabled Adi to attend school and be part of his community. The child protection plan was then closed.

Over the next one-and-a-half years, Adi and his family had their leave to remain granted, providing them access to the welfare safety net. Adi was then able to source funding for legal representation which led to him obtaining British Citizenship. Further welfare rights advocacy ensured that Adi's family was able to access appropriate benefits and entitlements, continue to seek and access housing suitable to their needs, and secure access to further education for Adi's older sibling. Finally, Adi's family was connected to further sources of legal advice and support to seek recompense for the LA's repeated failures to properly meet their needs.

Discussion

In the UK today, inequalities are deepening and widening. At the same time, there is concerted and ongoing removal of opportunities for meaningful dissent. Migration has been a key battleground in the erosion of rights and the furthering of inequality, through policies designed to make migrants' lives unbearable through the creation of a hostile environment. The co-opting of state and community support

services, including local authorities and their employees (including social workers), landlords, doctors and nurses, and even charities, hitherto held as emancipatory and countervailing, into the process of everyday bordering creates ethical dilemmas for the helping professions. Through an interlocking web of exclusionary policy and practice, which include data-sharing agreements between the Home Office and LAs, immigration enforcement has crept into everyday public life.

While it is seen as increasingly difficult to practise dissenting social work in these contexts, arguably more so in the statutory setting, but also increasingly in non-statutory social work, it is by no means impossible. As we have shown, the necessity to dissent is codified into the professional standards and capabilities, as well as the ethical frameworks, that social workers in this jurisdiction are required to meet to gain and maintain their professional registration. However, against a backdrop of politically chosen austerity, politically mandated hostility and deliberate acts of state violence against migrant communities, truly independent charities like TwMC play a crucial role in challenging and furthering the rights of those affected by unjust policies. This work takes multiple forms. Firstly, it is about open dialogue, critical reflection and collaboration, discussion and "telling [of] uncomfortable truths". This is done through groupwork and rights-based education which contribute to the building of communities and the fostering of solidarity. It has been most interesting and useful to the authors to reflect on the cumulative impact of TwMC's everyday micro-level practice with migrant children and their families. Through advocacy, direct work and legal casework, immediate tangible outcomes are secured for individual children and families, such as better housing; access to social and health care and support; improved standards of living; the obtaining of leave to remain and citizenship; and overall improved wellbeing. In addition, this micro-practice

accumulates to create wider change, through the development of case law, changes in societal attitudes which, in turn, drives changes in policy at local and national levels, albeit very slowly. Therefore, a socio-legal approach to migrant rights' issues for children combined with emancipatory education approaches such as group work and rights-based direct can achieve both tangible benefit at individual level and generate momentum for tactical change at wider, structural levels. Operationalising dissent in this space often involves these small-scale acts of tangible change—daily dissenting practice—which, over time, accumulate and lead to structural change.

However, there are tensions and dichotomies within this particular space. For instance, the structural challenges to promoting the participation of those affected, locking them out of roles and employment within the charities like TwMC. Also, there is the ever-present risk that dissenting practices will be met with oppressive responses by those in power, a key example being the Nationality and Borders Bill, served by the pernicious narratives of activist lawyers and social do-gooders frustrating immigration control and abusing the law. Dissent, therefore, is an on-going process of communication and dialogue within the contested spaces of a democracy, of push-and-pull power struggles, as opposed to single, sweeping acts of reform.

Much of what has been described and discussed here would appear to run counter to the increasingly bureaucratic, proceduralist and managerialist social work seen in the UK today. Yet, however dissonant, it also rings true with the global definition of social work and the professional and ethical frameworks social workers are required to uphold. It is often argued that the theoretical basis and social justice orientation of social work are at odds with the daily practice of state-agent social work. However, the principles, missions, and values of the profession—respecting and promoting rights, anti-oppressive practice

and social justice—have dissent at their core. At the same time, in the contemporary context, state-agent social work is often also implicated in maintaining and enforcing the hostile environment which, through legislative and enforcement frameworks, creep into daily interactions between social support services, which should be sources of help and assistance, and migrant families who go to them for help. Of particular concern is the increasing securitisation and hostility of some facets of statutory social work towards migrants, and also the stealthy everyday bordering into which charities are increasingly co-opted, compromised as they may be by their accountability to state funders. The independence of charities like TwMC is crucial to their work in operationalising dissent and building trust within this vital area of practice, as well as playing a crucial role in maintaining the health of our democracy.

Conclusion

Successful dissenting practice, such as that described and discussed here, not only makes crucial and instructive marks in the sand, but places pebbles and rocks in the water, the cumulative effect of which is to stem—or at least disrupt—the bitter tide of state-mandated hostility towards migrants in the UK today. In doing so, it runs an ever-present risk of increasingly vociferous and hostile state responses aimed at suppressing and preventing such resistance and disruption. However, this is no reason to lapse into hopelessness. This hostility serves to galvanise and inspire more dissent, and ever more creative resistance. Setting the risks against the many benefits gives reasons to be hopeful. Dissent is the necessary and effective counter to oppression, suppression and state hostility with which it is in dynamic opposition, at the very least keeping it at bay, and in its fullest expression and effect, driving progress at individual and structural level. In short, dissent *works*. Dissent is social work.

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The formulation of anti-vaccination mandate views in social work: Unpacking dissent

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: A feature of the Covid-19 pandemic in Aotearoa New Zealand was the introduction of mass vaccination and vaccine mandates as public health measures to minimise serious illness and deaths. These measures were generally popular, with wide support, and 90% uptake of vaccines across the eligible population. A minority, however, objected strenuously to both mass vaccination and mandates. In a stressful period, this opposition and the unrest generated significant conflict. Social work was not immune to this conflict.

Approach: This commentary explores the nature of dissent in social work about vaccines in Aotearoa New Zealand after August 2021, drawing on theoretical explanations of vaccine hesitancy and refusal. Social theory is helpful in unpacking arguments for and against public health initiatives.

Conclusions: Opposition to vaccine mandates has been framed as legitimate dissent where freedom and rights are largely conceptualised within a lens of neoliberal individualism. Social work values heavily weigh in on the side of a collectivist public health approach and this does not negate human rights.

KEYWORDS: Dissent, Covid-19, risk, knowledge, populism, public health, social work.

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A returnee from Australia to Aotearoa New Zealand tested positive for the Delta variant of Covid-19 in mid-August 2021, with the effect being a tranche of new public health emergency measures, with Tāmaki Makaurau, our largest city, in Level 3 and 4 lockdowns for 138 days. At the time of writing, the new Omicron variant is well-established and there have now been approaching 1.7 million cases of Covid-19 with more than 2800 deaths Covid-related deaths. The introduction of vaccine mandates in Aotearoa New Zealand in the spring of 2021 led to many debates about whether these mandates were a necessary public health intervention or an unwelcome authoritarian measure.

The debates did not escape attention in social work where mandates are applied in most health and social work agency settings. Social workers generally supported vaccine mandates. A poll conducted by the professional association Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) in November 2021 provided a snapshot of views (ANZASW). The survey was available to social workers over 1-5 November 2021 and there were 1,240 responses. The majority (90%) of social workers were vaccinated or intended to be vaccinated at the time of the survey. Only 6% indicated they would not be vaccinated and 2.3% were unsure they if they will be vaccinated. The results indicated that,

at the time of the survey, 72% of social workers were required to be vaccinated (59% because of the Covid-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order and 13% because of employer policies). In response to the question, "Should social workers be vaccinated to work with clients face-to-face?", 74% supported a requirement for social workers to be vaccinated (58% strongly agree; 16% agree) while 11% strongly disagree, 7.5% disagree, and 7.6% were neutral, or not sure.

The ANZASW subsequently announced its position statement, "COVID-19 vaccine and your professional responsibility" (November 10, 2022). The preamble made the association's position clear: "vaccination is a critical part of the Aotearoa New Zealand public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Social workers should help to protect themselves, the people they work with, and the wider community by getting their COVID-19 vaccination, unless medically contra-indicated" (ANZASW, 2021, p. 1).

Dissenting views on vaccines

While all public health measures during the Covid-19 have been debated, none have caused the conflict and distress engendered by vaccine mandates and vaccine 'passports' (the requirement to show an official record of one's vaccination status to undertake certain activities). Many health professionals and politicians have expressed shock at the intensity of the anti-vaccine sentiments during this pandemic. In an important thread on Twitter, Tara Haelle noted the following common reactions to challenges to Covid-19 public health initiatives:

—"I didn't expect so much public loss of trust"
—"I didn't expect political leaders to eschew public health advice because of ratings/donors/etc"
—"I didn't expect big swathes of public opposition to vaccines/masks/etc"

—"I didn't expect people to ignore public health recommendations."
(Haelle, 5 January 2022, Twitter thread)

Haelle reminds us that social scientists have been grappling with understanding how individuals and groups respond to major threats to health and well-being for many years (see, for example, Haelle, 2019). While Covid-19 is the focus of this article, there are many parallels: big societal threats like climate change, mental health, and smaller ones that have led to guidance and/or legislation such as car seatbelts, domestic smoke alarms, smoking cessation or using sunscreen. Vaccine hesitancy has been a feature of public health measures and, in particular, parental choice has featured in opposition to the widespread use of vaccines against common childhood infectious diseases with links to social media influencers and the "wellness industry" (Baker & Walsh, 2022).

Sociological scholarship provides useful concepts to seek to explain the ideological origins of opposition to vaccines. Space does not allow a detailed exploration of this social history, but a snapshot of some recent publications may add light to a murky discussion. An article by Alaszewski (2021) from a risk theory lens has explored the ideas of Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990, 1991) to understand the origins of the critical response to current vaccine campaigns which have formed the major component of government responses to Covid-19. This risk theory analysis is grounded in an understanding of "the risk society" (Beck, 1992) in which individuals conduct a "reflexive project of the self" (Giddens, 1991, p. 244) and develop strategies and decision-making about their own protection. Alaszewski noted that both Beck and Giddens observed that seeking to prevent future harm relies on access to knowledge: "to protect themselves, individuals need to access the technologies and knowledge through which they can identify and mitigate risks, a process Giddens refers to as reflexivity"(Alaszewski, 2021, p. 290).

In contemporary society, decision-making is rendered more challenging because there is no one source of authority, but a plethora of experts and expertise (Giddens, 1991). With a rapid change in the volume and accessibility of knowledge, there is "a plurality of heterogeneous claims to knowledge, in which science does not have a privileged place" (Giddens, 1990, p. 2). Rather, the dominance of the natural sciences is challenged, and powerful claims-makers call on distrust of science, often involving ideas of dissent and conspiracy. These calls will often invoke social and cultural tropes that will be attractive to people who are faced with an apparent avalanche of information at a stressful time. In a recent study, Baker and Walsh (2022) used a case study approach to analyse how antivaccine influencers promoted vaccine refusal on Instagram over 2020 to July 2021. They were interested in the commonplace discussions of suburban mothers as proponents of vaccine mistrust. Their findings revealed that:

> the maternal is strategically invoked in anti-vaccine content by appealing to three interrelated ideal types: the protective mother; the intuitive mother and the doting mother. These portrayals of the maternal are used to encourage vaccine refusal by presenting hegemonic ideals of the 'good mother' as one who is natural, holistic and authentic; depicting anti-vaccination as a feminine ideal to which mothers ought to aspire. (Baker & Walsh, 2022 p. 1)

While responses to this current threat are complex and influenced by many factors (and actors) it is important to remind ourselves of the structural context of responses to the pandemic. Pentini and Lorenz (2020) remind us of the risks of ongoing division and inequality as the Covid-19 pandemic rendered more vividly starkly the social, economic, and political divisions already present in our societies. Garrett (2021) noted the virus did not arrive in a vacuum—it came with a "pre-existing condition: it was, and is, largely structured and driven by the imperative of the global ruling class" (2021, p. 224). We have seen how health disparities in Aotearoa New Zealand have been writ large on the daily statistics.

The literature abounds with research and commentary on how particular populations have been impacted: see, for example, Tipene-Leach et al. (2021) on children and whānau and food security; Cousins (2020) on the effect on women and girls; Cox (2020) and Morgan et al. (2022) on older adults; Ratuva et al. (2021) on Pasifika communities, and Dawes et al. (2021) on Kaumatua.

While Garrett's book on dissent (2021) was written a little too early to have witnessed the rise of the sometimes violent anti-lockdown, anti-vaccination/anti-mandate protests and occupations that were to come in 2022, he characterises both the public health approach to Covid-19 and its opposition as reflections of two different kinds of neoliberalism. The public health campaign, with its focus on widespread measures aimed at minimisation of infections represents the form of neoliberalism that favours some interventions in the market in order that capitalism does not "self-destruct" (p. 225). The New Zealand social democratic government has taken that tack, albeit dressed up with the kindness trope and frequent exhortations to the collective solidarity of the "team of five million"[i]. The opposing forces on the other hand, while led by a somewhat rag-tag band of conservative petit-bourgeois small business owners and seasoned far-right activists have reflected a more anarchic form of neoliberalism, at the edges straying if not galloping into libertarianism. Loosely, the "let it rip" approach has emerged since the beginning of the pandemic with evidence of initially cynical attitudes to national and international health bodies and then increasingly vocal opposition to mandates such as compulsory mask-wearing. Penetini and Lorenz (2020, p. 549) note that this opposition brings together some unlikely political views:

It seems that for classical liberals the state is suddenly massively "back in" collaboration with commercial digital giants to introduce ever more pervasive (and often invasive) social control measures. The protests which sprang up against state-ordered restrictions represent a confusing mix of what used to be left and right political concerns.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, opposition to Covid-19 policies deepened between mid-2021 and early 2022 despite most parts of the country having relatively light restrictions in comparison to Auckland. In 2020-2021, most of us could not foresee the intensification of these critiques which, inflamed by populist leaders, would create the mass protests of early 2022 and the sporadic but not insignificant verbal abuse of people wearing masks and following health guidance. At the time of writing, the New Zealand government has abandoned vaccine and mask mandates for key sectors and removed border restrictions, despite significant case numbers and deaths. Protests continue, even though most restrictions other than mask wearing in public transport and health settings have gone.

Dissent, human rights, and attitudes to vaccine mandates

When announcing the "call for papers on dissent" for this issue, one social work commenter on social media saw this as ironic given social work's general support for mandates. The implication being that an anti-mandate stance was dissent while presumably support for mandates was a form of compliance with the state and challenged individual rights. Social workers who have opposed vaccine mandates have claimed (on social media and in private communications) that vaccine mandates violate individual human rights. In opposition, they thus claim to offer a dissenting voice. However, Garrett (2021, p. 7) helpfully clarifies that all dissent (as oppositional practice) should not be

"fetishised or unequivocally supported and valorised". The proponents of the anti-mandate arguments have asserted that vaccine mandates are dictatorial and tyrannical, and thus social workers who do support mandates are unethical.

In this opposition to vaccine mandates are social workers fetishising dissent or defending human rights? It is not straightforward. There is undeniably a real tension between a population/public health gaze and the individual choice position. Something that is obviously good across the general population may be seen to carry a different set of risks and benefits for each individual. Vaccination across a population clearly saves lives generally, but the personal risks and benefits of being vaccinated differ. This shapes decision-making too, and to consider the effects on people as individuals does not necessarily mean they are by default selfish, but rather that each decision does differ in important ways from that of a state or other governing body. People as individuals carry the risks of any adverse reactions, not the government, with its whole-population focus. On the other hand, it can be argued that individuals also bear the consequences of a pandemic that is allowed to run its course with the inevitable high death rate. We have seen across the world that the burden of illness and death is inequitably borne by people with disabilities and pre-existing illnesses. Logic in such a situation suggests that a utilitarian ethical approach—a focus on the greater good— along with some protection of the most vulnerable is better aligned with social work values. Nor can the role of organised campaigns of mis- and dis-information be ignored (see Hannah et al., 2021) as examples of social workers repeating misinformation were observed on social media and it is surely an ethical responsibility to push back against such harmful communication (Reimagining Social Work, 2022).

Haelle (2019) makes an important point that people who subscribe to an anti-vaccination position are not an homogenous group

and of course, some social workers oppose vaccination because of various beliefs and fears but would support lockdowns and other public health measures. Nor are all people who oppose mandates are anti-vaccination. A vociferous minority, however, has linked vaccine mandates, mask mandates and lockdowns together in a libertarian stance that all these measures impinge on our "freedoms". It is also helpful to remind ourselves that these views are often grounded in liberal-libertarian individualism which does fetishise personal rights, and, more broadly, in contemporary neoliberalism which focuses on citizens' responsibility for their own wellbeing thus enabling "a radical abstraction of self from social and material context" (Adams et al., 2019, p. 190). So there is significant pressure to valorise individual rights as freedom while framing collectivist approaches as "big government". Opposing public health measures is an individualistic approach that is steeped in liberalism: the realm of the social is abrogated by the ideal of free will. The occupation of land around the New Zealand parliament in February 2022 contained many disparate political elements but the self-styled "freedom fighters" shared a foundational belief that mandates, vaccination passports, and lockdowns were an unacceptable intrusion into the private lives of citizens and demanded their cessation.

Free speech and anti-vaccination views in social work

As I wrote this article, I encountered arguments that have extended anti-vaccine or anti-vaccine-mandate from a position of critique to a kind of victim status. Those who have opposed mandates and were stood down from or left their employment used phrases like "being forced to have the jab" suggesting physical coercion for having the vaccine; and mental coercion for being excluded from some activities. Yet strangely, many of the same social workers would have been obliged to be vaccinated

in order to gain their current employment. Vaccine mandates are not new. In the 1980s, working in a health setting, I was required to be vaccinated against tuberculosis as it reappeared in Aotearoa New Zealand amongst new arrivals from South East Asian refugee camps. Vaccines are an important part of health and safety in many workplaces for workers and service users.

These critical responses to social work support for vaccine mandates reflect a rejection of a collectivist response to a community crisis. However, any critique (or even gentle challenge) of this rejection of the social response to a public health crisis was countered with accusations of suppression of free speech. Garrett's position in respect of what is dissent—in the case of free speech—is of great relevance in considering the dynamics of tensions in social work currently. Garrett points out that dissent and social critique, in general, can be appropriated and diluted, or as he elegantly puts it "slyly abducted" (2021, p. 7) When some free speech advocates demand the individual right to utter hate speech or (in the case of anti-vaccine sentiments) to spread mis/dis-information, this can be seen as a fetishisation of a human right. What matters in dissent is the outcome. Dissent that included the street abuse of school children wearing masks or when such expression includes exposing others to harm through mischievous flouting of safety measures can hardly be valorised. It is valid to ask in dissent whose voice is heard, whose is silenced? (Garrett, 2021). Whose personal choice is valued above the ethos of collective welfare and whose is to be removed, and to what end? One person's freedom to go about their lives without restrictions forces others who are immunocompromised to endure months or even years of virtual house arrest. Who is harmed by free speech without limits? Dis/information costs lives. This is where links between right-wing populism and the anti-vaccination campaigns should cause social workers considerable alarm.

In making the case for collective responsibility, an important point to consider is what are its limits and who defines those limits in this current crisis? People are situated differently in terms of their subject positions when the state decides who should or should not engage in collective responsibility, and in terms of their perceived power (Keddell, 2022, personal communication). Within the context of the settler colonial state of Aotearoa New Zealand, the unprecedented micromanagement of people's freedom of movement felt brutal to many who felt politically alienated. Those who may have already felt powerless, alienated, and socially marginalised might be moved to resist more strongly the perceived imposition of power by the state than someone who already has a strong sense of self-efficacy and control. How do these differences in power relations affect vaccination decisions and discussions of collective responsibility? As early as March 2021, news reports explored *mana motuhake* in Māori hesitancy as linked to ongoing impacts of colonisation, alongside deficiencies in the rollout:

> Mana motuhake is about the right to choose for yourself what is right for you and your whānau or family. It is an expression of Māori self-determination and speaks to the value that our people place on having autonomy. It is something Māori hold in high regard after our disempowering experience of colonisation, which stripped us of our decision-making powers. What we are seeing with the coronavirus [vaccine] rollout is what happens when a group of people has suffered intergenerational harm through colonisation and continue to have negative experiences with authority. Many Māori people do not trust authority and will not follow suit blindly. (McLachlan, 2021, np)

It took considerable advocacy on behalf of Māori public health leaders to shift resources and communication strategies to Iwi organisations. The ensuing flax roots activism and service delivery outreach ensured high rates of vaccination amongst Māori, with similar efforts needed in Pasifika communities. The preponderance of dis/misinformation seemed designed to disrupt communications, engender fear and generate conflict in struggling communities with downstream impacts on the work of Māori health providers:

> [misinformation] means Māori have to work twice as hard, and be twice as visible, to combat the issue. That means Māori who are working to protect their communities from covid, and those who are also combatting misinformation or even basic sovereignty that doesn't align with the misinformation movement – are being subjected to threats, harassment, abuse, and acts of violence. (Ngata, 2021)

Links to populism in the anti-vaccine movement

While individuals might need to change their behaviour in response to risk, and public policy plays on that impetus, a broader Marxist analysis emphasises collective responsibility. This is where Prime Minister Ardern's social democratic urge leads to the promotion of the idealised "team of five million"[ii]. The anti-vaccine movement has significantly fought against that collective approach, drawing on tropes such as "my body, my rights" which, in the abortion debates, makes sense as abortion is a matter of individual choice, with minimal impact on others, but bound by legal restrictions that pander to conservative Christianity which is out of step with the majority opinion. Social workers who fall for this argument have failed to see that while (as individuals) they feel they are resisting technologies of mass control; they are also resisting the socialist urge to find collectivist responses to external threats.

While only a few social workers will go there, the extreme view fed by right-wing populists, lurches into fascism as was

seen in the coalition of the misguided, the misinformed and the malicious manipulators that has been reported in the coverage of the occupation of parliament's grounds in February 2022 (Dalder, 2022), and more recently, in the Stuff documentary film *Fire and Fury* (Stuff, 2022). These coalitions of far-right positions within the anti-vaccination/anti-mandate arena are a prominent feature of the responses to this pandemic (see Baker, 2022). Tensions mount between the more benign "wellness" and opposition to "big pharma" approaches, and the involvement of neo-Nazi groups where the blood purity trope shouts white supremacy. Social workers will resist this overt racism. But some have joined groups that are very close to those malignant movements, in order to find social and emotional support for their isolated stance. We should not be distracted by national and regional politics that would minimise these movements because we think these are only minority viewpoints, because if they are allowed to take hold, they will threaten many hard-won human rights (Ife, 2018).

What we saw develop over spring 2021 to February 2022 in Aotearoa New Zealand is right-wing populism, predicated on preserving and strengthening the rights of dominant cultures at the expense of others. Scratch below the surface of the calls for freedom and racism and misogyny can be found. The misogyny has been overt, particularly aimed at the Prime Minister and other politicians but also in hate speech and threats of violence against women scientists and other academics.

What unites people behind populist movements is often not something positive they have in common, more that they share a mistrust in the elite(s) and see government as being to blame for current frustrations, or they find solace in attacking a common enemy who is seen to be doing the work of a malign state. Given a clear majority of people support the vaccination campaign, including mandates (Neilson, 2021), it is not surprising that those in opposition seek a sense of

community for their dissenting views. Voss et al. (2018, p. 113) argued that, "by tapping into the emotions and frustrations of disenfranchised people, logic and facts seem irrelevant". Rather, use of tactics such as false "facts", dubious sources, outright lies, and "unethical, amoral, and aggressive and discriminatory behaviour previously not tolerated" are all employed when the leaders speak to the understandable anxiety and fears of people, even when those fears have themselves have been created by the repetitive promulgation of false explanations.

It is important that social workers unpack the ideological confusion that is present in many of the calls for "freedom". A particular example is the use of the slogan, "my body my choice", which exemplifies the "muddled messages from populist leaders whose ideological base is as slippery as an eel, but fundamentally rooted in right-wing beliefs" (Beddoe, 2021a, p. 2). Reich (2017), well before the Covid outbreak, explored how two different public health examples (vaccination and family planning) challenged "the meanings of individual choice and the role of the state in shaping access to choice" (p. 50). Reich noted the significance of privilege, in that access to private resources permitted individual choice in ways unavailable to low-income families who, in turn, are also subject to more state surveillance when seeking public funds or services. These are important debates for social work. Should the state, directly or through funding contracts, demand that people who receive services use long-acting reversible contraception for example? Does this requirement, potentially viewed as benign coercion, in fact deny reproductive rights and justice for women (Beddoe, 2021b)? I return to the position that vaccine mandates aim to support a collective response to a public emergency, while forcing a contraceptive choice on people who are already denied agency in other aspects of their life embodies misogynist surveillance. These policy responses are not the same thing, and they do not have the same targets.

It is also important to note that there is much ideological slippage in the rhetoric we have seen recently as Voss et al. (2018) assert populist leadership "highlights the deficiencies of contemporary democratic systems and claims that he [sic] will fix them in their favour—*sometimes by disposing of political processes, limiting human rights* [emphasis added], and appealing to specific forms of nativism over universalism and globalism" (p. 113). Many of those arguing most passionately for bodily autonomy in the media for example, are on record as opposing abortion and supporting "conversion therapy". Vaccine concerns do not align with other rights-based arguments such as abortion rights. As noted above, the decision to have an abortion is a private decision. Bodily autonomy and consent are vital. State policies that ban abortion force the state of pregnancy and childbirth on individuals with severe consequences. Anti-abortion laws force bodily consequences on the pregnant person's body, with no concern for their rights, but we do not physically force people to donate organs or blood or have invasive medical treatment (Beddoe, 2021b). And, of course, despite the rhetoric of the anti-vaccination campaigns, no country has physically forced people to be vaccinated. Rather there is a continuum of mandates from mild (Covid-19 vaccine mandates for frontline health workers, who already have to satisfy vaccination requirements) to draconian requirements where people are not allowed to leave their homes if unvaccinated.

Conclusions

This commentary has argued that opposition to vaccine mandates has been framed as legitimate dissent where freedom and rights are largely conceptualised on a continuum from neoliberal individualism to libertarianism. The waters of such dissent have been seriously muddied by the unhealthy coalition of right-wing libertarian and neo-Nazi groups and their malign ideologies. Social theory has been helpful in unpacking arguments for and

against public health initiatives, including the importance of understanding that many groups in Aotearoa New Zealand society, especially Māori, have legitimate questions and concerns about the incursion of state powers given their experiences of ongoing neglect and oppression. Social work values, however, heavily weigh in on the side of a collectivist public health approach. This does not negate human rights provided every effort is made to support all our people through culturally responsive and properly resourced public health systems.

As Covid-19 has spread its tentacles, in the Delta outbreak of 2021 followed swiftly by Omicron in 2022, we have seen at close quarters how existing inequalities and tensions in Aotearoa New Zealand society have been intensified. Garrett (2021) argued that the principles set in the International Federation of Social Workers definition of social work (IFSW, 2014) should guide us through the ongoing crisis: social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities. We have seen how inequities are revealed in the health disparities in many communities we work with in Aotearoa and elsewhere (Cox, 2020; McLeod et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2022; Ratuva et al., 2021). As the events of February 2022 have shown, there are many manipulators of vulnerable people and in facing this vexed discourse as educated social workers, let us explore the best evidence, be guided by science, and ultimately support public health measures for surely, in a public health emergency this is where we need to hold tightly to our collectivist values while recognising the tensions between individual perspectives and social good.

What remains to be addressed sometime soon is how to move forward. Pentini and Lorenz (2020, p. 549) capture this challenge neatly: "The underlying dilemma of the present confusion is how to combine social solidarity with personal freedom, dependency on others with autonomy, and bring the constitutive and unresolved tension contained

in modernity … to a critical point." It is vital for social work to remain critically engaged in building progressive social movements to counter right-wing populism. The disturbing growth of a populist social movement we have seen as anti-Covid-19 measures protests morphed into right-wing fundamentalist Christian coalitions goes beyond neoliberal individualism, instead signifying a deeply concerning shift toward more virulent, activist strategies to suppress the rights of others and undermine the capacity and authority of elected governments. This noxious and dangerous movement has feminism, anti-racism, decolonisation struggles, the rights of all genders/sexualities, and climate change activism in its sights.

Notes

i   During the lockdowns of 2020-2021, the Prime Minister frequently exhorted citizens to "be kind" and, "we're all in this together" or "he waka eke noa" in te Reo Māori.

ii   The Prime Minister also drew upon the idea of our population of five million as a team, fighting Covid-19 together.

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Dissent against "Definition debates" about Social Work

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ABSTRACT

This commentary dissents against definition debates. I argue that ongoing discussion about what social work is needs to find a common ground of recognition. Arguments about the bifurcation, demise or "end of social work" are challenged. Starting with the position that social work operates on a necessarily contested and contradictory space, the case is made for a shared definition of social work as a "mediator in the social". To stand up as a foundational definition for the diversity of social work worldwide, "mediation in the social" as described by Philp (1979) requires important updates to fit the complex "socials" of the 21st century. This necessitates a shift from the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge as an add-on to expansively identifying indigenous knowledge as a constant that underpins social work internationally. This definition needs to be founded on shared values and assumptions that capture the essence of social work such as citizenship, relational practices, human rights and social justice as expressed in diverse cultural contexts worldwide.

Keywords: Social work; definitional debate; social work knowledge(s)

This commentary dissents against debates about the definition of social work. I acknowledge my own limitation as an academic from far West in the world. This commentary is intended to contribute to the rich and diverse ongoing dialogue and debates within national and international contexts.

First, some *constants* in social work that provide a beginning scaffolding are identified. This is followed by a critique of *definitional debates*. This leads to an argument to support "mediation in the social" (Philp, 1979) as a scaffold to underpin the diversity of forms of helping within different cultural contexts for social work. The need to problematise mediation in the social from its original iteration (Philp, 1979) to incorporate a global perspective that challenges *universalism* (Gray et al., 2016a, p. 261) is asserted. The importance of a commitment to shared values shaped by culture, context, critical understanding of state–social work relations, use of authority and role of citizens in problem definition and resolution is emphasised.

Over the past decades, the critical knowledge base for social work educators, practitioners and students has progressed from closed academic paradigms to a vibrant, global body of knowledge. The battleground of opposing ideas is well beyond the traditional gladiatorial duels about social work paradigms (McGregor, 2019; Rojek, 1986). More nuanced critical understandings are available (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2018) based on current constants that scaffold how we theorise social work (McGregor, 2019). Greater potential exists to realise mutual learning through recognition of the diversity of forms of helping within different cultural contexts for social work (Gray et al., 2013;

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Gray et al., 2016b; Ruwhiu, 2019; Sewpaul, 2013).

Some constants are as follows. Knowledge that relies on academic theory only, long established, as "too far away from practice to understand its complexities" (Corrigan & Leonard, 1978, p. 1), is an inadequate starting point in social work education. Instead, citizenship approaches, recognition of Indigenous expertise and privileging of pathways to knowledge generated from practice and direct experience of those engaged with social work are foremost. Hegemonic, Western theory driven, dual-oriented positions are challenged by a decolonisation approach and a commitment to the democratisation of knowledge in, and for, social work. This implies mutual learning, respect and equal value rather than adapting or adding onto dominant Western approaches. Learning about social work worldwide and ensuring resources and opportunities for students to dialogue and debate within different contexts, should be basic expectations of social work education.

Realisation of these constants are often constrained because of external obstacles. Neoliberalism, marketisation of care services, discrimination, oppression, injustice and inequalities are such that social work finds itself in the paradoxical position that *investments in people* come with expectations of return in line with economic investments (Marthinsen 2019, p. 359). However, there are also internal obstacles such as the self-defeating *definitional debates*. These often focus on concerns about bifurcations, decline and death. Consider the following three illustrative examples about what social work *is*—from revolutionary, functionary and aspirational perspectives.

There are many excellent works on revolutionary, transformative and community social work practices to inform critical thinking and approaches (e.g., Iamamoto et al., 2021; Kamali & Jönsson, 2019; Sewpaul, 2013). However,

in dominant discourses of social work, the bifurcation of social work between *traditional* and *radical*, *individual* or *collective* or *critical* and *non-critical* is too stark and misleading (McGregor, 2019; McGregor & Millar, 2020) and oversimplified around individual (perceived traditional) and collective (perceived radical) discourses (McGregor, 2019). Transformative practice, from individual to collective practice, needs more in-depth mediation, as demonstrated, for example, in debates about balancing regulation and transformative bicultural social work in the professionalisation of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand (Hunt, 2016, 2017). Another obstacle set up with bifurcation is that, while often offering doable possibilities for practice from *outside* of the system (Mulally, 1993), the scope for transformational practice *inside* the system within a statutory context is less clear. Yet, it is here that the most contested and contradictory aspects of social work are mediated as reflected in national debates on social work—be it in Ireland, Aotearoa or many jurisdictions worldwide.

Another definitional problem relates to the thesis that social work is being diminished. Reflecting on social work in the UK and concerns about "Descent or dissent?" Parker (2020) expressed concern that UK social work, post-Brexit, is becoming parochial and less international. Social work in highly regulated contexts like the UK has led to regulators and politicians strongly influencing the very definition and prescription of social work. Such instrumental and reductionist approaches demand our dissent. Hyslop et al.'s (2018) review of the top papers read in this journal illustrates the range of critical practices refusing to allow such an instrumental (and destructive) construction of social work in Aotearoa:

> A common theme of recent social policy critique—developed in response to policies of targeting, use of data and talk of social investment—is to shift the

discourse back to practices that are anti-oppressive, promote social justice and place the families and communities we work with at the centre of social work practice. (p. 1)

Another debate is about the *end of social work*, which arises at different points in time. For example, recently Maylea (2021) called for the end of social work because of an incoherent theory base, issues with professionalism, a history of abuse and an inability to respond to current challenges. Garrett (2021) responded to this paper to propose dissenting social work. Whelan (2022) added to the debates within both papers to argue that: "rather than dismantling the profession and before imagining a new social work paradigm, we would do well to examine how social work is currently defined and whether or not this definition is reflective of contemporary social work practice" (Whelan, 2022, p. 1168). While acknowledging that there is a place in the literature for definitional debates, he argued that the focus should come back to definitions that "more accurately describe what social work is now" (p. 1175).

This echoes the argument by Philp (1979), whom Whelan also refers to, regarding the distinctive nature of social work. Philp situated social work as a practice of *mediating in the social,* as others such as Parton (1991), Skehill (2004), Hyslop (2013, 2016) and McGregor and Dolan (2021) have considered. I would argue that many decades on from Philp, in a very different social context, this central role of mediation between complex objective and subjective forces holds firm. However, the form of knowledge we base this practice on needs to be based on shared values and assumptions that capture the essence of social work such as citizenship, relational practices, knowledge from Indigenous and community-based approaches, human rights and social justice as expressed in diverse contexts worldwide. There is an irrefutable link between many individual and family issues (e.g., child

welfare and neglect) and wider socio-economic factors (see, for example, Bywaters et al., 2018; Hyslop & Keddell, 2018) which must inform how we mediate the social from micro to macro levels.

Furthermore, we need to situate Philp (1979) in the context of time. While he referred to social workers *creating subjects*, in the present day, we talk about *creation with subjects* or citizens in line with a partnership and citizenship-oriented approach. While Philp referred mostly to academic knowledge, today, the centrality of knowledge generation from direct experience of citizens is key. In this, we need to prioritise diverse Indigenous populations who share common experiences of colonisation, discrimination and marginalisation (Sewpaul, 2013; Walsh-Tapiata, 2016). In addition, critical engagement of practitioners in mediating and explaining the complex and contradictory social is essential (Hyslop, 2013; 2016, McGregor & Dolan, 2021). Knowledge by social workers is mediated in specific social, economic and political contexts (Hyslop, 2013, 2016) and practices of research and knowledge production need to be decolonised (Eketone & Walker, 2013). Skills of mediating social and public policy are crucial (McGregor & Millar, 2020).

Mediation in the social as a definitional constant is particularly relevant to the dual mandate of regulation and support amid social contradiction (Hauss & Schulte, 2009). This socio-legal role and expertise needs to be more clearly asserted within the IFSW 2014 international definition of social work (McGregor & Dolan, 2021). We need to balance regulation with rights-based practice as opposed to seeing them as competing entities (Jones, 2014; McGregor, 2015). Social work is intrinsically connected to social protection, child protection and safeguarding and we cannot and should not, refute this core purpose. If we think we need to get away from "regulation" and the legal role, we are getting away from the fundamental role of social work as mediator

of support and protection. Instead, we need to ensure that regulatory practices of social protection and safeguarding are developed in participatory ways that mediate the social to: maximise protection from abuse, harm and trafficking; support and protect across the life course and promote fundamental rights to safety, justice and welfare.

Hyslop (2016) argued that "[I]t is the knowledge form of social work that sets it apart – and if this is 'left behind', so too will the rights and freedoms of the clients whom we serve" (2016, p. 34). The case is made here that mediation in the social has wide definitional adaptability to explain our complex practices and the social contexts they operate within. It is an overarching frame around which we can come together globally to reframe it, decolonise it, fight for it, work it out, complicate it and communicate it widely.

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Social workers with criminal convictions navigating the social work profession

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Over time, the social work profession in Aotearoa New Zealand has become increasingly regulated culminating in mandatory registration under the auspices of the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), which took effect in February 2021. There has been considerable debate about the benefits and risks to social work from mandatory registration, particularly concerning whether someone is a fit and proper person to practise social work. This article presents voices largely absent from the debate, exploring the experiences of social workers with criminal convictions navigating the social work profession.

METHODS: The research presented is drawn from a Master of Social Work study where 11 social workers with one or more criminal convictions were interviewed. As part of the study, participants were asked about mandatory registration and their experiences with registering. Interpretive phenomenological analysis methodology framed the entire study, including data analysis.

FINDINGS: Most participants viewed mandatory registration positively, but many expressed frustration about the lack of transparency and clarity from the SWRB regarding the registration process for people with criminal convictions. The SWRB's practices and powers were also questioned, including over-ruling the Criminal Records (Clean Slate) Act 2004 (CSA, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS: It is apparent that the decision-making leading to mandatory registration did not include the voices of social workers with criminal convictions or advocacy on their behalf. Participants highlight many challenges such people face in gaining employment within social work. These challenges could be mitigated by SWRB reforming its current approach to the CSA (2004) and providing increased clarity and transparency for those with criminal convictions.

KEYWORDS: Registration; criminal convictions; social work; social justice; barriers; professionalisation

INTRODUCTION

In its aspirational definition and ethical code, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) heralds social work as a profession where human rights and social justice form the bedrock of practice. Social workers are directed to challenge inequality and discrimination and to empower people

(IFSW, 2022). Critically, the profession must also ensure that social workers are safe to practise and do no harm to the people they support. There is a significant tension between these aims, particularly when making decisions about educating, employing, and registering people with prior criminal justice involvement. The terms people with criminal convictions or

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criminal justice involvement are used within this article. Non-stigmatising language is important when referencing people with lived criminal justice system experiences (Tran et al., 2018).

On February 27, 2021, social workers in Aotearoa were mandated to register with the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), a government regulatory body (SWRB, 2020a). This requirement means social workers with criminal justice involvement are subject to additional layers of scrutiny—over and above current legislation. Of course, this has merit and can be viewed as an extra layer of protection in response to legitimate public concern about the conduct of social workers. However, social work education providers will likely become more wary about educating people with criminal convictions as they risk not gaining registration upon finishing their degree. This process may result in an increasingly conservative stance over who has the right to call themselves a social worker.

The journey to mandatory social work registration

The impetus for registration increased in the late 1990s due to public criticism of child protection services and related distrust of social work due to deaths of children at the hands of caregivers. Calls for registration coalesced with the Labour government's professional regulation impetus, culminating in the passage of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (SWR Act, 2003) and the establishment of the SWRB (Beddoe & Duke, 2009; Brown, 2000; Lonne & Duke, 2009; van Heugten, 2011).

While reducing or preventing harm to the public was the central focus of government regulation, social work associations hoped registration would raise the status of the social work profession (van Heugten, 2011). Social work registration also aligned Aotearoa alongside comparable countries with established registration processes such as England, Hong Kong and Canada

(Hunt, 2017). The introduction of mandatory registration has given protection of title to registered social workers. Today, only those registered with the SWRB have the legal right to use the designation *social worker*.

Reservations about statutory registration of social workers have existed since it was first proposed in 1994 and continues to this day (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), 2021; Corrigan, 2000 as cited in Hunt, 2017; Hunt et al., 2019; Randal, 1999; Rennie, 2013). While the ANZASW, the Tangata Whenua caucus and social work education providers generally supported registration, ongoing disputes with the SWRB over boundaries and jurisdiction have occurred (Hunt et al., 2019; van Heugten, 2011). For example, key stakeholders and the SWRB have grappled over the ownership of intellectual social work knowledge and have clashed over the mandate to control specific areas of professional space, such as social work courses and content (Hunt et al., 2019, p. 902).

While academics and educators have also shown support for mandatory registration, concerns still exist that mandatory registration may increase government control, further diminishing independent academic voices and sidelining social work's social justice mandate: potentially undermining a focus on poverty reduction and compromising commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Harington, 2006; Hunt, 2017; O'Brien, 2005, 2013; Orme & Rennie, 2006; Randal, 2018; Rennie, 2013; Simmons-Hansen, 2010; van Heugten, 2011; Williams, 2019). As Hunt et al. (2019) asserted, if social work regulation threatens to weaken the social justice mandate of social work, this must be challenged by the profession and educators.

Educators policing entry to social work

In reviewing literature from Aotearoa, no relevant research explored the experiences of social workers with criminal convictions

as they navigated their career pathway (Jackson, 2021). The central research focus in Aotearoa is related to the dilemma faced by social work educators when applying the SWRB *Fit and Proper* (2018) criteria to potential social work students (Apaitia-Vague et al., 2011 Hughes et al., 2017).

The SWRB determines fitness to practise when a candidate applies for provisional regulation after completing a social work degree (SWRB, 2018). Apaitia-Vague et al. (2011) highlighted the unfair position that this places educators in when making admission decisions based on the likelihood of the SWRB registering that person after they finish their 4-year degree. Crisp and Gillingham (2008) argued that it is unethical to educate individuals if they have no real chance of working in the field once they graduate. A Council of Social Work Education in Aotearoa New Zealand (CSWEANZ) Working Group Report (Hughes et al., 2017) provided feedback to the SWRB following a review of its *Fit and Proper* criteria. CSWEANZ expressed concern that the SWRB could not offer a definitive answer to students with criminal convictions about their ability to become registered upon completion of their degree. Effectively, decisions about whether an individual is fit and proper are made by educators, rather than the SWRB. This generates uncertainty as it is unclear whether the same criteria are applied across the country or whether admission decisions will always line up with the eventual SWRB determination.

Increased scrutiny and regulation of social workers

The SWRB has also been criticised for decisions concerning minor criminal convictions. The Public Service Association–Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (PSA) is Aotearoa's largest trade union with over 80,000 members (PSA, 2022), including approximately 3,500 social workers (PSA, 2018). In its inquiry into the operation of the SWRA 2003, the PSA raised concerns that

the SWRB might be unduly restrictive in its approach to the registration of social workers with criminal convictions (PSA, 2016). The PSA said it has witnessed trained social workers refused registration due to one-off, or minor, past offences (PSA, 2016, p. 4).

The Criminal Records (Clean Slate) Act 2004 (CSA, 2004) was created to avoid discrimination based on minor convictions. People who did not re-offend within 7 years of their last conviction had their criminal record automatically concealed so that minor infractions did not hinder their progress through life, especially in employment. However, in 2019 the Social Workers Registration Legislation Act (2019) and the CSA (2004) were amended so that "clean slate" provisions no longer apply when the SWRB undertakes police checks of prospective social workers. The SWRB are also granted access to criminal conviction history and court proceedings that did not result in a conviction. Further, the SWRB can access information the New Zealand Police hold on an individual, including reported family violence history and infringement or demerit reports (SWRB, 2018). Accessing this additional information could potentially flag concerns about future practice safety. However, as Apaitia-Vague et al. (2011, p. 58) stated, it could also reveal "a person's 'story' as a victim", exposing personal information that individuals may legitimately not wish to disclose.

Queries have also been voiced about the lack of reference to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the SWRA 2003. According to Simmons-Hansen (2010, p. ii), concerns about maintaining fair power relationships consistent with the "bicultural commitment tradition within the social work profession" were ignored. Te Momo (2015, p. 505) argued that the proposal for mandatory registration and SWRB regulation could be considered "colonisation by words applied in a subtle manner" (Te Momo, 2015, p. 505). The issue is that a one-size-fits-all regulation process that does not take specific account of the position of

Māori risks further marginalisation and undermines the goal of increasing Māori participation in social services (Beddoe & Duke, 2009; Randal, 2018).

Social justice and activism

The profession has successfully co-opted the term *social justice*, using it to claim a unique space within the helping professions. It is maintained that "principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities" are central to the profession (IFSW, 2018, para. 5). However, Williams (2019) questioned whether the profession upholds these principles when considering the place of non-violent social justice activism (NVSJA) within social work. Ostrander et al. (2017) pointed out that engaging in political activism (whether that be protesting or joining political or civic organisations) can be a way for social workers to uphold their social justice and human rights obligations as set out by the IFSW (2018). This raises the question of what happens when a prospective or current social worker gets arrested challenging social injustices through NVSJA? It is not uncommon to get arrested at such events, with Māori more likely to be arrested and convicted (Duarte, 2017; Eketone, 2015; Keane, 2012; Schrader, 2010, as cited in Williams, 2019). While social workers are advised to "engage in action to change the structures of society", they are also meant to uphold the principle of being "law-abiding citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand" (ANZASW, 2019, p. 12). Effectively, the role of NVSJA, which inevitably involves the risk of arrest, is discounted.

Scrutiny of IFSW documentation reveals scant reference to how the social work profession should approach the issue of criminal justice involvement. The only mention found is within the Education Global Standards (IFSW, 2012), which states: "Relevant criminal convictions, involving abuse of others or human rights violations, must be taken into account given the primary responsibility of protecting and empowering service users" (Standard 6.2). However, there is also a significant benefit in having social workers that reflect the population grouping with which they engage (Vliek, 2018). The IFSW (2012) standards highlight the importance of "student recruitment, admission and retention policies that reflect the demographic profile of the locality that the institution is based in…" and state: "Due recognition should be given to minority groups that are under-represented and/or under-served" (Standard 6.2). In considering the appropriate balance, it is crucial to hear the voices of social workers with criminal justice involvement and how they have experienced professional registration. Hopefully, presenting their views will lead to more discussion amongst social work bodies, regulators, educators, and employers about just processes to manage their entry.

Methodology

The research which informs this article was conducted as part of a Master of Social Work study that sought to understand how social workers with criminal convictions in Aotearoa navigated their social work career pathways. Data from participants concerning social work registration and experiences of the registration process have informed this article.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the methodological approach taken. IPA is an integrative hermeneutic phenomenology (Finlay, 2011) that favours interpretation over description. Since its inception, IPA has become known as a methodology that provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the experiences of research participants (Smith, 1996). Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 11 individuals with one or more criminal convictions and working (or who had worked) in the social work profession. Individuals included in the research did not have to be registered, as mandatory

registration had not come into effect at the time of recruitment.

Recruitment

Purposive sampling was employed. IPA researchers generally attempt to locate participants who can provide insights into a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009). The recruitment of practising social workers was achieved by advertising through the SWRB website and via a generic email sent by ANZASW and the Drug and Alcohol Practitioners Association Aotearoa New Zealand (DAPAANZ) to their members. Snowball sampling was also used in the recruitment of potential participants.

Data analysis

Smith and colleagues (2009) outline six steps to promote rigorous analysis. However, I added an additional, seventh, step from Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method. This extra step involved validating the "description of the phenomenon under study" by returning

the core meanings the researcher has drawn from the transcripts to the participants (Morrow et al., 2015, p. 643). Here is an overview of the seven steps taken within my analysis process.

Step 1 entailed "immersing oneself in some of the original data" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82) by reading and re-reading each transcript. At this stage, I used a journal to write down thoughts that came to mind and *bracket out* how my personal experiences linked to participant accounts. Bracketing is a methodological tool that demands the researcher deliberately cast aside their beliefs and experiences of the phenomenon throughout the research process (Carpenter, 2007). Step 2 comprised a line-by-line analysis of the data with comments made against significant bodies of text. Step 3 involved looking at the notes I had created to find emergent themes. These emergent themes were closely linked to participant accounts but also included my interpretation. Step 4 encompassed grouping together emergent themes while discarding those irrelevant to the research question. Step 5

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Ethnicity	Level & date of education	Years as a social worker	SWRB registration
Tania	Female	60-69	Pākehā	1999 BSW	19	Yes
Phillipa	Female	40-49	Pākehā	1997 BSW	20+	Yes
Darren	Male	40-49	Pākehā	2010 BSW	10	Yes
Sarah	Female	30-39	Pākehā	2014 BSW	5	Yes
Chad	Male	20-29	Pākehā	2017 BSW	6	In progress
Luke	Male	20-29	Japanese Pākehā	2017 BSW honours	18 months	No
Iosefa	Male	40-49	Samoan	2004 DipSW Currently doing masters	16	
Mike	Male	40-49	Māori	1990 studies Post grad & masters	25	No
Whānui	Male	50-59	Māori Irish	1990s addiction studies diploma	25	No
Shaun	Male	30-39	Pākehā	2014 BSW honours 2017 MSW	4 months	Yes
Aroha	Female	40-49	Māori	2010 Bachelor of applied social work	19	Yes

meant moving on to the next transcript and repeating steps 1 to 4. It was important to bracket out my learnings from the previous transcript to view the following transcript with fresh eyes and without preconceived ideas of what I might find.

Step 6 incorporated elements of Colaizzi's (1978) analysis. Four participants were randomly selected to check that the interpretation of their interview was a valid representation of their experiences. And finally, step 7 aligns with Smith and colleagues' (2009) final step in which the analyst looks for emerging patterns across cases. At this point, I used NVivo 12, a qualitative software program, which enabled me to manage many emergent themes and group them more efficiently into higher-order nodes (Edhlund & McDougall, 2019). During this stage, I created several parent nodes (representing the higher order concepts drawn from the emergent themes) and a series of child nodes (emergent themes) linked to relevant parent nodes. This was an inductive process that took considerable time and continued to evolve during the writing up of the findings.

Ethics

I applied to the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) and received ethics approval (reference 022943) on 29 May 2019 for 3 years. Through my personal experiences of the social work education system and profession as a woman with criminal convictions, I have experienced some personal barriers to practice. I had to be careful not to project my experiences onto the participants. As Kockelmans (2017) stated: "it is impossible to tear oneself completely away from that tradition, to adopt a 'neutral' and 'objective' attitude, and, in this way, to achieve an 'authentic' understanding" (p. 42). I ensured that my background and experiences were not made known to the participants during recruitment and interviewing. Of course, not

all the participants came into the interview space unaware of some elements of my background. Two interviewees knew me at different stages of my life and had some knowledge of my convictions. I maintained ethical and professional boundaries by refraining from engaging in dialogue about the project except in the confines of the interview and subsequent communication. I ensured that I anonymised participant contributions and used extracts carefully to limit the risk of identification.

Findings

Three themes in the findings captured participants' views of mandatory registration and their experiences with the SWRB's registration processes. The first theme, "To be or not to be … registered", gathers the participants' experiences with the SWRB and explores their views of mandatory registration. The second theme, "Smoke and mirrors", presents participants' views that the SWRB lacks transparency within the registration process and does not clarify whether someone can be registered before undertaking a 4-year degree. The third theme, "Black mark for life", conveys participants' displeasure that the CSA (2004) does not apply within the registration process and illustrates how minor convictions are a black mark they carry throughout their career pathway.

To be or not to be … registered

Whether registered or not participants expressed a strong sentiment of support for the broad principles and ideals underlying mandatory registration. Several participants said legalising the title "social worker" was good. Sarah said, "if you've done your social work degree, Joe Bloggs down the street who's never done anything can't say they're a social worker". Luke felt that the SWRB set the bar where "you need to be" and that this is "way better". Iosefa said, "I think it's really good, it strengthens that accountability". Aroha had the view that registration improved the

safety of clients and enabled them "to … lay a complaint should they need to … if they feel that they're not being, you know, treated fairly. I think that's a good thing". Sarah saw registration as providing a "kind of protection of title". However, she also questioned whether "this professional bod[y]" was "getting us further away from the clients".

Over half of the participants expressed concerns about mandatory registration and its application in practice. Phillipa said the "cost is a bit extreme" when registering, and Sarah was concerned that "for some people … who have kids … paying a lot of rent, that's quite a stretch". Shaun shared Sarah's insight about the financial impact on less privileged social workers in the following account:

> The people who are more able to get social work qualifications are going to be white, privileged, middle class, and the people who get stuck in community worker positions are…more likely to be working-class parents, people who can't afford to study, Māori people who face systemic discrimination.

Sarah was also concerned with declining diversity within the profession due to registration, questioning whether a 4-year degree was "equally open to everyone" and wondering if, before registration, "were we getting different social workers from different avenues?".

To be considered for social work registration, applicants must complete a recognised Aotearoa social work qualification or hold an equivalent overseas qualification (SWRB, 2020b). If they have extensive practice history but no recognised qualification, they may also apply through the experience pathway (SWRB, 2020c). Shaun outlined his views about experienced individuals being excluded from registration due to a lack of education in this account:

> The idea that everyone should be forced to go and get a four-year social work

degree at great expense and that that qualifies you to then be a social worker is absolutely absurd when there are people working in communities who have far more lived knowledge and experience and far more skill than I ever will.

Phillipa wondered "if some organisations will get away with it by not calling people social workers even though they are doing a social work kind of job". The concerns Phillipa and Shaun expressed about registration were being experienced by Whānui, who is unregistered due to the barriers around needing a 4-year degree qualification:

> At jail at the moment, I've raised the bar another level when it comes to clinical practice…my manager was mentioning it, that I've raised the bar and yet I'm on the lowest grade. So, I've got 20-something years' experience in the field but I'm still on the bottom rate I think I'm on the … lowest rate for social workers.

Whānui was resigned *to being part of a* system that did not recognise lived experience and work history as being equal to a qualification and registration by a professional body. It seemed he was going backwards professionally and financially in the face of professionalisation.

Some participants held off applying for registration due to their criminal convictions. Chad expressed anxiety about being rejected:

> I think I've kind of like put it off, because of that aspect, I feel like I would've applied for it a lot sooner … still to this day kind of still makes you a little bit more anxious and nervous about it all. So I've kinda just put it on the back burner I haven't really like been in a hurry to get registered because of that.

Shaun questioned the SWRB's narrow focus on criminal convictions in determining an applicant's ethical standing. Shaun said he was asked to disclose his conviction during

his application but that he "wasn't asked to disclose other unethical behaviour I'd been engaged in".

Chad directly experienced Shaun's hypothetical point in his career pathway.

> I mean I know a lot of people at university that did way worse stuff than me but didn't get caught … I know doctors, I know lawyers, I know accountants, I know teachers, that did some real … bad stuff but didn't get caught and that's kind of the difference … between me and them.

He understood first-hand that he was deemed less ethical and "worthy" than his peers due to being "caught" while his peers got away with "worse" actions.

Smoke and mirrors

Many participants viewed the SWRB as lacking transparency and most expressed some uncertainty about the SWRB registration process.

Shaun spoke of the lack of guidance when registering and divulging his ongoing commitment to protest action:

> I got in touch with them [SWRB] and said … I've got a conviction for civil disobedience, still engaged in it … can you give me any guidance on how the board would look at it, they said "no we have nothing that we can tell you or no guidance we can give you the only thing that we can say is that we would look at it with like from a social work perspective" and I go "what the fuck does that mean?"

Other participants shared concerns about a lack of transparency and expressed an undercurrent of fear, uncertainty and anxiety when applying for registration. When asked what she thought of the current screening of social workers with criminal convictions, Phillipa replied: "What is the current screening? All I know is that I had to write to

the Social Work Registration Board and then nothing else happened."

Several participants expressed concerns that the SWRB does not give prospective students with criminal justice involvement certainty about their ability to gain registration once qualified. Sarah stated:

> When I started my degree and you know they said, "you know registration will be coming", and I started my degree in like 2009 and that you know they can't tell you at the beginning that you are going to spend all that money and at the end potentially you won't get registration.

Iosefa expressed a similar sentiment. Although he had gained social work registration, he acknowledged it was more accessible due to the amount of time between his incarceration and needing to be registered.

> I think what was difficult back then when I first started was I didn't have a history of change, whereas now I have the history so it's a lot easier for me … when I initially started they'd ask me questions around "what changes?" The only changes was I came out of prison, I don't drink anymore, and I help out at church where now it's very different.

Some social workers in this study would likely fail against registration criteria within the current regime if their conviction history were more proximate to graduation. Other unforeseen barriers were also revealed. Sarah spoke about applying for a job and being viewed as an ideal candidate and how she had "applied for registration, but it hadn't come through yet, and they actually declined me for the position based on the fact that I potentially may not get my registration".

Black mark for life

The theme "Black mark for life" was referenced by many participants. They

sensed that the systems did not allow minor convictions to be wiped, which meant a permanent black mark remained with them. Eight participants had elements within their interviews that linked strongly to this theme.

Several participants spoke directly about their frustration with the SWRB decision to access all criminal justice involvement, even minor convictions that would have been restricted as per the criteria contained within the CSA (2004). Shaun described this approach as making "the purpose of the Clean Slate Act redundant". The CSA (2004) "was supposed to prevent people from facing unreasonable barriers for the rest of their life based on a minor conviction" and yet "the SWRB said no … we want to be the judges of that rather than your conduct … be covered by the Clean Slate Act".

Tania spoke of the confidence the Clean Slate Act 2004 gave her in progressing within her career:

> For my next job I didn't have to disclose my criminal record cos of the clean slate bill was there and that was actually that was probably 2004 so the clean slate would have been in around 2003 … and I think having the clean slate actually gave me the confidence to apply for that role.

Chad said the CSA (2004) "kind of give[s] you a false sense of hope". He thought the CSA (2004) was "absolutely useless" and "a crock of shit". However, he also understood why the "social work field needs to know about criminal convictions" but believed there were "ways they can improve it". Chad acknowledged that he would "love for my one [criminal conviction] to just disappear and be gone". Chad was frustrated with a "black and white" system that did not consider the context of criminal charges. He said his conviction was at the "very, very low end of the spectrum", many participants echoed these feelings of frustration; that the system is unjust.

Discussion

To be or not to be … registered

Most participants responded positively to mandatory registration; however, concerns remained. For instance, several participants stated that the cost of registration could be a barrier. Recently ANZASW (2021) made a submission on behalf of its members who vehemently opposed the 64% fee increase proposed by the SWRB. In a recent email to members, ANZASW stated that registration has had unintended consequences, which include a reduced number of social workers due to people leaving the profession and social work roles being "morphed" into non-social worker jobs so that employers can avoid mandatory registration (B. Clark, personal communication, December 21, 2021). The ANZASW concerns were mirrored by participants when they spoke about the potential for the registration process to create two different streams of social workers: those who were registered and legally allowed to use the name social worker and those who were unregistered but still performed social work responsibilities under another job title.

Participants raised concerns that entrance to the social work profession was narrowing due to the criteria set by the SWRB. In 1996 ANZASW members expressed concern about the potential for statutory registration to impact Māori and cause them to be "marginalised by the process" (Randal, 2018, p. 22). As Te Momo (2015) pointed out, an indigenous social worker mindset is not solely determined by academic institutions or governments, nor are registered social workers the "only experts of social work practice for indigenous people" (p. 506).

Given that structural racism exists at every level of the criminal justice system in Aotearoa (Brittain, 2016; Department of Corrections, 2007; Fergusson et al., 1993a, 1993b; Fergusson et al., 2003; Hook, 2009; Jackson, 1988; O'Malley, 1973; Tauri, 2005; Webb, 2009; Workman, 2011), one would

expect the social work profession, including the professional and regulatory bodies, to be more outspoken about biases and discrimination within that system. Similarly, it is ironic that the SWRB does not have more of a critical viewpoint about the need for social work to tackle the problem of incarceration, given the emphasis it places on an applicant's criminal conviction history during the registration process.

Two participants spoke about their history of political activism and indicated that registration would not keep them from activism in the future. They viewed NVSJA as a risk worth taking and consistent with the aspirations of the social work profession. Williams (2019) believed that the Fit and Proper Person Policy Statement (SWRB, 2018) needs to be amended to reflect that NVSJA is an important right of social workers to fight for social justice and human rights. This aligns with the participants' views and highlights the disconnect between social work values set by our international and national professional bodies and what the statutory SWRB decides is acceptable behaviour befitting a social worker. In omitting NVSJA from its Fit and Proper Person Policy Statement (2018) the SWRB is showing that its allegiance falls firmly in the lap of the state. In writing about the history of social work professionalisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, Hunt et al. (2020) highlighted the threat to the profession's social justice mandate as the state regulator gains more control in defining and policing social work practice.

Finally, the issue of what it means to be ethical, and how the SWRB views this, was raised by participants when they said receiving a criminal conviction is not necessarily the only marker of unethical behaviour. In a study of Scottish students, anonymously self-reporting criminal activities, only 3% indicated that they had never committed one of the 11 offence types listed. The majority of those were for drunkenness, theft, and traffic offences.

However, over a third self-reported offences such as fraud, drug possession, smuggling or breach of the peace (Perry, 2004). Most of the participants in my study experienced significant change through their criminal justice involvement. It appears they worked hard to ensure that they became ethical social workers and ethical members of society.

Black mark for life

Studies show that those with criminal justice involvement are more likely to be discriminated against in workplaces where they are mandated to divulge their criminal history (Carlin & Frick, 2013; Graber & Zitek, 2022). Many participants' accounts implied that their criminal convictions were an enduring black mark, no matter how minor. This aligns with the thinking of most criminal justice scholars who believe that "a criminal conviction – no matter how trivial or how long ago it occurred – scars one for life" (Petersilia, 2003, p. 19).

Participant data conveyed a sense of frustration about the differing legislation covering criminal convictions and how it was applied within the social work profession. The anxiety expressed by participants in this research align with a study that suggests ex-offenders are constantly fearful of being judged and rejected when their criminal record is disclosed (Aresti et al., 2010). Several participants conveyed this sense of injustice and suggested a continued feeling of being under scrutiny, or surveillance, and that they needed to be prepared to defend themselves at any given moment.

Smoke and mirrors

Participants expressed considerable concern about the lack of transparency, especially for those with criminal convictions unable to find out if they were suitable for registration before undertaking study. It appears that educators are left to decide whether they believe a potential social work student meets the SWRB Fit and Proper Person Policy

Statement (2018) well before that person will go before the Board and apply for registration.

Educators are left to second guess what the SWRB might choose to do, which could lead to reduced admission for those with criminal convictions and a subsequent reduction in diversity and lived experience within our workforce. Several authors have written about the process of *othering* and how rigid admissions policies that exclude criminal justice involved individuals from social work education can result in creating two separate groups: "Offenders are people who social work students have as clients" (Pomeroy et al., 1999, 2004, as cited in Crisp & Gillingham, 2008 p. 313). It is important that educating and hiring those from marginalised spaces continues to occur, otherwise we will end up with social workers who are not representative of the people we support. We must remain relatable and grounded within the communities where we work.

Also, while a social work degree may not guarantee registration it could help secure a role within another caring profession, for example, peer support or community work. It could also open the door to academic and research opportunities to benefit education providers and the social work profession. It seems small-minded to hang someone's entrance to social work education purely on guessing whether they may, or may not, be registerable once they graduate.

Most participants in this study had the relevant pre-qualifications and had no issue securing a place at an education provider. However, most participants had completed their social work studies some time ago, so their experiences would likely differ from those attempting to access social work education today. Due to mandatory registration, those applying for social work education with recent criminal convictions would not now have a buffer of time post-graduation. As noted in the Fit and Proper

Person Policy Statement, the "time that has elapsed since the offence took place" is an important factor the SWRB considers when making its deliberations (SWRB, 2018, p. 9). If access to social work education and registration narrows due to the emphasis placed on criminal conviction history, are we, as a profession, doing a disservice to the social work values we are mandated to uphold and, ultimately, to the people we support?

Limitations

Interpretive validity is critical in IPA research. I used different tools to ensure that the sense-making process was ordered appropriately. Smith and colleagues state, "[the] participant's meaning-making is first-order, while the researcher's sense-making is second-order" (p. 35). Although deeper understandings of a phenomenon gained in IPA can be transferable, they are unlikely to be generalisable (Smith et al., 2009). One limitation to the generalisability of this study was the time factor. Given that most of the participants with criminal convictions were older than the average graduate and/or had spent some time in practice, their experiences may have been very different to those of a person with recent criminal convictions attempting to enter the field of social work today.

To ensure my interpretation of each participant's account was as accurate as possible, I used reflexive journaling, participant checking, discussions with my supervisor, and a *critical friend* (Kember, 1997). A limitation within IPA is that relying on verbatim transcripts of participant interviews can mean missing out on subtleties conveyed through non-verbal communication (Duminda, 2020). In recognition of this, I wrote notes in a reflective journal after the interviews and re-listened to the recordings while reading through the transcripts. The role of the critical friend is to advise the researcher in a partnership-type relationship, different to

that of the more formal supervisorial role. My critical friend was beneficial during the later stages of data analysis.

Conclusion

Participants were asked for recommendations about how the profession should approach educating, employing, and registering those with criminal justice involvement. Suggestions included reform of the current approach to the CSA (2004) and a more flexible and transparent process. One consistent element within participant accounts was the need for clarity and consistency from the SWRB, social work education providers and employers about educating, registering, and employing people with criminal convictions.

This small study raises issues, not only for the SWRB, but for the entire social work profession. We lack data and research about those with criminal justice involvement accessing education, gaining employment and becoming registered within the profession. It would be interesting to research individuals with recent criminal convictions wanting to study and practise social work and to compare their experiences. Are higher education providers admitting fewer students with criminal justice involvement?

The social work profession has been going through significant change over recent decades, shifting toward "economic rationalism, efficiency and risk management" (Randal, 2018, p. 25). It is important to understand whether this increasing professionalisation and regulation is changing the social class and privileged nature of the social work workforce. The SWRB could provide insight into their decision-making by publicising what criminal justice involvement has resulted in a declined registration application. Ultimately, as a profession we need to consider the shape of social work practice within Aotearoa. If decisions are being made

that are changing the face of social work, we as social workers should be aware, engaged, and have the opportunity to challenge those decisions.

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Environmental accessibility for autistic individuals: Recommendations for social work practice and spaces

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Research and personal stories from disability advocates have highlighted the significant impact of environmental inaccessibility on an individual's independence and dignity. This article focuses on accessibility for autistic individuals, specifically the lack of accessibility they experience in built environments due to limited autism awareness among professionals and the public.

METHOD: Literature focusing on social work's role with autistic individuals, autism-friendly approaches, and accessible architecture was reviewed. The social model of disability and critical disability theory were utilised to explore social work's responsibility to develop and advocate for environmental accessibility for autistic individuals. Through this analysis and the collation of strategies from the reviewed literature, the Environmental Accessibility Infographic was developed.

IMPLICATIONS: The Environmental Accessibility Infographic has broad implications. Firstly, it can be applied to any built environment to improve accessibility for autistic people and others with sensory processing needs. Secondly, the accessibility strategies have the potential to positively impact social workers' practice with autistic people as they can guide change that will ensure their practice is autism-friendly and anti-oppressive.

KEYWORDS: Autism Spectrum Disorder; environment; accessibility; critical disability theory; anti-oppressive practice; social model of disability

Over the last two decades, accessibility for disabled individuals has become a key area of focus for many professions regarding inclusive practice and the environment in which they engage with clients. Accessibility for disabled individuals is becoming a widely discussed issue on social media, blogs, and through other forums such as Ted Talks. Disability activist, Sinéad Burke, advocates for an inclusive design that provides accessibility for disabled people (Burke, 2017). In her Ted Talk, Sinéad stated that "design is an enormous privilege, but it is a bigger responsibility," she goes on to say that it is design that can inhibit a person's autonomy and independence, not their impairments (Burke, 2017). Environmental accessibility can have the power to either ensure or diminish an individual's dignity, and due to this, it should be important to the social work profession.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the rights of disabled individuals are upheld by the Human Rights Commission (2021) and the Health and Disability Commission (2019).

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While these commissions advocate for the rights of disabled people in Aotearoa, the laws and codes for ensuring accessibility within the built environment often cater only for people with specific disabilities, such as those with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, deaf or hard of hearing people, and those who are blind (Standards New Zealand, 2001). Accessibility for those with invisible disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are often absent from building codes, and due to this, built environments can be difficult for autistic people to navigate.

The author of this article is a late-diagnosed autistic individual, practising social work with children and their families. As an autistic individual, I find myself in inaccessible environments frequently within public and professional spaces. Other people's lack of autism knowledge often contributes to my accessibility needs as an autistic adult being seen as being demanding, picky or childish. I have found that many people do not understand the difficulties that I, and other autistic people, face completing daily tasks like grocery shopping, driving, or working within a professional social work environment. These experiences led to the critical reflection of social work practices and recommendations made in this article.

Throughout this article, the author will use identity-first language, *autistic individuals* over person-first language, *individuals with autism*. Over recent years, many individuals within the autistic community have discussed their preference of identity-first language through social media and blogs (Hayden, 2021). In doing so, they often identify autism as a core component of their personality, interwoven into everything they do. For this reason, the majority of the community expresses that they feel *autistic person* more accurately represents their experience rather than *person with autism* (Hayden, 2021). This preference for identity-first language has also been shown to be true through research (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017). While identity-first language is preferred by most autistic people, best practice is to ask each individual what language they prefer. The terms *non-autistic* and *neurotypical* will be used in this article to describe those who are not autistic.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability which is characterised by repetitive and/or restrictive behaviours and interests, impairments with communication and social interactions, and atypical sensory processing (Hull et al., 2017). The level to which environments are accessible for autistic people can significantly impact their ability to function within built environments (Davidson, 2010).

It is important for professionals, such as social workers, to consider accessibility and its implications for practice with autistic individuals as they can experience many environments as inaccessible. Environments such as public outdoor spaces, classrooms, workplaces, libraries, hospitals, supermarkets, and organisations' built spaces, can be difficult for autistic people to navigate due to inaccessibility. Social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand is underpinned by anti-oppressive practice (AOP). Anti-oppressive practice requires social workers to acknowledge and challenge structural, cultural, and personal oppression in their everyday practice (Maidment & Egan, 2016). As such, social workers are well placed to advocate for accessibility rights for autistic people, and challenge systems in which they may be discriminated against for their differences.

This article will explore the methods through which social work environments and practice can be made more accessible for autistic individuals. Firstly, the way in which autistic people experience the world and some of the common misconceptions people hold about ASD will be discussed to provide context for the exploration of social work's role in creating accessible environments.

Secondly, the social model of disability will be examined as a lens through which to view and understand accessibility issues for autistic people. Along with this, critical disability theory will be used to identify the implications accessibility issues have on the social work profession and individual practitioners. While the final section of this article will bring together knowledge from different professions to provide a collection of strategies that can act as a standard for developing accessible practice and environments for autistic individuals in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Autism and sensory processing difficulties

Perceptions of autism in society

According to the World Health Organisation (2021), ASD occurs at a rate of one in every 160 individuals globally. However, rates of ASD vary significantly between countries as one in every 54 individuals is identified as autistic in Aotearoa New Zealand (Acraman, 2021). These rates have risen significantly over the last decade. In 2016, only one in every 120 individuals was identified as autistic in Aotearoa (Ministry of Health, 2016). However, it is likely that ASD is not occurring at a greater rate, but rather, diagnostic criteria are beginning to reflect diversity within the autism spectrum more accurately, and professionals are becoming more competent at identifying autistic individuals.

Autism stereotypes are widely perpetuated within society (Rodgers et al., 2018). Stereotypes and misconceptions around the nature and presentation of autism can lead to the discrimination of autistic people, invalidation of unconventional presentations, and misdiagnosis. Many of the stereotypes that exist today have been cultivated through media. Movies and TV shows, such as *Rain Man*, *Atypical* and *The Good Doctor*, depict autistic individuals as white males who speak and move in unusual ways and have savant-like abilities (Rodgers

et al., 2018). The media's portrayal of autism can impact professionals' biases regarding how they expect autistic individuals to present. This can lead to the invalidation of a person's diagnosis and accessibility needs. Autistic advocates have reported receiving comments such as "you don't look autistic", "you communicate well for an autistic person" and "you must be Asperger's/high functioning" (Redjohn 1971, 2016).

A common misconception is that autism is present only in males. Some authors, such as Ratto et al. (2017), have posited that the gender ratio seen within autism diagnosis rates is highly affected by bias and stereotypes. This rate is generally recorded as one female to every four males diagnosed with ASD, however, it is likely that many autistic individuals who were assigned female at birth remain undiagnosed (Ratto et al., 2017). The influence of autism stereotypes in society may contribute to the lack of accessibility frequently experienced by most autistic people, particularly within the built environment.

Ethnicity and culture can also affect the way autism is viewed. In Aotearoa New Zealand, a key cultural group to consider are Māori, who are indigenous to Aotearoa. In 2017, the term *Takiwātanga* was proposed as a way to portray the Māori understanding of autism (Opai, 2017). Takiwātanga means "in their own time and space". The term encapsulates a widely accepted notion by Māori that autistic individuals should be accepted for who they are and be provided with accommodations that meet their needs (Tupou et al., 2021). Cultural differences, in combination with sensory needs, have the potential to significantly impact the level to which environments are accessible for Māori autistic individuals—particularly within spaces and practices that have been developed from a western worldview.

The next section of this article will discuss the impacts of sensory processing issues on autistic individuals and the way in which

the environment influences the experience of sensory processing issues.

Sensory processing

Prior to 2013, when changes were made to the diagnostic criteria for autism, sensory processing issues experienced by autistic individuals were generally diagnosed as *sensory processing disorder* rather than being seen as a component of ASD (Hazen et al., 2014). Professionals now recognise that a core feature of autism spectrum disorder is atypical sensory processing, which is highlighted by its inclusion in the DSM-5 (Robertson & Baron-Cohen, 2017). Hazen et al. (2014) identified that this shift in thinking has contributed to a growing body of research regarding sensory processing issues and the way in which they can impact other ASD impairments.

Robertson and Baron-Cohen (2017) estimated that 90% of autistic individuals experience atypical sensory processing. Hearing, taste, smell, touch, sight, proprioception, and vestibular senses can all be affected by sensory processing issues. Sensory processing issues for autistic individuals consist of three categories: hypersensitive, hyposensitive, and sensory seeking (Ashburner et al., 2013). Autistic individuals are likely to experience a combination of hypersensitive, hyposensitive, and sensory seeking responses to different stimuli. Sensory processing issues can be fluid, and responses to stimuli may change day to day or moment to moment. In periods of hypersensitivity, individuals experience distress in response to sensory stimuli, which can result in sensory overload, for example, a car alarm, light touch, or a pungent smell may overwhelm the individual (Hazen et al., 2014). While in periods of hyposensitivity individuals may seem unaware of, or slow to react to sensory stimuli, for example, taste seeming dull, being unresponsive to their name, or a high pain tolerance (Hazen et al., 2014). Finally, sensory seeking behaviours relate to craving

a certain sensory experience, for example, the feeling of certain fabrics, chewing on an object, or listening to loud music (Hazen et al., 2014). Sensory overload occurs when the brain is unable to process sensory input as a result of overstimulation (Bates et al., 2016). Sensory overload can impact an individual to the extent that they may need to remove themselves from the environment. While these examples demonstrate how sensory processing difficulties might be experienced by an autistic person, it is important to acknowledge that every autistic person is different, and their sensory experiences are diverse and can vary based on situational factors.

Other features of ASD are repetitive and restrictive behaviours. Self-stimulatory behaviours or *stimming* falls under this feature. Stimming is a voluntary behaviour used by most autistic people to self-regulate their emotions by creating sensory input to focus on (Gilliespie-Lynch et al., 2017). Most neurotypical people also stim, for example, spinning a pen or tapping your foot to concentrate are both self-stimulatory behaviours. Common autistic stimming behaviours are hand flapping, spinning, touching comforting textures, rocking, and tapping objects or oneself (Davidson, 2010). In some cases, stimming can be harmful if the individual is hurting themselves or others, but usually stimming is non-harmful. People who are unaware of the purpose of stimming may try to stop behaviours to help the individual calm down or fit in. However, it is important that stimming is normalised, and it should be encouraged by professionals as a strategy to manage sensory issues.

Autistic individuals often feel a need to hide their differences from their neurotypical peers in an effort to fit in. This phenomenon is known as *masking*. Masking strategies may include hiding social difficulties, maintaining eye contact, reducing stimming behaviours, and rehearsing scripts for social situations (Hull et al., 2017). Successful masking may allow autistic individuals

to appear behaviourally non-autistic for limited periods of time (Cook et al., 2021). However, masking has been linked to several negative consequences such as misdiagnosis, mental health difficulties, identity confusion and burnout (Cook et al., 2021). Autistic people report that masking is mentally and emotionally draining and requires extensive concentration on social cues, maintaining the social norm, and scripting (Hull et al., 2017).

Frequent periods of masking can lead to burnout. Autistic burnout varies from non-autistic burnout in that it is due to the stress of living in an inaccessible world and fatigue as a result of masking (Higgins et al., 2021). Burnout for autistic individuals can involve the full or partial loss of executive function, memory capacity, speech, social skills, and self-care capabilities, along with increased difficulty managing sensory overload (Higgins et al., 2021). Addressing the social and environmental aspects of our society that are inaccessible to autistic people will help to reduce stressors, and therefore, the experience of autistic burnout.

The next section of this article will examine the way in which accessibility needs are understood and discuss social work's role in relation to the difficulties autistic people face, along with the responsibilities of the social work profession to develop accessible practice and environments.

Interpreting accessibility issues: social work's role

Models and theoretical lenses

An important factor to consider when discussing accessibility is society's understanding of disability. The social model of disability, developed in the 1970s, views disability as a socially constructed phenomenon (Woods, 2017). The social model posits that it is the way in which society views disability and the environments that disabled people must navigate that truly disable them. While the medical model, which remains the

predominant model of understanding, argues that disability is a result of impairments alone and they should be corrected with medical intervention (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013). A contemporary approach recognises both the medical model and the social model, where it is understood that both impairments and a number of social factors impact one's experience of being disabled (Woods, 2017). Acknowledging the societal views that underpin disabled people's experiences of the world is critical to discussing accessibility issues and social work's role in ensuring their practice is equitable and accessible.

The social model of disability demonstrates the importance of considering what environmental and societal factors contribute to an individual's experience of disability. As a method of reflective practice, critical social theory can be utilised by social workers to critique structures and power struggles that impact their clients on a systemic level as well as to address their own biases and preconceived ideas (Harms et al., 2019). Critical disability theory evolved from critical social theory and has become widely used alongside the social model of disability as a theoretical underpinning for the disability rights movement (Hall, 2019). Critical disability theory views disability as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon rather than a direct result of the individual's impairments (Hall, 2019).

Through these theoretical lenses, the environment becomes a significant factor that can disable an individual. This issue brings into focus the power that professionals and designers can have over the level of disability individuals face. For example, if an environment was designed specifically for autistic people they would most likely thrive in that environment and, by society's definition, would not present as being disabled. Therefore, social workers have a responsibility to utilise critical disability theory to analyse their practice and

the systemic issues that autistic people face—such as environmental accessibility.

Taking a critical disability theory approach is also important when working with Māori autistic people as they may experience marginalisation and discrimination in different ways to New Zealand European autistic individuals. In their study, Tupou et al. (2021) found that parents of autistic children felt that understandings of autism draw heavily on western medical perspectives, while in Te Ao Māori, autism is seen as a natural part of human variation. These whānau also reported that they looked for support in their own communities due to a lack of cultural competency among the professionals involved in their child's care (Tupou et al., 2021). In her study, Bevan-Brown (2004) found that Māori autistic children were culturally disadvantaged in school settings as they were often left out of cultural practices due to teachers' and teacher-aids' lack of autism awareness. These findings highlight the need for social workers to be both culturally competent and autism-aware as the intersectionality of these identities may cause increased disadvantage for their clients.

The next section of this article will examine the level to which autistic people's accessibility needs are understood and met within the social work field, particularly through education and research.

Social work's level of accessibility

Social workers work with a diverse range of people over their careers, which may include differences in culture, religion, gender, sexuality, or disability. It is important that social workers can work competently with each of these groups in a way that remains anti-oppressive and utilises a critical theory lens to interpret issues. One of the many ways that a social worker's competency is developed is through education and evidence-based practice. However, best practice for working with autistic people is

seldom addressed in social work education or research (Preece & Jordan, 2007). While new social workers may develop autism-friendly practice through observing co-workers and working with autistic individuals following their education, it is possible that this may not be achieved until one has been a social worker for many years.

Due to this potential delay, it is important that components of autism-friendly practice are taught within social work education. Several authors identified that there is a significant lack of education around developmental disabilities in social work programmes, and that misconceptions about autism can lead to biases and stereotyping (Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Preece & Jordan, 2007; Keesler, 2019). In their study, Preece and Jordan (2007) found that many misconceptions were held about autism. A fifth of the social workers they interviewed believed that the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine causes autism, a claim that has been shown to be false (Preece & Jordan, 2007). Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2019) argued that there is currently limited systemic intervention from the social work field regarding the discrimination and lack of accessibility that autistic individuals face. This highlights the importance of social work students learning to utilise models and theories such as the social model of disability and critical disability theory to analyse systemic impacts on their clients.

Along with this, very little social work research regarding working with autistic individuals has been undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers journal, only two articles address the topic of autism, one examined parents' views of ASD (Hastie & Stephens, 2019), while the other discussed the inequities and suffering that autistic school students face (Oades, 2021). While both of these articles contribute to a social worker's understanding of autism and ability to work with autistic individuals, neither directly addresses becoming autism-friendly

within one's practice and work environment. Regardless of the focus of the previous research, it is clear that there is a significant paucity of New Zealand scholarship in this area of social work. While some research has been completed internationally, best social work practice when working with autistic individuals is a largely unexplored topic. The lack of research regarding best practice guidelines for working with autistic people requires greater recognition within the social work profession in Aotearoa New Zealand.

However, Haney and Cullen (2018) argued that social workers are perfectly placed to challenge discrimination and advocate for systemic accessibility changes alongside autistic individuals. Particularly because social workers practise in a broad range of sectors and are able to influence change in many different environments and contexts. The social work profession has the potential to empower autistic people by ensuring their workplaces are accessible and inclusive, and advocating for systemic change such as greater autism awareness and acceptance, and environmental accessibility within the wider community.

Accessibility and the built environment

The role of design

Many authors have identified the need for architects to become more aware of autism accessibility needs when designing the built environment (Denhardt, 2017; Kinnaer et al., 2016; Mostafa, 2008; Shell, n.d.). Tola et al. (2021) argued that the built environment is an extremely influential factor in the quality of life for autistic people. Inaccessibility has the potential to impact autistic people's capability to complete tasks such as going grocery shopping, visiting public spaces, and accessing education, among others. Physical accessibility is usually adequately addressed in built environments, however, research and thinking around designing spaces for

sensory accessibility for autistic individuals is relatively new (Bates et al., 2016).

Some businesses and public spaces, such as supermarkets and libraries, offer small windows of time each week when specific accommodations are made for autistic people, such as lights being dimmed, music being quietened and minimal staff on the floor. While this creates a more accessible space for autistic people, it only occurs for a short period of time, normally once a week in the middle of a weekday. Many autistic people who have significant sensory issues also have full-time jobs or need to visit the supermarket more than once a week. For spaces to be considered autism-friendly and accessible they must always be accessible.

Although designers have begun to focus on creating autism-friendly spaces, this process can lead to autistic needs and voices being forgotten. Generalised design standards for sensory accessible spaces can result in inadequate environments as autistic people's sensory needs are diverse (Kinnaer et al., 2016). Elise Roy, a deaf disability advocate, proposes that there is only one way for designers to address this issue, which is including disabled people in the design process (Roy, 2015). Along with other authors, Roy (2015), argued that disabled people have unique experiential knowledge which makes them experts about accessibility issues (Burke, 2017; Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017; Kinnaer et al., 2016). This is especially true for autistic people because sensory issues vary significantly between individuals. In social work, the most important perspective is the service user's perspective, and their needs, wants and rights should guide the intervention or advocacy they receive. Autistic individuals, like neurotypical people, are the experts on their own situation, even though they may communicate their needs differently (Gilliespie-Lynch et al., 2017). For spaces to be made autism-friendly, it is essential that disability is thought about in different ways and autistic people are included in design

planning. Instead of trying to accommodate individual issues, design should aim to create inclusive spaces that are accessible for everyone (Stebbins, n.d.).

Shell (n.d.) argued that buildings designed with autism accessibility in mind, are better for all users. All building users struggle with sensory input on occasion, whether it is a loud or bothersome noise, or another environmental stimulus. Designing for autistic people also creates a space in which neurotypical people may find that they can function more effectively.

Environmental accessibility strategies

Due to the paucity of the literature addressing environmental accessibility for autistic people

and the diversity among autistic individuals' sensory experiences, strategies for creating accessible spaces vary significantly. However, it is possible to identify some common factors among the strategies discussed in previous research, many of which were created in partnership with autistic people. Figure 1 displays a summary of these strategies which have been collated across social, educational, psychological, and architectural research. The infographic can be used as a standard from which autistic-friendly practice can be developed within professional and public spaces.

Reduction of sensory input

One of the most important strategies for creating accessible spaces for autistic people is sensory input reduction (Mostafa, 2015).

Figure 1 Environmental Accessibility Infographic

Strategies for Creating Accessible Environments

Pre-visit information
Provide pre-visit information, which may include details about the appointment structure, information about staff members, and a walk-through video of the building.

Sensory packs
Provide tools to help individuals manage sensory issues. Sensory packs may include earplugs, fidget tools, a weighted item, and a map of the building that shows escape/sensory spaces.

Escape rooms
Provide a room in which individuals can manage sensory processing issues. These spaces should have as little sensory input as possible such as a simple design, indirect lighting, and soundproofing.

Sensory rooms
Provide a room that has increased opportunities for sensory input. Which may include fidget tools, various surface textures, colour changing lights, or a rocking chair.

Reduction of sensory input
Reduce sensory input where possible, for example, soundproofing, indirect lighting, and simplistic designs.

Practice visits
Allow an individual to visit and become familiar with the environment prior to engagement with a worker.

Alternative engagement options
Provide alternatives for face-to-face meeting, such as emails, phone calls, and video calls.

Clear signage
Use clear signage to help individuals navigate spaces, especially when experiencing sensory processing issues.

Customisable spaces
Ensure spaces can be adjusted to an individual's needs, for example, dimmable lights, blinds on windows, rearrangeable furniture, and doors between spaces.

While all other strategies recommended in this article can be utilised to make sensory input more manageable, the reduction or removal of particular sensory inputs altogether may have the greatest positive impact for autistic people. The fewer sensory inputs to process, the easier the management of sensory issues becomes for individuals (Mostafa, 2015). This can be achieved through sound-proofing or minimising reverberations, using muted colours and simplistic patterns, having the same furniture throughout a space, minimising intense smells, or using indirect lighting (Shell, n.d.).

Pre-visit information

Uncertainty regarding an environment and meeting new people, such as a social worker, can be a significant barrier for autistic people. A coping strategy frequently employed by autistic people when faced with uncertainty is avoidance, which can lead to a lack of engagement with services. One way to support autistic people to navigate this uncertainty around new environments is to provide pre-visit information (Hugo, 2018). Pre-visit information should provide specific details about what can be expected from an appointment, photos of the staff, information about each of them, and a walk-through video of the building highlighting key areas such as the reception, meeting spaces, emergency exits, and toilets (Buckley, 2017).

Practice visits

Some autistic people may find a practice visit helpful to alleviate anxiety and become familiar with sensory stimuli present in a new environment. A practice visit, much like a walk-through video, can be used to show the individual key aspects of the building (Hugo, 2018). Although, unlike a video, during an in-person visit the individual can ask questions, identify potentially disabling factors within the environment and plan accordingly. The option to request a practice visit should be a part of the pre-visit information provided for clients.

Alternative engagement options

Another strategy to ensure accessibility for autistic individuals may be offering alternate methods through which to engage with a service. Spain et al. (2021) completed a study that looked at the effect of the Covid-19 outbreak on autistic individuals. In their study, autistic individuals reported that the alternative methods of engagement that were offered by services over the Covid-19 lockdown period, such as emails, phone calls, and video calls, were often more accessible for them (Spain et al., 2021). These findings have important implications for practice as they indicate that autistic people may find it easier to engage with a social worker virtually from their home environment. While this may require social workers to re-evaluate the importance placed on face-to-face interactions, alternate forms of engagement can create a more accessible environment for autistic people.

Clear signage

Clear signage is vital to make a space accessible to all people, especially disabled individuals. Signage should be easily understandable and denote the purpose of each space to provide clarity and order (Bates et al., 2017). This is important because autistic people may find it more difficult to navigate environments when experiencing sensory overload due to their reduced capacity for sensory processing. Along with this, having clearly labelled spaces can help autistic people orientate themselves to a new environment (Mostafa, 2015). Some authors have also suggested that having different colours on feature walls or doors in each space can help autistic individuals to make sense of their environment (Kinnaer et al., 2016; Mostafa, 2015).

Sensory packs

Sensory packs are an innovative tool for organisations and public spaces to increase their level of accessibility for autistic people (Hugo, 2018). Sensory packs contain various

items that may help autistic people cope with sensory issues. They can be extremely beneficial in spaces where a reduction of sensory input cannot be achieved easily. Sensory packs can include items such as earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones, a variety of fidget tools, a weighted item and a map of the building that shows escape spaces (Hugo, 2018). Having sensory packs available can help to break down the stigma that autistic people regularly face for using self-regulations strategies such as stimming. By making this small change, organisations can validate autistic people's needs and make the environment more accessible.

Customisable spaces

To support the varying needs within and between autistic individuals, spaces should be customisable and flexible (Tola et al., 2021). An individual's needs can change daily or moment by moment, by having a space that can be adjusted, organisations can allow for the full inclusion of autistic people. Customisable aspects of a space may include blinds on windows to block out sunlight, the ability to dim lights, doors between spaces, furniture that can be rearranged, or air-conditioning that can easily be adjusted. In existing spaces some of these accommodations may be difficult to achieve, but social workers can work around barriers by gaining their autistic client's perspective and working together to find a solution.

Escape rooms

An escape room is a separate space within a building that has been purposefully created with minimal sensory input (Kinnaer et al., 2016). Escape rooms are a place in which autistic people can retreat to manage sensory overload. Even when strategies are used to make a space more sensory-friendly, it is inevitable that at some point an autistic person will experience sensory overload. Escape rooms should be sensory-neutral environments, typically they are quiet, and have dim lighting and

simple designs (Mostafa, 2015). They may also have stimming tools and furniture that can be used to stim such as a rocking chair. By creating a space in which sensory inputs are minimised and autistic people are encouraged to manage their needs in a way that works for them, organisations can ensure their space is accessible.

Sensory rooms

Sensory rooms are spaces that autistic people can use when they are sensory seeking. Unlike escape rooms, sensory rooms have increased opportunities for sensory input (Kinnaer et al., 2016). This may include fidget tools, noise-makers, various surface textures, colour-changing lights, an object for bouncing like a swiss ball or small trampoline, smelly objects, or speakers to play music. It may not be possible for some agencies to create a sensory room in their existing built environment. In these cases, elements of a sensory room can be incorporated into sensory packs for clients. Sensory overload is often a more significant barrier for clients compared to sensory seeking needs, for this reason it is more important to create an escape space where possible (Kinnaer et al., 2016).

Recommendations for practice

The following recommendations provide key areas in which the strategies suggested in this article can be utilised to create positive social change within the social work field in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Transforming social work environments

When environments are designed to suit an autistic person's sensory needs they are able to thrive, as such, social work spaces should be made environmentally accessible wherever possible. The strategies proposed in this article are designed to be simple adjustments that can be made to any space to increase its accessibility for autistic people. To ensure that the strategies

are adequately meeting sensory needs, they should be implemented through collaboration with autistic clients. Along with this, the promotion of autism-friendly spaces and practice has the potential to result in consciousness-raising about the misconceptions practitioners may hold about ASD and the effect these can have on engagement with autistic people. Advocating for the development of autism-friendly practice and creation of accessible environments should not only be the responsibility of individual social workers but the social work profession as a whole through research, professional development and partnering with autistic people. It is crucial that the development of accessible environments and pratice is championed at both a micro and macro level within the social work profession. Another key group of stakeholders to be considered are autistic social workers, as inaccessible social work spaces do not only impact autistic clients. It is important that autistic social workers are not lost amongst this discussion, as the strategies proposed in this article can significantly benefit them as well.

Engaging in interprofessional collaboration

Interprofessional collaboration has the potential to be a key of factor of influence on the development of autism-friendly practice for the social work profession. Collaboration across disciplines, such as architects, social workers, council members, teachers, health workers, and autistic people, will allow for the most innovative practices in each area to be shared and used to inform the development of accessible environments and practice. While this article has primarily discussed how these strategies can be utilised within social work, they are applicable across many different disciplines such as health, education, public services, and architecture. Collaborative practice between disciplines has been shown to improve outcomes for clients (Giles, 2016). Due to this, interprofessional collaboration has significant potential to result in long-term

positive social change for autistic people, at both individual and systemic levels.

Education and professional development

There are a number of ways that a social worker can gain an understanding of autism-friendly practice, such as working with autistic people, reading current research, undertaking professional development, and learning from autistic social workers. One of the most pertinent aspects of this professional development is gaining a good understanding of autism, how it presents and common misconceptions that are held about ASD.

The aim of this article was to contribute and develop knowledge that can enhance a social worker's practice—it thus has significant implications for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, there is still development needed in this area within the social work profession. More research in this area is vital and autistic social workers should be utilised for their understanding of autism and social work practice. Along with this, the knowledge and strategies discussed in this article have the potential to be developed into a professional development programme for social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

One of the key factors of influence in developing an autism-friendly workforce is social work education. The skills developed during education become the foundation of a social worker's practice. It is paramount that this foundation provides an understanding of diverse groups and their needs. This is of particular importance because some of the elements of engagement and interaction taught in social work education may actually hinder engagement and relationship building with autistic people. Teaching the elements of autism-friendly practice early on will ensure that they are woven into the foundation of each new social worker's practice. Every social work programme within Aotearoa New Zealand should include the development of autism-friendly practice skills.

Conclusion

Living in an inaccessible world can be far more disabling for autistic individuals than their impairments alone. While there is currently a lack of research regarding the implications of environmental accessibility for autistic people, it is a significant inequity that individuals face in their daily life. Often inaccessibility is influenced by the stereotypes and misconceptions about autism perpetuated in the media. Professionals working with autistic individuals may hold preconceived notions about autistic presentations and needs due to the perpetuation of stereotypes and misconceptions. As discussed throughout this article, social workers have the potential to make their practice and the environments they work within accessible for autistic people. This can be achieved through autism education for social workers, interprofessional collaboration, and the use of the environmental accessibility strategies proposed in this article. A final thought from disability advocate, Elise Roy, "professionals must change their mindset from that of tolerance of disabled individuals and individual accommodations to creating fully inclusive practice and environments" (Roy, 2015, 06:40).

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The impact of individualised funding on the wellbeing of mothers raising an autistic child in Aotearoa New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: How best to support the wellbeing of mothers raising autistic children is an emerging issue of importance due to the growth in autism diagnoses. While the move to individualised funding has been seen to promote autonomy for disabled people and their family to make decisions about services to meet their needs, it has also received criticisms, leading to inequitable processes and outcomes. The purpose of this research was to explore how individualised funding has impacted on mothers raising autistic children and their wellbeing.

METHODS: A qualitative approach, combining semi-structured interviews and the theoretical underpinning of social constructionism, was used to interview seven mothers in 2020 to discuss their experiences of raising an autistic children and how individualised funding has impacted on them. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected.

FINDINGS: Key findings indicated that caring for an autistic child has an ongoing negative impact on mothers' overall wellbeing and the individualised funding did not seem to ease the stresses of caring.

CONCLUSION: Mothers raising an autistic child in Aotearoa New Zealand face complex funding systems, which are difficult to navigate. Individualisation of disability funding frameworks continues to create barriers and negatively impact the wellbeing of mothers. Wellbeing requires the funding support to see the family as a unit of care instead of the individualisation of a child's needs. Results of this study urge practitioners and policymakers to support parents raising an autistic child in a more flexible and holistic way to meet the unique circumstances of a family.

KEYWORDS: Autism; individualised funding; mothers; wellbeing; disability

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Many countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand, have been shifting disability support from a government-managed to a consumer or client-led approach to enable disabled people to exercise their rights which have been previously neglected and marginalised (Foley et al., 2020; Rummery, 2006). Increasingly, research has focused on discussing how individualised funding can positively impact on disabled people by fostering autonomy to make decisions about services to meet their needs, in a challenge to the traditional top-down approach (Fleming et al., 2019; Yates et al., 2020). While the move to individualised funding is an international trend, existing research has focused mainly on the benefits for disabled people, and the implementation system changes by professionals and service providers (Fleming et al., 2019; Foley et al., 2020).

Individualised funding may provide some flexibility in individual care and choice for disabled children and their family. However, the notion of individualisation varies with people's ability to negotiate the system while the distribution of choice and control across the population is not entirely inclusive or equal (Carey et al., 2017; Malbon et al., 2019). In addition, the care and support for disabled children usually falls to women, which can have negative impacts on their health (Cantero-Garlito et al., 2020). With the growing adoption of individualised funding within disability service provision, understanding how individualised funding influences the wellbeing of mothers raising an autistic child is particularly crucial for practitioners and policymakers. This article reports the findings from interviews with seven mothers, each raising an autistic child in Aotearoa New Zealand, about their experiences with individualised funding and its impact on their disabled child/children and their own wellbeing.

Positioning of the researcher

This article came from the first author's Master of Social Work thesis, which had both a professional and an insider research lens. As a mother raising three autistic children and a registered social worker with extensive experiences in disability sector, it was not uncommon to hear stories of people struggling for years without any support, nor was it uncommon to hear stories of a caregiver facing emotional and physical fatigue resulting in caregiver burnout. The thesis journey was, not only an academic journey, but an opportunity to realise just how important it was to look after oneself while appreciating just how hard it is to add selfcare into an already busy schedule. It is hoped that by sharing the research findings, the wellbeing of mothers raising disabled children would be given more importance.

The use of terminology around autism, specifically the language used to refer to autistic people, has a significant role in an increased risk of self-harm, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress disorders and death by suicide for autistic people when compared to a non-autistic population (Vivanti, 2019). Identity first language is considered an appropriate expression of a cultural shift to a neurodiversity perspective. It has been intentionally used to counteract the risk that separating the person from the diagnosis perpetuates a societal view that something is wrong about the diagnosis. Where possible without changing historical context or other academic literature, the term *autistic* has been purposely used throughout this article as a positive and affirming word to replace language such as autistic spectrum disorder or its acronym ASD.

Literature review

Autism is a developmental disorder characterised by deficits in social communication and restrictive, repetitive behavioural patterns emerging from a young age (Hyman et al., 2020). The number of people diagnosed with autism appears to be rising worldwide (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022) with an estimate of 0.5–1% of the world's population diagnosed with autism (Manohar et al., 2019; Ministry of Health, 2018), and is about 4.5 times more common among boys (Juergensen et al., 2018; Klin et al., 2015).

The lifelong nature of autism creates a deep impact on, and challenges for, parents raising an autistic child. Research has indicated that mothers caring for a child with a disability are at greater risk of experiencing negative psychological outcomes and parenting-related stress than mothers of non-disabled children (Oprea & Stan, 2012; Ozgur et al., 2018). Challenges faced by mothers raising an autistic child are directly related to accessing disability support, including obtaining a diagnosis, finding appropriate treatment, costly medical treatments, and therapies, and managing problematic behaviours whilst learning how to navigate support service systems (Minnes et al., 2014;

Weiss et al., 2013). The negative impact of a drawn-out diagnostic process for mothers can result in an increase in anxiety and depression levels (Gobrial, 2018).

Two paradigm shifts in public policy since the 1980s have driven the international trend towards individualised funding. The first was neoliberal public sector reforms creating privatisation and marketisation of social services. The second was a greater attention to human rights (Purcal et al., 2014), such as the disability policy of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which recognised the importance for a disabled person to have individual autonomy and independence, including the freedom to make their own choices (United Nations [UN], 2020). Choice is a central driver in both paradigms; however, neoliberalism emphasises choice in a free market, and human rights advocates choice of the person with a disability (Purcal et al., 2014). Individualised funding or personalisation policies vary widely internationally regarding their degree of choice, flexibility, access, and entitlements to funding. However, it has also been criticised for being inflexible to accommodate changes to plans—for example, using funds for different types of therapies (Carey et al., 2019). The neoliberal influence has not only created sector reforms, but it has also redefined parenting in the 21st century. Neoliberalism has dichotomised *good* mothers as those who can cope and are raising an independent and economic producer (Tabatabai, 2019) versus *bad* mothers who struggle and are a burden to society (Charmaz, 2019). According to Runswick-Cole and Goodley (2017), parenting is an individualised task, which also defined "good parenting" or a "good mother" through the assumption that is socially constructed, imposing upon women who choose to become mothers to behave a certain way and to align with social expectations (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) and Lalvani (2011) argued that mothers of disabled children are

often being considered as "m(others)" (p. 276) as they have been marginalised by the mainstream society "within a stigma-phobic, normative world view claiming others as external and inferior" (Carroll, 2016, p. 253).

A recent study examining the adherence to these guidelines in Aotearoa New Zealand found that there were discrepancies between recommendations and practice, indicating that parents were dissatisfied with the assessment process and there was a large variance of services offered throughout the country (Taylor et al., 2021). There is a small, but growing, literature examining the experience of raising an autistic child in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2004, Bevan-Brown's qualitative research with 23 Māori caregivers described difficulties including service and funding shortages, geographical, cultural, procedural and financial barriers to services, loss of support, and discrimination. A recent scoping review has found that there may be broad differences between Māori and Western understandings of autism which can impact the way in which autism is defined and assessed for needs and services for autistic Māori and their family (Tupou et al., 2021). The review has highlighted the importance of ensuring autism diagnostic and support services are both effective and culturally appropriate for Māori. Htut et al. (2019) have reported that the current disability support services provided by Ministry of Health are complex, fragmented and difficult to navigate. Another study stated the psychological wellbeing of a parent raising an autistic child is connected to the quality of care they can offer their child; therefore, a parent suffering from poor mental health may undo benefits of interventions or create an increase in problem behaviours (Shepherd et al., 2021).

Support from professionals has been reported to help reduce care-related stress (Goedeke et al., 2019), and to play a role to provide valid and trusted information in disability funding, as well as service provision to support the families (Laragy

& Ottmann, 2011). Bennie and Georgeson (2019), however, argued that currently those in social work roles are mainly practitioners who do not have lived experience of, or have a limited knowledge of, disability. This means these social workers will need to negotiate their way through a system somewhat unprepared as more disabled people and their families and whānau require support.

COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing difficulties and inequity that disabled children, adults and their families face due to the loss of services and supports, lack of access to education and therapeutic services, loss of caregiver support, and disruption of daily routines (Perry et al., 2020). These adverse effects are likely to affect the wellbeing of autistic children and their families, and these heightened fears about increased infection rates. Autistic children may have difficulty adhering to basic preventive measures such as mask wearing, hand hygiene and social distancing (Parenteau et al., 2020; Spain et al., 2021). This context places parents at risk of experiencing greater psychological distress as reported in Manning et al.'s (2020) study. This is understandable since these interventions have been previously shown to reduce caregiver stress and increase a caregiver's ability to cope (Lounds et al., 2007). This evidence has suggested that clinicians, researchers, and policymakers need to consider the mental health of parents raising autistic children to allow flexibility of funding to meet the unique circumstances of every family as the pandemic unfolds.

In summary, autism is a lifelong condition that is on the increase worldwide. The impact of raising an autistic child is reported to lower the level of wellbeing for mothers. Aotearoa New Zealand has seen shifts in public policy which has resulted in an increase in disabled people having more choice and control over their lives as well as neoliberal privatisation of social services. A

better understanding of how these services and systems impacts mothers raising an autistic child in order to improve wellbeing was the catalyst for this research.

Methods

Study design

Using semi-structured interviews, a descriptive and an interpretive approach to both describe and interpret the stories of the mothers, combined with social constructionism, was used to examine the aims of the research. The constructivist perspective is useful in qualitative research as it assumes that all knowledge is context-specific and influenced by the perspective of the perceiver (Ritchie et al., 2013); in the context of this research the perceiver was the mother and her experiences. Using an interpretive approach has allowed the researcher to understand and describe the experiences of mothers while also acknowledging the differences of each family situation. Interactions with these mothers and sharing and reliving significant moments of their personal stories, alongside the first author's insider view, provided a broader and more in-depth insight on their perspectives and subjective experiences of being a mother raising an autistic child.

Study Participants

To be eligible to participate in this research, participants needed to be a mother of an autistic child (aged 21 years or under) and receiving individualised funding; currently residing in one of the major cities in the South Island; and able to participate in an interview conducted in English. The reason to specify the age limits of a child being under 21 was because for some disabled children, it was possible to remain at school until this age while remaining in the care of parents at home.

A recruitment flyer was developed and circulated to mothers who met the research

criteria via friend and work colleague networks. The seven mothers who contacted the first author via email were then sent an information sheet and all accepted the invitation to participate in the research. All interviews were completed between July and August 2020 (Alert Level 1) before the rest of the country (except Auckland) moved to Alert Level 2 on 12 August 2020.

Ethics approval was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (SOB 20/07). Voluntary participation, informed consent, respect for privacy and confidentiality and data storage adhered to ethics guidelines. As a professional and a student researcher, the first author was aware of the potential vulnerability of this group of participants. For some of the participants, there may have been a power imbalance due to the education and research positioning that the first author potentially had, unintentionally making people see her as the expert when, in fact, the mothers are the experts of their own lives. One participant stated that although reflecting on the past was sad, it was nice to talk about it with someone who understood and also to remind herself of how far they had come. The following day after each of the interviews, participants were contacted by email to check in on them and thank them again for their time and sharing.

Data collection

Upon receiving an email consent from participants, a mutually agreed time and venue was arranged. The primary method of data collection was the use of semi-structured interviews which was described by Carey (2017) as the best format for social work research as these provide freedom to ask additional questions if necessary. The interviews were conducted face-to-face using open-ended questions and carried out in a conversational style to engage deeply with the participants. The interview questions explored

mothers' personal circumstances including relationships within the family and in the community, how they defined wellbeing and how they came to have individualised funding and their experiences on using this to improve their wellbeing. The insider researcher lens enabled an understanding of the culture and ability to know how best to approach people, which could take a long time for an outsider to acquire (Unluer, 2015). This trusted position also helped promote the ability to both judge and express the truth more readily (Taylor, 2011). Each interview lasted between 50 and 110 minutes. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim by the first author. A copy of the interview transcripts was emailed to the participants for review.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis of the interviews was carried out. Interpretive description considers the social, political, and ideological complexities, thus challenging the researcher to look below the obvious within the issue, to document patterns and themes among the more self-evident issues (Seale, 2017). Thematic analysis was used for its strengths in helping to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes in the collected data (Cartwright, 2020). During the process of transcription and rereading the transcriptions, emerging patterns and themes began to highlight some of the statements that captured these themes in the mothers' own words. The research aim was examined against these emerging themes and patterns. New literature reviews were also undertaken at this time to examine the research aim against the emerging themes and patterns to audit the analysis.

Trustworthiness

Multiple means of investigator triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were used in this study to reduce potential bias in data collection and analysis. Member checking

was achieved by all participants who signed the transcript release document after reviewing the transcripts. Credibility was considered by reflecting on the first author's bias as the researcher, triangulation of data sources and theories. Confirmability and dependability were achieved using field notes during the research process as well as the end product, allowing the researcher to describe the participants mothers' stories which guided the research.

Findings

The seven mothers were reported to be aged between 30 and 50 years of age. Most of the mothers ha been raising one autistic child, with one mother raising three autistic children. The autistic children ages ranged from nine to 20, with their siblings ranging from primary school aged living at home, to school leavers no longer living at home (see Table 1).

Two major themes have been identified as: (1) the overall impact of caring for an autistic child, and (2) the disability system does not support mothers' wellbeing adequately. Each of the themes will be discussed in detail with support from some sub-themes, using direct quotes from the study participants to help with interpreting the phenomena.

Theme one: The overall impact of caring for an autistic child

The emotional and physical strains of raising and caring for an autistic child were acknowledged by all participants. This first theme looks at how the overall wellbeing of mothers was impacted by raising an autistic child.

1.1 Dealing with grief and loss in relationships

The complexity of relationships for mothers raising an autistic child often results in missed opportunities to develop positive relationships, including friendships. Participants reported a significant decrease in the quantity and quality of their social ties and relationships. The demand of raising an autistic child often puts strain on a range of relationships resulting in connections prematurely ending.

> I don't have deep friendships because my experience is so different from other people and other parents. (Alice)

Raising an autistic child has also caused a change in family life as the whole familial ecology had to adapt to a new reality. Marriages of parents raising children with disabilities have often been portrayed as dysfunctional, challenging and particularly

Table 1. Brief Descriptions of the Seven Mothers Who Participated in the Study

Name*	Relationship to children's father	No. of children	No. of autistic children	Children's education level	Other impairments	Employment status
Nadia	Separated	3	3	primary, intermediate and high school	ADHD	not employed
Maggie	Separated	2	1	intermediate and high school	ADHD and Dyspraxia	employed part-time
Heather	Separated	2	1	high school and school leaver	–	self- employed
Julie	Married	3	1	primary	ADHD	employed part-time
Alice	Married	3	1	high school and university	–	full time
Anne	Married	2	1	high school and university	Rare disorders	full time
Kim	Separated	2	1	primary school	–	not employed

*Pseudonymous were used to de-identify participants' real names.

likely to end in divorce or separation. Four of the mothers interviewed had separated from the father of the child.

> It's like it has embraced our entire lives. Like I never would have thought possible. It impacts your marriage, your other children, your work life, your social life, your everything. (Julie)

The negative impact from losing personal and social relationships was reported to be associated with a lack of support and funding. Under the current disability funding framework, there is no mechanism to use funding for families to access relationship or personal counselling. Due to the barriers of cost and time, only one participant mother received some regular counselling. Another participant also talked about how counselling would have been useful for her to deal with her marriage ending, the lack of family support and the loss of her job.

Respite breaks were seen as important but difficult to arrange with many relationships structures negatively impacted. Participants certainly wanted more respite support, and understood the value of these breaks, but they wanted more flexible support, allowing them to tailor-make to suit their needs, not just for the mothers, but for the whole family. Many mothers reported they would enjoy having a supported break that included their autistic child, like how other families raising typically developing children get to experience a break.

1.2 Social stigma and burden

Cultural norms and societal motherhood beliefs have been strongly linked to the expectation of the *good mother* discourse, which was woven throughout the discussions of the participants' interviews. Many mothers talked about the need to appear to be in control and managing well. They expressed the constant need to keep up appearances rather than be able to reach

out for support from the community, which made them feel anxious and eventually avoid situations where they felt they would be judged.

> Sometimes it would be nice to have someone that actually understood you… If you just had a friend that you could say, "for god's sake these people are idiots". (Heather)

> This has actually been a huge factor for me … where can I go with him? Where we can be accepted because a lot of the time his behaviour is so unacceptable. (Maggie)

There has been a strong societal belief that mothers should take care of themselves allowing them to provide the best care for the children. However, the reality for mothers raising autistic children was different in that they were often negatively judged in social situations and there was little financial support offered to make that self-care possible.

Theme two: The disability funding system does not support a mother's wellbeing

Theme two examined how mothers have found their experiences with the disability funding system involving the assessment process and the tangible support that would help them have more opportunities to address their wellbeing needs. All the participants expressed concerns about the complexity of the funding systems, which made them feel anxious, stressed, and disenfranchised. Nadia described the process to get individualised funding as *one of the most stressful times of her life*.

2.1 Assessment process – Unwelcoming, oppressive and complicated

The needs assessment process was often the first step and first introduction to

the disability funding systems and was described as oppressive, disjointed and complicated. The participant mothers felt that the assessment often focused on what the child was not able to do and what challenges the child would bring to the home, community, and school. The person who was ultimately responsible to make the funding decision was not the person who came to do the assessment. This process created a lack of confidence for the mothers that their child, and their needs, would never be fully understood.

> Having to prove how much of a challenge it is to people… You actually just had to lay on how much of a deficit it is, and the celebration of the child is absolutely lost. (Heather)

> These guys haven't even met [child's name removed] … and they already determined that he wasn't going to get …. That to me is shocking… I have never met the woman that makes all the decisions. In fact, I didn't even get a phone call this time. (Anne)

2.2 Funding is to be individually and wholistically focused

Feedback from the mothers indicated that individualised funding of a disabled child has not considered the wider and more holistic needs of that child, including caring for the wellbeing of a mother. What appeared to be missing with individualised funding was being able to support the unique circumstances around that child and respond appropriately.

The concept of being able to access support early or as needed was also linked to personal wellbeing by many other mothers. Maggie stated, "wellbeing would be earlier interventions, feeling safe and supported and listened to and access to help when you need it, rather [than] when someone else decides that you need it." This sense of empowerment for the families to be able to

manage how and when support could be accessed was also described by Heather: "it shouldn't need to be a battle, why does it have to be a battle? There is enough stress in your life." This feeling of frustration, powerless and hopelessness that funding issues were simply a battle and barrier was echoed by all participants:

> I feel that we are in survival mode so much that your're always in survival mode anyway, so anything really dreadful that comes along it's like just another battle in the war. (Maggie)

Every mother commented that if there was some small provision of flexible funding to provide additional support to look after their wellbeing, they would use it. Most of the mothers felt they would benefit from some form of regular counselling; however, all of them remarked that the funding would need to be adjustable. Julie stated, "people are on the verge of breakdowns… and all they need is a bit of support but because [the funding system] it's also secretive and complex it is very hard to get straight answers." For them, wellbeing represented within a collective unit in a family; therefore, it would require a collective solution to support wellbeing for mothers and their family as a whole.

2.3 More barriers and stress from a confusing system

While many of the mothers had been using individualised funding for several years, including two mothers who had been using the individualised funding system for longer than 10 years, there was still significant confusion around the funding guidelines. Having the responsibility to constantly try to navigate the complex system to seek information about the autistic child's funding has made them feel that they were being put in a vulnerable position, often resorting to social media to ask questions, especially during the COVID pandemic. Social media is described as an unreliable

source of information as it could cause unnecessary anxiety due to the credibility of the information that was being presented. Nadia stated she would call the funding host to try and clarify a purchasing question without success, and would end up seeking answers on social media, "I generally found that out on Facebook".

When interviewing Maggie, it became apparent she was still using information that was out of date. Maggie was surprised to hear changes had been made to the system for over 6 years; yet, she had not received any information regarding these changes. Finding information out years later that there had been a change, ended up creating feelings of anger and grief for these mothers. Mothers knew that they had been financially stretched and using the family income for years to pay for something that could have been supported through individualised funding. Many of these families have other typically developing children in their care, so using the family income to pay for disability-related costs that could have come from the child's funding also made families feel they had been denied opportunities to use their family income for their other children.

The vulnerability and additional stresses were highlighted in the experiences of these mothers. There had been times that Kim thought she would be better off without individualised funding because she felt that those who hold power about her funding were judging her decisions on how she would use it. Kim became tearful explaining the emotional impact on her when she was denied funding to purchase a bike during the COVID-19 lockdown and then shortly after being denied the cost of swimming lessons for her daughter. Kim said, "it is terrible as a mother to be judged as someone that doesn't know what is best for their child, as her mother I know what she needs and that should be trusted." All of the mothers felt it was important that improvements be made as to how funding

changes should be communicated to families to create equity of access.

Discussion

Results of the study show that mothers raising an autistic child have faced a multitude of challenges that negatively impacted on wellbeing. Even though Aotearoa New Zealand has moved its disability funding system to a more individualised context to promote more freedom and choice for disabled people and their families, individualisation of funding has not been able to respond to the unique circumstances of families, especially for mothers raising autistic children. Findings from this study have shown that, while the mothers desired to pursue individual tasks to meet their own aspirations of enhancing their wellbeing, the process and outcomes derived from the individualised funding were mostly peripheral for their lives. This has further perpetuated the view that funding fails to meet the needs of mothers of autistic children, because it seems that funding decisions are linked to the perception of wellbeing in terms of individual benefit, rather than collective good. The impacts of neoliberal influences on funding and allocation of resources, whether implicit or explicit, somehow accelerates and deepens the injustice processes to dichotomise *good* mothers as those who can cope versus those who struggle as *bad* mothers (Charmaz, 2019). Mothers in the current study did not necessarily enjoy the freedom of choice that having access to individualised funding was supposed to purport. Instead, their decisions were socially patterned as their roles were assumed to be that of their child's primary caregiver, expected to become the "experts" in their child's conditions, and conditioned to use the funding wisely to enhance their own wellbeing only in an individualised context—and only if it enhanced their children's wellbeing. Research on disability studies has argued

that mothers of disabled children are often forced to take a liminal position because they are often not disabled but can experience forms of disablism (Ryan & Runswick-Cole, 2008). The focus is often so much on the child that mothers' needs are "hidden" and ignored.

Findings from the current study aligned with existing research reporting that families want support, which considers the needs of the whole family, along with individual impairment-focused interventions that the child needs (Galpin et al., 2017; Smith & McQuade, 2021). Policies and decision-making need to consider the entire family unit, as well as the impact on the person being supported so that parents and caregivers are recognised for their contribution to society (Hickey & Wilson, 2017; Ministry of Social Development, 2019).

The responsibilities of advocacy, coordination and service management have been seen to have shifted from the state or government to parents and caregivers (Simpson et al., 2016), adding more stress to their already hectic and challenging lives as a family (Malbon et al., 2019). Further research has found that individualised funding such as the Aotearoa New Zealand system can embed inequalities rather than level them, which then places more accountability on parents (Gavidia-Payne, 2020; Malbon et al., 2019). The Aotearoa New Zealand Carers Strategy Plan has stated that it is important to recognise that both the carer and the person they support have needs and rights, and they may not be the same (Ministry of Social Development, 2019). However, this was not the case when it came to the individualised funding options. The mothers referenced the rigid and rule-based system as being unable to adapt and respond to both the individual needs of the child and the holistic needs of a family, leaving them feeling undervalued. These experiences precipitated negative feelings towards day-to-day living and for their

futures, which can widen inequalities and inequities (Carey et al., 2017). This suggests that unless the overall wellbeing of the family unit is considered within policies and systems, there will be no improvement to wellbeing.

Supporters of individualised funding have argued that there is strong evidence that reliance on natural supports is effective in achieving better outcomes across a range of measures for families and people with disabilities (Bennett & Bijoux, 2009). Many of the participant mothers expressed that with the friendships that they were able to maintain, they did not want to burden their friends with any additional expectations of providing support for their disabled child. This view is also shared in a recent Aotearoa New Zealand study indicating that parents raising autistic children did not perceive friendships to be a significant source of support, particularly when they did not want to burden them or lose a friendship due to challenging behaviour or lack of understanding around autism (Shepherd et al., 2020). Findings of the current study have highlighted that mothers did not experience the anticipated freedom of choice, autonomy and self-agency, due to the dominant ideologies such as good mother theory and structural inequalities and barriers stemming from lack of adequate and appropriate institutional support. To enhance wellbeing and quality of life for mothers and their family units, the system needs to be able to integrate anti-oppressive and rights-based approaches to a holistic assessment and funding allocation process which considers the wellbeing for mothers and recognises their contribution (Laragy & Fisher, 2020; Thomas, 2020).

Implications and recommendations for social work practice

Narratives from mothers of this study have discussed the lack of understanding of professionals in working holistically to

support autistic children and their families. Research has suggested that the social work profession has not yet taken a leadership role in supporting autistic people and their families (Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). In Aotearoa New Zealand, any registered social worker needs to be able to demonstrate they can work respectfully and inclusively with diversity and difference, this includes working with disability (Social Workers Registration Board, 2021). Social work education and training shapes professional practice and currently there appears to be a gap between curriculum and practice with disability as a specific field of practice having a low profile within the social work profession. Bigby et al. (2017) stated that there is a risk that disability issues only surface as a specialist option in postgraduate study, which is often too late in the training programme to create holistic practice insights. As governments embark on changes to disability systems, it is key that social workers and health practitioners will be able to practise confidently, competently and with a deeper knowledge of disability. To achieve and maintain this competency, it would also be necessary for social workers to continue to participate in education and professional development about autism and wider disability issues on an ongoing basis (Simpson et al., 2022).

In late 2021, the Aotearoa New Zealand Government announced the establishment of the Ministry for Disabled People which acknowledges that the current system created barriers for disabled people and families to achieve ordinary life outcomes due to complex systems. The new ministry is described as aspirational, and a true transformation of the way government serves disabled people and their families and promises to have a larger range of functions working within the principles of Enabling Good Lives (Ministry of Social Development, 2021). Families will also have more control and choice about the support they receive (Small, 2021), giving hope

that there is an opportunity with the new ministry being developed to consider the impacts on families and their wellbeing, especially with the long and ongoing impact of COVID 19 on disabled children and their family and whānau.

Limitations of the study

Seven research participants were interviewed and while this number was not representative of all mothers raising an autistic child, it provided rich narratives to illustrate the challenges these mothers have faced constantly and the love, hope and resilience they have got to support their disabled child and family. As an exploratory study, the research did not intend to recruit participants based on ethnicity; however, a range of ethnic identities was included in the study, including the first author who identifies as Māori. Currently, there is limited research on autistic children and adolescents specific to Aotearoa New Zealand that includes reporting ethnic identity. However, a 2020 study of recently diagnosed autistic children aged from 0–19 and focused on the Hutt region of Aotearoa New Zealand found that 55.2% identified as Aotearoa New Zealand European, followed by 23.6% Māori, and 4.3% as Pasifika (Drysdale & Van der Meer, 2020). As such, future studies need to consider the importance of ethnicity and culture to be brought in developing person-centred and relational practices not only for the behaviour of those with autism, but also the interpretation that parents or mothers' wellbeing may be viewed or impacted.

Conclusion

Mothers raising an autistic child in Aotearoa New Zealand face complex systems, which are difficult to navigate and impact on their wellbeing. Research has argued that this complexity of systems may further perpetuate existing social and cultural inequalities, such as literacy, and socio-economic and cultural status (Malbon et

al., 2019). Numerous challenges faced by mothers in this research are confirmed across other existing literature and research which include economic disadvantages, the loss of significant relationships, social isolation, stigma, poor mental health, high levels of anxiety, depression and stress. Individualisation of disability funding frameworks continues to create barriers and negatively impact the wellbeing of mothers. Results of this study urge practitioners and policymakers to consider both the individual needs of the autistic child as well as the needs of mothers as a collective of care.

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We need to talk about self-care (but not in the way you think)

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ABSTRACT

Self-care is widely acknowledged as crucial in the social work profession. While this area of research has begun to expand in recent decades, there is still much to be explored. Most studies in this field cover issues like the types and frequency of self-care engaged in, how to teach it, and how it relates to the prevention of issues like burnout. This research brief will review the literature surrounding these important matters, highlighting a gap pertaining to the practical understanding and application of self-care. How do social workers and social work students think and feel about self-care and the way it is currently taught? Do they know how often most of their peers engage in self-care? Do they know how to realistically incorporate self-care into their own lives? This research brief will discuss what is currently known about the answers to these questions, culminating in suggestions for future research and recommendations that will give future social workers realistic expectations and tools with which to enter the field.

KEYWORDS: Self-care; barriers to self-care; macro social work; social work education

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Social workers are more likely than many other professionals to face stress, burnout, and vicarious trauma (Cox & Steiner, 2013; Martin et al., 2019). While not often said explicitly, these have become accepted consequences of being a social worker (Beer et al., 2020) and a social work student (Grant et al., 2015). Discussions of self-care in social work have become ubiquitous, yet relevant studies agree that the frequency with which social workers engage in self-care is only limited (Bloomquist et al., 2015) to moderate (Miller, Grise-Owens et al., 2019). The situation is similar for social work students (O'Neill et al., 2019). This is problematic given that the risks associated with social work can contribute to serious negative health outcomes, such as cardiovascular disease (Beer et al., 2020). In this research brief, the current literature will be reviewed for what it reveals about the frequency and methods which social

workers and students are engaging in self-care and about what some of the benefits of and barriers to self-care are for these populations. Through this review, a research gap will be highlighted regarding the thoughts and feelings of social workers and students about self-care. The little existing research in this area will be shared along with ideas for future research and recommendations on changing the way the profession discusses self-care to better acknowledge barriers and further support social workers and students.

Literature Review

Key terms and theoretical framework

Self-care is referred to here as "purposeful actions people and organizations take that contribute to wellness and stress reduction" (Bloomquist, 2015, p. 293). The main guiding

theoretical consideration is *neoliberalism*, the ideology driving the economic system of capitalism, encouraging profitability and privatisation, and discouraging government intervention (Rogowski, 2018). Neoliberalism has had major impacts on the discussion of self-care in social work such that current discourse is often "marked with themes of self-responsibilization and market-based thinking" (Pyles, 2020, p. 2). Some researchers point to neoliberalism as the primary cause of the societal shift from viewing care for people as a collective duty to viewing it as a problem for individuals (Rogowski, 2018; Stuart, 2021). The result is a hazy picture within social work of what self-care is, how it is facilitated, and what reasonable expectations for oneself might be.

Rates and forms of self-care

Research on social workers' self-care practices is sparse (Miller, Donohue-Dioh et al., 2019); what studies have been done have found professional social workers practice self-care in only limited to moderate amounts (Bloomquist et al., 2015; Miller, Grise-Owens et al., 2019; Miller, Lee et al., 2019). Similar findings exist for social work students (Diebold et al., 2018). Examining common types of self-care among professional social workers, a large study by Bloomquist et al. (2015) found physical self-care (e.g., exercise, healthy diet, sufficient sleep), was most common, followed by professional and emotional self-care. Self-care activities social workers engage in frequently include spending time with family and friends, laughing, and casual discussions with colleagues (Bloomquist et al., 2015; Smullens, 2015). Results are similar for social work students, with physical activity being the most prominent type of self-care activity (Moore et al., 2011; O'Neill et al., 2019; Shannon et al., 2014). Some specific common activities include meditation (O'Neill et al., 2019), engaging with children (Moore et al., 2011), and spending time with family and friends (Moore et al., 2011; Shannon et al., 2014). Lastly, it is worth noting that social

workers also engage in what are referred to as *disengaging behaviours* (e.g., substance use and emotional eating) (Beer et al., 2021). Maladaptive coping strategies have been observed in social work students as well (Addonizio, 2011).

Benefits of self-care

The social work literature is growing with data supporting the positive benefits of, and critical need for, self-care in social work. Current studies indicate self-care being associated with prevention of stress, vicarious trauma, and burnout (Cox & Steiner, 2013; Miller et al., 2018; Newell & MacNeil, 2010), with additional benefits including higher levels of compassion satisfaction (Salloum et al., 2015) and job satisfaction (Acker, 2018). Perhaps most importantly, studies have shown a positive association between one's quality of health and amount of self-care engaged (Miller, Donohue-Dioh et al., 2019; Miller, Lee et al., 2019). As a result of these benefits, self-care's importance as a preventative measure was added to the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics in 2021 (NASW, 2021) in the United States. With such practices being clearly beneficial, one might wonder what barriers are in the way of implementation.

Barriers to self-care

With the occupational risks and demands of personal and professional lives, what may end up limiting social workers' and students' self-care practices is an array of barriers rather than a lack of knowledge of its benefits. As one study put it, many social workers "did not have either the energy, time, or access to utilize these approaches" (Beer et al., 2021, p. 326). While barriers can take many forms, they mainly fall under three umbrella categories: personal/family issues, lack of time, and work/financial issues (Martin et al., 2019). Personal issues are perhaps the most prominent barriers, with health arguably being most vital, especially given that social workers have a

high risk of severe stress and burnout, which can lead to serious health conditions like cardiovascular disease, sleep disturbance, and gastroenteritis (Kim et al., 2011).

Mental health is also a concern, with roughly half of social workers struggling with mental health (Straussner et al., 2018). To make matters worse, getting necessary health care is often difficult, even in developed nations. Combined with the barrier of finances, one in five Americans with incomes matching the average social worker cannot afford to meet their medical needs (Witters, 2021). Moreover, among those who *can* afford care, many still cannot access it. For instance, almost half of New Zealanders wait over a month to see a specialist (World Population Review, 2022) and women in the United Kingdom with suspected ovarian cancer wait an average of 69 days to see a specialist after referral (Target Ovarian Cancer, 2022). Self-care can help ameliorate negative health risks of the profession (Miller, Lee et al. 2019); however, when one is overwhelmed by a stressful job, serious health issues, and a lack of access to health care, it can be difficult to break out of cycles of poor (or absent) self-care.

Regarding work barriers, Smullens (2015) found a lack of organizational support and lack of appropriate environment for self-care practice to be prominent concerns. As an example of family issues and time constraint barriers, Xu et al. (2019) found social workers (women) in their 30s–50s often bear major, family-related responsibilities in addition to professional ones, noting this could contribute to the lack of energy and time needed to engage in self-care. These family and work barriers are echoed by others in the field, with some explicitly noting that many social workers put others before themselves (Jackson, 2014; Smullens, 2015).

Social workers' and students' perceptions of self-care

Research on self-care in social work, specifically on the relevant thoughts and feelings of social workers and students, is extremely minimal. The consensus from these studies seems to be that social workers do value self-care (Beer et al., 2021; Bloomquist et al., 2015; Newcomb et al., 2017) but, as noted earlier, are only able to engage in a limited to moderate capacity. Students also appear to value self-care (Diebold et al., 2018) and believe stress management should be a part of social work programmes (Addonizio, 2011); however, as discussed earlier, like social work professionals, they are only able to engage in moderate capacities. Thankfully, teaching self-care in social work programmes can positively impact post-graduation self-care practice (Grise-Owens et al., 2018). A student of one such programme remarked, "[Self-care assignments] made me remember to care for myself and that I am worth caring for" (Grise-Owens et al., 2018, p. 184). However, it is much more common that social work students neither feel they understand how to incorporate self-care into their lives (Griffiths et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2011) nor feel their social work programmes adequately prepared them to do so (Newcomb et al., 2017).

Discussion

There are calls for social work education to emphasise teaching of self-care (Straussner, 2018) and to encode it in educational accreditation standards (Diebold et al., 2018; Grise-Owens & Miller, 2021), but the profession also needs to change the way it talks about self-care. While working to raise awareness of the need for self-care and its various forms is a worthy goal, this writer would like to see great care taken in the way it is achieved. As mentioned earlier, many social work students do not feel prepared to engage in self-care activities in their own lives (Griffiths et al., 2019). This is consistent with research showing more training in this matter is needed (Pack, 2015; Moore et al., 2011; Shannon, 2014). All of this is problematic given that, anecdotally, an undercurrent has begun to spread among

social workers and students who feel self-care has become yet another chore, one that is often not feasible to accomplish. There has been little research examining social worker and student perspectives on self-care, but one small study did summarise this trend well: "Students seemed to have found self-care important, but an atmosphere of resignation among them suggests that self-care is also lofty and somewhat unattainable" (Diebold et al., 2018, p. 664).

Recommendations

Some relevant recommendations from research regarding raising the awareness and utilisation of self-care practice in social work and social work education include the following: highlighting skills that can be used in real-world settings (Lewis & King, 2019), inquiring about student stressors and how they cope (Addonizio, 2011; Lewis & King, 2019), acquainting students with self-care as early as their programme orientation (Grise-Owens et al., 2018), placing relevant assignments in practice and field classes (Newell & Nelson-Gardell, 2014; Grise-Owens et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2011), having whole credit-bearing and/or required courses on self-care (Greene et al., 2017; Miller, 2020), augmenting supervisory relationships and requirements to enhance the quality of the supervisory relationship (Aotearoa New Zealand Social Workers' Association, 2013, as cited in Pack, 2015; Pack, 2015), and having students form accountability check-in groups (Clemans, 2011; Grise-Owens et al., 2018). It would also be beneficial to have social workers and students create unique self-care plans for themselves (Eaves, 2018; Grise-Owens et al., 2016; Grise-Owens et al., 2018; Lewis & King, 2018; Lynch et al., 2021; Miller, 2020). Lastly, creating a depository of information (Butler, n.d.) may be helpful for exposure to a variety of tools to pull from.

While teaching specific self-care methods is an excellent idea, the conversation could be expanded to include thoughts and feelings about self-care, the barriers to it, the strong possibility that many social workers and students will not fulfill all their self-care needs, and how to do the best one can with their available resources. Additionally, it would be helpful to discuss the many risks of the profession before moving on to self-care (Newell & Nelson-Gardell, 2014; Xu et al., 2019). This is not with the intention to scare, but rather to prepare. Schools of social work have an ethical responsibility to provide tools and frameworks preventatively, lest, as is all too common, students receive rude awakenings upon entering the field (Grise-Owens & Miller, 2021). These steps would provide context regarding what current research shows about how much social workers are engaging in self-care in the real world so social workers and students may feel less isolated and more informed of these matters.

Further research

Research on self-care in social work has grown substantially in recent decades, but there is room—and need—for more. For example, little research has been done regarding self-care of social work students (Pyles, 2020), which is concerning, given how one study found the highest levels of mental health problems are among social workers aged 21–39 (Straussner et al., 2018). As a social work educator, this writer is interested in seeing more research conducted around social work students' thoughts and feelings about self-care and is currently planning a study along these lines. Anecdotally, I have found that many social workers and social work students often feel shame and inadequacy as a result of being unable to maintain their needed levels of self-care. This writer is interested in exploring this further and creating interventions to help alleviate these challenging feelings. Finally, the participants in many of the current studies on self-care in social work primarily consist of white women (Griffiths et al., 2019). Steps should be taken to achieve more diversity among future study participants – and

attempt to explore how self-care varies in different ages, races, regions, and cultures – to make findings and recommendations more widely generalizable.

Conclusion

Social workers are still figuring out how to adequately care and advocate for themselves in a world where their value is not always meaningfully demonstrated. This research brief has shared the current literature's consensus that self-care is valued by those in the field but is being practised in only limited to moderate capacities, with the barriers in the way of self-care being vast. The goal to get social workers and social work students further engaged in self-care is an important one. Yes, the profession must continue to talk about self-care, its many forms, its value, and its necessity, but it must do so while addressing that this is not happening for many social workers and students, that many barriers may prevent full engagement in self-care, and explore what the systemic reasons are for this. It would behoove the profession to better equip itself, especially its students preparing to enter the field, with realistic expectations and concrete tools to combat these challenges. Social workers and students have enough obstacles; the way the profession talks about self-care should not be one of them.

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The *wounded* social work student:
A strength-based enquiry of personal loss experience and its impact on social work students' professional practice

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: When working in the fields of loss, grief, bereavement and dying, the lived experience of the social work students, and their developing practice in the field, can be enhanced by awareness of the concept of the *wounded healer*.

METHODS: This study sought to explore the wounded healer concept amongst Australian social work students who had experienced the death of a loved one. The project was underpinned by a phenomenological approach seeking to understand personal loss experiences in professional practice skill development. Using semi-structured interviews, final-year social work students were asked to reflect on the positive and negative impacts of their personal loss experience on their emerging professional social work practice.

FINDINGS: An analysis of the data identified three main themes: (1) repeated triggers of loss and grief during field placement can occur; (2) students' ambiguity and confusion of safe inclusion of lived experience in a professional setting was identified; and (3) learning can be impacted by *wounded* reflections.

CONCLUSION: The study noted a lack of understanding among social work students on how to safely navigate their own *woundedness* and how to incorporate awareness into their professional practice skills. This may be addressed by responding to a current gap in the Australian social work curriculum. Future considerations for reflections on the effectiveness of field placement supervision and further guidance and education for wounded social work students at a university level may assist.

KEYWORDS: The wounded healer; loss and grief; social work curriculum; field placement supervision

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The conceptualisation of the project was developed through reflexive personal curiosity on how to use knowledge and insights from a personal loss experience in a social work practice skill development. Author one utilised their lived experience to position the study:

My mother died, quite unexpectedly, in 2019. Ever since then, I have spent a lot of time thinking about my change in perception to life and death. I now feel comfortable talking about death and dying. I do not shy away from friends and family that are grieving. I have been

able to see and accept the possibilities that can come with this loss. I have become more reflective about my own actions, more assertive with my desires, but at the same time more vulnerable and wounded. While I feel strong and wise some days, I feel weak and alone on others. My emotional growth over the past two years both personally and professionally, has been driven by my loss experience, which has forced me to re-evaluate my life and consequently encourage big life alterations. The loss that I have experienced has undeniably changed the course of my life and the essence of who I am. Moreover, the personal experience I had with the social worker who took me to see my mother at the morgue was the catalyst that drove me to further understand how my own experience can influence my practice framework. Her ability to comfortably be with me in the moment of the most painful minutes of my life, inspired me to do the same for others. Her silence, that said more than words could ever have; her comforting and safe presence; her ability to say only what was necessary for this very moment, are all attributes I aspire to achieve for my own social work practice.

What is a *wounded* social work student?

The term *wounded healer* derives from ancient Greek mythology, conceptualised by Jung (1951, 1979), from the tale of Chiron who was enabled to heal others once he has been injured himself. Supiano and Vaughn-Cole (2011) identified that 80% of the participating social work students in their study had experienced the death of a loved one. Further research also identified that there were a significant number of social work students who have identified that their decision to choose social work as a profession, was due to their own lived experience (Gilin & Kauffman, 2015; Negrete, 2020; Thomas, 2016). Many students have experience of

significant life events, where they may have been emotionally *wounded*.

The current understanding of wounded healers is often affiliated with a reflexive recovery process. As a result of their professional education, a wounded healer should have the ability to reflect on their own experience, and understand its benefits and limitations which, in turn, allows for the possibility of being more empathetic and understanding of the client's situation (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). Within the field of social work practice, awareness of the impact that vicarious trauma could have on the practitioner if their own conflicts and personal issues have not been resolved, is vital (Straussner et al., 2018). Vicarious trauma is defined by Kapoulitsas and Corcoran (2015) as the impact of hearing stories of trauma from others. Ho Chan and Tin (2012) highlight an increased risk for wounded social workers to experience vicarious trauma if they work in the field of death and dying. Zerubavel and Wright (2012) emphasise that therapists who have not recovered from their own emotional distress are more likely to be impacted by unwanted countertransference which can affect their rapport with clients, and consequently the client's recovery.

Newcomb et al. (2015) identified a gap when it comes to research in wounded healers as social workers, despite the evidence of high levels of *woundedness* among them. Therefore, the exploration of the wounded healer concept within a social work perspective could assist wounded practitioners to shape their professional practice skills.

Methodology

The overarching research question that informed the study was: How are social work students who have experienced the death of a loved one incorporating their own experience of being wounded into their professional practice when working

in contexts of loss, grief, bereavement and dying?

The research was influenced by a strength-based enquiry, guided by hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is based within a qualitative approach to research and strives to understand how people make sense of their lived experiences (Liamputtong et al., 2016). This research approach considers that the researcher will inevitably make educated presuppositions when analysing the qualitative data gathered throughout the study (Harper et al., 2011). Hermeneutic phenomenology is used when the research endeavours to look at existential experiences of the participants that have had significant impact on their lives (Harper et al., 2011).

This study was developed with a strengths perspective in mind, which emphasises a person´s abilities over their deficits (Payne, 2021). This meant that the researcher set out to explore the strengths that can come from the loss of a loved one, rather than contemplating the challenges one had after the loss. Tsey (2019) argued that a strength-based approach does not disregard that people face challenges but strives to explore what can enable them to keep going despite the challenges. Therefore, the interview protocol was developed from an analysis of the literature that explored the beneficial attributes of wounded healers in practice and was also guided by the reflective recovery process of wounded healers. The protocol guided the interviews to shed light on the growth and professional capability that can come from being wounded and emphasise the healer aspect of the wounded healer concept.

Eight semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with Bachelor and Master of Social Work students at a regional Australian University. The inclusion criteria for participants included three requirements: 1) that the participants had all experienced the loss of a loved one more than 12 months ago; 2) were in the last year of their degree, to ensure they had completed a field placement; and 3) that students have an interest in working in or have worked in the field of loss, grief, bereavement and dying post-qualifying.

Data analysis

Data analysis of the interviews was guided by the six stages of phenomenological data analysis, which enables reflective thinking about each interview and the formulation of themes and meanings (Liamputtong et al., 2016). The first two stages of analysis required the researcher to carefully read the transcripts while applying a reflective lens to identify first themes and thoughts (Liamputtong et al., 2016). Stages three and four concentrated on the formulation and meaning of the different themes that emerge, and finally narrowing those themes down (Liamputtong et al., 2016). Lastly, stages five and six constituted of another revision of the narrowed-down themes, a discussion and reflection of the themes with a third party, and finally a detailed description of the themes (Liamputtong et al., 2016). The reflection and meaning-making of the narrowed-down themes continued throughout the write-up of this thesis.

Ethics

This project had been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No HE21-009).

Hughes (2015) argued that research that includes topics of loss and grief is ethically challenging due to the emotional nature of its context. However, this study did not require the participants to talk about their loss experience. Rather, it asked them to answer an exploratory interview protocol during an in-depth interview in relation to the change in their professional practice framework after the bereavement occurred. Further, the questions were guided by a strengths-based

perspective, meaning that they looked at the growth that comes from a loss.

The recruitment material used clearly outlined any potential emotional harm that may affect the participants to ensure clear consent to proceed. Furthermore, the recruitment material provided the participants with the contact information for support services.

Prior to the interview, the researcher provided the participants with consent forms, which were discussed verbally and returned with the signature of the participant. Between 48–72 hours after the interview, the researcher emailed the participant to check in, and once again provide the contact details for CAPS and Lifeline.

All participant quotes have been assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Findings

The thematic analysis of the interview data identified three major themes across participants.

Triggers during field placement

Five participants stated that they were exposed to loss, grief, and bereavement at least once during their first field education placement. The most common experience for the participants was to offer bereavement support to clients. Only one participant, who undertook her first field placement in the context of a hospital, was exposed to death and dying. While some experiences within this context were positive for the participant and encouraged them to further reflect on how their own experience had shaped professional practice, there were also experiences that still appeared to be unresolved within the participant.

> . . . that was a really hard one. I kind of felt that when they left. I really, it was quite emotional. . .. I would often

question . . . how they were going, how they were coping? . . . So that was, it was it was a challenge, I guess, to be learning on placement, and to be exposed to that situation. (Jane)

Ambiguity of inclusion of lived experience in professional setting

Eight participants agreed that their own woundedness provided them with greater capacity to respond to their grieving or dying clients.

> . . . it's good to have experience with that, because it helps you to be more empathetic to what others are going through. (Sam)

Seven participants agreed that having had that lived experience of losing a loved one can enable a deeper level of understanding towards the grieving client. Being able to have that deeper level of understanding can enable the social work student to better support their grieving clients. One participant reflects on their practice before and after their loss experience.

> . . . I still managed to connect with that person and work with that person. But I feel like if I had had that death earlier, I could probably understand that that anger that she felt, that she couldn't quite place. . . I probably would have just had a deeper understanding for it . . . I think had I gone through my own loss. It probably would have been a bit different for me to just, yeah, understand how difficult it was for them. (Jamie)

Seven participants stated that their own grief provided them with the platform to understand every person grieves differently and that this will enable them to show unconditional positive regard to their grieving clients.

> I think that I was really able to just be genuine . . . I think it was really

natural for me to sort of address her grief in a really natural way, you know, acknowledge that, you know, whatever she was doing, or feeling was like completely normal . . . just assure her she wasn't going crazy. (Sue)

While this research identified that participants believed that their personal experience with death can be a helpful tool when working in the context of loss, grief, bereavement and dying, there is also ambiguity and confusion surrounding the practical use of the lived experience in a practice setting.

> Yeah, I just, every all of our experiences create who you are as a practitioner. But just how you do it, like I don't know, maybe you use it [the personal experience] as a starting point. (Sue)

There was noticeable interest and simultaneous uncertainty of self-disclosure among participants. Some participants believed increased awareness of when or if they disclose was vital for their practice framework.

> [Self disclosure is a] a big question for me. Through my whole social work studies is that line of self-disclosure . . . I feel like there is some level of self-disclosure that could be of benefit . . . I actually have felt that through the course subject that it has been more of a negative concept to self-disclose that. And that's why I've struggled with the concept through the whole studies, because I've felt, yeah, that there are benefits to self-disclosure. (Jane)

> I remember hearing someone . . . like one of the lecturers . . . saying how, like, there were times when I wanted to just, you know cry, but they had to hold it together till they were like, in private. But, like I think it's like honesty . . . But there is nothing wrong with showing a bit of vulnerability as a professional in front of your client. (Sam)

Wounded reflections

Throughout their studies, participants stated that they learnt about the importance of reflective practice and having awareness of how they have an impact on clients but also how clients might impact on them. Additionally, the death of a loved one could also be a catalyst for reflection and provide a foundation for personal and professional growth.

> So, awareness in that sense of knowing how your grief and loss affects you and how you react to things like that is really helpful moving forward in a professional setting as well. (Abbie)

> I guess that that sort of has occurred since losing my mum, and I guess I am looking back on it, yeah, I guess, yeah, possibly the way that I have changed? . . . The way it's changed me as a person, the way it's changed my thoughts about life and how I use that to go forward. (Jane)

In line with the concept of the wounded healer, participants noted that they needed to be reflective about their own experience, but also participate in an active recovery process of their own grief. The active recovery process of their own grief can enable the social work student to draw strength and competence from their experience into their practice.

> I believe you would, if you have processed your own grief, you will be able to support probably better than those who didn't have the lived experience . . . during lots of times I think I tried to say what I wanted to hear . . . [This] made me realise I was working on my own grief. (Lena)

Participants reflected concerns about any accidental and unwanted countertransference or triggers when working with clients who are dying or grieving. Six participants spoke of their own "unhealed" wounds possibly

being opened up when working with clients who are dying or grieving.

> And also that I don't take it on personally, that I don't start, yeah, seeing like someone, someone's passed away and putting my friends death on that or like treating it the same way. That would be my worries at the moment. (Jamie)

Discussion

This is the first Australian study that explored the wounded healer concept among Australian social work students. The participants of this study all confirmed that their personal experience with the death of a loved one impacted on their professional practice approach. The study revealed that the participants´ own loss experiences influenced their interest in working in loss, grief, bereavement and dying. This is congruent with other international studies, which discovered that a high percentage of social work students were influenced by their own adverse life experience when it came to studying social work (Gilin & Kauffman, 2015; Negrete, 2020; Thomas, 2016).

Acknowledging that the personal self can impact the professional self

Wounded social work students will eventually enter the professional workforce as wounded social workers. More so, students' adverse life experience which, in the case of this particular study, is the death of a loved one, is the force that drove the decision to become a social worker in the first place. The participants hope to transform their own woundedness into a professional healing tool for others' needs to be valued.

The social work curriculum teaches different theories of grief and, while those acknowledge the complexity and nuances within different grief responses, it may not be until the students experience it

themselves that they fully understand the totality of grief. This study showed a common consensus that a social worker, who walked the same path as the client, may have a more nuanced understanding of the client's situation. Wallace et al. (2019) asserted that "real-life exposure, self-disclosure, and emotional guidance are all supported strategies for providing an impactful educational experience preparing professionals for work with dying and grieving clients" (p. 54). Their own encounter with grief provided them with an insider perspective of its physical and emotional impact on life. Therefore, their own wounds enabled them to be compassionate and empathetic due to the insight that grief does not have rules, but is indeed often irrational, different from person to person and there is no clear end.

From wounded social work student to wounded healer

The findings of this study indicate that wounded students are actively thinking and often talking to peers about how their personal experience, or woundedness, and how this can affect their professional social work practice. However, awareness of the term wounded healer is limited, which emphasises the active recovery process of the professional practitioner in order to transition from wounded to wounded healer. There was attention paid to the importance of self-awareness and reflection of the participant`s own grief, but this was expressed in relation to the individual's responsibility and internal self-reflection, not as part of an active process. This process would need to entail more than one's private internal reflections and be indeed active in its nature, meaning that it should for example be done during clinical supervision (St. Arnaud, 2017). Supervision has been highlighted as a vital tool for wounded healers to reflect on their woundedness and ensure safe practice with clients (St. Arnaud, 2017). Although not mentioned with a clear concept of how to actively engage in

reflection that enables and supports active recovery, most participants did consider self-reflection and reflective practice when working with clients who are dying or grieving as a vital core skill for wounded students.

The importance of field placement supervision for the healing narrative

Participants in this study identified that reflection is key to understanding how one's woundedness impacts on professional practice framework, However, there was confusion among the participants when asked how they would practically incorporate those reflections into their practice.

There is a strong emphasis on students' ability to develop their own practice framework during their field placement by engaging in reflective supervision and reflective journaling (Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW], 2021). Yet, only one participant named supervision as a vital tool in their healing process. This indicates that supervision during field placement may not be the place for most students to actively engage in their recovery process and reflection on how their woundedness impacts on their professional practice skills.

The AASW (2012) stated that field education supervisors need to have two years' professional social work experience and be eligible to be registered with the AASW. There are no other prerequisites or mandatory courses that potential field education supervisors need to attend. An international study found that, while there is strong reliance on field supervisors to provide professional support and growth to students on their field placements, there is also a lack of organisational support as well as misunderstandings of what field placement supervisors are responsible for when it comes to the student's learning (Cleak et al., 2016). If social work students' knowledge about the wounded healer

concept is limited, the chances are that the field education supervisors may not be aware of this concept.

This study has uncovered limited support and understanding of active recovery and reflection on one's woundedness among participants. The findings suggest that wounded social work students need more support and guidance throughout their study when it comes to active reflection.

Promoting wounded healers at a university level

Straussner et al. (2018) argued that, despite a high level of wounded social workers (and therefore the potential for wounded healers), there is no common theoretical framework used in social work. Yet, Zerubavel and Wright (2012) have originated a wounded healer practice framework for psychotherapists. Including their own experience in their professional practice skill development is often considered inevitable and important for psychotherapists and social workers (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2021; Linden, 2019).

Conversely, the participants of this study expressed concern about bringing "the self" into their professional practice as social workers. This contrasts with the study's findings that indicated that the participant's own wounds were the reason for becoming social workers. The study found that participants believed that the current social work curriculum discourages this or at least does not provide the guidance needed for students to understand appropriate ways of including oneself. Participants were worried that bringing too much of themselves into the work with dying or grieving clients would open their own unhealed wounds and consequently trigger and re-traumatise them.

Implications for practice

To ensure the incorporation of awareness of the wounded healer concept into the

social work curriculum, to assist wounded social work students' needs to gain better understanding of how their woundedness impacts their practice. This research highlighted the need for further awareness of the lived experience of wounded social work students. The study highlighted how confusion and ambiguity surrounding the safe inclusion of their woundedness into their practice approach when working within the context of loss, grief, bereavement and dying, was required. This shows a need for a more in-depth study around the guidance and perception of wounded social work students at a university level and gain further insight on the gaps of the current social work curriculum. There is a need to assist social work students with a theoretical framework on how to safely navigate through their own woundedness and how to incorporate this as a strength into their professional practice framework (Fox & Wayland, 2020).

This study revealed that loss, grief and bereavement may be common factors faced by the wounded social work students during field placement. Previous research has shown that supervision can be a vital tool during one's active recovery process as a wounded healer (Zuchowski, 2016). However, studies have also highlighted the lack of guidance and structure when it comes to field placement supervision. Hence, there is an urgent need for further research into field placement supervision, specifically in the realm of wounded social work students.

Limitations

This study was limited by a small sample size and its focus is as an exploratory study only. The participants were recruited from one regional Australian University, meaning that insights cannot be generalised.

This study was also limited by one time interaction, limiting further clarification during the thematic analysis to gain further insight into some of the discoveries.

It should be noted that this study did not specifically ask students about the guidance they receive from university, or their supervision experience, but rather the analytical part of this study made presuppositions according to the information they received from the students around their professional practice.

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The politics and ethics of representation in qualitative research: Addressing moments of discomfort

The Critical Methodologies Collective (Eds.)
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The Critical Methodologies Collective consists of nine, early-career feminist researchers. Their shared interest is in critical research, and they come from various disciplines with diverse roots in Denmark, Finland, India, Iran, Poland, Sweden Turkey and the United Kingdom.

I was attracted to this title because, as a qualitative researcher, I experience many "moments of discomfort", even with most of my own research being with professional participants. As qualitative researchers, we shape our research from our own standpoint and we need to acknowledge our positionality in choosing our subjects, the participants we involve and the *why*, *when*, *where* and *how* decisions in any study reflect our perceptions. There are political and ethical dimensions to these choices and, for social work researchers, many sensitivities. There is a growing literature on the exploration of issues of access, consent, and representation in social work research. (See, for example, Kara et al., 2022; Leigh et al., 2022; Nordstedt et al., 2022.) This book is a very valuable contribution to the literature and will be of interest to social work postgraduate students and researchers. As a bonus, this book is available open access at Taylorfrancis.com

This edited book contains chapters on a wide range of issues on qualitative research: Exploring potentials for affective reflexivity in critical intersex studies (Tove Lundberg); Negotiations of the ethical practice of informed consent during the research process (Johanna Sixtensson); Creating knowledge through community theatre (Emma Söderman); Ethnographic research (Pankhuri Agarwal); Middle-classness: Research object and fieldwork performance (Katrine Scott); Representation in a study of social workers (Vanna Nordling); The ethics of renaming: On challenges and dilemmas of anonymization in a study of anti-Muslim racism (Marta Kolankiewicz), and Caring encounters in ethnographic research (Eda Hatice Farsakoglu and Pouran Djampour). Space permits me to discuss only two of these chapters, but those selected will offer a window into what is contained in the collection.

In Chapter 6, Varna Nordling writes about social workers working within the Swedish welfare state but who actively supported young people to avoid deportation. She explores the tensions present in working within a powerful system while acting out a form of resistance to aspects of that system that would forcefully exclude. Her chapter focuses on her own reflections on the social workers in her study and the choices she made. An interesting observation is that, while she analyses their practice, in her efforts to anonymise participants, their diversity as people was erased. She notes that professional titles are "associated with neutrality as well as whiteness" (p. 96), but her social worker participants were diverse—many themselves were migrants and (presumably) not all white. Nordling focuses on concern that, in presenting her

participants with minimal information about who they were, they became disembodied, separated from their various identities. This may have created the "image of social workers as distant from the social worlds of their clients" (p. 101) and assumed to be white and neutral as no counter-image was provided. Nordling goes on to discuss, in detail, the decisions she made in focusing her analysis. Her interest was in the ambivalence of social work actions simultaneously working within the status quo but acting against the rules to assist young people to avoid the power of the state system to deport them. Had she focused more on the social workers themselves, the richness of those accounts would have changed her study's central aim, which was to understand the limits of acts of resistance in terms of social transformation. These acts temporarily destabilise the status quo but the powerful systems are left intact.

Chapter 8, by Eda Hatice Farsakoglu and Pouran Djampour, addresses the challenging aspects of doing ethnographic research. The chapter reflects on caring encounters that occurred during the conduct of their ethnographic PhD studies with different groups of people experiencing migration and asylum seeking. The authors collaborated on the writing by sharing ideas and experiences in a series of focused conversations. This is a fascinating chapter as the two researchers explore moments during their studies when they were challenged to share with participants more of who they themselves were. They note that the care and empathy in these encounters challenges their sense of themselves as ethnographers. Doing ethnography is hard work, requiring relationship building through the establishment of rapport and trust. There is a balance between blending in and being able to observe natural social

phenomena while always being mindful of the dynamics of power and positionality. The authors explore how they had thought themselves to have rejected positivist notions of objectivity and detachment and to have built authentic relationships with their research participants. The experience they shared in their collaborative conversations, however, suggested that they were still maintaining distance. In this exploration, they pose the question "could it be that we had internalised some of the main pillars of the migration and border regimes such as the radical dichotomy between 'us and them' and the internal hierarchies… reflected in myriad distinctions" (p. 134). This is a powerful chapter, provoking deeper reflection on research privilege and positional perceptions.

This is a great set of readings to challenge us to think deeply about representation in qualitative research, taking us beyond the common issues of whether or not to use pseudonyms and how much information to provide about participants. I would strongly recommend it to those undertaking qualitative studies and to academic supervisors. I will include this book in the readings for teaching research methods in future.

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