



DOING ANTI-OPPRESSIVE SOCIAL WORK

RETHINKING THEORY
AND PRACTICE

4th Edition

edited by

DONNA BAINES,
NATALIE CLARK
& BINDI BENNETT

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Fernwood Publishing
Halifax & Winnipeg

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Development editing: Wayne Antony

Copyediting: Jenn Harris

Cover design: John van der Woude

Type setting: Jessica Herdman

Printed and bound in Canada

Published by Fernwood Publishing

2970 Oxford Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3L 2W4
and 748 Broadway Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 0X3

fernwoodpublishing.ca

Fernwood Publishing Company Limited gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism under the Manitoba Publishers Marketing Assistance Program and the Province of Manitoba, through the Book Publishing Tax Credit, for our publishing program. We are pleased to work in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia to develop and promote our creative industries for the benefit of all Nova Scotians.



Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Doing anti-oppressive social work : rethinking theory and practice /
edited by Donna Baines, Natalie Clark, and Bindi Bennett.

Other titles: Doing anti-oppressive practice

Names: Baines, Donna, 1960- editor. | Clark, Natalie, 1968- editor. | Bennett, Bindi, editor.

Description: 4th edition. | Previous editions published under title: Doing anti-oppressive practice. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20220273405

Canadiana (ebook) 20220273413 | ISBN 9781773635552 (softcover)

ISBN 9781773635774 (PDF)

Subjects: LCSH: Social service. | LCSH: Social service—Political aspects.

LCSH: Social justice. | LCSH: Social change. | LCSH: Social problems. | LCSH: Equality.

Classification: LCC HV40 .D64 2022 | DDC 361.3—dc23

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*To all those who didn't come home
and all those fighting for social justice in all its forms.*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Donna Baines is a cisgender, white, straight woman. Her family originally immigrated to Canada from many parts of Europe, in some cases fleeing religious persecution or arrest for union organizing and, in others, trying to exit poverty. Her journey through social work was interrupted by stints as an organizer in the student, unemployed workers, peace and feminist movements. Donna's work draws on anti-oppressive, feminist, anti-racist, intersectional, anti-colonial and Marxist approaches.

Bindi Bennett is a Gamilaraay cisgender straight mother and woman. Her interests include trauma in mental health utilizing animals, Aboriginal social work, Aboriginal identity and well-being as well as increasing cultural responsiveness in allied health. Bindi has over twenty years' practice experience in the fields of Aboriginal social work, child and adolescent mental health, schools and health. Bindi does all her life, including research, through an Indigenous female Gamilaraay lens that critically aims for anti-oppressive, anti-racist, anti-colonial practice as well as re-Indigenizing with sovereignty.

Shari Brotman is a cisgender, straight, white, Jewish woman who lives with disability. She is also the proud mom of a young adult son. Shari is an associate professor at the McGill School of Social Work. Her research explores issues of access and equity in the design and delivery of health and social care services to older adults and their families (racialized, immigrant, LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse communities). Shari loves and is inspired by the ideas in critical race feminism, queer and critical disability theory.

Catrina Brown is a Jewish professor and graduate coordinator at the School of Social Work and is cross-appointed to Gender and Women's Studies at Dalhousie University. She has been an active member of the Dalhousie Faculty Association Executive, including as president, and initiated the equity committee and subsequently co-initiated the Queer Faculty Caucus. Her work focuses on social justice approaches to women's health and mental health issues, including "eating disorders," substance use problems, depression, trauma and post-trauma within a feminist postmodern/narrative lens.

Lea Caragata is a white, cisgender feminist academic. Her interest in poverty and social justice is rooted in her family background. Her mother was a single parent and an early and committed feminist. Lea worked for a number of years in government, coming face to face with the challenges single moms on assistance faced. Lea teaches in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia. Her research focuses on gendered poverty, examined through an intersectional lens and guided by a commitment to participatory action research.

Ben Carniol was born in Czechoslovakia. He was a hidden child in Belgium when his parents were murdered as part of the Nazi genocide against Jews. As an adult, he became a social worker and a university teacher, focusing on reaching for economic, environmental and social justice. Ben is deeply inspired by the writings of his Jewish mentor, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Irene Carter, professor and coordinator of the MSW Working Professionals Program at the University of Windsor, uses an interpretive epistemology, constructivist grounded theory and an anti-oppressive approach in her research and advocacy for disabled people and their families. Irene's scholarship focuses on the study of disability and its inclusion in social work curricula in Canada, the United States and Great Britain. Irene is a long-term co-chair of the Disability Caucus of the Canadian Association of Social Work Education and encourages the development of social work courses about disability that include anti-oppressive practice and support for disabled individuals.

Natalie Clark's practice, research and activism is informed and mobilized through her interconnected identities, including her settler ancestry and her Secwépemc and Métis kinship — as a grandmother, mother, auntie and community member. Natalie is full professor and co-chair of the School of Social Work and Human Service at Thompson Rivers University, and she continues to practice as a clinical supervisor, violence counsellor and girls' group facilitator with children, youth and families.

Ilyan Ferrer is a cisgender straight male. He is a second-generation Filipino-Canadian settler whose parents immigrated in the 1970s. Ilyan is also a partner and father of two inquisitive daughters. His work and teaching are informed by oral histories shared by racialized and immigrant communities, and he draws from intersectionality, critical race theory and anti-oppressive social work practice.

Bonnie Freeman is a straight cisgender Algonquin/Mohawk member of the Six Nations of the Grand River. Her interest in Indigenous social work stems from her personal experiences growing up and the search for anti-oppressive, decolonial and anti-colonial approaches to healing. Her experiences have inspired Bonnie's search for understanding and research as an Indigenous scholar in social work in bringing

forward the importance of Indigenous forms of social connection as important forms of healing and social justice that support an anti-oppressive and decolonial understanding individually and on a much broader level.

Trevor G. Gates is a gay cisgender man with twenty years of social work practice and research experience with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/gender-diverse and queer+ communities. His scholarly interests include global social work practice, mental health and well-being, allyship and inclusion with people who have experienced marginalization. Recent research includes an exploration of civic engagement and volunteerism as a protective factor for well-being for 2SLGBTQ+ people. Additionally, Trevor is interested in international education in the Asia-Pacific regions and has an interest in experiential, intersectional and critical pedagogies.

Daniel Grace is a white, cisgender gay man. He is a medical sociologist who conducts research to advance sexual and gender minority health. He draws on critical social research traditions in his public health scholarship, including institutional ethnography, intersectionality, critical political economy and community-based participatory research approaches. Daniel is a Canada Research Chair in Sexual and Gender Minority Health and an associate professor at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto.

Roy Hanes, MSW, PhD, retired associate professor, Carleton University. Roy spent his forty-year career working with and for Disabled Peoples, first as a frontline social worker and then as an academic. He has published broadly in the area of disability histories and policy, disability and violence and the accessibility and inclusion of disabled people in schools of social work in Canada and abroad. Roy's social work theory and practice has always involved deconstructing how ableism perpetuates individual and collective oppression of Disabled Peoples. Roy is known nationally for his activism in disability rights and for promoting disability studies and accessibility within the academy.

Wendy Hulko is a bi-queer cisgender woman living with episodic disabilities on unceded Secwépemc territory (third generation of Scottish and Nordic ancestry) and benefiting from social capital. Wendy conducts interdisciplinary research on aging, dementia and health care with equity-seeking groups. Her research, teaching and activism are informed by critical ideologies and theories, including Marxism, intersectional feminism, cultural safety, structural social work, queer theory and critical disability studies. She is the co-author of *Gerontological Social Work in Action: Anti-Oppressive Practice with Older Adults, Their Families, and Communities* (Routledge Press 2020).

Banakonda Kennedy-Kish (Bell) is an Anishinaabe and Irish kwe born on the outskirts of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. She has worked as a Traditional Practitioner and Teacher with Indigenous communities for over forty-five years. Banakonda is deeply influenced by the teachings of Elder Onaubinisay James Dumont, Eastern Door Chief of the Midewiwin Lodge.

Dylan Lambi-Raine is a disabled queer white cis woman settler originally from Saskatoon, Treaty 6 territory. She holds two baccalaureates with high distinction in both Gender Studies and Social Work. Raised by a community, in poverty, with intergenerational familial trauma and mental health issues, she has always questioned the role of the state and of carcerality in social work and mental health care. Community care, self-actualization, critical, self-reflexive growth, vulnerability, radical love-based praxis, abolition and anti-colonialism are projects to which she is forever committed.

Judy E. MacDonald is a (dis)Able white, straight, cisgender woman. She comes from Scottish immigrants who landed in Pictou, NS, on the Hector ship in 1773, as well as other ancestors from various parts of Europe. Judy has been a (dis)Ability advocate since her early days in hospital social work. She enjoys working with (dis)Able students in using their own lived experiences to guide their research and advocacy. Her work is influenced by feminist, anti-oppressive, critical clinical and critical (dis)Ability theories, practices and policies.

Kinnon R. MacKinnon is a white, trans and queer-identified critical social scientist. Informed by his social work practice experiences in support group facilitation with trans people, his platform of community-engaged scholarship includes examining gender-affirming care policies and practices happening on the ground. Kinnon's research applies a range of methodological and critical theoretical approaches, all aiming to understand and transform 2SLGBTQ+ people's health and social care experiences. Kinnon is currently an assistant professor at the School of Social Work, York University.

Stella Ng arrived in health professions education research after working as a pediatric educational audiologist in the public school system, navigating between institutions of health and education. Being a part of the structures that left many children and families under-supported and pitted health workers against education workers motivated Stella to engage in research that could bridge divides and challenge and change unhelpful systems and structures. She is influenced by diverse paradigms of education, reflective practice, critical reflection, critical pedagogy, critical approaches to knowledge mobilization, dialogue and transformative education.

Doret Phillips is a Jamaican-Canadian registered social worker who practises through a critical feminism, anti-racism, anti-Black racism and anti-colonialism framework. She has extensive work experience in child welfare, the violence against women sector and providing therapeutic support to parents and children. She has also worked in the infant, child and adult mental health sectors.

Fritz Pino is an assistant professor at the University of Regina's Faculty of Social Work. She moved to Canada after completing her Masters of Psychology in the Philippines, where she was born and raised. As a trans woman of colour, her research and social work experiences foreground the lived experiences of racialized 2SLGBTQ+ subjects, especially those from the Global South, to expand social work knowledge that pays attention to global political forces, power relations and politics of difference to build resistances grounded in the experiences of the below.

Gordon Pon identifies as an upper-middle-class Chinese-Canadian, heterosexual cisgender man. His Christian faith is an important part of his life as is his family. He grew up speaking the Toisanese dialect of Cantonese with his parents, who emigrated from the county of Toisan in Southern China. Prior to his professorship at Toronto Metropolitan University, Gordon's child welfare work experience taught him much about anti-oppressive and anti-racism social work practice, especially how his own subjectivity, fears, desires, biases and ego often obstructed his ability to effect critical social work.

Lori Ross is a white, queer cisgender woman and a settler with ancestors of Scottish origin who immigrated to Canada in the mid-1800s. Her ancestors settled and started farming in southwestern Ontario, on Anishinaabe territory covered by Treaty 29. Her interdisciplinary training, together with her community work, has informed her current scholarship, which focuses primarily on the health and health service experiences of communities that experience social marginalization and intersecting forms of structural oppression. She continues to learn about and apply intersectional and other anti-oppressive approaches in her work.

Jaclyn Sauer is a white, queer cisgender person of Dutch and Ukrainian/Norwegian background. She is a settler living on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. Her practice is informed by feminist, anti-oppressive and queer approaches, plus experience working in anti-violence organizations. Her current hospital social work practice occurs in the context of a drug poisoning crisis; her work is influenced by harm reduction and decriminalization movements. She wants to recognize all those who have been harmed by or lost their lives due to failed drug policies.

FOREWORD

Social work is one among the array of disciplines that are in a heightened state of flux as we cope with changes wrought by global forces affecting us all, including the COVID-19 pandemic. In the two-plus years since “lockdown” in Canada, the pandemic has altered how we teach, learn and practise social work. Institutions worldwide have made the shift to online learning, while faculty, staff and students have struggled with the imposed isolation of lockdown, which has altered the very fabric of social life.

The pandemic has also served to create economic chaos and total loss for thousands of medium-to-small business owners while enriching the coffers of multinational corporations that thrive in a lockdown environment. The divide between rich and poor is huge and increasing every day. The pandemic upheaval follows on the heels of other global forces that have challenged the aims of social justice, equity and inclusion. The blatant and hostile far right swing of the American political system has given rise to an ideological chasm between left and right politics and given license to incivility which, in turn, has seen an increase in politically motivated violence. In this gloves-off, no-holds-barred battle, the casualties are primarily the racialized, the poor and the marginalized. The increasing visibility of right-wing racist and fascist groups and their propaganda, the attempted imposition of legislation designed to limit critical thinking, a shocking number of killings by police of Black and Indigenous people, and everyday attacks by regular citizens on people of colour and those who are otherwise marginalized have fomented fear as well as resistance and backlash in the form of demonstrations, retaliatory killings and violence. These, in turn, have led to increasingly repressive approaches to control unrest and another backlash calling for defunding police across North America.

In Canada, while the divisions may be more subtle under the current Liberal Party leadership, an undercurrent of anger and divisiveness abounds and is evident in academia, where, for example, the implementation of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, coming in the midst of the chaos, has triggered a pushback leading to a mass exodus of academics of colour from some institutions. These scholars are leaving in a search for safer ground, where the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are more than a cognitive exercise. Ironically, the TRC

Calls and the uptake of EDI policies do not appear to be effective in mitigating racism in the academy and may be fomenting divisiveness and racism for some who prefer the benefits of an inequitable status quo. Ironically, the push for more equitable numbers of Indigenous faculty in Canadian universities has fuelled a contentious discourse surrounding Indigenous identity and identity politics. Individuals with tenuous or non-existent genetic, familial, community and cultural links to Indigenous ancestors and communities are coveting and acquiring Indigenous-specific academic positions and are subsequently lauded as symbols of institutional commitment to Indigenization. However, such individuals cannot claim the lived experience that is requisite to truly understand Indigenous experiences of intergenerational oppression and discrimination, nor can they claim stewardship of esoteric traditional teachings and knowledge. Both are essential to the legitimacy to speak, write and educate as an Indigenous scholar.

How shall social work approach these grave concerns? It seems overwhelming. No single person has all the answers; however, individually, we focus our learned gazes upon key aspects of the world we inhabit and the topics that ignite our passions, and we come together and bring those ideas into collections such as *Doing Anti-Oppressive Practice*. In this way, we synthesize and centre collective wisdom about multiple concerns. This edition offers intersectional perspectives, discussions of resistance, valuable critical reflection and analyses of the multiple forces with which we are currently confronted. The collection provides keen insights and wisdom into the ways that social workers, social work educators and the profession can understand not only its relationship to the state, but also its responsibility to individuals and its accountability to the canons of social work ethics and standards of practice. Black, Indigenous and allied scholars offer identity and intersectional analyses, transgender perspectives and discussions on topics that include cultural humility, child welfare, single mothers, the elderly, and immigrant and racialized families. Each chapter may provide new social work wisdom, may suggest enhanced “evidence-based practice” approaches or may offer novel analyses of emerging issues. Whether the topic under discussion is new to you, the reader, or simply a reminder of best practice in theory and application on topics in which you have expertise, in challenging global times, such reminders provide the vital anchors we need to circumvent despair and nurture the motivation to remain steadfast in our ongoing pursuits of social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion.

— Raven Sinclair
January 2022

Excerpt

1

ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE

Roots, Theory, Tensions

Donna Baines and Natalie Clark

Anti-oppressive practice (AOP) is historically rooted in approaches to social problems that focus on how the larger system protects the unearned privilege and power of some groups of people while generating harmful and unfair conditions for many others. AOP draws on a number of critical theories to explain the world in which social work operates and to point towards practices and policies that foster equity, fairness and social justice. While relatively new, the origins of AOP can be located in the historical development of social work, which offers seven core insights that form the base of anti-oppressive, social justice social work practice. As with any theory and professional practice, there are some important ongoing tensions and puzzles.

As you read this chapter, ask yourself:

1. What are the roots of AOP and social justice approaches and how can we draw from this foundation today?
2. What are some of the gaps in historical and current writings on AOP and its predecessors? What are some of the points of agreement?
3. What are the connections and distinct differences between Indigenous epistemologies and AOP?
4. What differentiates more mainstream approaches and AOP?

One of the last children to be forcibly taken from her parents and placed in a residential school, a mature-aged Indigenous social work student finds that the final report of

the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gives her unexpected feelings of affirmation and legitimacy but also ambivalence. In light of the discovery of the mass graves of Indigenous children at former residential schools, she worries that her community may never find peace. She also worries that old and younger members of the community will continue to experience the collective trauma of neocolonialism. She finds a growing base of knowledge and empathy in her social work circles and wonders if this is just because of the friends she has deliberately chosen and the university program she has selected or if it could be indicative of farther-reaching change. She hopes it will eventually extend out into larger society, where things often still seem to be deeply racist and colonial. (Name withheld at the request of the student)

Initially full of enthusiasm, a student doing a placement in a child welfare agency soon becomes disillusioned. She feels that she does little more than fill out forms and complete computerized assessments. She never has time to challenge oppressive practices or even think about them. Workers in her agency are sympathetic but tell her to get used to it because “there’s no room for theory in the real world.”

An anti-oppressive social worker whose workplace doesn’t use the title “social worker” is told that she will lose her job at a family counselling centre because she hasn’t registered with the provincial social work college. Primarily providing services to very poor women, most of whom are racialized and many of whom are refugees or other survivors of abuse and torture, she wonders whose needs are being served by the professional college.

CHARITY AND BAND-AIDS VERSUS SOCIAL JUSTICE AND TRANSFORMATION

Although details have been changed to protect confidentiality, these vignettes are based on real events and people. They highlight the intersectional complexity of struggles in the world of social work practice, the need for models that advance social justice at multiple levels and the kinds of personal and shared struggles in which social workers find themselves. Social work is a unique field in many ways. It contains a number of very different approaches and philosophies regarding what constitutes care, skills, knowledge and practice, as well as how to stop or slow the social problems that generate the need for care.

Oppression

Oppression takes place when a person acts or a policy is enacted unjustly against an individual (or group) because of their affiliation with a specific group or identity.