

## Conceptualizing Notions of Poverty in Graduate Social Work Education: Contextualizing the Formation of the 'Social Worker' Subjectivity

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**Abstract :** This research takes a critical look at the development of the social worker subjectivity, particularly in Canada. Through an interrogation of required graduate course texts, this paper explicates the discursive formation, orientation, and maintenance of the social worker subject and the conceptualizations of poverty in graduate social work education. This research aims to advance understandings of power and ideology in social work graduate texts and formations of particular dominant constructions of poverty and social worker subjectivity. Guiding questions for this inquiry include: What are social workers being oriented to? What are social workers being oriented away from? How is poverty theorized, discussed and/or attached to social location in social work education? And, how are social workers implicated in contesting or reinforcing poverty? Using critical discourse analysis, 6 texts were analyzed with a particular focus on ways in which notions of poverty are discursively represented and ways in which notions of the formation of the social worker were approached. This revealed that discursively underpinning social work in anti-oppressive practice (AOP) can work to reify hierarchal structures of power that orient social workers away from structural poverty reduction strategies and towards punitive interactions with those that experience poverty and multiple forms of marginalization. This highlights that the social worker subjectivity is formed in opposition to the client, with graduate texts constructing the social worker as an expert in client's lives and experiences even more so than the client.

**Keywords :** Canada, education, social work, subjectivity

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