The Transition from Post-Secondary Education to Work:
Power, Performativity, and Entanglement in Becoming Social Service Workers

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the conditions of front-line social service workers, in not-for-profit organizations serving marginalized groups, as they navigate their transition from post-secondary education into their professional role. Social service work involves relational engagement with clients shaped by and situated in significant social conditions, yet this work is constrained by neoliberal, managerialist expectations. I critically deconstructed these neoliberal, managerialist assumptions underlying much of the scholarship on the transition from post-secondary education to work, in order to create space for social service workers' more nuanced perspectives on the purposes of education and of work. I explored the experiences of individuals who identified themselves as newly transitioned into social service work in Vancouver, British Columbia. Through a series of in-depth interviews, guided by principles of critical narrative inquiry, the participants and I co-created narratives of their transition experiences. Drawing on these participant narratives, I found that these social service workers experienced tensions between technocratic skills and relational practice; internal conflicts in being in relationship while maintaining appropriate boundaries; and tensions between self and others in terms of values and societal measures of financial 'success' and comparisons and competition with others. By examining the narratives through Foucault's conceptualizations of power and Butler's theory of performativity, I found that while the social service workers were constrained by neoliberal definitions of 'success' and performed toward the 'ideal social service worker,' they also demonstrated resistance and an ability to redefine success and social service work. Their experiences, reflected in their narratives, led me to analyze their transitions as an ongoing process of 'becoming,' within material and discursive arrangements, or 'entanglements.' Recognizing the complexity of social service work as entanglement promotes intra-active relational practice; this has meaningful implications for social service work and education. Being entangled promotes increased responsibility to one another and the need, in working relationally, to be critically aware of, and awake to, emergent possibilities to remake the world.

Keywords: post-secondary education, school-to-work transition, social service work, neoliberalism, entanglement, post-human performativity

Dedication

This work is dedicated to everyone who fights to remake the world anew.

> “Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.”
>
> -Vincent Van Gogh

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The universe works in strange ways – I had been reading about vocationalism and the relationship between school and work and found Norton Grubb's work quite by accident. Shortly after, Becky came into our doctoral class to introduce her work and I found out that she had studied under Norton Grubb in her doctoral work. Since that serendipitous connection, Becky has been an incredible mentor in every way. Becky - I truly appreciate all your help with every question I have had; from helping me shape proposals and presentations for conferences, to engaging in research projects and learning about the publishing process, to working with graduate students, to articulating the importance of precise language and the correct usage of "as such". You gave me things to think about and asked that I think about things differently – it was not easy, but it was very helpful and generative. Thank you, also, for building the amazing committee that I feel very grateful and honoured to have had the opportunity to work closely with throughout this journey.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Before becoming a post-secondary educator, I worked in social services for several years, primarily with young people (and their families) who experienced multiple vulnerabilities: histories of trauma, poverty, family breakdown, violence, addiction, mental health concerns, criminal justice involvement. Now, as an educator, I teach students who are interested in doing similar work, connecting with marginalized people and creating space for positive change. As an educator, I am interested in how students learn to become effective social service workers. From my time in social services, I am acutely aware of both the challenges of the work and of the necessity of having positive, present, and engaged social service workers. Working in social services involves putting the needs of people who have been discarded by society and live very precarious lives at the forefront. I wondered how students may transition into this role, focusing on others, given the institutions of post-secondary education and work emphasize individualism and competition. I was curious how students like my students transition from post-secondary education to working in social services. In my observation, students approach their education very instrumentally; they express pressure for timely completion, the need to graduate, the importance of achieving a credential, and the stress of making the 'right' choices with respect to courses, specializations, practicum experiences, volunteering, and work experience. Given their instrumental approach to education, I was especially interested in how those students experienced the transition from post-secondary education to social service work. How were their values, beliefs, education, experiences, and sense of self challenged by the actualities of work in a helping profession? What tensions did they bump up against in navigating educational and employment expectations and responsibilities? How did they see themselves as a "student" and a "worker" and how were those identities enacted across different contexts? My intention was to explore the transition process to improve the lives of clients involved in the social service system. Understanding transition and the experiences of new social service workers can shape social service work, and the education of social service workers, to better meet the needs of clients. I want marginalized people to be better supported in social services, but also to be more widely

respected and valued; exploring the transition of social service workers can help demonstrate how some people are discarded to precarity and how education can help create a more just and equitable world.

In this introductory chapter, I elaborate on this story of what led me to this inquiry and why I believe this attention to the specific challenges of students transitioning into social service work is important. First, I introduce the academic and professional contexts that led to my interest in student experiences of transition from post-secondary education to work, specifically in social services. I describe how my approach to this project has shifted, given my understanding of education, the phenomenon of transition, and the purpose of my research. Then I explain my approach to my work as an ethical responsibility and discuss my intention to remain in a place of unknowability, to be open to new ideas and ways of thinking that may emerge. I also discuss how I present my process of transition – as researcher, scholar, educator, and citizen – explicitly throughout the dissertation, as a parallel process to the transition experiences of the participants. Lastly, I outline the architecture of the dissertation, briefly summarizing the upcoming chapters.

My Experience and Research Interest

I came into my doctoral program as a practitioner; I worked in social services for over a decade in a variety of positions, primarily working with youth with addiction concerns who were involved in the criminal justice system. I moved through various front-line and management positions and held a senior management position where the focus of my work was corporate functioning (for example, program development and implementation, strategic planning, and agency budgeting) rather than individual client needs. I felt disconnected from the work I was interested in as the focus had, over time, shifted from addressing immediate and longer-term client needs (like finding a youth a safe place to stay for the night or connecting youth to an alcohol and drug counsellor) to the responsibilities of an audit culture: budget, funding, reporting, accountability, and risk management. The aspects of my role that I remained passionate about were training and developing new staff and program improvement. That passion led to an opportunity for sessional instruction at a local college, teaching classes such as criminology and child and youth care, for students who were interested in working with youth who are involved in the criminal justice system. I had been teaching in this capacity for several

years on a part-time basis when I began my doctoral studies. I was interested in transitioning from the social service field to teaching full-time in a college and felt that a doctoral degree could be helpful in that transition. I chose to pursue a doctorate in education rather than in my original discipline of criminology because I felt, despite all my years as a student, woefully uneducated about education. I felt it was important to learn about education theories and practices to be a strong teacher of students wanting to work in social service. I felt confident in my content knowledge but knew, from my experience as a student, that being an expert does not mean one is a good teacher. I wanted to better understand teaching, learning, and educational processes to improve my own teaching, so ultimately my students would be better equipped to work in social service. By improving my teaching, I hoped to produce more effective social service workers, who could then work on social inequities and could help improve the lives of the people they worked with.

The work of social service workers varies, depending on their role, the agency they work within, and the clientele they serve. Unlike social work, social service work is not a regulated, professionalized discipline; social service workers come from a variety of academic trajectories and life experiences. For my research purposes, social service workers are employed as front-line workers in community-based not-for-profit agencies. Their work involves building caring connections, engaging in informal counselling, providing outreach, building strengths, competencies, and life skills, and addressing the identified needs of their clients. This front-line work may involve working at a drop-in centre for homeless youth, providing warm meals, a shower, clean clothes, a listening ear, and connecting youth to other resources and services. It could also involve working with adults with significant mental health concerns in their own homes to build life skills and independence. It may mean working at a homeless shelter for adults who have multiple vulnerabilities – mental health, addiction, and physical health needs – to provide temporary safety and connection to other resources. Social service work is complex in that it involves engaging with all developmental stages and a variety of vulnerabilities; the role is varied, and social service workers need to adapt and innovate when faced with new situations and challenges. In my role as an educator, I teach students about mental health, addiction, family dynamics, counselling skills, professional ethics, trauma-informed practice, and other challenges they may face in their varied work roles. I

discuss social service work, and how I have defined social service workers, in more detail in Chapter 3.

Although I had been teaching for some time and had a solid conceptualization of the content future social service workers should learn, the initial statement of intent from my doctoral application shows how little I understood education, the post-secondary system, students, instruction, and curriculum. In my initial statement of intent, I said I wanted to examine "how curriculum and instruction could capitalize on students' idealism and foster the development of empathy, a key factor in the therapeutic change process. In essence, my research would help determine how best to teach those intending to work in community services to be effective agents of change." I was interested in how education could harness the idealism of students into empathy, so they could build strong therapeutic alliance with clients and be effective in helping clients through the change process. I thought I would review the literature on empathy and therapeutic alliance and then figure out how those evidence-based components could be incorporated into curriculum to produce more effective social service workers. I intended to do a quantitative study examining various diploma and degree programs to determine differences in occupational skills and core competencies at graduation and in entering the workforce. I planned to compare (through surveying) student self-assessment of skills and competencies with faculty and employer assessments to determine congruence or misalignment, also examining whether the program itself (i.e., college or university; certificate, diploma, or degree) was predictive of different skills outcomes. I recognized that operationalizing many of my key terms within a questionnaire would limit what I could learn; that is, defining a priori the concepts I was examining limited what I could explore and the methods I could adopt. For example, how could "unconditional positive regard" be defined and explained in a way that would be clear to students, faculty, and employers and how would each be able to assess the students' acquisition and implementation of this skill in very different contexts? Similarly, how would a Likert scale allow for clear ratings of how these skills were acquired or demonstrated? How could these scores be compared across stakeholders with varied amount of contact with the student? As these types of questions arose, I recognized that a quantitative study would not help me explore the complexity of the social service worker and their transition from school to work.

My intention to engage in a quantitative study was rooted in good intentions and an ethical desire to create workers who were better equipped to address the very complex needs of the clients they would be working with, ultimately providing better service to those in need. However, as my understanding of education grew throughout my doctoral program, so did my understanding of people and relational work. Relational practice recognizes that interactions (and interventions) occur in the spaces between us. Engaging in relational practice means focusing on co-constructing safe and respectful space; creating mutual relationships; being with others; actively participating in the lives of others; meeting people where they are at; connecting; engaging; acting with intentionality; and doing with, rather than doing to (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012). Relational practice is integral in social service work and in teaching/learning, pedagogy, and education.

As I thought through and discussed educational theory and concepts throughout my doctoral coursework, my thinking shifted substantially. Although it sounds elementary now, in our coursework we troubled the purpose of education generally, and of post-secondary, specifically. I was introduced to the idea that education is not only a bridge to occupational opportunity but holds its own use value; education is valuable in and of itself, not only as a credential that can be exchanged for social and economic mobility. We discussed academic capitalism and overcredentialling, decreased funding for public education and the marketization of post-secondary education, and critical theories of education that allowed me to see control, classification, indoctrination, and reproduction within stratified social systems. All this has informed this dissertation and is discussed further in Chapter 2 (*Dominant Discourses on School, Work, and Transition*). In doctoral courses, we also explored the idea of education as a mechanism for social change, for emancipation. We discussed theories of teaching and learning and explored the idea of knowledge transfer from school to the field. I became interested in Grubb and Lazerson's (e.g., 2005a, 2005b) ideas about vocationalization, Freire's (1993) concept of conscientization, Kincheloe's (1995) critical call for democratized work, and Apple's (2004) discussion of hidden curriculum. I read critical scholars (e.g., McLaren, 2007; Giroux, 2014, Apple, 2004; Ellsworth, 1989). I started to explore Foucault's (1979) ideas of power and the mechanisms of classification and discipline within the education system. It was through this process that I recognized that the educational context and process for students was much more complex than I had originally imagined (see

Appendix A for mindmaps of how I conceptualized the relationships between new ideas and concepts). Before entering the doctoral program, I had initially thought I would be able to say something important by comparing the skill and competency acquisition of different students from different programs. I thought I would walk away with concrete suggestions for curriculum that would produce a better practitioner. I thought I would provide instructors with guidance about how they can best instill these skills and competencies. However, I hadn't troubled the idea of skill acquisition or that learning may be demonstrated differently in different contexts. I hadn't thought that different people (e.g., students, faculty, employers) may define certain skills very differently or recognized the multitude of other factors, besides their post-secondary experience, that would influence a student's learning and growth. I hadn't even begun to look at the relationship between skills and competency and therapeutic alliance and one's ability to be an effective practitioner. In trying to maximize practitioner efficacy, I lost sight of relational practice and the perspective of the client in relationship with the practitioner. I wanted a clear, black and white answer that would have immediate practical implications. I learned early in my coursework that research (and life) isn't really like that.

My introduction to these new ways of thinking about education (both in class and through engagement with the literature) changed what I wanted to know and why I wanted to know it. I recognized that my initial assumptions were problematic. I realized I was truly interested in how students experienced their post-secondary education and how this prepared them for work in the field. Specifically, I was interested in how students interested in social service work (who will work with marginalized children, youth, families, and communities) experience the transition from post-secondary to work. For this group, working in the field may involve employment in non-governmental or not-for-profit community agencies that focus on the multitude of challenges people face, in the forms of trauma, addiction, mental health, criminal justice involvement, homelessness, and poverty. I became interested in narrative inquiry, a method that recognizes that an individual's process of meaning making is unique and dynamic; the identity of the narrator and their story is under ongoing development (Chase, 2005). As Clandinin (2013) explains, individual experience is contextualized within a complex life; narrative inquiry seeks to thoroughly explore experience within its wider context, without essentializing the narrative. That is, the narrative of individual experience is explored

within the social, cultural, political, historical, and institutional narratives in which it occurs; dialectically, macro-level narratives shape and influence individual experience as the individual constructs and affects macro-level narratives (Clandinin, 2013). I thought rather than compare different stakeholders' perceptions of the skills and competencies of students, I could hear from the students themselves about their own learning and preparation for working in social services. Knowing that the transition from post-secondary education to employment is significant in both personal and professional development, I decided to interview social service workers who were new to the field, asking them to retrospectively reflect on their educational experiences and their transition to the field. My initial theoretical framework focused on the "skills gap" often identified in the literature, that described employers who claimed their new employees weren't adequately prepared in their studies for actual work in the field (see, for example, Province of BC, 2014; Centre for Human Capital Policy, 2014; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2015). I initially hoped my research would fill this skills gap by identifying where students and employers differed in their perceptions of acquired skills and competencies, and subsequently recommending curricular changes to address these divergences. However, my understanding of this perspective became more nuanced as I became more familiar with the context for transition.

As I explored the idea of a "skills gap" between post-secondary education and the field, many questions came to mind about the purpose of education. Is education intended to train workers for specific occupational pursuits? Or is education intended to promote citizenship and democratic values? Is education valued and useful in itself or only in the exchange value of credentials that can provide access to certain employment opportunities? What are the responsibilities of the labour market in training employees? What makes for good work or a good life? My initial questioning of the purpose of education was very dichotomous but I recognized the need to explore and deconstruct the contradictory discourses on the purpose of education as these discourses produce different relationships between school and work. I also recognized that the purpose of education may shift over time or one purpose may become dominant given certain social, cultural, and historical events and that the discourses of school and work are coloured by neoliberal ideology. I explore these discourses, and how they are coloured by neoliberal ideology, in detail in the *Dominant Discourses on School, Work, and Transition* chapter (i.e., Chapter 2). Briefly stated, in neoliberal contexts, social functions

are reduced to market transactions (see Ball, 2012a). These social functions - like education and work - then become marketized and commodified, so they can be purchased and sold like all other commodities (see Ball, 2012b). Within these neoliberal institutions, students are consumers and educational institutions compete for niche markets, seeking to operate efficiently and profitably (see Bergquist & Pawluk, 2007). From this perspective, education is a meritocracy – those who require assistance and those who don't succeed have only themselves to blame (see Giroux, 2014). It is up to each individual to make appropriate choices and self-govern to be successful; students must make the right choices about courses, credentials, job experience, volunteering, and extra-curricular activities so they can instrumentally maximize the benefits of their choice and not waste time with other activities that do not help them be "successful". In global neoliberal economic systems, competition and individual responsibility are key and success is defined financially. Given this ideology, within which school and work are situated and constructed, I wondered how workers in social service navigate neoliberal discourse and material arrangements. How do new employees make sense of their helping role with marginalized groups in institutions shaped by neoliberalism? How do social service workers, whose role emphasizes empathy and social welfare, make sense of a system based on competition, individual responsibility, and meritocracy? What do these neoliberal values mean for the marginalized populations they serve? What becomes possible when we explore the transition experience of social service workers – for the workers, their clients, the environment within which they interact, and for the education of future social service workers? How could plugging into their transition experience provide new ways of thinking about relating, helping, teaching, and education? I focused these wonderings, through my engagement with the literature, to my research question: how do new social service workers experience the transition from post-secondary education to working in the field? Encompassed within this question are three sub-questions:

- What tensions do transitioning student/workers experience? What narratives do they "bump up" against in their transition?
- How do they see, know, and describe themselves as “students” and “workers” and how do they enact various identities across social, political, and institutional contexts? What shapes these identities?
- How do their personal narratives connect to socio-political relations?

This work examines the transition of social service workers from post-secondary education to employment. I believe people working in social services, as a subcategory of helping professionals, face distinct challenges in transitioning from post-secondary education to the labour market. I make a distinction between helping professions, that encompass a wide range of professions, from various disciplines, engaging in relational work, and social service workers. Helping professions include those working in health care (e.g., nursing) and social work; these are professionalized fields (i.e., standardized educational qualifications, qualifying exams, registration, etc.) and often result in employment with provincial authorities (i.e., government positions in health care or child welfare). Social service workers are those in front-line positions working in community-based, not-for-profit agencies. The academic qualifications of social service workers range from certificates to baccalaureate degrees. There is a lack of standardization in qualifications and disagreement in the field about what characteristics, traits, skills, and competencies are most important in relational work. While all helping professions share certain challenges that could relate to transitioning into their professional role, I argue that social service workers have additional stressors that could influence their trajectory.

Like all helping professionals, social service workers bring their histories and positionality to their relational work. To varying extents, those in social services work directly with marginalized and increasingly complex clients in environments that are often lacking adequate resources; because of reduced services and resources, these workers may be overworked, burdened with high caseloads. Given the clientele they work with, social services workers are at high risk to develop vicarious trauma or toxic stress (Cohen & Collens, 2013) which often leads to burnout. In addition to these relational factors, these workers are socialized in their training to work from an ethics of care, within a managerial environment. That is, while social service workers need to centre themselves, in relational work with clients, they also have to ground their work in an environment that operates under a business model. As Bates et al. (2010) state in their discussion of the experiences of social workers, “concepts of regulation and control interface with those that are nurturing and empowering” (p. 153). Those who work with clients facing life-threatening challenges (e.g., abuse, trauma, neglect, violence, substance use, mental health, physical health, and other vulnerabilities) each day, must balance their supportive, empowering approach with regulation and control designed to

reduce harm. The complex interplay of these various aspects puts helping professionals, in general, in a unique position.

Social service workers, as one group of helping professionals, face additional challenges. The lack of professionalization in front-line social service work creates two distinct concerns: the creation of an educational under-class and a transition into more precarious work. Workers in social services are a liminal group: employment in this field is not well paid or well respected; government funding for services is tenuous, meaning employment can be unstable; and workers are responsible for working with clients who have been all but disposed of by society (e.g., individuals with addiction, mental health concerns, histories of violence, developmental delays, homelessness, and other challenges). By Deil-Amen and DeLuca's (2010) categorization, students engaging in education to obtain employment in social services constitute an "educational underclass"; these are primarily non-traditional students who engage in vocationalized education in colleges and non-elite universities, to enter a field marked by tenuous employment. Many of these non-traditional students, in my experience, are first-generation students who may not have had positive educational experiences, students who may be receiving funding for retraining (e.g., as a job placement program), and/or students who may have been previously involved in the social service system as clients. As there are no standardized educational qualifications for front-line social service work (in contrast to a more professionalized field like social work), these students may be involved in certificate, diploma, or degree programs. While those students who receive a degree (e.g., Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Care, etc.) have additional opportunities for work in government positions, students transitioning into community-based non-governmental employment face more precarious employment. Butler (2009) relates precarity to determining who is recognized as a worthwhile subject; this concept can be applied both to the marginalized populations served by social service workers and the social service workers themselves. According to Butler (2009), those who live outside of the idealized norm may be marked by precarity, including increased risk of poverty, injury, disease, violence and death. That is, those living outside of what is deemed acceptable are not recognizable and subsequently not worthy subjects. Clients in the social service system who are living outside of what is deemed acceptable face poverty, injury, violence, and increased risk of death. Their lives are precarious; "precarious life characterizes such lives who do not

qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable" (Butler, 2009, p. xii and xiii). Social service workers, working with these clients, also live outside of the idealized norm – success as exhibited through demonstrations of financial wealth. They too may face tenuous employment (e.g., contracts, part-time work, lack of benefits) and living environments, transience, and a lack of recognition in the legitimacy of their work.

Social service workers exist within a complex arrangement that can regulate them to precarity; this arrangement involves their own history and experiences that they bring to their work, their academic trajectories, the nature of front-line work, the complex needs of clients, and the neoliberal institutions they exist within. It is for these reasons that I was interested in exploring the transition from post-secondary education to working in the field with marginalized people. My intention was to gain understanding that would be useful to social service workers, promote healthier working environments, lead to positive and impactful relationships with clients, inform how social service workers are educated, and more broadly, encourage positive, equitable, and respectful relations. Ultimately, I am driven by social injustice, inequity, and violence and, as such, approach my work as an ethical imperative; I have a responsibility to engage ethically, think differently, and offer new potentialities for social service work.

My Response-ability to Think Differently

My responsibility goes beyond being an ethical researcher; according to Barad (2007; 2010; 2012), responsibility is a condition of existence. She argues that we are "constituted in response-ability" (Barad, 2012, p. 215); meaning we have the ability "to respond, to be responsible, (and) to take responsibility for that which we inherit" (Barad, 2010, p. 264). I have a responsibility and a response-ability (an ability to respond ethically and responsibly) in my connection with others. For Barad, responsibility is not a choice but a condition of interdependence; being responsible is recognizing and honouring the "stranger threaded through oneself and through all being and non/being" (Barad, 2012, p. 217).

As a researcher, I have a responsibility and a response-ability to think differently. The purpose of thinking differently, in research, is to provide new potentialities to live differently – to live more justly. The goal of thinking unthought thoughts and imagining

new ways of being is to address the injustices of our current situation. How can thinking differently help us live differently? As Barad (2007) explains:

> The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting. How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter?...Mattering and its possibilities and impossibilities for justice are integral parts of the universe in becoming; an invitation to live justly is written into the very matter of being... The yearning for justice, a yearning larger than any individual or sets of individuals, is the driving force behind this work, which is therefore necessarily about our connections and responsibilities to one another – that is, entanglements. (p. x-xi)

Barad emphasizes the importance of justice and creating new potentials for justice by disrupting patterns of thinking and remaking the world anew, through connections and responsibilities to one another. This yearning for justice is what drives my work. Understanding that we are constructed and remade in our connections creates possibility and hope. It is this hope – and my ethical obligation to remake the world in each meeting - that threads throughout my inquiry. Specifically, rethinking transition can shed light on living justly in relation to marginalized populations, helping professionals, students, educators, and education more broadly.

In examining my ethical obligation as researcher, I found the work of Aaron Kuntz (2015) very helpful. In his book, *The Responsible Methodologist*, Kuntz (2015) critiques technocratic approaches to methodology that emphasize mechanically following prescriptive steps. Drawing on Foucault's notion of parrhesia (truth telling), Kuntz argues that inquiry is an inherently political undertaking that allows us to be, know, and live more productively in the world. He discusses relationality, citizenship, and risk in truth-telling. Based on a new materialist onto-epistemology, Kuntz argues "inquiry (and the inquirer) (are) relationally bound to the phenomenon of interest" (p. 17) in a fluid movement of relations. To speak and be heard as a truth-teller, one must be recognized as a citizen – a member of the community. However, speaking the truth, within the community one has membership in puts one at risk. Yet, despite the risk, the truth-teller speaks the truth to transform the relations of which they are a part (Kuntz, 2015, p. 118). I am a previous member of the social service community and I still have connections to this community, in my current role as post-secondary educator. Currently, I am part of a community dedicated to teaching students to work effectively with others. In my connection with these communities, I have a responsibility to work to transform the

communities of which I am a part. Kuntz's (2015) work explicates my methodological responsibility to engage in truth-telling that promotes social justice.

To approach my research in an ethical and responsible way, I emphasized staying in a place of unknowability. My research involves reading concepts, theory, and data through one another (see, for example, Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This is a dynamic process because how those concepts and theories take up with one another, and with me, changes throughout time. I construct and am constructed by those readings, theories, and concepts. Ideas and concepts do not exist independently, waiting to be digested and understood; I continually take up these ideas and concepts in new ways, with other ideas, understandings, and experiences. Throughout my research, I intentionally embraced this dynamism and unknowability. The way I read, and make sense of ideas, changes such that I cannot read the same material, in the same way, twice. I think through everything I know, I have experienced, I have seen, I have dreamed. St. Pierre (2011) recognizes that one is always thinking through other ideas, concepts, experiences, and histories. She explains:

> I imagine a cacophony of ideas swirling as we think about our topics with all we can muster – with words from theorists, participants, conference audiences, friends and lovers, ghosts who haunt our studies, characters in fiction and film and dreams – and with all our bodies and all the other bodies and the earth and all the things and objects in our lives – the entire assemblage that is a life thinking and, and, and...All those data are set to work in our thinking, and we think, and we work our way somewhere in our thinking. (p. 622)

Throughout this process, I have tried to think with all I can muster, recognizing that I am attempting to think through a number of different ideas, swirling around from various sources. So, while writing may present ideas as complete, distinct, and attributable to specific sources, my experience with thinking has been akin to this swirling of ideas that St. Pierre poetically articulates. This relates to unknowability. I cannot "know" the works of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze (especially Deleuze!), Barad, or Butler. I read their dynamic, evolving ideas through one another, such that mine might be an especially Derridean read of Foucault or a more Butlerian Barad. While I cannot definitively or conclusively know the ideas presented by these scholars, I do think with their writing in my work. Although I cannot "know" the works of the scholars I think with and draw from as the meaning I construct of the text shifts and morphs with other ideas, concepts, experiences, thoughts, readings – creating a "cacophony of ideas swirling"

(St. Pierre, 2011, p. 622), it my intention is to think through these ideas to open new ways of thinking. I have a responsibility and a response-ability, to use their work productively and constructively, to generate new understandings.

How do I represent this place of unknowability when writing? How can I write in a way that doesn't fix meaning in time and place? Writing is, as Hughes and Bridges-Rhoads (2013) discuss, “a space for potential action” that is productive and *allows us to think differently* (p. 104). Writing, for me, is also "an empirical application" (St. Pierre, 2016b, p. 2); an opportunity to understand things differently and to "become in language" (St. Pierre, 2016b, p. 2). Writing allows me to work through and work together ideas and concepts in application. Intra-acting with text (reading and writing) constructs who I am, as I construct the text. To demonstrate this intra-action and to make my thinking transparent, I contextualize my work with excerpts of free writing from my research journal. These excerpts highlight some of the tensions and messiness I experienced and continue to experience and work through. By drawing on these excerpts I hope to demonstrate the unresolvable tensions that I am working through and making sense of, within each chapter. These tensions will be prefaced as “messes” and “swirlings”. These writings were productive in helping me think differently and be different than I was before and to bring new and different thinking to the participant narratives and understanding social service work practice.

I borrow the idea of “mess” from John Law’s (2004) book, entitled *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research.* In his work, he critiques the dominant normativities of social science research, arguing that “we are told how we must see and what we must do when we investigate” (Law, 2004, p. 4-5). Law argues that social science, in attempting to make complex and messy phenomena clear and simple, creates a bigger mess. He discusses the need to rethink social science to better deal with mess; to recognize that events and processes are not only complex and difficult to grasp, but “necessarily exceed our capacity to know them” (Law, 2004, p. 6). Law proposes broadening method, moving away from automatic, secure, and technocratic approaches to knowledge creation, and instead, moving slowly, uncertainly, and vulnerably through the process. I attempt to demonstrate my process of moving slowly and uncertainly (i.e., staying in a place of unknowability) by sharing the messiness of my thinking and the tensions that exist in engaging with complex, messy phenomena. I share these pieces

of writing, as Law states about his own writing, not to create answers but to open questions and promote new ways of thinking.

As I think through the phenomenon of transition and my own messes, I recognize that writing has served to keep me in a place of unknowability. Unknowability is expressed in my emphasis on continually problematizing the phenomenon. As Olsson (2012) discusses, once a problem is defined, it has a "preformed and corresponding solution" (p. 92); unknowability involves continually redefining or reterritorializing the problem (through different agential cuts and boundaries), "activating problems and concepts in the midst of the event" (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 207). Continually problematizing and activating concepts, from the middle of it, helps guard against pushing towards a preformed solution. Instead of trying to find a solution, I am able to define, analyze, deconstruct, and redefine the problem with new boundaries, allowing for further analysis and deconstruction. Remaining in a place of unknowability allows me to think new thoughts and reimagine the world, in an ethical way. My intention in embracing unknowability is to remain open to the real implications of how nuanced and complex lives are lived, and the material implications of this research on the lives of students, social service workers, clients, and educators.

My Own Process of Transition

I share my messy process of transition – as a researcher, a scholar, an educator, and a citizen – as a parallel process to the experiences of transition discussed by the participants. I recognize that my transition shapes and is shaped by my interactions with the participants and the research process. That is, I am changed by my investigation of the transition of participants and recognize their experiences influence my transition, and vice versa; I am “becoming with the data” (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 265). The participants and I are inseparable in this exploration of transition and I sought to make this explicit throughout the dissertation, as it shapes how I view transition, how I analyze participants’ experiences and my own, what I see as meaningful and relevant implications of this research, and how I think those implications can be realized within social service work and education more broadly. My hope is that this work will provide recommendations for relational educational practice that will produce critical, intentional, and ethical social service workers, who can do meaningful work with clients. Ultimately, this work is about improving the real lives of those who suffer. This involves

understanding the transition process so students transitioning into social service work can be educated and prepared for the tensions they may encounter so they can better attend to the needs of clients, while maintaining their own wellness, throughout their practice.

My intent, in sharing tensions and messes and my "becoming with the data" (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 265), is to be transparent about my inquiry and how it has taken on a life of its own (see Bridges-Rhoads, Van Cleave, & Hughes, 2016). I recognize, throughout my inquiry, that I have attended to affective intensities. In examining digital literacy and the control society, Smythe (2018) enacts affective intensities as a mode of analysis. In describing this process, she explains attending to "moments when affective flows called us to attention, when we wondered, 'What is going on here?' (Smythe, 2018, p. 204). In my inquiry, affective intensities guided not only my analysis, but all aspects of my research process. For me, this involved being awake to the moments that affected and captured me, allowing them to guide my inquiry. In my experience, I was affected in my body and in my mind; this could look like excitement, quickened heart rate, tightened stomach, wondering, questions, returning to the same idea or concept again and again, and being pulled back to memories, images, or stories. MacLure (2013) discusses this as "the glow" (p. 661), where some aspect of the data draws the researcher in, speeding up and slowing down time simultaneously, immersing the researcher. She explains that the glow is "not under our conscious or intentional control as analysts"; it is "something that is befalling us" (p. 662). This emergent process means that I have been pulled in various directions and in attending to these affective intensities, I have become with the data. I am affected and this, subsequently, affects my research process. The research process and my research decisions are influenced by what calls me to attention – to what 'glows' for me – and I am made different by attending to these affective intensities throughout my research.

Where We Are and Where We Are Going

Thus far, I have explained my interest in the transition from post-secondary to working in social services, the unique challenges faced by social services workers, and my own shifts in thinking that led to engaging in the current project.

In Chapter 2, I discuss my theoretical framework for exploring the transition from school to work, which includes examining the context within which transition occurs - school, work, and the relationship between school and work - to better understand how student transition experiences are configured. Specifically, I deconstruct key assumptions in the dominant discourse on transition, highlighting research on helping professions specifically. In deconstructing each assumption, I also examine literature that speaks back against these dominant constructions, opening new ways of looking at transition.

In Chapter 3 (*Fluid Methodologies: Examining Transition)*, I explain how I initially employed critical narrative inquiry to engage with the complexity of the transition experience of social service workers, as critical narrative inquiry allows for individual experience to be examined within social, cultural, political, historical, and institutional narratives. I discuss my participants and our interview experiences. I explain how my onto-epistemological understanding began shifting during my data collection and analysis and how this shifting resulted in an intentional, fluid methodological process. I share how my initial examination of the conversations with participants led to various theoretical analyses.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I examine some of the ideas that began to "glow" (as Maggie MacLure, 2013, discusses) from the conversations I had with the participants, through one another and through theory. Using theory as a dynamic and productive force, I think with and through various theories and concepts to examine the phenomenon of transition through different theoretical lenses. As Masny (2016) states:

> The concept of theory is constantly in movement, de- and re-territorializing. Theory is also practice and so is thinking with theory and an ability to create concepts and respond to problems and questions related to the flex of experiences of life. (p. 672)

Masny highlights the importance of theory as a dynamic and fluid conceptualization which allows for concepts, problems, and questions to be viewed in different ways. Theory also has the potential to de-territorialize dominant ideas and assumptions. In keeping with Masny's idea, I use theory to think through problems, create concepts, and understand how knowing is dynamic (always de- and re-territorializing).

In the first analysis (Chapter 4), I examine how participants are constructed as social service workers within neoliberal ideology. I then examine the participants' experiences of resistance through Foucault's (1979; 1994) conceptualization of power. I examine power relations and the participants' material experiences of resisting being constructed as neoliberal subjects. This analysis highlighted that participants do not resist or accept neoliberal expectations, but are in a process of performing these expectations, never feeling like they are "enough". So, in Chapter 5, based on discussions of participants feeling like they are "not enough", I followed affective intensities to explore how the participants' identities are made and remade within the field of social service, using Butler's (1999) concept of performativity. I explore ideas of subjectification and recognition, in the role of social service worker, recognizing that social service workers are always performing towards an ideal that they will never achieve. This analysis led me to examine transition as the ongoing process of expressing a multiplicity of identities. While power and performativity clarify how power flows through transitioning social service workers as they perform toward the expectations of their role, these concepts foreground the human subject and the agency they exercise in their varied contexts. In examining the participants' narratives, I viewed their performance as "entangled in relations" (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 204). I wanted to explore the participants, and their social service work, as entangled in discursive and material arrangements.

In Chapter 6, I move from examining the transition of individual human agents to viewing practice as an ongoing performance of transition that occurs within entangled relations. I articulate a flattened, relational ontological approach that involves human and non-human agents; emphasizing materiality and drawing on post-human performativity and power as a performative agent, I examine transition as a phenomenon of dynamic entanglements. I recognize the inseparability of me, my participants, the transition experiences, the apparatus with which we explore the phenomena, and the discursive and material arrangements within which we (as an entanglement) are situated. Understanding relationships within entanglement produces new understandings of our intra-actions and more ethical understandings of our responsibility to one another. Adopting this relational ontology has implications for social service work and education as relational fields; recognizing the inseparability of social service worker and client, or educator and student, minimizes power differentials, increases connection,

honours humanity, and promotes more just relations. These implications have the potential to move beyond improved social service relationships and just classrooms to a broader recognition of connection and an increased responsibility for one another.

I explore these implications for theory, research, and practice in Chapter 7, discussing the *Risks and Response-abilities* of thinking, being, and doing differently in relation to the transition from post-secondary to working in social services. In this chapter, I explore ethical and material potentialities and risks that result from my work: How can material conditions change? What new ways of thinking become urgent? What are the risks in these new ways of thinking? What are the enabling constraints? If we are committed to doing good ethical work (as social service practitioners, educators, researchers), what risk and opportunities to respond present in thinking/doing/being differently? I finish the chapter, and my dissertation, with the rhizomatic openings that I am continuing to move and think with and what exploring these openings may offer.

Chapter 2.

Dominant Discourses on School, Work, and Transition

Swirling

I have been in school for a very long time and, until very recently, I never questioned that working hard at school would lead to getting a good job (i.e., stable and well-paying, rewarding would be a bonus) and living a good life. This messaging was consistent regardless of the source – parents, friends, teachers, principals, government, media, etc. – and I understood that I had to make the "right choices" (in terms of the right courses, achieving the right grades, and participating in the right extra-curricular activities) throughout high school and post-secondary to achieve the career I desired. Thing is, I had no idea what that was. And I'm guessing many students don't know, in high school, college, or even beyond, what they want to be when they grow up. I saw the pathway from school to work as a linear one, where, if I took the right steps over time, I would move from being a "student" to being a "fill in career here". A lawyer. A teacher. A marine biologist. A something. Someone. That career would provide the answer to the ice breaker question in meeting someone new – "so, what do you do?" – and somehow tell people who I am. It wasn't until my doctoral program that I questioned the relationship between education and work. Before that, I assumed that school was synonymous with education and that school would adequately prepare students to transition to certain jobs or careers. Even coming into my teaching role at a community college, I agreed that we (as a college, as college educators) should be responsive to labour market needs and that we train students to work in a specific occupation. But isn't education so much more than that? An opportunity to not only learn career-related content but also to question our assumptions and to grow and develop as citizens? Aren't our paths towards a career (or a number of various

jobs and careers) often circuitous? Unexpected? I want to know more about the paths of students who are not unlike my own students. And to really do that, I have to break down some of my own assumptions about school and work.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between school and work to better contextualize the concept of transition to social service work. My purpose is to examine how dominant discourses of school, work, and transition shape students as subjects and influence how they experience their educational trajectory, employment, and transition from school to work. My initial assumptions, discussed in the above swirling excerpt (taken from my research journal and written prior to my dissertation research during doctoral coursework), relate to the purpose of higher education to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve a good job and subsequently, a good life. I saw transition from school to work as a linear and distinct event that could be completed and then assessed. The assumptions I held regarding school, work, and transition – namely, that education is a pathway to a good job and subsequently, a good life and thus, that the transition between education and work needs to be successful – are also engrained as dominant discourses in the literature. I seek to question and deconstruct three key assumptions underlying the research conducted on the transition from post-secondary school to work. First, I examine the stated purpose of higher education, questioning a common assumption that education serves as a pathway to success. Then I examine the ideological environment within which these discourses become possible and are sustained; I question the idea of education as a meritocracy and explore the idea of democratized work. Lastly, within this expanded understanding of the purpose of education and the ideological environment in which transition occurs, I deconstruct the idea that the transition from school to work is a linear and distinct event that can be assessed. For each assumption, I discuss literature embedded in the dominant discourse, before examining ways to speak back against these discourses. My intention in questioning the dominant discourses on school and work is to engage in ethical work that does not reproduce inequality and provides space for multiplicities in my exploration of school, work, and the possible configurations of transition.

Deconstructing: Education as the Pathway to Success

As part of broader neoliberal discourse, higher education is portrayed as the pathway to a highly skilled and globally competitive workforce and as the pathway to individual financial success. For example, as discussed in a Statistics Canada report on the labour market outcomes of graduates in Canada:

> Knowledge and skills are increasingly important to innovation, productivity, economic growth and competitiveness. For Canada, a better educated population and a highly skilled workforce are vital to ensure successes in the face of growing global competition. Higher education can provide individuals with knowledge and skills needed to participate in a changing economy and society. As jobs become increasingly knowledge-intensive, having a postsecondary credential is the best route to a well-paying, quality job in Canada. (Ferguson & Wang, 2014, p. 4).

For these authors, higher education is necessary for Canada to build human capital and to compete on a global level, and for individual Canadians to find well-paying, quality jobs. Inherent in this discourse are assumptions about school, work, the relationship between school and work, and what a "successful" transition entails. Specifically, education serves both a private and public good. I use Labaree's (1997) typology of the purposes of education as a private or public good to help deconstruct this stated purpose of education, in relation to the individual, society, and the labour market. In his work, Labaree (1997) responds to complaints and concerns about education and the ongoing call for education reform. He states that educational issues (in the United States) are not pedagogical, organizational, social, or cultural but are politically-driven and result from disagreement over the goals education should pursue (Labaree, 1997, p. 40). His typology delineates public goals (i.e., democratic equality and social efficiency) of education from private goals (i.e., social mobility) of individuals; he also explains how various goals become prominent in the discourse at different points in time and how public and private goals may work together. This is demonstrated in the quote above as post-secondary credentials are viewed as necessary for good jobs (private goal) and a skilled and competitive workforce (public goal). This framework helps to delineate and examine the varied discourses on the sometimes contrasting and contradictory purposes of education, and to explore how these conflicting values and interests may differentially construct students and shape a student's transition to work. Arguably, for several decades, social mobility has been the most prominent educational goal for students; it is for this reason that I begin the discussion here.

Education as a Private Good

Education serves as a private good in that schooling can promote social mobility (Labaree, 1997). Within this discourse, education is viewed as an asset or commodity held by an individual that gives them “competitive advantage... for desirable social positions” (Labaree, 1997, p. 42). Labaree explains that the private benefit of education has become most influential and is the hegemonic discourse within education. This discourse is shared by students, parents, administrators, and educational policy makers who see obtaining a credential as a way for an individual to “get ahead”. Astin (1998), examining the changing values of students over a thirty-year period (1966 – 1996), found a significant shift in the identified priorities of students. He found that student goals shifted from “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” to “being very well off financially” (Astin, 1998, p. 124). This shift happened throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as students became increasingly concerned with social and economic mobility. In keeping with a social mobility perspective, most students also articulated that “the chief benefit of a college education is to increase one’s earning power” and that they were attending college “to be able to make more money” (Astin, 1998, p. 125). While the shift towards a social mobility function of education became apparent in the 1970s and 1980s, over the past half a century, it has waxed and waned as the hegemonic discourse within higher education.

According to Labaree (1997), from the social mobility perspective, the student is a consumer and education is a commodity, subject to principles of supply and demand like any other commodity. Rather than serving a use value (i.e., the curriculum and learning is useful in itself), education has exchange value; education provides a credential which can be exchanged for desirable employment that promotes status attainment. Social mobility demands inequality; educational consumers want the best – the school with the best reputation, highest rankings, and the most comprehensive extra-curricular opportunities – to set themselves apart from others. The social mobility perspective frames education as a meritocracy, where those who demonstrate the most merit will be rewarded. This promotes intense competition and personal responsibility and fails to recognize how systematic factors can disadvantage some students. Labaree (1997) also explains how a social mobility goal can serve to make schooling "anti-educational” (p. 68), encouraging students to get the greatest exchange value for the least time and energy possible (see also Cox, 2009). When credentials are valued for

their exchange value (in terms of access to employment opportunities), and education is viewed as a training ground for work, students make instrumental decisions to finish their education and transition to work as quickly as possible.

Education as a Public Good

In addition to social mobility, Labaree (1997) explains that education can function for the public good in two distinct ways: promoting democratic equality or social efficiency. When education serves to promote democratic equality, the purpose of education is to prepare students for citizenship. From this Deweyan perspective, education encourages individual and collective moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth that results in positive citizenship and promotes social progress and democracy (Dewey, 1897; Rolfe & Gardner, 2006). People should have equal access to education and equal treatment within schools and liberal education should be prioritized over specialized (i.e., occupationally-focused) education; this encourages the development of citizens with a broad spectrum of knowledge, to better enable participation in the democratic process (Labaree, 1997).

While democratic equality promotes equal educational opportunities for all, social efficiency recognizes that inequality is necessary for the public good. The social efficiency perspective states that school prepares people for work and that assuming certain economic roles is necessary for a healthy economy (Labaree, 1997). Education builds human capital and creates "workers to fill structurally necessary market roles" (Labaree, 1997, p. 42). These market roles may not be desirable jobs but are necessary for social and economic functioning, so the nation can be competitive on a global scale. That is, it is socially beneficial for education to differentially prepare students to fill various roles. Schooling socializes students to adapt to the stratified social structure and the demands of the labour market (Labaree, 1997). To promote social efficiency, school should be responsive to occupational needs. Unlike the democratic ideal of equal treatment in education, social efficiency requires a highly stratified educational system that reflects the stratification in the labour market and serves to track students into various occupational positions. According to social efficiency, education does not produce an educated citizenry that are better equipped to participate in the democratic process, instead, it serves to reproduce existing social stratification and inequalities.

Labaree's typology provides a framework to examine the varied purposes of education within the current public discourse about post-secondary education as both a public and private good. Education, specifically post-secondary education, is often promoted as delivering individual and collective values and benefits. This is clearly noted in the quote from Ferguson and Wang (2014) discussed above, where they argue that "a better educated population and a highly skilled workforce are vital to ensure successes in the face of growing global competition" (i.e., social efficiency) and that "having a postsecondary credential is the best route to a well-paying, quality job in Canada" (i.e., social mobility) (Ferguson & Wang, 2014, p. 4). Within this discourse, the importance of democratic equality – educated citizens participating in the democratic process – is lost. Social efficiency and social mobility goals in education work in conjunction, as both rely upon inequality and the reproduction of social stratification. Critical scholars examine the role of education in reproducing inequality and social stratification, highlighting how inequality maintains the ruling class (e.g., Apple, 1999; McLaren, 2007). In the following section, I consider the scholarship of these critical scholars who speak back to the promise that education offers a pathway to success; these scholars argue that rather than offering the opportunity for social and economic mobility, education serves to stratify people into various classes (i.e., social efficiency perspective) under the guise of individual ability and merit. They also discuss the nature of work in a hypercapitalist society, and the ways in which labour market trends actually impede education as a pathway to social and economic mobility.

Speaking Back to Education as a Pathway to Success

Critical scholars[1] argue against the idea that education serves as a pathway to success, troubling fundamental concepts in education like competition and meritocracy. In this section, I examine the critical perspective of education as a tool that disciplines students into docile workers, to meet the needs of capital. In keeping with social efficiency goals of education, students are stratified in keeping with their existing social position, reproducing inequality. Critical scholars argue that the discourse of social mobility, with its emphasis on personal responsibility, competition, and meritocracy,

[1] Although a diverse group of academics, critical scholars are grouped to demonstrate an alternate perspective on the purpose of schooling focused on relations of power and the effects of discourse. I recognize this generalization and argue it is necessary within the confines of this dissertation.

effectively hides the reproduction of inequality perpetuated by education for social efficiency purposes (e.g., Giroux, 2014).

Proponents of critical pedagogy critique popular discourse that school is a fundamentally democratic institution that is politically neutral and serves to educate the masses by transmitting essential, factual information. They problematize key concepts of schooling, including knowledge, curriculum, testing, and classification (McLaren, 2007; Kincheloe, 2004). They further explore the disciplinary nature of schooling (Foucault, 1979) and are committed to developing education to fulfill an emancipatory function (Freire, 1993; McLaren, 2007; Apple, 2004). Critical scholars examine multiple forms of knowledge, question why some knowledge forms are valued over others, and expose the process of knowledge creation as a political process, which reveals power dynamics in terms of what information is selected and what information is silenced (Kincheloe, 2004; Buras & Apple, 2006). Critical scholars argue that education serves to meet the needs of capital (i.e., social efficiency), by training students efficiently and effectively towards a specific occupation, without problematizing what knowledge is, what learning is necessary, or how the educational process is politicized (Apple, 1999; McLaren, 2007); within a neoliberal state, education takes on the role of indoctrinating people to take up as "appropriate and appropriated subjects" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 248). School is highly regulated, classified, and disciplined (Foucault, 1979) and "learning" prioritizes classroom and behaviour management rather than unpacking and critically examining information (McLaren, 2007). Learning becomes a process whereby teachers provide standardized information, which is accepted as Truth and reinforces the dominant culture, and quality is measured through standardized assessment (McLaren, 2007).

Working from a critical perspective, Dougherty (2001) discusses conflicting views on the social benefit of education by examining the role of the community college in the United States. He explains that while some argue (like the democratic equality perspective outlined by Labaree) that college was designed to serve the community, providing opportunity through training for mid-level jobs, promising social mobility, and providing a democratizing function through low-cost, open-door access, others see college as reproducing class inequities in a capitalist society (Dougherty, 2001). From this perspective, workers are trained at public expense for private profit and are diverted away from four-year institutions, ensuring that working class children maintain their

oppressed social position (Brint & Karabel, 1991). Colleges then help preserve the selectivity of four-year institutions, promote the "cooling out" of students (Clark, 1980), and protect the exchange value of credentials in training employees for the workforce (Dougherty, 2001). Rather than promote democratic equality, education serves to protect the privileged in a stratified and unequal society, by tracking students into less desirable educational opportunities (e.g., college, vocational and training programs, etc.) which will align to socially necessary employment (i.e., social efficiency).

In the hegemonic discourse in higher education, students are promised that achieving a credential will provide the opportunity for 'good' employment that promotes social and economic mobility. The problem with this is that education is promoted as a ladder of opportunity, where students can empower themselves and rise above their current social strata, promoting the opportunity for advancement; critical theorists argue that this is a lie that is perpetuated to keep people in their existing social positions. The myth of social mobility benefits the ruling class, through the discipline and indoctrination of workers that will fill the needs of the labour market, in line with social efficiency perspectives. There is also an assumption, in the social mobility discourse, that desirable employment is available to those who work hard and achieve an appropriate credential. The false portrayal of school as a meritocracy serves to reproduce inequalities by placing individual blame without problematizing structural constraints that limit student options, including labour market realities (Giroux, 2014; Ireland, 2015; Valadez, 2000). In the following section, I examine the concept of 'good' employment and whether the labour market can support the promise of social mobility.

Although higher education is portrayed (by the Government of Canada, for example) as promoting social mobility, the labour market does not support highly skilled occupations. As stated by Deil-Amen and DeLuca (2010):

> Highly skilled technical labor does not dominate the labor market, and the stable pattern of less than a third of jobs requiring a postsecondary credential is predicted to continue into the foreseeable future. Further, nearly half of the fastest growing occupations require less than a bachelor's (BA) degree. (p. 27).

There is widening disparity in labour market opportunities, as growth is occurring in bottom-tier and top-tier jobs but not in the middle (Ireland, 2015). The implications of this U-shaped growth pattern are growth in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs and the number

of working poor; racialized employment opportunities with Black, Latino and immigrant workers concentrated in the bottom-tiers; greater disparity between rich and poor and a diminishing middle class; and less opportunity for workers to progress into better positions (Ireland, 2015). Community colleges have focused on educating students for mid-level positions; these positions are disappearing, but college enrollment continues to grow. Rhetoric pushing students into higher education for employment results in overcredentialling and academic inflation (Grubb, 1985). There is a surplus of educated student/workers available for a finite number of positions commensurate with their skills. This often leads to students accepting positions for which they are overqualified (in terms of educational background) and being under-employed. This may explain employer concerns that students entering the workforce often have unrealistic expectations about the opportunities available to them and that this discrepancy between employment expectations and reality results in disillusionment for new workers (Centre for Human Capital Policy, 2014). Students may feel the employment opportunities available to them do not match with what was promised as the reward of hard work and obtaining a post-secondary credential. Within a social efficiency perspective, there is no examination of the labour market nor questioning the nature of work. The demand side of educational supply (i.e., work) is viewed as fundamentally sound and the responsibility lies with educational institutions to be responsive to labour market needs.

Although there is no literature on social service workers (as a unique subset of helping professionals) specifically, available research on the transition trajectory of social workers is relevant. The focus on educational responsiveness in preparing students for work is well documented in existing literature on newly qualified social workers, assessing their preparedness for practice. That is, researchers examine the extent to which the educational trajectory of new social workers adequately prepares them for their profession. This research involves having the social workers assess their own preparedness (e.g., Grant, Sheridan & Webb, 2017; Bates et al., 2010) and compares the ability of new social workers with other helping professions, like teaching and nursing (Moriarty, Manthorpe, Stevens & Hussein, 2011). The literature identifies specific need areas for further development for transitioning social workers; for example, the need to be more prepared for high-needs clients and specific technocratic tasks (Grant, Sheridan & Webb, 2017). While helpful in identifying ongoing training and development needs,

this research does not critically question that the purpose of education is to adequately prepare students to transition into workers. It also does not examine that transitioning workers may have different experiences of transition and varied training and development needs based on individual factors like social class, ethnicity, gender, and previous experience. Nor does this research critically examine or question the current structure and organization of the labour market, in relation to these transitioning students. The research on helping professionals and preparedness for practice does not adequately explore the role of education in reproducing social inequality and promoting neoliberal ideals, like competition and individualism, or explore how those discursive arrangements shape a student/worker in transition.

Research on preparedness for practice assumes that students and their educational institutions are responsible for training students for work, without examining the nature of work. As seen, in keeping with social efficiency goals, low- and no-skill work is required for social functioning in the current capitalist economy. Those who haven't been successful in navigating their educational trajectory and/or those who face significant barriers may be slotted into more undesirable positions. Offering a unique perspective, Joe Kincheloe (1995) troubles the concept of "work" in a hyper-capitalist society. Kincheloe (1995) conducts a Marxian analysis to argue that school and work are inseparable and that the current system of school-work increases disconnection (i.e., worker isolation, poor morale, increased bureaucracy, oppression, profit-maximization). Drawing also on Dewey, he examines modern efficiency and management strategies and their negative impact on democratic work arrangements. He discusses the social disintegration that has occurred as we have transitioned into a postmodern hyperreality. This postmodern hyperreality is marked by increases in unemployment and decreases in wages, such that workers lack the ability to consume, which is the only remaining legitimizing aspect of labour (Kincheloe, 1995). Kincheloe further argues that democratic work moves beyond consumerism and consumption to meaning, belonging, ownership, and interconnectedness. His call is to democratize work to provide meaning and purpose, recognizing all skill-levels of work as necessary and important and promoting respect for all workers. His vision of democratized work fulfills social efficiency needs while reconceptualizing what work means, as he imagines a system of meaningful work that is not founded on social hierarchy, inequality, competition, and the myth of meritocracy.

The promise of education resulting in social mobility (through increased employment opportunities) is not realized by the labour market, where available positions increasingly require less than a bachelor's degree. While the prevailing message is that a post-secondary credential will provide social and economic mobility, employment and labour market realities do not support that message. One argument (Kincheloe, 1995) is for the development of more democratized work, where all occupational positions promote meaning, connection, and purpose. When students are not able to find employment commensurate with their education, it is seen as a personal failure, rather than a structural issue with education or work. This will be further explored in the next section, where I discuss the ideological environment within which a social mobility discourse is sustained and promoted, despite evidence that the relationship between education and individual success is not as clear as it appears.

Deconstructing: Neoliberal Ideology Sustains Social Mobility Discourse

In this section, I examine the role of neoliberal ideology in maintaining the myth that education, specifically higher education, promotes social mobility. Neoliberal ideals, like meritocracy and competition, are congruent with social mobility and social efficiency discourses (discussed above). Here, I discuss how neoliberal ideology influences dominant discourses of school and work and examine how students are constructed by this ideology.

Neoliberal ideology has been written about at great length yet it is a complex term to define. As Ball (2012a) notes in his attempt to define neoliberalism, it is a term "that is used so widely and so loosely that it is in danger of becoming meaningless" (p. 3). Saunders and Ramirez (2017) argue against one definition of neoliberalism, noting:

> (B)ecause neoliberalism attempts to reshape and redefine most aspects of our society, scholars focusing on different social, cultural, and economic practices; institutions; and discursive representations will emphasize particular aspects of neoliberalism. These different foci help enable the political aims of critical scholarship, and to forcibly reduce 'neoliberalism' to a singular definition risks undermining the potential for our work to contribute to meaningful democratic and emancipatory change. (p. 189).

Heeding the warning of Saunders and Ramirez (2017), I do not try to reduce neoliberalism(s) to one singular definition; I do seek to provide an explanation of what neoliberalism is and what it does, in relation to the institutions of school and work and the social, cultural, and economic practices of student/workers who navigate through these institutions. While neoliberal ideology is challenging to define, there are clear examples of neoliberalism at work all around. One can point to examples like: tax breaks to corporations; environmental deregulation; funding cuts to social programming; privatizing public services like health and education; moving jobs to developing countries; and employing "flexible" workers lacking job security or benefits (see Giroux, 2014; Smythe, 2015; McLaren, 2007) and exclaim that these are expressions of neoliberal ideology. It is more challenging to clearly describe the global framework that gives rise to these examples. As an ideology, neoliberalism influences and infiltrates social, economic, political, and institutional systems as well as individuals; in reciprocal relationship, individuals participate in a neoliberal system, serving to reproduce and perpetuate the global framework. Existing literature can be discussed by exploring neoliberal ideology as a global framework of practices and by examining the influence of neoliberal ideology on the individual. To better articulate this distinction, I borrow from Ball's (2012a) discussion of policy networks where he states that the term neoliberalism is "about both money and minds" (p. 3). Although these elements are intertwined and interdependent, the delineation provides a useful starting place to examine the meaning of neoliberal ideology.

Neoliberal ideology is "about money" in that all social relations are reduced to market-based terms through processes of marketization and commodification (Ball, 2012a, p. 3). Neoliberal ideology promotes laissez-faire economics and the primacy of the free market; the market is deregulated and operates with minimal government interference (Saunders, 2014; McLaren, 2007). Within a neoliberal framework, social structures traditionally regulated by the state are left to market forces to regulate. Laissez-faire economics is built on the assumption that the market self-regulates and operates fairly, rewarding people according to their effort (Peters, 2013). The marketization of social structures, such as education, is accompanied by a focus on profit and capital accumulation (Ball, 2012a; Levin, 2005). This process of marketization and commodification is justified as a necessary and inevitable outcome of a global, capitalist society. One result of neoliberal austerity measures is that government funding

for social programming, generally, and education, specifically, is being dramatically reduced. The influence of neoliberal ideology on education, including decreased funding, will be examined in the following section.

Neoliberal ideology is also "about minds" in that it produces self-governing individuals who accept the inevitability of the neoliberal system and actively contribute, consciously or unconsciously, to its reproduction (Ball, 2012a, p. 3). As stated by Davies and Bansel (2007):

> The emergence of neoliberal states has been characterized by the transformation of the administrative state, one previously responsible for human well-being, as well as for the economy, into a state that gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledges through which people are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives. (p. 248)

As "economic entrepreneurs", citizens see themselves as free, independent, and responsible for their own success (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 248). Citizens are accorded "freedom" through their choice to consume and democracy is reduced to practices of consumption (Apple, 1999). Neoliberalism results in the "capitalization of existence"; individuals are free to purchase, to consume, and to buy into a "lifestyle" discourse (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 252). Citizens perceive themselves to have agency and to be responsible for their own success or failure; they believe they are participating in a meritocracy, where hard work is rewarded with economic success. Lack of success is seen as an individual failing rather than being influenced by structural constraints that can severely limit individual options. Social problems, like poverty, racism, sexism, and other intersecting forms of oppression, are not examined or problematized because "social problems are reduced to individual flaws" (Giroux, 2014, p. 2). In what Giroux (2014) terms *economic Darwinism*, neoliberal ideology promotes the idea that only the strong survive and that the market will weed out the weak. In an example of governmentality, workers internalize the importance of productivity and are responsible for their performance and the performance of others (Ball, 2012b). Workers are produced, rather than oppressed (Ball, 2012b). When individuals accept neoliberal ideology as inevitable, believe in an illusory type of freedom, and emphasize individual responsibility over social constraints, neoliberal ideology is internalized; this internalization reinforces and reproduces neoliberalism on a macro level.

Neoliberalism is about money and minds; it is, at once, all around and within us (Ball, 2012a; 2012b). The power and influence of neoliberalism derives from a set of practices that is above us, influencing social, economic, and political structures and how they interact with one another. As a hegemonic system, neoliberalism relies on social and cultural mediation (e.g., education, work, etc.) to encourage the internalization of its ideals on an individual level. This internalization affects how students see themselves and how they determine their life trajectories; this will be discussed further in more detail. Individual citizens may see neoliberal practices as the inevitable result of a global, capitalist system and struggle to compete within this system for their own survival. This process of self-governing contributes to the oppressive nature of the neoliberal system and the production of neoliberal subjects.

As stated above, neoliberal ideology requires social and cultural mediation, through institutions like education and the labour market. Neoliberal ideology strongly influences current discourses around the purpose of higher education, how institutions of higher education operate, and how students and faculty within the academy are produced and reformed as subjects. Key elements of neoliberal ideology promote and perpetuate the myth of social mobility (to support social efficiency goals) of education outlined by Labaree (1997), including the interrelated aspects of competition, meritocracy, marketization, and a managerial culture. I explain each, in relation to how educational institutions and students are constructed and how this is experienced by students studying to work in social services.

Competition and the Myth of Meritocracy

Neoliberal ideology reduces social relations to market-based terms. Since the late 20th century, public funding for education has decreased substantially (Levin, 2005) resulting in educational institutions competing for students and other sources of funding (e.g., research, endowments, etc.). In addition to tuition increases, institutions attempt to make up for lost government funding through internationalization, tuition fee differentials, creating and marketing programs and delivery methods popular with student consumers, and privatizing previously funded programs (e.g., English as a second language) (Levin, 2005). Public higher education becomes privatized through increased entrepreneurial activities (e.g., corporate sponsorships and endowments, the commercialization of research, etc.); private funding sources to public institutions impact neutral and objective

research and influence who the institution is indebted to (Kirby, 2007; Rose, 2014). As Rose (2014) argues, corporate sponsorships and educational endowments are tax deductible, so individuals and corporations build a positive public image by giving to education, while avoiding paying tax that could be used to improve other public services that could significantly impact disadvantaged groups. From this perspective, sponsorships and endowments can restrict academic freedom within an institution and can negatively impact other publicly funded social systems.

As institutions must compete in the market, so too must the neoliberal student. Consistent with neoliberal ideology, education is an individual opportunity that creates individual rewards; thus, the responsibility to fund higher education shifts to the student. Education becomes financially inaccessible to many students, especially disadvantaged students, or results in crippling student debt loads (see Giroux, 2014). When education is viewed as a meritocracy, students must compete to differentiate themselves and to get ahead of others; students are increasingly commodified into disciplined workers. Within the myth of meritocracy, more competitive and capable students will obtain more desirable employment while other students will be tracked into various types of employment. The fact that students have unequal access to the social capital required to be competitive and capable is not examined within neoliberal discourse. An inability to compete is seen as a personal character deficit (e.g., lazy, irresponsible) and rather than see the role education and employment serve in reproducing social inequality, blame is placed on the individual (Giroux, 2014). Competition and meritocracy continue to be key expectations of neoliberal ideology, once students enter the labour market.

Marketization

Consistent with neoliberal ideology, education is increasingly marketized, creating a commodity that requires minimal state intervention and can be left to the market to regulate. Marketization occurs when social and human interests in education are displaced by market principles, like competition and profit, and students become consumers (Kirby, 2007; Levin, 2005) and commodities (Levin, 2005; Urciuoli, 2008; Saunders & Ramirez, 2017). When education is commodified, students become consumers, or purchasers of the educational product; programs and delivery methods are marketed towards their preferences, rather than learning needs (Ball, 2012b). With this change in role, the emphasis can shift from “teaching a student” to “satisfying a

customer". Urciuoli (2008) articulately explains that students are also being increasingly commodified through the educational process and encouraged to become a bundle of employable skills. That is, students are encouraged to see themselves as products to be sold to prospective employers. Commodification promotes skills as discrete units of knowledge that one obtains through education and holds in relation to productive job performance (Urciuoli, 2008). Urciuoli (2008) conducted a discourse analysis of internet sites marketing skill-related services and found that the concept of "skill" has shifted from skilled labour (i.e., apprenticeship, craft mastery) to the internalization of ideals of being a disciplined worker; these ideas correspond to cultural values in the United States, including being self-directed, self-improving, and striving for social mobility. Urciuoli (2008) concludes: "new workers are seen, and are encouraged to see themselves, as bundles of skills anticipating company needs, readily adaptable and subject to assessment", such that identity is reduced to ability to labour (p. 219). From this perspective, education involves the commodification of students – students internalize the ideals of a 'disciplined worker' and sell themselves as a bundle of employable skills. As the characteristics of being a disciplined worker (e.g., striving for social mobility) may not be consistent with social service workers, I am interested in how the pressure towards commodification influences social service students, specifically during their transition from school to work. I am interested in their perspective on employable skills as discrete units of knowledge and how this may fit with their relational practice.

Managerial Culture

Within a neoliberal environment, a managerial culture (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2007) pervades universities and colleges. The managerial culture involves efficiency, standardization, and performativity (Arvast, 2006; Kirby, 2007). Given the focus on the financial bottom line, efficiency is vitally important; institutions must minimize cost and maximize output (in standardized measures) to remain competitive. Standardization involves ensuring similar products and consistency in markets to allow for standardized outcome measures, comparison, and the maintenance of integrity (Arvast, 2006). In keeping with market principles, provinces are emphasizing quantification, testing, and measurable outcomes; this creates a focus on measures of quality (Levin, 2001; Kirby, 2007) and performativity (Arvast, 2006), where outputs and outcomes are benchmarked, measured, and improved upon (Ball, 2012b). Standardization and performativity can

reshape the work of faculty members as they "re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those which are likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance outcomes and...(deflect) attention away from aspects of social, emotional or moral development that have no immediate measurable performative value" (Ball, 2012b, p. 20). The quality measures examined may be economically-motivated efficiency measures rather than an actual examination of educational quality. Although education may serve a use value – such that the content and curriculum is useful in itself - within the managerial culture, institutions emphasize a marketable product (i.e., credential) that students see as valuable for its exchange value.

Levin's (2001) research on community colleges in the United States and Canada highlights the neoliberal shifts in education. Levin (2001) examined the contradictory goals of the community college in a neoliberal environment. While the community college provides increased access to post-secondary education (through less stringent admission requirements and lowered tuition costs), promoting democratic equality, it also operates to track students into specific employment opportunities in keeping with social efficiency. Levin (2001) analyzed federal and state/provincial policy in the United States (i.e., Hawaii, California, Washington) and Canada (i.e., British Columbia and Alberta) to examine how globalization and neoliberal government policies impacted community colleges. He found that policy has shifted community college mission towards economic goals; he sees the focus shifting from democratic equality goals of access, personal and social development, and general education, to social efficiency goals of workplace training, producing a globally competitive workforce, and providing specific skill acquisition. Within federal and state/provincial policies, governments emphasize the community college as a "globally competitive business", with reduced public sector funding, and subject to the elements of globalization (i.e., internationalization, multiculturalism, commodification, homogenization, marketization, re-structuring, labour alterations, productivity and efficiency, electronic communication and information) (Levin, 2001). Levin (2001) found that Canadian institutions were more closely aligned with government ideology, noting that these institutions operated as an extension of the state. In sum, "serving the community – a foundational principle of community colleges in both countries – can be viewed as a euphemism for supporting the interests of a neo-liberal state with its devotion to private sector business and industry" (Levin, 2001, p. 258).

Neoliberal ideology shapes the world in which we all live. Neoliberal ideology supports social efficiency goals of education, while perpetuating inequality within a social mobility discourse. In the next section, I explore how this neoliberal environment influences how students of social work and other non-market oriented disciplines are formed and shaped as subjects and how they experience their educational trajectory, employment, and transition from school to work.

Speaking Back to Neoliberal Ideology and Social Mobility Discourse

Students are influenced and impacted by the dominant discourses of school and work; neoliberal ideology shapes educational institutions, teaching/learning, and how students are constructed. In this section, I explore how teaching/learning and students are differentially influenced by neoliberal ideology and social mobility discourse. Drawing on social work research, I first explore how non-market-oriented disciplines are negatively impacted by neoliberal ideology. Then, I examine literature on how neoliberal ideology (supporting the myth of social mobility) influences students; the relevant literature that is available in this area examines how students internalize or resist neoliberal ideology in creating their own identities and life trajectories. Broadly speaking, it appears that students who do not subscribe to the social mobility discourse (and the disciplines within which they are constituted) demonstrate resistance to neoliberal ideology and its expectations.

Some research has been done on how neoliberal ideals within post-secondary institutions have negatively impacted the learning experience of students studying to be social workers. In their historical analysis of social work education in Hong Kong, Yuen and Ho (2007) explore the impacts of neoliberalism (i.e., marketization, managerialism, and standardization) on social work education. They provide a historical analysis of the changing socio-political context of social work education and the educational system, following the 1997 transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong. Given financial pressures during this time, public spending on education was dramatically reduced, resulting in commodification (i.e., students as consumers) and performativity (i.e., documented outcomes/evidence of performance) measures to demonstrate quality educational outputs. Cost-reduction strategies, like the use of low-cost sessional instructors and adjunct staff, threatened the educational emphasis on social work values and the ethical dimensions of practice. Drawing on their own experiences, they discuss how neoliberal

ideals have negatively affected the quality of social work education and the morale of social workers but attempt to reframe these changes as potential opportunities to rethink social work education. They argue that neoliberal ideology produces efficient, technocratic workers, threatening the social justice foundations of social work education:

> In order to meet the perceived needs of the new consumers…social work programs may have to compromise their original goals and ideals. Instead of providing leadership to nurture the future generation of social workers in accordance with espoused programme goals, programmes have been developed to meet market needs. This may distract social work education from its original mission and degrade it to the category of technical training without any sense of vocation. Social workers trained through these programmes will, in turn, become technocrats who may be highly skilled in practice, but who may not necessarily possess the deep sense of commitment to social change and social justice which is what social work education is for. (Yuen & Ho, 2007, p. 554-555)

Yuen and Ho's (2007) warning about commodification and a shift in teaching and learning practices could be very relevant to other programs and disciplines that emphasize social justice ideals and relational practice. Similar challenges are discussed in Preston and Aslett's (2014) work, examining social work education in a Canadian context, in an introductory social work course open to both social work and non-social work students. Preston and Aslett (2014) discuss how "non-market oriented departments", like social work, are challenged by neoliberal ideology pervading post-secondary educational institutions (p. 502). Social work requires "deep engagement with critical perspectives, such as anti-oppressive practice" (Preston & Aslett, 2014, p. 504). The authors, in reflecting upon their own experience teaching foundational social work courses, found that elements of neoliberal education – specifically, larger class sizes, the use of precarious labour, and depoliticizing the classroom – were inconsistent with implementing an anti-oppressive, social justice curriculum. The authors argue that students in social justice-oriented disciplines require an intimate environment that promotes critical examination and allows for problem-posing pedagogy in a politicized arena (Preston & Aslett, 2014). These elements are integral to examining oppression, power, and inequity as part of students' learning and development. While these are important elements to problematize within any discipline, they are a sine qua non of social work and social service work. I argue that disciplines less likely to subscribe to a social mobility discourse are more affected by neoliberal ideology and increased marketization and managerialism.

This research demonstrates that changes in teaching/learning, catalyzed by neoliberal expectations, influences the construction of specific students (i.e., social work students) and the roles they assume as workers. Neoliberal ideology is powerful in influencing and infiltrating students in educational settings and research shows that students generally are shaped by neoliberal ideology. The research in this area has examined students in elementary school and their conceptualizations of future work (Cairns, 2013), job placement programs and the transition to employment (Hull, 1993; Hull & Zacher, 2007; Valadez, 2000), and graduate school programs involving unpaid practicum experience (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose, 2013). These researchers find that students internalize neoliberal ideals of individualism and competition at a young age and self-govern due to an ongoing fear of failure (Cairns, 2013). However, students can find that their own life experiences "bump up" against dominant messages of personal responsibility; students facing significant structural barriers recognize that neoliberal conceptualizations of education as a meritocracy are simplistic (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose, 2013; Valadez, 2000; Hull, 1993). Some students find that the neoliberal message that hard work will be rewarded with (economic) success (i.e., social mobility), and that a lack of success is a personal failure, does not fit with their experience. Students may also resist the "professional identity" promoted by neoliberal ideology (i.e., student as a commodity) (Valadez, 2000; Hull, 1993; Hull & Zacher, 2007). Students tend to resist internalizing the messages of neoliberal ideology when they recognize the disjuncture between the reward of hard work by gainful employment and their actual experiences (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose, 2013; Hull, 1993; Hull & Zacher, 2007; Valadez, 2000). That is, students are sold a lifestyle discourse where hard work and higher education lead to employment, economic and social mobility, and a "good life" (Cairns, 2013). When students recognize that the labour market does not support this simple trajectory, students may demonstrate resistance to neoliberal ideology; I explore some of this research in more detail below.

Critical qualitative research on the transition from short-term job placement programs speak to how students internalize or resist neoliberal ideology. For example, both Hull (1993) and Valadez (2000), examine the experiences of students transitioning from job placement programs. Each of these ethnographic studies involves extensive and thorough data collection over a considerable time frame, including interviews with students, teachers, prospective employers; examination of relevant documents, such as

course materials, handouts, assignments; classroom observation with field notes; as well as involvement with the students in lectures and other educational roles (e.g., tutoring). In each study, the authors found that the neoliberal ideology promoted by the job placement program was inconsistent with the realities of the students. The programs emphasized socializing students into a more "professionalized identity" (i.e., one that is racialized, classed, and gendered), rather than providing new knowledge, skills, or understanding. Consistent with neoliberal ideology, the programs emphasized the need to work hard, project a positive and professional image, and obtain menial employment as a "first step" towards social and economic mobility. The programs' ideology failed to account for labour market reality, structural constraints, and other obstacles faced by the students transitioning into the workforce.

Similarly, Hull and Zacher, (2007) in their ethnography of adult students in a job training program examined the identities students enacted, to determine if their identities changed throughout the program, and whether the students' identities converged or were in resistance to the professional identities promoted by the program. For 18 months, the authors acted as participant-observers in a new job training program in Northern California which was explicitly intended to serve low-income communities and provide opportunities for IT employment for "disadvantaged" adults. The authors examine points of resistance where students recognize they are being disciplined to incorporate privileged, hegemonic ways of being into their identity, as they increasingly recognize that the job training program fails to provide the high-paying employment opportunities promised. Whether students accepted the mediational means offered by the job training program or explicitly rejected them, they were able to articulate their reorientations of self; these new understandings lead to other enactments of self and other identity shifts, which may or may not be related to professional identities or employment. This research demonstrates that students' sense of self is influenced by how they navigate through school to work and that this sense of self extends beyond those specific contexts. The research on how students experience dominant discourses of school and work demonstrates that, although the influence of neoliberal ideology is all-encompassing and begins shaping students early in elementary school, students in transition may critically question the validity of the claim that hard work will lead to a good life. Some students recognize that neoliberal ideals of competition and meritocracy

fail to account for societal barriers that limit their options. I am interested in how social service students, specifically, navigate their transition within this neoliberal environment.

Academic disciplines that emphasize social justice and anti-oppressive approaches are significantly impacted by neoliberal ideology; students may be constructed as efficient and technocratic workers, without learning the social justice foundations of social service work. While neoliberal ideology sustains social mobility discourse, students who do not subscribe to social mobility discourse demonstrate resistance to internalizing neoliberal values and expectations. Students are differentially constructed by social mobility discourse and neoliberal ideology; some students may resist, or speak back to, social mobility discourse, recognizing that factors beyond their individual merit (e.g., labour market realities) limit their opportunities.

I have deconstructed the dominant discourses on school as a pathway to success and the neoliberal ideology supporting the myth of social mobility, to better understand how transition itself may require retheorizing. Transition from school to work is often examined as an event that, once completed, can be assessed following a specific educational trajectory; research primarily examines how to make the transition event successful (i.e., the student obtains work commensurate to their education). However, as seen, transition is more nuanced than obtaining a credential and finding appropriate employment. In the following section, I question whether transition can be viewed as a linear and distinct event that can be assessed. I then explore how looking at transition differently may allow for new understandings of the transition experience, specifically for social service workers.

Deconstructing: Transition as a Linear and Distinct Event

While the literature on the transition from school to work examines a broad range of transition points, a core assumption within much of the existing research is that transition is a linear and distinct event. The dominant configuration of school to work transitions in the literature assumes that students progress to a transition point and then complete a transition which can be assessed as successful or unsuccessful, based on specific outcome measures (e.g., employment, income level). Literature examining the transition from school to work includes research on transitions to the labour market from various education exit points, including entering the labour market from secondary

school, vocational programs, post-secondary, and other educational programs. The framing of transition from school to work research is international, including national, international, and comparative analyses, and can be examined by discipline and the population(s) under examination. Different disciplines, including business, human development, psychology, and education, focus on various outcomes of transition, for different groups of people. For example, there are areas of research that focus on the transition of people with disabilities, youth in government care, second generation immigrant students, and other groups of people. Within their examination of these groups, researchers undertake a variety of approaches, including critical, race, and/or gender analyses. However, despite the diversity in approaches to the phenomenon, transition is contextualized as an event that happens and, once completed, is assessed by researchers to determine if the individual involved was successful. A great deal of the literature focuses on the barriers to successful transition for various populations of students and deriving evidence of effective interventions for improving transition. This is driven by the view that "unsuccessful" transition will have negative consequences for the individual student and society, more broadly. Individually, unsuccessful transition is associated with unemployment, under-employment, or precarious work. A segment of research exists examining young people who are not employed, in education or training (NEET) to determine ways to protect students from unsuccessful transitions. Researchers warn of the possible consequences of a poor transition experience, including unemployment, social exclusion, substance use and various mental health concerns (Bäckman & Nilsson, 2016). Societally, unsuccessful transition means the lack of an educated and employed public, which, according to human capital theory, results in being less competitive globally. Given the potential negative consequences of an unsuccessful transition, much of the literature focuses on strategies and interventions that may improve transition outcomes, like career development programs (e.g., Koen, Klehe & Van Vianen, 2012), or mentorship and apprenticeship models (e.g., Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor & Detwiler, 2014; Lang, 2010; Ogbuanya & Chukwuedo, 2017). Some researchers use statistical analyses to examine the personal characteristics (including psychological traits, family structure, socio-economic status, etc.) of students who have transitioned to work to determine the predictors of more positive or negative transition experiences (e.g., Yang, Yaung, Noh, Jang & Lee, 2017; Pinquart, Juang & Silbereisen, 2003). Other research focuses on student goals and aspirations in relation to their transition, and how these relate to their values, identity, and fit with later

employment (e.g., Vuolo, Staff & Mortimer, 2012). Despite the varied approaches in examining transition, this literature assumes that transition is a distinct event and that the outcomes of the transition event can be influenced by a student's personal characteristics, goals and aspirations, and the degree of support available to the student.

While research on the transition from school to work varies in purpose, theoretical framing, and methodological approach, the dominant discourse assumes transition to be a distinct event that can be assessed. One such study (Finnie, 2004), uses a large Canadian database (i.e., National Graduates Survey) to provide longitudinal information on cohorts of graduates from 1982, 1986, and 1990. Follow-up interviews occurred two and five years after graduation to assess the students' perceptions of the transition event, including perceptions of their skill levels, degree of preparedness for the workforce, and their level of satisfaction with their educational programs. Students reported that they were able to find work that is comparable to their educational qualifications and were generally satisfied with their educational preparation and current employment. This demonstrates that, for most students surveyed, their transition from school to work was successful. However, certain findings from this study raise questions about viewing transition as an event.

Speaking Back to Transition as a Linear and Distinct Event

Although Finnie's (2004) work assessed transition as an event, examining transition outcomes (in terms of preparedness for the workforce, skill levels, and current employment), this research also found that the transition from school to work is often not linear and direct. The research found that many students take a more circuitous route to employment and/or work and attend school simultaneously. Finnie (2004) found that an increasing number of graduated students returned for additional credentials; in many cases, this involved progression to the next, expected level of education (e.g., moving from a baccalaureate degree to a master's degree). However, Finnie also found "relatively high rates of 'non-progression'", in that those with a credential returned to school for credentials at the same level or lower level as their current credential (Finnie, 2004, p. 44). For example, master's graduates returned for diplomas at the college level and bachelor's level. So, despite an overall trend towards increased credentialing (i.e., increased numbers of students with baccalaureate degrees with a decrease in diplomas), a growing number of students are returning to school to obtain lower-level

credentials. Also, Finnie's (2004) work excluded part-time workers who were also students and workers who were making "unreasonably low earnings" (p. 37). According to this work, students may engage in a more circuitous path towards employment or work and attend school at the same time. This shows that transition may not be a linear and progressive process for many students and that many students may not be represented by research that delineates school and work into two distinct stages (i.e., school and work).

Research on helping professions, specifically on newly qualified social workers, extends the concept of transition by examining it not as an event but as a process that may extend over time. Much of the literature (specifically throughout Europe and Australia) focuses on transition as the first year of professional practice and how support, development, and supervision can assist in skill development and the development of professional identity throughout this transition period (e.g., Bates et al., 2010; Moorhead, Bell, & Bowles, 2016). This work is helpful moving beyond traditional definitions of school–to–work, recognizing that transition also includes (at least) the first year of practice, when social workers learn about their role and responsibilities and apply their academic foundations. This research recognizes the challenges involved in transitioning into a helping profession and seeks to find ways to effectively support new social workers. This definition of transition – as an ongoing process of development – speaks back to transition as a distinct and finalizable event that is completed and then assessed. While this work is useful in retheorizing transition as a process over time, the research available focuses exclusively on social workers; as I have argued in Chapter 1, given that social service workers face unique challenges due to their challenging and often precarious work, I am interested in how this group experiences transition. I am curious about the development of their professional identity, their role and responsibilities as social service workers, and how their transition process is influenced by social, political, historical, economic, and institutional narratives.

A Transgressive Approach to Understanding Transition

I have considered up to now how dominant discourses of education, work, and transition differentially construct students. Rather than assuming school is a pathway to success and assessing whether transition has been successful for a specific group of students, I am interested in what the transition process means to social service workers

and how they actually experience it. With an understanding of the neoliberal environment that shapes teaching and learning, the myth of social mobility, labour market realities, and the unique challenges faced by social service workers (as discussed in Chapter 1), I have taken a transgressive approach to understanding transition as a process.

Without adequately deconstructing dominant discourses, my work is at risk of perpetuating injustice and reproducing inequality. As discussed in Chapter 1, I have seized my response-ability, my ability to respond, to discourses that perpetuate inequality and to find appropriate ethical ways of approaching the phenomenon of transition in research and in educational practice, as an educator of students transitioning into helping professions. In the following Chapter 3, I discuss how my methodological approach to examining the transition experience shifted. This involved first reading the data through relevant theories, and then reading the data and theories (and my own experiences and multiplicities) *through* one another (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) to produce difference and diffraction (Barad, 2007), opening up new insights on transition that provide new ways to think and mobilize the concept of transition. This is demonstrated through the progression of my analysis, starting with the thematic or theoretical analyses (Chapter 4 and 5) and moving into an experimental diffractive analysis (Chapter 6).

Chapter 3.

Fluid Methodologies[2]: Examining Transition

A mess

> *This is a real mess. Interviews, participants, stories, experiences, sense data, representation, interpretation, meaning. Meaning?!? I followed a qualitative path of interviewing participants about their experiences. But then my inquiry took on a life of its own. Key concepts along my path – data, voice, subject – started falling away, leaving a real mess. My initially qualitative approach deconstructed - self-destructed? - and I had to retheorize key concepts, guided by philosophical ideas. I started off with a qualitative inquiry and have moved into an unknown space. The more I read, the more ideas swirl.*

As discussed in the Introduction (Chapter 1), I situated my approach to the concept of transition from school to work in my personal, professional, and academic experience, as well as my commitment to social justice. I had a clear plan to research how the dominant discourses of school, work, and transition may shape social service workers' experience of transition. While my initial methodological approach of critical narrative inquiry was consistent with my original research question and theoretical framework, my understanding of research and knowledge shifted in a very fluid way. My engagement with interviewing led me back to re-examine theory, question and retheorize methodological concepts, and reconceptualize my understanding of knowledge and social research. Below, I describe my participants, recruitment, interviewing, and my process of representing the interviews. I discuss the tension I experienced in analyzing the interview transcripts and the messiness that ensued, that ultimately led to an ontological shift and a methodological transition from critical narrative inquiry to diffractive analysis. I explain that progressive shift in the three analysis chapters that follow Chapter 3.

[2] Concept of 'fluid methodologies" borrowed from Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. 79.

My Initial Approach: Critical Narrative Inquiry

After my doctoral coursework, which led me to question my original quantitative approach to my research interest (I discuss this in detail in Chapter 1), I began positioning myself as a qualitative researcher. I see qualitative research as a progressive way of creating new knowledge that challenged traditional modes of knowledge production (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemologically, I positioned myself as a constructionist, recognizing that our reality is created through our interactions with the world, as we are engaged in an ongoing process of meaning making (Crotty, 1998). A constructionist epistemology argues against an external reality, instead emphasizing that our reality (both the social and natural world) is created through our interactions and interpretations. A socially created system of understanding exists and meaning is transmitted; this system of meaning guides our thought, behaviour, and understanding (Crotty, 1998). Knowledge creation is subjective, interpretive, relative, and partial; it is understood that there are multiple subjectivities and so, one cannot truly know the experience of others. Similarly, research cannot be conducted in a neutral, objective fashion; the researcher is always part of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) and implicated in meaning making. The values, beliefs, and life experiences of the researcher and participants contextualize the research, so that interpretations drawn from the research may provide insight for other settings but do not claim to be generalizable (Broido, 2002). Constructionist qualitative research emphasizes uncovering subjective meaning making through a collaborative, interactive, and respectful research process.

One key strength of qualitative research, in the vein of critical narrative inquiry, is its potential to "make visible the politics and power relations of the everyday lived experience of the oppressed" (St. Pierre & Roulston, 2006, p. 678). I thought critical narrative inquiry would help unpack student narratives of how they navigate the transition from school to work within helping professions, within a world coloured by neoliberal ideology. Critical theorists recognize that knowledge is a political process of selection and that information presented as "fact" is rooted in the values of the dominant class to maintain the status quo (e.g., Apple, 2004; Giroux, 1988; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994) and to classify and control others (e.g., Foucault, 1979). Through a process of problematizing ideas of truth and knowledge, critical theorists believe people become

increasingly aware of their own social, economic, political, and historical positionality. This process of awakening, or conscientization, can promote emancipation (Freire, 1993). I believed that through conversations with participants, they would recognize their context and be better equipped to navigate various tensions in their role and the context within which they work. Critical theorists also attend to the power dynamics involved in the research process and, while recognizing the power of the researcher cannot be abdicated, strive to create a collaborative and respectful research relationship with respondents that honours jointly constructed knowledge. The purpose of critical research is to end suffering in all its forms and emancipate all people (Kincheloe, 2008; Broido, 2002; LeCompte, 1994). It is the responsibility of an ethical, qualitative researcher to ensure their research serves a practical purpose and is meaningful to those involved in the analysis (LeCompte, 1994). I enacted this by grounding my research in an ethical imperative to create new understandings that could help promote a more just world. Specifically, I sought to eliminate the suffering endured by marginalized groups of people who receive social services. I intended for my work to demonstrate the urgent need to change the precarious material conditions both clients and social service workers live within. I believe that by thinking differently about our relationships with, and responsibilities to, one another, social service work and education can be made more just, relevant, and meaningful. By providing voice to participants, research should highlight and intend to disrupt existing power dynamics, expanding our understanding of lived experience and allowing respondents to see beyond their current position. Unlike Roulston's (2010) conception of a transformative interview, I did not "*intentionally* aim to challenge and change the understandings of participants" (p. 220); instead, I thought that critically reflecting upon and discussing their transition experience would expand participants' existing understanding of their situation within broader social, historical, cultural, economic, and institutional narratives. My intention was not to intervene in participants' experience, but I thought discussing their transition would inevitably lead to more critical understanding for them and for the audiences of my study.

Narrative inquiry was congruent with my constructionist epistemology, my critical approach to inquiry, and with my research question: how do new social service workers experience the transition from post-secondary education to working in the field? Encompassed within this question are three sub-questions:

- What tensions do transitioning student/workers experience? What narratives do they "bump up" against in their transition?
- How do they see, know, and describe themselves as “students” and “workers” and how do they enact various identities across social, political, and institutional contexts? What shapes these identities?
- How do their personal narratives connect to socio-political relations?

Critical narrative inquiry, as one qualitative research approach, recognizes that an individual’s process of meaning making is unique and dynamic; the identity of the narrator and their story is under ongoing development (Chase, 2005). As Clandinin (2013) explains, individual experience is contextualized within a complex life; narrative inquiry seeks to thoroughly explore experience within its wider context, without essentializing the narrative. That is, the narrative of individual experience is explored within the social, cultural, political, historical, and institutional narratives in which it occurs; dialectically, macro-level narratives shape and influence individual experience as the individual constructs and affects macro-level narratives (Clandinin, 2013). A narrative inquiry approach recognizes that the narrator and the narrative are dynamic and continually developing, producing one another; through the process of reliving their narrative, the narrator learns about who they are (Clandinin, 2013; Hull & Zacher, 2007). An important aspect of narrative inquiry research is to determine how the narratives can disrupt hegemonic, oppressive processes and promote social justice and democracy; to examine, as Clandinin (2013) describes, how narratives “bump up” against existing narratives, creating tension and revealing new understandings. A narrative can be disruptive in its ability to demonstrate the social, cultural, historical, and political constraints that limit an individual’s range of options for construction of self and reality (Chase, 2005). A narrative can also promote social justice by highlighting the creativity and complexity of how people construct themselves within their world, despite these powerful constraints, pointing to new possibilities for living in the world. From the start, my objective for using a narrative inquiry approach in my study was to allow participants to determine what is meaningful and relevant, as they engaged in telling, re-living, and re-telling their narrative (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990) in a way that would promote critical awareness of their position and experiences. This approach is consistent with critical paradigms that seek to provide space for multiple subjectivities and voices (Kincheloe, 2008). It also recognizes that embedded within our own individual and social narratives, the participants and I co-construct meaning, through a process of dialogue.

Positioning myself in a critical narrative approach, I set out to pilot my interview protocol (see Appendix B). My intention was that interviews would be semi-structured, allowing for the participants to discuss what they felt was important in their transition process within three areas that my reading of the literature indicated as the most relevant: current employment, educational trajectory, and the transition from school to work. I would examine the individual narratives, as well as convergences and divergences amongst the narratives, to learn how students experience the transition to working in helping professions. I also thought the process of reflecting, retelling, and re-storying might raise the participants' consciousness about the social and institutional structures within which they do their work, as well as the personal narratives that shape their identity. I was aware that I would have to explore my own narratives and what I bring to my relationship with participants. I recognized that, as a researcher, I would be stepping into a narrative that was already in process and would continue after our interaction. I would be privy to one strand of the story and, by pulling together the strands of several narratives, I thought I could extract themes that would help us understand the nuances of the transition process that existing research ignores. With these intentions in mind, I began recruiting participants and planning my pilot interviews.

Recruiting Participants

I recruited participants for my study through not-for-profit and non-governmental organizations that serve children, youth, adults, and/or families who face various challenges (e.g., homelessness, addiction, mental health, unemployment, etc.). I emailed recruitment information (see Appendix C) to various agencies throughout the Greater Vancouver area. I had initially intended to include in this dissertation a list of the agencies I contacted for recruitment but recognized that this could jeopardize the confidentiality of the participants. In contacting potential agencies from which to recruit, I tried to represent the diversity in the social services field; the contacted agencies differed in mandate/focus, philosophy, funding, organizational structure, and in their connection to other agencies. Recruitment was intentionally broad to elicit interest from new employees within social service agencies with a range of mandates; I hoped this would result in participants with varied educational trajectories, work experience, current employment, and transition experiences. I asked the agencies to post the information in an area accessible to employees and/or email the information to new employees. Once

I connected with participants, I also asked if they had colleagues, friends, or classmates who may also be suitable and interested in participating in my study; I sent recruitment information to each participant via email after our initial conversation, asking them to share the information with others who may be interested. I was connected to most of my participants through other participants.

I limited my participants to those who were "new to the field"; I initially defined this as participants who had been working in social services for less than one year (which is consistent with existing literature on newly qualified social workers). I found that defining a participant as "new to the field" was much more complex than originally conceived. Participants had travelled or done international work, had worked in various contexts but still considered themselves new to social services, had moved in and out of social service positions and other areas of employment, and had returned to post-secondary (while working in the field) for additional degrees. As social service work is diverse, so too are the experiences of those who work in the field, their role and responsibilities, and the degree of connection they have to the work. This nuanced nature of transition and the various trajectories I encountered in the recruitment process alerted me to the problematics of transition that I reviewed in Chapter 2. I ultimately decided that participants were suitable if they considered themselves to be new to the field. All potential participants who were interested in participating considered themselves new to social service work and as such, were included in the scope of the study.

Who are the Participants?

As I describe in the sections above, I am interested in how the experiences of the participants can be a resource to examine and deconstruct existing discursive arrangements; as Davies (2003) describes, "the primary focus of poststructuralist analyses is on discourse, and on shifting patterns of discursive practices, rather than on the specificity of the individuals who take up those discourse and make them live" (p. 147). The research, participants, and researcher are situated in discourse and theory and thus, are under constant construction (Bridges-Rhoads & Van Cleave, 2014). In describing the participants there is a risk of individualizing and essentializing participants; however, I think readers will want to have some sense of who the participants are, both as unique individuals and members of social groups according to

age, gender, ethnicity, academic qualifications, and work experience. However, I am not describing these individuals to construct them as fixed, stable, coherent, and knowable (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). While I seek to deconstruct the assumptions about individual experience, I also recognize my participants are situated in various discursive and material arrangements and explaining some detail of their experience may provide meaningful context for how they have been configured in neoliberal discourse. I believe this is important, not to emphasize their individual experience, but to explore how those constructions work and perpetuate discursive and material arrangements.

The participants include four women and one man (as presented, I did not ask participants to identify biological sex or gender identity). I did not ask the participants specifically about their age, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics; in some cases, this information was shared in the dialogue. Where it was not, I base the description on my own observations (e.g., early 20s Caucasian-Canadian woman). I refer to them as Elizabeth, Carolyn, Hannah, Alison, and Matthew.

The participants have different experiences in social services, working with various client populations with unique challenges, and working in agencies with varied mandates and operating budgets. Their positions (i.e., role and responsibilities) and degree of connection to the field of social service work at the time of the study were also diverse. Some of the program models they worked within and approaches they used sound more therapeutic or clinical than others, although they were all employed in front-line, entry-level positions. All participants engaged in practicum learning throughout their education, providing practical experience and exposing them to possible employment options in the field. Some worked in the field throughout their education (e.g., Matthew, Hannah, and Alison), while others see themselves as transitioning to social service work more recently (e.g., Carolyn, Elizabeth). Despite very different trajectories, all five participants identified themselves as new workers in the field, demonstrating the lack of a linear and finalizable transition process. The descriptions below represent the five participants at the time of the interviews:

Elizabeth was in her early 20s, a Caucasian-Canadian woman who graduated from a private, Christian liberal arts university with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a certificate in Human Services. She noted that the program was a combination of psychology and sociology with some similarity to social work, and that her degree had

applied learning components (i.e., practicum). She worked as a mental health worker promoting independence for adults living with mental health diagnoses. Elizabeth said she always knew she wanted to work with people and help those facing challenges by recognizing and honouring their humanity. She recognized that being supportive to others, empathic and non-judgmental, were important values in her family and that she regularly saw her mother and grandparents enact these values.

Carolyn was in her early 20s, a Korean-Canadian woman who worked at a crisis shelter for youth. She completed her Bachelor of Social Work degree at a large, public research institution and spent some time doing church ministry work before moving into social service work. Carolyn also engaged in an international internship before obtaining her current position. Carolyn noted that her education allowed her to reflect on bias and critically examine race, culture, gender, and oppression; she found this social justice perspective congruent to who she is and wanted to work with children and youth to put her values into practice.

Hannah was a 24-year-old Caucasian-Canadian woman who worked as a consultant for inclusivity in community settings. As she explained, she educated child care professionals, empowering them to do their work in a way that is more inclusive; this included maximizing ways for children to fully participate, be respected, and preserve their dignity in a variety of settings. Hannah completed her Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Care at a large, public research institution before doing an international internship. Hannah resided with Carolyn during their internship; the two are best friends and Hannah agreed to participate in this inquiry project at Carolyn's cajoling.

Alison was a 30-year-old Caucasian-Canadian woman who has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Anthropology but returned to school full-time to obtain a Bachelor of Social Work degree from a large, public research institution. Alison worked part-time at a resource centre for youth who are street entrenched, struggling with substance use, and/or have mental health concerns. She sought more practical experience and wanted to learn about good relational practice that can help promote systemic change. Alison was committed to continuing to learn, gaining more experience, and improving her practice. She stated that her family is perpetually confused as to why she would return to school to work in a field where she will earn less income than she would with her initial degree.

Matthew was a 40-year-old Caucasian-Canadian male. He worked at a group home for adults with developmental disabilities as well as relief work at shelters for homeless adults. Matthew was initially interested in psychiatric nursing but obtained his diploma in Community Social Service Work, with a Co-Occurring Disorders Advanced Certificate. He says his educational experience really changed who he is in a positive way and that he was looking at whether he should continue with his education and seek more responsibility within the agencies he works for.

I believe the participants who chose to share their experiences are oriented to reflective practices; throughout our conversations, they were articulate and attuned to sharing their thoughts and feelings about various experiences. I believe this could be influenced by their academic experiences which require ongoing examination of the self and how one's beliefs, values, experiences, and interests influence their relational work with others. I noticed, in our conversations, that the participants were self-aware, empathic, compassionate, and inquisitive. I did not purposively sample the participants; that is, I did not sample participants to ensure generalizability to a wider population. The positivist foundations of sampling are incongruent with my critical, constructionist approach. A positivist critique of the participant group may highlight the need for more participants and question the homogeneity and lack of diversity within the participant group; this perspective assumes that there are a distinct range of possible experiences and perspectives related to a phenomenon and that perspectives may vary according to specific variables (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, etc.). Positivist research seeks to extract information related to all possible experiences and perspectives, thus the importance of reaching saturation and seeking out negative cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). From a constructionist approach, the range of experiences related to a phenomenon is unknowable (and possibly infinite); a sample can not be defined that will represent all possible experiences. Instead, in determining participant involvement, I considered what matters in relation to the phenomenon of transition (or what may be made to matter, in the words of Barad). I was interested in how narratives may differ in relation to academic trajectory, family and cultural influence, work and volunteer experience, current employment, and future goals. I recognized difference as potentially productive and generative. I considered how the narratives may be taken up beyond the individual experience in how they call attention to the discursive and material arrangements that affect the phenomenon of transition. I am very cognizant that my

research decisions regarding my participants took me in a certain direction. In considering this decision, I recognize that whiteness, as privilege, may have been more apparent, if there had been more ethnic diversity within the participant group. I did not ask specifically about ethnicity, gender, or culture, which highlights my own privilege in not having to account for the role of ethnicity in transition experiences. In future work, I would like to examine how intersecting aspects of unearned privilege (or lack thereof) influence transition and performing as social service worker. The participants also represent the "educational underclass" - a group of primarily non-traditional students who study to enter a field marked by precarious employment (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010) - of social service workers to varying extents. While some of the participants appear to be more "traditional" students (e.g., Hannah and Elizabeth), some of the participants had different academic trajectories before transitioning into more or less precarious employment. Two of the participants (Alison and Matthew) discussed challenges and gaps in their secondary schooling; Matthew had dropped out of school before returning to college and Alison had lived independently from a young age and completed her high school in a supportive self-paced environment. In terms of precarious employment, arguably all social service work is somewhat precarious due to limited resources and volatile funding; however, some of the participants had more precarious work than others. While Alison only worked part-time because she was enrolled in a full-time Bachelor of Social Work program (her second baccalaureate degree), Carolyn and Matthew had part-time contracts that they supplemented with additional on-call shifts to make full-time hours. Hannah was also in a contract position. In future work, I think it would be generative to explore whiteness and the gendered role of social service work and helping professions more generally.

Interviewing

Prior to interviewing the five participants, I coordinated pilot interviews with three volunteers to test my interview protocol and to practice my interview approach. Within qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and I was concerned about presenting professionally and doing the interviews "correctly". While I recognize now that there is not one way to conduct interviews and that the material conditions of the interview interaction can never be duplicated, at that time, I thought pilot interviews would allow me to foresee any issues with my interview

approach and questions and would help prepare me (see Roulston, deMarrais & Lewis, 2003). For me, very important learning about the nature and purpose of the interview and the narratives produced happened through this process. I discuss this learning after describing my interviewing approach.

In keeping with my critical narrative approach, I interviewed participants to explore their experience of transition. Semi-structured interviews were used to provide space for the participants to discuss the topics most salient to them. Unlike traditional interviews, where the researcher limits the topics for discussions to the information desired for the research (Weiss, 1994), in narrative inquiry the researcher and participant engage in dialogue and collaboratively identify areas for discussion. Broad areas for exploration may be identified by the researcher, but how the participants approach those topics, and what is important to them within those topics, shapes their narrative. My interviews were designed to explore participants' experiences relating to three interrelated topics: current employment, educational experience, and transition to work. The ordering of these topics was not fixed, and discussion of these topic areas differed by participant; that is, the participants shaped, through their own narrative, how these topic areas were discussed, what was emphasized or given priority, and what was most salient.

Due to the dynamic nature of life stories and individual identities (Clandinin, 2013), I met with five participants for a minimum of two interviews each. Our conversations occurred in public locations (generally coffee shops) that were convenient for the participants and lasted one hour on average (ranging from approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes). I audio taped all interviews with participant consent. The interviews followed a general interview protocol (see Appendix B). I intentionally approached the interviews as conversations, opportunities for dialogue, where I would attend to and ask questions about the participants' experiences. Approaching the interview in this way promoted discussion and allowed participants to explore and share areas they felt were pertinent and relevant, rather than attempting to provide the information they thought the researcher may want. I recognized that I was bringing myself and the narratives I am embedded within/construct to our conversation. I see that I was attempting to allow the participants to drive the conversation, while recognizing that our interaction would shape our discussion. I was aware of, as much as is possible, the power relations inherent in our discussion and was intentional about

attempting to build positive rapport with the participants; as mentioned, I wanted our conversation to evolve organically, and I did not want the participants to feel constrained in their discussion. I wanted to be open and patient with where the participant wanted to go and be actively engaged to pick up on threads of interest (Weiss, 1994). I was also acutely aware of what I was asking participants to do – reflect on and discuss their life experience to someone they do not know. I suspected that our discussion may have been the first time the participants had reflected on what it means to be a student or a social service worker and how that may influence how they see themselves. Throughout our interviews, participants were processing new ideas, thoughts, or feelings through our dialogue, and figuring out what they think about their experience by hearing themselves speak. Not only is it a challenge to "know" what your thoughts and feelings are related to an experience (e.g., transitioning from school to work) but it is also difficult to "translate" experiences. Devault (1999) notes that there may not be words or phrases that fit experiences, especially where the experience is gendered. She cautions to be attuned to dismissive terms like "you know" or "I can't explain it" as possible signs that translating the experience is difficult; these are places of tension, or difficulty in translation, and these places may be very interesting (Devault, 1999).

All interviews began with a discussion of the participant's current employment; this often led naturally to discussions of their educational trajectory, how they came to be in that position, what they enjoy about their work and what they find challenging. Throughout our conversation, I consciously attended to the story and information provided, asking clarifying questions and commenting on the narrative in the moment. For example, I asked participants what they meant by certain terms or concepts, to explain ideas more fully, and what connections might exist among various concepts they explored. At times, I shared observations about how the participant shared their narrative; for example, making explicit highly intentional and reflective decision-making processes, commending their passion and commitment to the work and the people they serve, and being supportive and encouraging about ongoing tensions, ambivalence, and doubt in their transition process. I chose not to take notes during the conversations as I felt this may be distracting for participants and myself (i.e., I may miss hearing elements of the narrative while attempting to write notes). Writing notes could have jeopardized our rapport as I could not fully attend to the narrative, and participants might feel apprehensive or anxious about what I was writing.

While I recognized that I was asking a lot of participants in the interviewing process, I found our time together to be very interesting, informative, uplifting, and frequently, inspiring. It felt right to be in the moment with the participants, listening to parts of their ongoing story. I found that prior to meeting a participant for an interview, I would be slightly apprehensive. I felt a pressure (largely self-imposed) to do the interview "right" – to be professional, to portray competence as a researcher, and to elicit (through my perfectly crafted questions) information relevant to my interests; even though it was inconsistent with my constructionist perspective, I had to actively dismiss the idea that I could excavate relevant or pertinent information with my questions. Once I sat down and began speaking to the participants, my apprehension dissolved, and I became engrossed in their stories. I was interested in how they discussed their experiences and how they related elements of their life and their identity to their professional trajectory. In conversation, the participants seemed open to discussing their passions, plans, and the pressures they are constantly under. I thoroughly enjoyed the conversations we had and left each interview feeling energized, excited, and inspired. I felt energized by the passion and dedication that the participants had for the people they served and by the reflective nature of their practice, which meant continually questioning their role, their power, their purpose, and the best way to serve others. Several participants also stated that they enjoyed the interview process and found it meaningful to think about and discuss their work.

In my research journal, I noted that my role in the interviews shifted depending upon the participant with whom I was conversing and that our dialogues lacked the coherence I had assumed. I recognized that I took on multiple voices in engaging with the participants; for example, in some conversations I engaged in an academic or scholarly manner, discussing concepts like agency and structural inequity, while in others I approached the interview more supportively and therapeutically. For example, part of my conversation with Alison focused on how one could help someone (i.e., clients, students) increase their awareness of the structural constraints that are limiting their opportunities; this was a theoretical conversation, where both Alison and I thought it was important that marginalized groups do not internalize personal responsibility for structural inequities. In contrast, when I spoke with Carolyn about her international experience, I took a much more therapeutic role in reassuring her of the value of the experience and commending her courage in working in other countries. In reviewing the

audio and my journal notes, I found that my approach tended to mirror that of the participant but may also represent my attempts to meet what I perceived to be the participants' needs in our conversation. The participants varied in their connection to the work and their ability to reflect on and discuss their transition; each participant seemed challenged by various aspects of their role, their work in the field, and their transition from being a student. I noticed myself responding to the needs presented by these challenges by reassuring the participant, emphasizing their agency, and by raising questions to problematize the pressures they feel constrained by. Although unintentional, I noticed my tendency to attend to the needs of participants and to help shape their view of their work through a new perspective. As an example, Carolyn discussed her faith-based work as being distinct from her social service work; at times, in the interview, I related the similarities in the relational work she was doing and how elements of practice may translate in either context. I saw similarities in the work she described and attempted to shape her view of her own work through this perspective. In addition to my own varied roles within the interviews, it was here that the conversations strayed from the clarity and linearity I had intended. I had assumed a degree of coherence in the story and some predictability or linearity in the transition; it was during the interview process that I began to question my initial assumptions regarding transition as a linear event and began looking at transition as a process.

During my earlier interviews, I was primarily concerned with the content of the interview – i.e., that I ask about and gather as much information as possible about the participant's relevant experiences. As I became more familiar with interviewing, I found I attended more to the process of the interview, trying to ensure that I was present and engaged with participants (Roulston, deMarrais & Lewis, 2003). I recognized the importance of being in relationship with the participants and in being comfortable in a state of unknowing. Many of my questions and realizations would arise after the interview was complete; using interim research documents allowed me to return to the participant and delve deeper into some of the areas of tension in subsequent interviews. Before describing the purpose and contents of the interim research documents, I explain some of the questions that arose during my interview process. As I troubled my initial approach, I began picturing a different way of approaching my inquiry.

Examining the Interviews

A mess

> *As I read through my clean, linear, sharply formatted transcript, I feel my stomach knot. What did I do wrong? I thought that producing a verbatim transcript of one of my pilot interviews would allow me to interpret my conversation with the participant in new ways – to see and hear things that I hadn't recognized before. I thought the written transcript would demonstrate the vibrant interaction we had, so that I could immerse myself in the nuances of our discussion. Instead, it just sat there. Words. Flat. Fixed. Now what?!?*

Following the interviews, I wrote descriptive notes, transcribed the audio recordings, and created written verbatim transcripts of the interviews. I found that the process of transcribing our conversation/co-story into a written document for analysis took all the life out of the vibrant conversations the participants and I had together. In the written transcript, often sentences were started but then dropped, leading into another thought or idea. There were fragments of ideas and words that did not fit and, on the face of it, there was a lack of depth of content. It was awkward to read through, stumbling through half formed ideas and jumping around to various examples. Written as decontextualized words, the meanings, co-constructed in relationship, were lost (see Jenks, 2011). For me, a decontextualized verbatim transcript was not a helpful representation of the stories the participants had shared; the transcript did not capture the richness of the dialogue. While narrative inquiry recognizes the dynamic nature of living, telling, re-telling, and re-living (Clandinin, 2013), written transcripts of the interviews presented the narrative as static, completed, and fixed in time. I viewed the interviews as narrative; as stories that are dynamic, changing, and ongoing. Would coding the transcript and following a traditional process of in-case and cross-case analysis (see Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) allow me to better understand the experiences of the participants in their social, historical, political, and economic contexts? Or would the process of coding reduce and essentialize the participants' experiences (Jenks, 2011; St. Pierre, 2013)?

While I was familiar with processes of analyzing qualitative data from my classwork and readings, I began to question the assumptions behind various

conventions such as transcription, coding, in-case and cross-case analysis, and interpretation (see Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). What assumptions am I, as researcher, making about participants, social research, knowledge production, and how we live in the world, when I follow qualitative data analysis conventions that are steeped in positivist traditions (St. Pierre, 2013)? How can I approach my analysis in a way that fits with my commitment to unknowability, deferred meaning, and ethical responsibility? How can I examine the experience of individual participants to understand the discursive practices that shape and influence them? What types of analysis will open new ways of examining and understanding the process of transition so that real, material changes can occur in the realities of nuanced and complex lives?

As I was questioning the affordances of various data collection and analysis techniques, I came across St. Pierre's (2013) article on *The Appearance of Data*, which questions the concept of "data" and "analysis" in qualitative research. Her argument resonated for me and my experience in analyzing my interviews. She argues that incommensurability plagues a lot of qualitative research, as qualitative approaches begin with a constructionist (or interpretivist) approach of textualizing the experiences of others but then analyzing the produced text as brute data. By using the term 'brute data', St. Pierre (2013) highlights a positivist assumption that there is information that exists independently of interpretation and subjectivity; true data that awaits to be "collected" by researchers (p. 223). St. Pierre is questioning the process of writing up interviews into verbatim transcripts and then treating the transcript as if it holds a true meaning to be discovered; she argues that this focus on discovering true meaning is incommensurate with constructionist approaches which would recognize the researcher's involvement in interpreting and making meaning of created texts. In discussing this incommensurability, she explains:

> Qualitative researchers diligently, carefully, and accurately textualize in written words in interview transcripts and fieldnotes what people tell them and what they observe. In other words, they make texts to interpret…Too often, without explanation, they then employ a logical positivist/empiricist methodology and treat the words in the written texts they've produced as brute data. The rationale seems to be that if qualitative data can't be numbers (pure and uncontaminated by humans) then words will have to do. Once the empirical is transformed into real, visible words on a page—brute, sense data—these researchers strip the words from context, manipulate them, order them in binaries and hierarchies and categories,

> label some words with other words (code data), and even count words. (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 224)

This paralleled my experience with transcribing (textualizing) and then attempting to accurately interpret (through coding) the true meaning of the narratives (i.e., data). To preserve the narratives as one part of an ongoing, multidimensional, flowing life story, I decided to explore the interviews from the audio recordings and not the transcripts of these recordings. My intention was to keep the shared narratives contextualized within the time and space they occurred, as much as possible. By that, I mean that I wanted to recognize the narrative as one story, among many stories that could and will be told, that shifts and alters depending on the audience, setting, passage of time, physical and emotional states, relationships, and countless other factors. To do so, I relied heavily on what Clandinin (2013) calls interim research texts, that I created as a starting place of interpretation to provide space for the narrator (i.e., participant) and the narrative inquirer (i.e., researcher) to continue to co-construct meaning.

Interim Research Texts

Working from the audio recordings allowed me to create a written summary of our conversation without getting stuck in the verbatim transcript. Listening to the conversation (and referring to my notes on non-linguistic observations of our discussion) allowed me to focus on the meaning I was making from the conversation. I then shared the meaning with the participants, through written documents that were designed to elicit further conversation. Clandinin (2013) states that interim research texts are created as a starting place of interpretation and provide space for the narrator (i.e., participant) and the narrative inquirer (i.e., researcher) to continue to co-construct meaning with the text. My interim research texts took two forms: reflective memos and draft narrative accounts. I created each of these written documents from descriptive notes I wrote after each interview. These notes included details about our setting (time and space), my interpretation of the participant's narrative, reflections on my own involvement in the conversation, and points of interest or topics to follow up on from the conversation. I used these notes for two purposes; to provide information for reflective memo writing and to provide context for reviewing the audio recordings of our conversations to create draft narrative accounts. These two types of written documents (i.e., reflective memos and draft narrative accounts) served different, yet complementary, purposes.

Reflective memos. Reflective memos helped me remain cognizant of, and transparent about, my own narratives in which I am embedded. As the researcher, I made attempts to be cognizant of what I brought to the interaction with participants and how we were co-constructing our reality (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). To do this, I explicitly positioned myself and engaged in an active process of checking my subjectivities (Peshkin, 1988). The purpose of my reflective writing was not to improve my ability to interpret and represent data or to make my work more valid. I wasn't attempting to transcend my own subjectivity, so I could access the truth in the narratives; this is what Pillow (2003) discusses as reflexivity as a methodological tool for improved rigour in qualitative work. Instead, my reflective writing served a different function than Pillow critiques, questioning knowledge construction and how we, as unknowable, dynamic subjects, can know (Pillow, 2003). I made efforts to recognize my own position and reflect on my own learning. Here is an excerpt from a memo written early on in my research process (i.e., after my doctoral coursework and before data collection), which illustrates how I made sense of the relational aspect of co-constructing meaning through interviews:

Swirling: My Initial Thoughts on Interviewing

> *I especially recognize the importance of relational processes. Being in relationship with. I think this is a key element in research of any kind but especially in qualitative approaches. I think this is tricky and means taking a real risk. You are putting yourself out there. You have to – you cannot claim to be objective, distant, and detached. You are part of the problem you are investigating and are bringing your own thoughts, beliefs, values, and privilege to your investigation. More importantly, you are bringing all of that – all of yourself – to your relationship with your participant. When I said I preferred narrative inquiry to ethnography because it allowed for collaborative meaning making rather than ascribing meaning, Suzanne said that we are always ascribing meaning. We cannot not ascribe meaning. This is where the how of being reflexive is so difficult. I understand the importance of reflexivity and constantly checking our own assumptions (i.e., how we make meaning) but to actually do this is much more challenging.*

> *I also had very simplistic ideas about participants, data collection, and data analysis. I felt like interviewing was the most straightforward approach – ask questions and get answers. I never considered that participants may not know, remember, or feel comfortable sharing information. That they may lie. That they may not even share what I would consider relevant information because they contextualize the question completely differently than the interviewer. People are complex and mysterious. If they do tell you everything you want to know, you probably have elite bias, where the voices of more marginalized participants (i.e., outliers) are not being represented. That's why I felt drawn to narrative inquiry – it seems to allow for stories to naturally develop, minimizing the element of expectation that seems attached to interviews. In interviews, I feel like you have ideas of what you think participants will say or what you want them to say. In narrative inquiry, this may also be the case. But I almost feel – never having actually done it, mind you! – that what you want to find in a narrative may change as the narrative (and the rapport with the participants) develops. I think the narrative process is like sifting through sand and you aren't really sure at the beginning what treasures will emerge. Maybe when I look back at this after the summer I will think this was a very simplistic perspective as well – time will tell.*

In this excerpt, I am involved in a continual questioning of my purpose and philosophical foundations. Looking back, I find the ideas in this piece of reflective writing simplistic in the assumption that I could obtain accurate or inaccurate information through the interviews; I can see how my perspective on interviewing and meaning making has shifted considerably since this was written. Following my interviews and analysis, I wrote a response piece (approximately two and a half years later) investigating my perspective on interviewing:

Swirling: My Response

> *In that time and space, I had glimmers of thought glowing that have ignited and now burn through my thinking. I began to understand, after initially conceptualizing my study as a quantitative survey, the*

importance of relational processes. Then, I saw myself as part of the research process and understood that research process as necessarily relational. I now recognize myself as an inseparable element of the research entanglement; I see that entanglement as shifting and dynamic, each agent within the entanglement becoming at different speeds, within an entanglement that constitutes and re-constitutes in different arrangements over time. Odd that while relational practice is heavily emphasized in social service work and in educating students who will work in the field, I never recognized the relationality of research. Although it seemed like a breakthrough in thinking at that time, now I don't understand how it took me so long to connect relationality to research. I also see the vestiges of a more positivist approach in my previous journal entry – I unintentionally emphasize the importance of retrieving accurate information from my interviews with participants. I moved from seeing interviewing as a simplistic process of question/answer to questioning whether the information I collected through the interviews would be honest, complete, and accurate. I had expectations of what data would be collected through the interview process, but also recognized the potentiality of the interview process to generate unexpected, productive results. I have retheorized the interview as an apparatus that is part of the research entanglement but also determines its boundaries, regulating what is made possible and what is made impossible. Such that the interview is not completed but exists, in different forms, in the research entanglement. Emergent. The intra-action of me, the participants, our stories, memories, thoughts, experiences, our physical surroundings, and various material agents entangle creating something unpredictable. The outcomes cannot be known. Synergetic effects. I become differently because of our intra-actions. As do the participants and their clients, because of the encounters they share. Because of the intra-actions that occur when they are entangled in specific arrangements where "social service worker" and "client" no longer exist, where nouns and roles are lost within the whole. Where there is

no separation. What Thich Nhat Hahn (2017) calls interbeing. We inter-are.

As demonstrated in the swirling above and the messes shared throughout this chapter, I used writing, as inquiry and application, to work through tensions and messiness in data collection and analysis. Writing allowed me to find out about myself, the world, and the phenomenon under examination (Richardson, 1994, p. 516). In writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994; St. Pierre & Richardson, 2005), writing is a process of finding out; I do not wait to write only when I know what I want to say. I share my messes and swirlings as experimental writing (Richardson, 1994) that helps me to learn new things. Clandinin (2013) articulates the need, as a narrative inquirer, to know oneself and to be "awake to the ways we attend to the experiences of research participants" (p. 36). To actively engage with my subjectivities and to explore how I attended to the experiences of the participants, I wrote memos explicating my experiences and assumptions about my research, and further defining my research problem (Cox, 2012). My initial purpose was to continually question the interrelationship between me, the participants, and wider social, historical, and political narratives. The memos I created allowed me to explore my interview experience in light of theoretical and philosophical perspectives and provided a medium for making my assumptions explicit and open to critique. Through this process of memo writing, I began reading the participant narratives through different theories and ideas; this helped me examine the narratives in different ways but also helped me understand concepts, theories, and ideas through the narratives. I used reflective memos primarily for my own reflexivity, but I also shared them with critical friends to promote dialogue and questions about how I was attending to the research process and how I was making meaning through various theories and concepts. When I shared these documents, critical friends helped pushed my thinking forward and helped bring to the surface any assumptions I was working from.

Draft narrative accounts. I also created draft narrative accounts (as recommended by Connolly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin, 2013) to share my interpretations with participants. My descriptive interview notes allowed me to remember non-verbal elements of the conversation that could not be adequately captured on the audio recording. These descriptive notes provided context while listening and re-

listening to my conversations with participants. I wrote draft narrative accounts directly from the audio recordings.

My initial draft narrative accounts were tailored after Clandinin's (2013) example (see examples of all narrative accounts in Appendix D). I wrote these in the third person, outlining, in a chronological fashion, the key elements of the participant's story. Here is an excerpt from Carolyn's story, as an example:

> Carolyn obtained a women's inreach position working at [agency name] shelter based on her practicum and volunteer experience. Carolyn said it can be very challenging to find work without experience, which puts people looking for work in a bind. Carolyn worked at [agency name] for approximately one year – initially, she wanted to work with those who are hardest to help (face the most significant challenges) and felt that she would not burn out. Working with people in the downtown eastside helped her come to a "humbling realization that this may not be for me" and had her questioning if social service work generally was for her. At this point, she left social service work to do church ministry work. She spent two years in the church (2013 – 2015?) doing community organizing, events, running groups, and building relationships.

This, according to Mishler's (1995) typology, is "reconstructing the told from the telling" (p. 90). This involves the researcher interpreting and reordering the events of the story, as told by the participant, into a telling that has temporal and conceptual coherence (Mishler, 1995). Imposing coherence makes it easier to explore the narrative, but it also reduces the narrative to a complete account, with a clear beginning, middle, and end, where information is presented as fact, rather than one partial and incomplete way of knowing. In addition to interpreting the telling for coherence, I also attended to issues of temporality, sociality, and space in reconstructing the told (Clandinin, 2013). I then shared the draft narrative accounts with the participants to continue to build the story. For example, after our initial interview, I listened and re-listened to the audio recording and created a draft narrative account. When I met with that same participant for a second interview, I provided the written account of our first meeting. The account provided a summation of the conversation we had and questions for ongoing exploration, during the second interview, into some of the issues initially discussed. This second interview became a second draft narrative account, for the third interview.

Initially, the narrative summaries did not elicit a great deal of response from participants. Participants tended to point out factual errors or inaccuracies (e.g., incorrect dates or program names) in the document or clarified certain aspects of their

narrative, but the documents did not encourage further meaning making through dialogue. When I reviewed the narrative summaries, they appeared to be too neat, complete, and factual. I was reminded of Jackson and Mazzei's (2008) warning to be "constantly wary of the neatness and tidiness of meaning, where the effects of connection and full understanding foreclose meaning" (p. 307). It was my impression that the narrative summaries were too neat and tidy - that the information was provided in the voice of "the researcher" as fact and this effectively shut down any further elaboration or discussion. These “facts” were nicely organized and connected into a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Given that the document presented as complete, factual, and objective, it did not provide adequate space for the co-construction of meaning (Clandinin, 2013). With this awareness, I adapted the format of the narrative summaries (see examples of all summaries in Appendix D). Using the third person perspective seemed to remove me (as the researcher) from the narrative, so although I had created this version of the narrative, my voice was strangely absent from the document. Instead, I decided to represent our conversation using first-person narrative and the participants' own language (e.g., tone, style of speech, some direct quotes) so the coherent telling was provided from the "voice" of the participant (for an interesting analysis using second person narrative, see Jackson, 2010); an example is this excerpt from Hannah’s dialogue:

> I don’t know if confidence and my feeling of peace are related. In terms of confidence, it has grown in that I bring a lot of self-doubt into things that are new. I’m recognizing that as a pattern. But then when time and time again, I am able to do the work or exceed the expectations that I put on myself, that’s what builds my confidence. My confidence has just grown in going in Monday to Friday and working on new programs with new caseloads and recognizing each client as a work in progress. And recognizing that the expectations I had on myself to be there right away aren’t there – I don’t know it all and I can’t even expect to be there in a year. That sense of peace has come in talking through this with a lot of people with my support system. Family and friends. Lots of people have reassured me that I am in a good place – you are 24, you work in a good agency, you have your bachelor’s degree, etc. Again, I think I’ve been focusing on being consciously happy because I don’t want to miss it and always be focusing on the next thing. So I feel more fulfilled.

This excerpt contrasts sharply with the excerpt from Carolyn’s story above. The tone of the first-person narrative is more engaging, compared to the third person account which sounds more sterile. In addition to the participant’s narrative, I added my own

narrative to the account; my thoughts, comments, and reflections were also written in the first person and directed toward the participant, to run parallel alongside their story. This allowed for a textual representation of our two experiences, running alongside one another and interacting to create meaning and build the narrative. On the documents provided to the participants, the first-person narrative runs alongside my comments and questions, directed at the participant:

> That mindset of not knowing takes the pressure off needing to have answers to huge structural and social problems that don't currently have answers. I work through the problem on a case by case basis, in terms of where can I get a meal, and it makes it more tangible. School has a very grand focus on social justice and it is humbling to recognize that making tea and checking in with someone while they watch cartoons is an act of social justice because no one else is checking in with them to see if they're okay.
>
> Me: Is setting your own expectations of the work a form of resistance?

In the example above, my question was not posed in our initial conversation but arose when I was creating our narrative summary, the interim text, so in the written document this question ran alongside Alison's original narrative and became a point for further discussion and meaning making at our next meeting (see Figure 1 below). As seen in this example, presenting the information in first person allowed for greater transparency in how I was hearing the information discussed and how I was responding to various parts of our discussion.

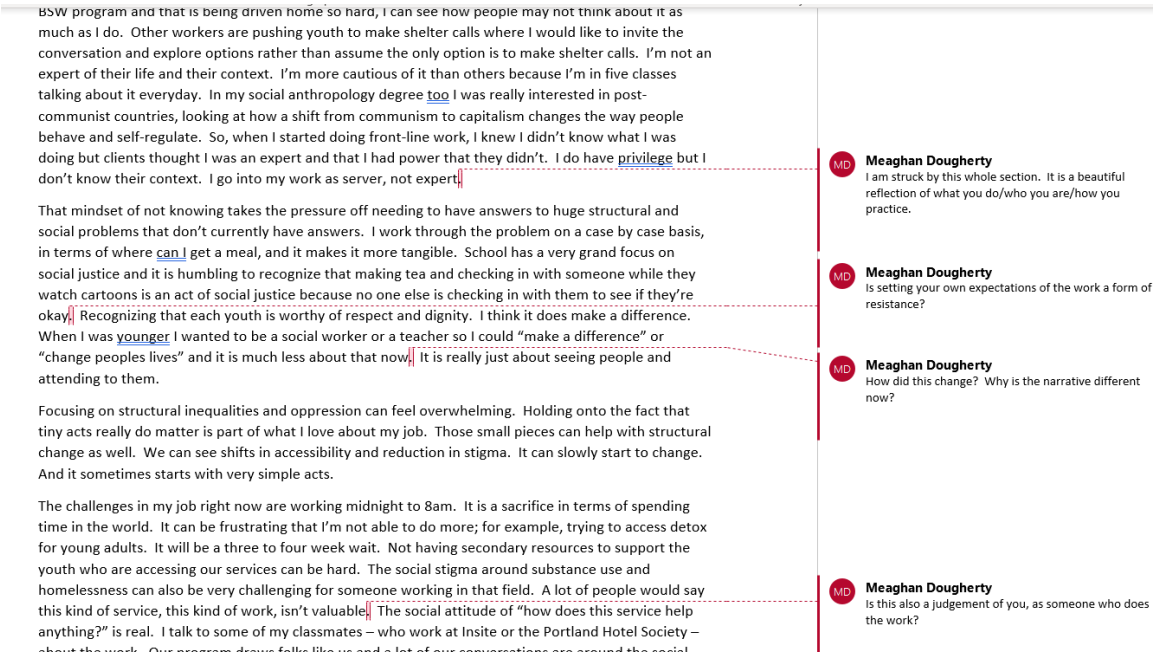

Figure 1: Draft Narrative Account

When meeting with participants for subsequent interviews, I provided the participant with the narrative account I had written in hard copy and asked them to read it and, if they desired, make written notes on the document. Although I had initially planned to review the narrative account verbally (i.e., reading through the account aloud) to allow for feedback and discussion as points arise for the participant (as recommended by Clandinin, 2013), I was aware of our public location and the personal nature of the conversation. Allowing the participants to read the narrative account could have changed the way they process the information, but it helped to ensure that their story remained confidential. After the participant reviewed the narrative account, I asked them what it was like for them to review. As mentioned, when reading the original third person narrative, many participants made note of discrepancies or inaccuracies in the written account (e.g., incorrect job position title, adjustment to dates, etc.). When I reformatted the narrative account into the first person, participants discussed what it was like for them to see their own story in writing and talked about how things had changed or stayed the same since our previous discussion. For example, one participant said reading the narrative account was like reading an old journal. She found it helpful to see where she was at that time and to see how her thinking and feelings had shifted since that time. Another participant asked if she could keep the hard copy and share it with her partner as she felt it really explained what was going on for her at that point in time,

in a way she hadn't been able to adequately communicate. Still another participant noted that reading her narrative account was like hearing her own voice and that it flowed in a more organic and dynamic way than the third person account; interestingly she also noted that she felt more vulnerable reading her story in her own voice, like a wall had been removed and she was more exposed. Participants also made note of my comments/dialogue in the document, discussing the ideas further or asking questions about my meaning. Some participants noted that they liked that my perspective of our conversation was presented transparently in the narrative. It appeared that the participants' response to the first-person narrative accounts was more animated and vibrant and that it promoted further discussion of interesting elements of their narrative. The first-person narrative seemed to help promote more in-depth conversations. These discussions were also audio recorded and became the basis for the subsequent written narrative account.

A mess

> *I can't cram these narratives into a coherent story; it nails down just one version of the story. There is no beginning, middle, and end. No hero. No plot twists. Just becoming in intra-action. Writing our conversations as a story doesn't allow meaning to be deferred; no already-absent present. Instead, the story becomes fixed in time, and it is my job, as researcher, to provide an accurate representation of what happened, of what the individual participant experienced – an accurate version of "reality". But I don't want truth. We can never get to the bottom of things, St. Pierre says. I want to show our conversations as entangled, intra-actions. The materials created from our conversations - the audio recording, the written notes, the transcript, the narrative summary - are* ***not*** *the conversation. Just partial representations in a multitude of possible perspectives.*

Initially, I felt stuck when I tried to determine a way (other than a verbatim transcript) to represent conversations with participants. The messiness in creating the narratives seems to be related to the messiness of transition as a concept; just as transition isn't a clear, coherent, linear event, neither were the participants' stories of their transition. Although the first-person narrative accounts served my purpose in representing each conversation I had with a participant, I was unsure how to represent

several interviews with the same participant. I tried adding new or divergent material from the second interview into the original interim text but found it was clumsy and difficult to represent the varied context within which the stories were discussed. It meant I had to add material to certain sections of text, based on general topics, which seemed to essentialize and simplify the stories. I tried editing the original interim text, so it represented an amalgamation of the information shared in multiple interviews but then the story presented as one coherent narrative, rather than a series of stories. Unlike Clandinin (2013), I decided not to incorporate several interviews into one story or one telling. I saw the subsequent interviews as a form of restorying and recognized that each story can be retold in different ways depending upon time, place, audience, mood, experience, etc. (Mishler, 2004). To honour this, and to represent each story as in progress and unfinalizable, I wrote a narrative account for each meeting, rather than compiling the information into one coherent story. There is not one story that contributes to who someone is but there are a multitude of stories (told by the individual and those around them, over time and space, to different audiences) that contribute to a plurality of identities (Mishler, 2004). Given the dynamic nature of our experience and our narratives, I did not want to impose new meaning on previously told stories; rather, I thought it was helpful to see the stories as a compilation that could allow for reflection and provide a transparent process of how we created (are creating) meaning in relationship with one another. The written documents are material artifacts that demonstrate the progression of our dialogue and meanings in the making.

In co-creating the narrative accounts, I was aware of my own involvement in the process. I recognized the need to actively build positive rapport with the participants and to attend to them to make them feel safe and heard. I also recognized when I could relate to the experiences explained within our discussions and how that influenced how I heard those elements of the narrative. Often these relational elements were very clear to me and I would include my thoughts about them in my research notes after the interview. In some cases, I was not aware of my own responses until I had reviewed the audio several times. As one example, I found myself being very reassuring with one participant who had felt that she had "wasted time" in starting her career. I was very impressed by her experiences and admired her courage in undertaking various experiences out of passion and interest (rather than with the express concern of 'getting a job'). My feelings were clear and explicit in my responses, so I made note of this on

the narrative account and raised the question of why I felt it was necessary to reassure her in this way. This made my position explicit and provided space for further discussion about how we were each making meaning and what was important to us in that process.

A note on interim research texts. Interim research texts played an integral role in my analyses, yet I adopted the terms "interim research text" and "draft narrative account" from Clandinin (2013) without critical examination. Through my discussion of the texts, and the purposes they served in my research, I have recognized that the terms may need clarification. The terms, as introduced by Clandinin (2013) differentiate a draft text, or field text (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber & Orr, 2009) from a final research text, generally a published research article or a dissertation; field documents are generative in producing this final research product. For the purposes of my work, the interim texts represent the dynamism of the participants and their narratives. I recognize that narratives, ideas, concepts, theories, and writing are always dynamic and in transition. Recognizing texts as unfixed and in transition is congruent with my desire for unknowability and the idea that "we can never get to the bottom of things" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 482). So, although interim research texts are differentiated from final research texts in narrative inquiry, I present my writing as always in a process of becoming. My understanding, as demonstrated through my writing, is always changing and growing more complex and nuanced.

Onto-Epistemological Shift

A mess

> *What am I really trying to do? What can I hope to say at the end of the day? I'm not seeking to answer a specific question with rational, stable, fixed knowledge. I can't remove myself from the research entanglement to take a look at things – to examine phenomena, to solve problems. I want my inquiry to open up other questions. I want to explore new ways of looking at and deconstructing entanglements. It is in the space where things can be broken down and rebuilt and broken down again that there is hope. What we are doing isn't working; we have an ethical imperative to do things differently. To re-imagine what is possible.*

As mentioned above, I experienced tensions in my approach as I interviewed participants and attempted to represent those conversations in a way that would maintain a sense of unknowability and not fix the interviews as an accurate representation of the participants' experiences; instead I wanted their stories to be one story, among many, given their multiplicities and our shared time and place. I wanted my approach to honour the dynamism of the participants, in their varied contexts. My intention was to examine their stories in a way that would not elucidate the same themes that have been identified in the literature but to provide some new insight into how various micro, meso, and macro level forces work in transition.

When I experience tension, I start reading, in the hope that someone else has experienced something similar or will offer something that will help me get unstuck. Elizabeth St. Pierre's (2013) article on "The Appearance of Data" was my introduction into questioning the philosophical foundation of research decisions. Although, as a doctoral student, I had read post-modern, feminist, and post-structural theory, I had not considered how deconstructing traditional ideas of truth, reason, progress, and identity may influence methodology. I began reading literature troubling voice and representation (Mazzei, 2013a; 2016; 2017; Mazzei & Jackson, 2016), data (St. Pierre, 2013), coding (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014), and writing (St. Pierre, 2017b), and examining inquiries engaging post-qualitative approaches like rhizomatic analysis and diffractive analysis (e.g., Davies, 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2012; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Mazzei, 2014). My introductions to these ideas was methodological, in hopes of resolving my own methodological tensions. But my interest proliferated into onto-epistemological questions of knowing and being (e.g., Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). Since then, I have begun to delve into new materiality and post-humanist literature as well (e.g., Braidotti, 2013; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). This has brought me to a place of examining transition through a relational ontology focusing on productive difference (i.e., diffractive analysis), a process I describe in Chapter 6.

My analysis of the transition experiences of social service workers is, in itself, transitional. My initial analytic approach involved applying theoretical lenses to the data (see, for example, Honan, Knobel, Baker & Davies, 2000; Collier, Moffat & Perry, 2015) to understand how different theories generate different constructs of social service work. These lenses are theoretical concepts that provide a framework for interpreting the interviews; I examine the participant narratives through concepts of power (as discussed

by Foucault) in Chapter 4 and performativity (as discussed by Butler) in Chapter 5. These are concepts that glowed for me (MacLure, 2013) through repeated listening of the audio recordings and review of the narrative accounts and researcher memos. Initially, my interest in power was sparked by power differentials inherent in social service work, the desire to empower clients, and the messages of resistance that rang through the interviews. When I began working with Foucault's concept of power (and resistance), I attended to messages of 'not enough' that pervaded some conversations. This led me to examine social service work as performativity. In examining the ongoing performance towards an expected ideal, I questioned the emphasis on the agential human subject performing identities. I explored Barad's (2007) idea of entanglement, post-human performativity, and the concept of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005), to highlight the complexity of transition as an ongoing and entangled process. I explored the participants' becoming and my own process of becoming-with the participants, in entanglement. This exploration, and my engagement with the literature discussed above, catalyzed an ontological and methodological shift; employing diffractive analysis, I explored the transition experience of social service workers as an element of becoming in entanglement. "In a diffractive analysis, research problems, concepts, emotions, transcripts, memories, and images all affect each other and interfere with each other in an emergent process of coming to know something differently" (Davies, 2014, p. 734, italics in original); I diffracted various elements, including the interview audio recordings, theoretical concepts, narrative accounts, material agents, researcher memos, with my experience as a social service worker, an educator of social service workers, and a researcher. Reading these elements, in entanglement, through one another to explore difference (see Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) is productive in creating new understandings that promote thinking/being/doing differently; the purpose of creating new understandings is to deterritorialize the status quo and produce new opportunities and interventions for a more just world. These concepts take me far afield from the categorizing and sorting work of thematic coding. As I elaborate in the chapters that follow, these new understandings have meaningful implications for social service work, transition, education, and the nature of relational practice in intra-action. While these insights offer opportunity to do things differently, they also carry with them potential risk. I discuss these risks and response-abilities in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Chapter 4.

Neoliberal Constructions of Participants in Transition – Power

Swirling

> *My interviews really got me thinking. Each time I listen to the audio recordings, a different aspect of the conversation glows in the foreground; I then hear the conversation through that glow, until the next listen, when a different aspect seems to jump into the foreground. With one listen, I feel the pressure of being successful; the fear of not being enough. Then, I hear the same words as full of strength, intention, and resistance. I see the interview as something that happened but the conversation as a dynamic, ongoing representation – like a text that is read differently each time, as the reader constructs and is constructed by the reading. As I listen, my mind automatically connects the conversation with the participant to different concepts, theories, thinkers, memories, experiences, and other stories I have heard. Almost like a pinball machine, the conversations bounce off my own experiences, the last article I read, a tension I have been thinking through. They are flung back into play by a YouTube video, a novel that I can't forget, or the snapshot in my mind of a beautiful vista from my last hike. They ring against current events, a passionate discussion in my classroom, what is possible. Ding ding ding ding ding. High score.*

This swirling demonstrates how I began analyzing the interviews I had with participants. The conversations with participants catalyzed my thinking and brought to mind theories and concepts that led to other thoughts, ideas, and memories. MacLure (2013) discusses this as "the glow" (p. 661), where some aspect of the data draws the researcher in, speeding up and slowing down time simultaneously, immersing the researcher. She explains that the glow is "not under our conscious or intentional control as analysts"; it is "something that is befalling us" (p. 662). As demonstrated in my swirling, various aspects of the interviews glowed for me at different times, in different

ways and I found myself pulled in by the data. As discussed in Chapter 1, I attended to these affective intensities and found myself moving in various directions. I was pulled in the direction of exploring the participants' experiences of transition, recognizing how neoliberal ideology colours their experiences as both students and workers. Based on the literature and theories I discuss in Chapter 2, I explore how participants talk about accepting or rejecting neoliberal values in their transition from school to work. This excavates the tensions and frictions the participants may have 'bumped up' against as they transitioned from being a student to being a social service worker. Through this analysis, I recognized that a dichotomous approach (for example, how participants discussed accepting/rejecting neoliberal ideology) did not fit with all participants' narratives; encounters with neoliberalism are more complex. Ideas of power, resistance, and freedom glowed in relation to some of the participants' narratives. I then turned to Foucault's concept of power to explore how participants explained that they do not accept/reject neoliberal ideology but navigate the tensions of this ideology throughout their transition.

Variation in Participants' Perspectives

I recognize that the interview experience – the coming together of various elements in time and space – defies replication and comparison. I also acknowledge that there are certain intensities or patterns in the interviews. In analyzing the participants' narrative accounts, I recognized differences between my conversations with Matthew and Elizabeth, compared to those with Carolyn, Hannah, and Alison. I noticed that the conversations with Elizabeth and Matthew focused on elements of their role and transition. Elizabeth and Matthew both spoke of their work in a matter-of-fact manner, explaining their responsibilities, challenges, and what they found rewarding in their work. For example, Matthew spoke of challenges with the computer program used to document and report on clients and in the difficulty in working at various sites with different groups of colleagues. Elizabeth portrayed her approach to her work as very holistic and intentional yet emphasized strategies or techniques she uses in her relationships with clients, without discussion of the wider contexts that may be shaping both her and her clients. In contrast, Carolyn, Hannah, and Alison tended to explore the complexity of their work and the tensions they experienced in their trajectory by discussing the context within which they transitioned and worked. For example, Alison

passionately discussed the broader social inequities that influence the clients she serves, Hannah explored the importance of cultural context in relational work, and Carolyn spoke of spirituality and questions of purpose. Elizabeth was the first participant I interviewed, and I had surmised, at the time of our interview, that the direct, concise approach to discussing her experience resulted from my interview style. Matthew was the last participant I interviewed, and I believe (based on review of the interview audio) that my interviewing style was very similar to that which I adopted with Elizabeth and all the participants (see further discussion of my approach to interviewing in Chapter 3). Rather than flowing from my interview style, perhaps the difference in focus with Matthew and Elizabeth's narratives speaks to differences in their approach to social service work. Below I explore how these differences appear in narrative accounts of their transition. Specifically, I examine how although neoliberal pressures to succeed seem evident throughout all the participants' experiences, participants demonstrated resistance to these pressures to varying degrees.

Experiencing Pressure to "Succeed"

The discourse of social mobility (described fully in Chapter 2) weaves through participants' narratives of how education is viewed as a 'pathway to success'; their discussions seem to affirm the view that receiving a credential provides access to meaningful and profitable employment, and ultimately, a good life. Most participants discussed the pressures, both internal and external, to 'achieve'; to possess certain material goods and to be envied in their personal and professional capacities – to 'succeed'. Matthew discussed how he has internalized the pressure to succeed from family and friends, comparing himself to his previous classmates who have achieved additional credentials and are working in more advanced positions. He focused on the financial aspects of work – desiring an increase in hourly wage, ensuring he works adequate shifts to maintain a certain income, working close to home to limit the time, energy, and financial costs of commuting – and whether engaging in additional education is "worth it", financially. In discussing the pressure from others to return to school, he stated:

> The choices I make have to be my own. They have to be well thought out – especially financially. I feel a lot of pressure to make the right choices financially, especially considered the amount of money people are paid in this industry right now.

Carolyn also discussed the pressure to "succeed" as a competition to be more successful than others. She explained:

> I still feel elements of competition. Being back in Canada after my internship, I look around at my peers. I should be further ahead. Where is my house? We are very competitive in Western countries. You are always feeling like you are not doing enough, that I am not enough. We all feel that pressure to be somewhere fast or be successful in something but where? For who? I worry about the pressure when your friends are getting married, their career, or people in accounting who are making good money, you're like, I better step my game up.

Carolyn felt pressure when she compared herself to her friends who have met social milestones, including getting married and having a lucrative career. She felt she needs to "step her game up", suggesting she does not feel she is 'enough'. Her lack of career stability and wealth is presented as a personal failure or character defect. In comparing herself to her friends, Carolyn addresses material elements of success. In Carolyn's discussion, she noted competition is a cultural value in Western countries; she stated that she became increasingly aware of competition within Canadian culture after returning from an internship in Africa. Her discussion highlights the relationship between pressure to succeed (as a physical and affective force) and the materiality of wealth. Western cultural values of competition and consumerism are consistent with neoliberal ideology that emphasizes personal responsibility, individualism, and meritocracy.

Alison noted similar experiences of pressure to compete, based on comparisons with family members:

> I am 30, I have never made more than $16, 000 per year. I have almost $60, 000 in student loan debt. I have never been able to pay off any of it. I come from a family deeply entrenched in poverty – both of my parents have been on permanent disability for over 10 years. My dad worked in street ministries and got donations from the church; he didn't have a salary for most of my life. I live in a basement suite that is definitely illegal. That place will be renovicted any day. They get closed down if they are not suitable for people to live in; they are open to inspections and this neighbourhood has been under examination. It is constantly precarious. So, I look and compare that to my cousins who went right through college into $50, 000 - $70, 000 per year jobs, minimum. My 27-year-old cousin is on his fourth mortgage and has been married for eight years. He bought a house at the age of 19. That is the norm in my family. For me, deciding to go back to school for a career that pays less than the degree I had to begin with, at the age of 28 – everyone thought I was nuts. I feel like there are all of these social

> expectations of where you ought to be when you're 30. You should have at least started an RRSP!

Alison noted that her immediate family was deeply entrenched in poverty and that she now resides in a precarious living situation, due to her limited income and substantial student loan debt. She later compared herself to her cousin who first bought a house at the age of 19, explaining that this is the norm within her extended family. Alison's family is both entrenched in poverty and is made up of members who move from college into high paying jobs, marriages, and mortgages; this demonstrates the complexity of lives and incomes. She noted that social expectations are associated with age; she is 30 years old, not married, and her comment about starting a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) and having a mortgage is steeped in irony. She recognized that, at her age, the expectation (from somewhere beyond herself, swirling in neoliberal discourse) is that she should be planning for the future and retirement; Alison's reality is much more tenuous and focused on immediate needs. Alison is focused on maintaining her residence and meeting her daily needs on a part-time income, while taking a full course load and preparing for practicum. Alison did not have financial assistance from her immediate family, which is integral for members of her generation to live outside of precarity. She compared herself to her cousin, who is an anomaly in his financial stability. Although Alison's challenges in living independently seem to be common with members of her generation, she internalizes her precarious work and housing as flowing from her own choices and from not being 'enough'.

Matthew also shared his desire to get somewhere and "to get there fast", although he was also unclear on the destination. Like Alison, Matthew has internalized his lack of perceived success as flowing from his own actions. Below, Matthew described where he is in relation to his current work and how he is responsible for changing his current situation:

> Overall, I'm happy. Sometimes I think I should push more to make more money. I have a pretty good understanding that you don't make more money just because you want to make more money, you have to be willing to take on more responsibility. You better be worth the money you are making. I have impatience to get where I want to go – and I don't even know where that is. But I want to get there fast. Wherever that is. I've pushed myself to work 16 hours per day, going from the shelter to the group home, sleeping four hours per night. But it isn't sustainable. It would be nice to make another $5 per hour, make a bit more money, work close to home. The positions that are available

> where you make more money seem a bit beyond my level of experience -I don't know if I just need to suit up and show up.

Matthew, like Carolyn, described the pressure to get somewhere quickly, while recognizing uncertainty about where he is trying to go. Matthew discussed his feeling of responsibility for getting where he wants to go (i.e., taking on more responsibility, making more money, working closer to home, etc.); in this vein, he views his lack of perceived success in achieving a certain position or wage as an individual failure. In Matthew's example, it is unclear whether more senior positions were available or if there were positions within his field where it *would* be possible to make an additional $5 per hour. Matthew puts this responsibility upon himself, in keeping with neoliberal values of meritocracy and competition, without examining the structural constrains that may limit his ability to achieve these goals.

Elizabeth discussed the disparity between needing to get somewhere and then, once arriving, wondering if it was worth it. She explained that the pressure to get somewhere seems to continue, despite successfully achieving significant goals; the goal line keeps moving. Elizabeth discussed the desire to transition from a student to being "a functional adult". She described how she was ready to "not be a student"; she wanted to let go of that identity and be more of an adult. For her, being an adult was not necessarily marked by financial indicators of success in keeping with social mobility discourse and neoliberal ideology, rather this involved "having a balanced life of going to work, having friends, doing things, living not with family – all of those aspects". She further elucidated that when she was in school, she found being a student all-consuming. To her, being an adult meant being able to spend time with friends, doing things you enjoy, and living independently. However, upon graduation, she questioned whether she had made the right decision to attend post-secondary:

> Really graduation happened and I was like, oh man. I had worked so long and now it is behind you – what do I do now? Did I make a huge mistake and wrack up a bunch of student loans for nothing?

Elizabeth shared that in her current role in social service work: "similar questions come up now. I sometimes look at the job I'm in and ask, could I do this for awhile?" Elizabeth's questions highlight that the pressure to get somewhere (e.g., graduating from post-secondary, obtaining a job that aligns with your educational trajectory) does not

subside when one actually *gets* to where they intended; instead, the value of the achievement is questioned, there is disappointment, and a new goal is set.

Matthew, Alison, and Carolyn discussed this pressure to succeed as an external and undifferentiated force – in their experience, "we all" feel "all of these social expectations". When speaking of the successes of friends and family members, they ascribe the pressure they feel to compete with them as social and cultural, noting that "everyone" thinks they should be in a certain and better social and financial place than they are. Yet I note that, although the pressure is described as external, Matthew, Alison, and Carolyn still compare themselves to friends and family members, using specific material measures of "success". Based on their explanations, success involves houses instead of basement suites, well-paying careers instead of jobs, and mortgages instead of student loans. It is interesting that while both student loans and mortgages are forms of debt, mortgages are seen (in these examples) as acceptable and as a sign of success, while student loans are seen as negative and potentially irresponsible. Education, in terms of both its use value and exchange value in the labour market, is seen as a much more valuable "asset" than a material possession that can depreciate in value, but this is not how Carolyn and Alison talked about these forms of debt.

However, these participants also recognized that perhaps the relationship between education and employment was not as clear as they had originally thought. In describing his internal conflict in deciding whether to return to post-secondary for his degree, Matthew examined the relationship between credentials and positions within his work place:

> I have met a lot of people with [agency name] who have diplomas or sometimes no formal education and they are in middle management because of their experience and their willingness to do a good job. Then there are brand new casuals with degrees or master's degrees, or people who are counsellors who work at the shelter as a second job – there doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason in terms of who is where in terms of their education and where they sit in the agency. There is no rule to that – so you can't tell me that magically, things will work out for me just because I decide to go back to school for three more years.

Matthew's discussion demonstrates that although some of the participants seem to be internalizing neoliberal pressures to succeed, they are also questioning, at times, some of these expectations. I saw the participants questioning the pressures they feel and the expectations that are placed upon them (by themselves and by others) as acts

of resistance. To help explore this idea, I think with Foucault's concept of power to understand how participants deconstruct these expectations and practices, question their origin, and resist neoliberal conceptualizations of success as natural and inevitable and flowing from individual choice and competition. I review Foucault's concept of power to then analyze the participants' narratives of resistance to neoliberal discourses and definitions of 'success'.

Foucault's Conceptualization of Power

For Foucault, power is not a characteristic held by an individual. Instead, power is a productive force that is relational and works both on and through people. Foucault (1979) states: "In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (p. 194). That is, the individual is constituted (or produced) within power relations and this production is ongoing throughout time. Foucault (1994) argues against the "absolute position of the subject" (p. 3), instead arguing that subjects are continually constituted and reconstituted by history. In addition to producing and constituting subjects over time, power also constitutes knowledge; constraining what is possible to know, what is accepted as knowledge, and constituting new knowledge forms. In his discussion of institutions, Foucault (1979) notes that defining the boundaries of the problem gives rise to specialized and elite knowledge. For example, in examining prison and mental hospitals, Foucault (1979) argues that elite bodies of specialized knowledge – disciplines like criminology and psychology – are created to define and address identified problems like delinquency and mental illness. The knowledge produced within these discourses limits what can be known about the individuals constituted as subjects.

In describing the connection between power and knowledge, Foucault (1994) states:

> It is not natural for nature to be known. Thus, between the instincts and knowledge, one finds not a continuity but, rather, a relation of struggle, domination, servitude, settlement. In the same way, there can be no relation of natural continuity between knowledge and the things that knowledge must know. There can only be a relation of violence, domination, power, and force, a relation of violation. (p. 9)

Here, Foucault articulates the role of power in the creation of knowledge. There is no natural connection between "knowledge and the things that knowledge must know"; this relationship is determined by discursive arrangements that produce certain practices and forms of power-knowledge. When practices and constituting forms of power-knowledge are accepted as unquestionable or inevitable, they produce subjects and discourse that maintains these arrangements. Returning to the example of the prison, when prison is the accepted response to crime, specific subjects – the prisoner, guard, warden – are constituted within a discourse – criminology, penal studies - that produces and maintains these power arrangements as natural. Foucault (1994) moves away from the individual subject as the "central core of all knowledge", recognizing that the subject and knowledge itself are produced through power relations (p. 3). The discursive arrangements that produce subjects, knowledge, and what is possible to know and do (specific practices) are powerful, constraining individual action or behaviour. As knowledge is created about what is good and bad (criminal, deviant, sick, abnormal, etc.) and power is exercised over those who do not conform to conceptualizations of "good" (e.g., institutionalization, imprisonment, punishment, etc.), subjects self-govern and monitor their own conduct. Individuals have become subjects of normalization through mechanisms that are discursive in creating subjects that unconsciously discipline themselves (Foucault, 1979, p. 308).

In discussing Foucault's concepts of power, St. Pierre (2000) notes that although individuals internalize expectations that can lead to 'self-governing', power is a productive and relational force that can also be modified or reversed (p. 490). That is, power operates in relation, and is dynamic; so, while people may abide by norms and social expectations, power may be modified or reversed in forms of resistance to these norms and expectations. St. Pierre (2000) further explains that the presence of power elucidates freedom; power relations exist where there is "a certain degree of freedom on both sides" (p. 490). "Power is productive and can be found in the effects of liberty as well as in the effects of domination" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 491). The fact that power demonstrates freedom, as well as domination, is important in understanding resistance to neoliberal discourses that is my concern in this chapter. As power highlights the presence of freedom, and power is everywhere, resistance is always possible; resistance is an effect of a power relation. Therefore, although individuals are constituted within discursive arrangements that are produced through relations of power-

knowledge, there is always the opportunity for resistance. Foucault (1994) argues that this resistance "is a question of analyzing a 'regime of practices' – practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken-for-granted meet and interconnect" (p. 225). So, rather than accepting and internalizing conceptualizations of "good" and "normal" as inevitable, resistance involves examining and deconstructing concepts of good and normal to show how these practices are legitimized. This is the core of Foucault's work – to question and deconstruct taken-for-granted practices - and his analyses demonstrate the importance of, and possibility for, resistance. That is, Foucault emphasizes the importance of resisting, through question and critique, practices that are accepted as natural and inevitable. By making visible the relationship between power-knowledge, accepted practices, and the construction of subjects and material-discursive arrangements, Foucault creates space for resistance and new ideas of what could be.

While resistance is integral to Foucault's concepts, he does not seek to "dictate 'what is to be done'" (Foucault, 1994, p. 236). Instead, he sees the deconstruction and analysis of practices and techniques in their multiplicity (polymorphisms) of arrangements as a form of critique, of resistance. "Critique doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, 'this, then, is what needs to be done.' It should be an instrument of those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is." (Foucault, 1994, p. 236). So, while Foucault articulates the need for critique, for resistance, and for refusing what is, he does not offer strategies of resistance and discounts the utility of prescriptive statements of what should be done (Foucault, 1994). This allows for generative resistance where the focus is on opening up new possibilities of what could be, rather than simply "refus(ing) what is" (Foucault, 1994, p. 236). It is through this perspective of continual deconstruction that I explore the participants' experience of transition – their construction as subjects, the power relations that configure them, and their experiences of and capacities for resistance.

Resisting Neoliberal Definitions of "Success"

In this section, I think with Foucault's concept of power to show how some of the participants deconstructed social mobility expectations and practices, questioning their origin, and resisting neoliberal conceptualizations of success as natural and inevitable.

As noted above, participants discussed the pressures they feel in comparing themselves to and competing with others (i.e., family and friends) in relation to their financial success – for example, having a house, obtaining a well-paying job, starting an RRSP. They discussed their educational, relational, and life experiences in an instrumental way in relation to the overarching goal of financial success; they asked how their experiences contribute to or detract from their concept of financial or material success. This is demonstrated in detail in discussing the participants' experience with the pressures to succeed; for example, both Matthew and Elizabeth analyzed their educational decisions in terms of whether they are "worth it" financially. The participants described those experiences that do not directly contribute to financial success as a waste of time. For example, both Carolyn and Hannah loved their involvement in international social service work and felt it was one of the best experiences of their lives, yet both were wary of engaging in future international projects because it could put them behind where they want to be in relation to financial success and stability. They seem to moderate their internal desires and expectations with external pressures that are constraining their options. They self-govern to meet the social expectations they feel are placed upon them, reinforcing and reproducing neoliberal values of competition and success.

However, while the participants described the pressure they feel to compete and demonstrate material success, some participants also recognized their ability to resist this pressure and to think about what else may be possible. Carolyn, Hannah, and Alison discussed the need to step back from these powerful messages of where one should be (i.e., financially, socially, etc.). They described an active process whereby they make a choice not to buy into the externalized neoliberal pressures placed upon them (constructing them) and they stop themselves when they get caught up in the feeling of not being enough. Carolyn explained:

> But then I stop and think - for what? What am I not seeing right now? It is that inner dialogue. You can so easily get caught up in the idea of wasted time and get sad about it. Or you can see time not as a waste but as what makes me who I am. It would be a waste to feel like my life was a waste of time. I'm trying to figure this out for myself. If I can't learn how to stop and enjoy what's around me and who I am now – imperfections and all – then I am just wasting time trying to prove myself to someone else or myself. Not valuing the time I do have. Trying to see the world like that makes for a much more productive and happy life. It is super hard. Super challenging. That's the message –

> even growing up as a low-income immigrant kid – I wasn't white enough, Korean enough, Canadian enough. Never enough. Then growing up, I am reteaching myself to talk to myself in a way that's empowering.

For Carolyn, comparing herself to others resulted in a feeling of never being enough. Rather than trying to compete, she stated that she actively stops and reflects on how she is using her time. She reframed the idea of "wasted time" (i.e., time spent on activities and experiences that do not directly contribute to overall goals of financial success) to recognize that the time she has invested in different experiences has made her who she is today. Carolyn discussed the need to value who she is and to honour where she is on her own life trajectory. She focused on gratitude – on recognizing what she does have, rather than focusing on what she is lacking. However, this is not an easy perspective to hold onto. The default position seems to be to fall back into competition, comparison, and feeling not enough:

> I feel competitive but then I reflect on these thoughts and learn how to be grateful. Working in this field is incredibly humbling. People are dealt really shitty hands. And you forget to see how much you've been given. I get to eat three times a day. I have people who love me and I love people. Still, it is a very real struggle to remember, to be thankful, and to try to maintain balance. It is easy to slip into that competitive mindset without even being conscious of it. I want to be genuinely happy for others and be content with where I am currently while still growing. That is the ultimate dream.

In this part of our discussion, Carolyn compared herself to her clients, who are "dealt really shitty hands". This, in contrast to comparisons to "successful" friends and family members earlier, helps Carolyn reframe her experience and be grateful for what she has. She continues to navigate this binary between self/other to help determine her own position – what she "should" have and what she "should" be. In this way, Carolyn is enacting reflective skills associated with being a social service worker to disrupt some of the expectations involved in transitioning into the social service work field.

Hannah, who enhances inclusivity in child care settings, felt uncertainty about her work and her future. She, like Carolyn, explained that she has been working on reframing her uncertainty; she noted that she is recognizing what she has and feeling grateful and, in doing so, has a renewed sense of peace. She explained that she was feeling pressure to figure out what to do next (in terms of education and career), but that she has moved beyond that feeling and is trying to be consciously happy:

> That sense of peace has come in talking through this with a lot of people in my support system. Family and friends. Lots of people have reassured me that I am in a good place – you are 24, you work in a good agency, you have a bachelor's degree, etc. Again, I think I've been focusing on being consciously happy because I don't want to miss it and always be focusing on the next thing. So I feel more fulfilled.

Hannah discusses intentionally reframing her experience and in looking to others to determine if she is where she "should" be. She feels reassured by others – family and friends – who tell her that she is "in a good place"; that is, she is reassured that she is enough by those around her. Hannah is drawing on different ideology – being present, practicing gratitude – to resist neoliberalism.

Alison recognized that external pressures and messages of 'not being enough' construct her, even when her values are inconsistent with the dominant neoliberal values idealized socially (e.g., consumption, financial success, competition, etc.). Here she reframed what she has been able to do, how she has succeeded, by her own benchmarks of what is valuable:

> I am able to pay my bills every month and I don't carry a credit card debt so that is the most exciting thing I can say about where I am at. That comes with having been on my own at a very young age and learning to balance that. It all comes back into a capitalist market economy and where you ought to be within that, and that dictates how you interact with every other social institution from the work you do, to being in school, to everything. It is all embedded in that. And I've consciously resisted that my whole life. Funny that even if I don't place value within any of that, I've still very much internalized those messages. There are dominant discourses that I may not believe in but very much influence me. Being aware of that and not letting it get the better of me is very important. Even within my own values, none of this is important to me but I make sense of myself also through how others see me. So, my identity isn't just internal – it is also relational. And if I am seen as not quite getting it right, it is going to have a negative effect on me.
>
> I recognize that most of those things that I feel like I'm failing at adulting are not values that are mine anyway so I'm like wait, that's not my value, never mind. It comes back to resistance. Recognizing that it is an aspect of the system that I've never appreciated anyway so I don't need to worry about that. So when those feelings do come up it is questioning whether I feel like I am failing in myself or if that is something that someone else expects of me. How many expectations have we all built up about ourselves that may not be meaningful to us at all and we are totally taking for granted? What is frustrating about that for me is trying to decide whether something is my own value or is it something implicit from my family or society. I'm 30. I've done a lot

> of pretty great things in my life. I'm proud of where I am. But I forget that all the time.

Alison's discussion highlighted the distinction (often comparison) between self/other and how one navigates internal and external pressures and expectations. She recognized that her identity is "also relational", so that how she views herself (as 'enough', as an 'adult', as 'successful') is influenced by how others view her. When others do not see her as successful, this has a negative influence on her self-concept, even when she does not share these values. As with Carolyn and Hannah's intentional reframing above, Alison stated that she actively resists external expectations and tries to determine her own values and expectations. She described this as actually stopping the process – "I'm like, wait, that's not my value" – and assessing whether values she holds are truly her own or are societal values that she has internalized without critical thought. Although Alison explicitly differentiated between her "own values" and what others expect of her, within Foucault's conceptualization she is constituted by discourse, even if this discourse is disruptive to neoliberalism. Alison, Carolyn, and Hannah also discussed the importance of knowing themselves – listening to and questioning themselves to determine what they think, feel, know, and do. Resistance then, involves drawing upon other discourses that question, deconstruct, and speak back to neoliberal discourse.

These narratives suggest that Alison, Carolyn, and Hannah are constantly constructing and reconstructing themselves, in an incomplete process, where they are open to new formations (St. Pierre, 2000). They are navigating and disrupting a series of binaries – self/other, internal/external, enough/not enough – throughout their transition. At times, they actively resist the internalized and external messages of success by stopping, re-evaluating those messages, and reframing their own experiences within discourses of gratitude and intentional happiness. They are navigating what it means to have and to be 'enough' in a globalized, capitalist society and this can be disruptive and generative within that society.

What Does This Analysis Allow?

Although the original intent in my analysis was to explore how participants accept or reject neoliberal expectations in their transition from post-secondary to social service work, the complexity of participants' thinking and experiences alerted me that this

dichotomous approach to neoliberal expectations was too simplistic. Participants navigate and disrupt neoliberal expectations; in their ongoing disruption of self/other, internal/external, and enough/not enough, the participants' narratives demonstrated how power works through them. They are not powerless and oppressed by neoliberal ideology and social mobility discourse. Neoliberal ideology and social mobility discourse are powerful and harmful in participants' lives, but participants intentionally draw on other discourses to disrupt the inevitability of neoliberalism and provide new possibilities for living. Power flows through the participants, in relation to others. The participants, in a Foucauldian sense, do not hold power as individuals but exercise power in different ways, in varied entanglements, situations, and experiences. The participants are constituted, as subjects, through the power-knowledge discourses that are constraining them. They have internalized the importance of normative ideas of being 'enough' and 'success' but are using elements of their education and life experiences (e.g., self-reflection, strength-based practice, reframing) to critique these ideas. Throughout their discussions, participants highlighted the material elements of transition. This included precarious living situations, scarcity, and the need for financial security. These basic and immediate needs can be distinguished from a neoliberal desire for wealth and status. While participants are constituted and constrained by this discourse, they also use it to critique from within. The participants do not accept the way things are or take for granted the inevitability of current definitions of 'success'. Instead, they have questioned their perspectives and values, and contextualized their experience within a broader social narrative. This critique is a form of resistance that is consistent with Foucault's conceptualization of power and of resistance as a deconstruction of dominant practices and discourses. This resistance is also consistent with the literature (explored in-depth in Chapter 3) that finds that students tend to resist internalizing the messages of neoliberal ideology when they recognize the promise of a "good life" (Cairns, 2013) – gaining economic and social mobility through hard work, higher education, and employment – is inconsistent with their lived experiences (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose, 2013; Hull, 1993; Hull & Zacher, 2007; Valadez, 2000).

Reading the participants' experiences through Foucault's concepts provides a different perspective of transition to social service work. Rather than viewing the experiences of participants as moving seamlessly and in a linear direction from school to work, from being a student to becoming a successful, professional adult, a Foucauldian

analysis suggests that participants continually navigate neoliberal expectations and question the promise of a 'good life' after post-secondary. The process of internalizing neoliberal ideals, in school and work, is more nuanced and complex than simply acceptance/rejection, as participants navigate who they are, what their role is in the field of social service work, and what they value. The participants, as new social service workers, critique ideas of competition and meritocracy, critically reflecting upon and questioning these ideals, and are challenged not to default back into this dominant discourse. The influence of neoliberal ideology, colouring school and work, exerts pressure throughout transition, and participants discussed resistance and critique as an active, intentional process. Foucault's conceptualization of power allows for an interconnected view of power relations that moves beyond the individual, instead focusing on social and discursive arrangements. In addition, thinking with Foucault demonstrates transition as an ongoing process that students/workers continually navigate. As relational fields involving power differentials, power flowing in relationship has meaningful implications for social service work and for education; the idea of power flowing in relation, rather than being held by an individual, has the potential to alter relational work.

In a practical sense, this means that power flows through social service workers as they actively critique the dominant ideal of a 'good life'; instead of working towards neoliberal goals, social service workers can help clients identify what is important and meaningful to them, in their own lives. Social service workers recognize that not everyone is afforded the same privileges and can empathize with each unique client, working on creating the vision of the life that client wants for themselves. The power relationship is not one of the worker holding power over the client, or of the worker trying to empower the client. Instead, power flows through their relationship, and in relation to the agencies and institutions within which they operate. Social service workers can advocate for clients, arguing against the concept of meritocracy and competition, and promote understanding of intersecting vulnerabilities. Working within agencies that must demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency to funding agents, social service workers can stop and critically question technocratic requirements of their role. Power flows through them as they navigate the tensions between these requirements and the needs of their clients.

What Remains to be Explored?

This analysis highlights the incongruence between the discourses of social service work education and practice and neoliberal discourse. The participants' narratives highlight the tensions that exist as they transition through neoliberal institutions (post-secondary to the labour market) and are challenged by societal views of success. Their narratives highlight that while resistance is possible, participants' internalized views of neoliberal measures of success led to questioning themselves and their trajectories. So, while Foucault's conceptualization of power offers a framework for the resistance demonstrated in the participants' narratives, this concept does not allow for exploration of the feelings of 'not enough' that glow for me. In my exploration of power, an affective intensity of 'enoughness' seemed to pervade the participants' discussions of navigating neoliberal pressures and expectations in transitioning from post-secondary education to working in the social service field. I felt, in hearing, reading, and analyzing our conversations, the pressure to be, and to feel, enough relative to their position in society, but also in their professional role in helping marginalized people. That intensity resounded with me in my experience in social service work and academia and led to further examination of my questions about how participants' identities are enacted differently as 'students' and 'workers'. How do participants take on the identity of a social service worker? What shapes their identities? Is there a feeling of 'enough' in taking on this identity? These questions arose for me as I was thinking through Foucault's concept of power, yet the concept was insufficient for analyzing these questions. Therefore, I needed to think with another theoretical lens that can more adequately analyze identity in a different way. In the following chapter, I draw on Butler's concept of performativity to explore participants' experiences of their identity as social service workers. This analysis builds on Foucault's concept of power, as power flows in the construction of participants as social service workers but allows for more nuanced understanding of how the participants' see themselves as new social service workers.

Chapter 5.

Identity and the Transitioning Social Service Worker - Performativity

Swirling

> *What does it mean for students to move from the classroom to working with people who face significant challenges? In my classes, we talk a lot about relational work. About strength-based approaches. About honouring autonomy and self-determination and ensuring clients are driving our work together. But what does it really mean to do the work? What does it mean to students to leave the insular environment of the classroom and start working with real people? People with unfathomable histories, who strive to overcome multiple barriers to live the lives they want; people who are often viewed as less than human, unworthy, and disposable by our society. It is very challenging work. How do students, like mine, come to see themselves as social service workers? How do they negotiate their expectations of the role and the expectations of others? How does power flow through them as they navigate what the role means to them and what they want their practice to look like?*

After examining the conversations I had with interview participants through Foucault's concept of power, questions about how the participants took up their role and identity in social service practice were swirling for me. Thinking with Foucault allowed me to move beyond power as the characteristic of an individual and to instead see power as flowing beyond the binary of participants' acceptance or rejection of neoliberal ideals of competition, meritocracy, and financial success. Rather, participants navigated these ideals, engaged in an ongoing process of self-governing and resistance. While thinking with Foucault provided a framework for resistance to neoliberal ideology, the analysis (in Chapter 4) raised additional questions about identity, self-concept, and participants feeling that they are 'enough' that required different theoretical concepts for analysis.

Throughout their experiences of resisting neoliberal ideology, participants wrestled with feelings of 'enoughness', asking "Am I enough?". The idea of enoughness

prompted me to further explore participants' identities and how they come to see themselves as social service workers. This concept led me to examine how participants see, know, and describe themselves as "students" and "workers" and how they enact various identities across social, political, and institutional contexts. In the present chapter, I discuss how participants understand their role as social service workers and how they assess themselves against these expectations. I use the concept of performativity, as articulated by Judith Butler (1999), to examine participants' ongoing negotiation of the social service role and related feelings of enoughness. Thinking with Butler's concept of performativity builds upon my thinking with Foucault; power flows through participants as they navigate the conflicting values of social service work and neoliberal ideology, finding ways to resist and explore different ways of living. Power does not only constrain the construction of the participants as social service workers, it also works through them in their performance of social service worker identities. Moving beyond neoliberal definitions of success, thinking with Butler allows me to examine how participants continually navigate conflicting values, as they transition into being a social service worker. I use the concept of performativity, building upon Foucault's concept of power, to analyze the work social service workers do to construct and become recognized in their professional roles. I discuss the relationship between performing an identity and being recognized and acknowledged by others. I also explore how participants resist the construct of the ideal social service worker, reconstituting and resignifying themselves and their professional role.

Experiences of the "Ideal" Social Service Worker

In this section, I briefly discuss what social service workers do to highlight the complexity of the work and the multiple and often conflicting demands they face. I draw on participant narratives demonstrating uncertainty about what their professional practice entails to highlight this complexity. I examine how participants experienced their transition into the role of social service worker, attending to how they navigated the expectations of the "ideal" social service worker in various contexts, and how this might relate to constructions of being 'enough'.

As discussed in Chapter 1, social service workers are a unique subset of helping professionals that face distinct challenges in their work. While social service work includes numerous job descriptions within agencies with varied mandates, social service

workers engage with clients facing significant challenges, evoking client strengths and helping clients to lead the life they desire. This involves building a rapport with clients that promotes trust and safety, exploring their strengths and needs, and working collaboratively with the client towards the goals they have identified. For the participants, this work occurs in supported residential placements, shelters, drop-in centres, and on an outreach basis in the community. Clients may have histories of trauma, mental health concerns, addictions, behavioural issues, homelessness, cognitive delays, criminal justice involvement, and/or physical health needs; for many clients, these vulnerabilities intersect with poverty, racism, intergenerational trauma, and violence. Given the complex needs of clients and the lack of social supports available, social service work is often crisis-driven. As social service workers engage in relational work with clients with complex needs, in agencies with reduced resources and increased caseloads, they are at risk for burn out and vicarious trauma. In this complex, high-stress environment, transitioning social service workers are navigating the responsibilities of their professional role. As I elaborate in the discussion below, for many new social service workers questions arise about their role, being a 'good social service worker', and whether they are capable of doing this challenging work (i.e., are 'enough').

Transitioning into the field, workers are constituted in their developing mastery of their new identity as social service worker. In discussing their identity, several participants said they were unclear what a social service worker is or does or how to manage conflicting expectations within the role. The participants are, as new practitioners in social services, attempting to master "subject positions for which they have little or no first-hand knowledge" (Davies, 2006, p, 433). These subject positions are unstable and unattainable, yet the participants continue to perform and strive for an ideal. As demonstrated in the following discussion, the "ideal" social service worker is a complex arrangement of responsibilities and expectations, enacted in relationship with various stakeholders. In other words, the ideal social service worker is many things to many different people, often creating tensions between conflicting positions. The participants I spoke to discussed navigating their identities; participants are "still figuring it out", as participant Carolyn explained. In our first interview, Carolyn was only two months into her current position but had worked in other social service positions and had considerable international experience doing relational work. Despite her experience,

Carolyn felt unsure about herself in her role. During our second interview, we first reflected together on issues that emerged in the first interview and reviewed the narrative summary. At this point, Carolyn shared feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence, explaining: "[The narrative] seems to show some ambivalence about what my future will hold and shows that I still have a lot of questions – Where will I go? What does it mean to be a professional? I still have a lot of those questions." She later went on to elaborate that ambivalence, explaining "I am a little bit in-between". In this conversation, Carolyn voiced a desire to be constructed as a professional, but she was not yet sure what that meant and was feeling "in-between" the role of student and the role of worker. As participants are constructed as social service workers, they are also recognized as capable, empathic, relational practitioners. Recognition of being enough is a relational process between the participants, clients, colleagues, and others; through these relationships, the participants are constructed as social service workers. Feeling "in-between" student/worker challenges how Carolyn may be recognized by others and influences her feelings of being enough.

Several participants (e.g., Hannah, Carolyn, and Matthew) discussed their uncertainty about being enough in their role as social service worker. This uncertainty presented as participants questioning whether they were selfless, passionate, or competent enough to perform their jobs. For example, Hannah was unsure of the expectations of her role, and questioned whether she was "selfless enough" or "passionate enough", seeing these characteristics as necessary for social service work. Hannah noted she received "mixed messages" throughout her education; she remembered guest speakers presenting conflicting information about what was required as a social service worker:

> There were mixed messaged (in the degree program) about the importance of self-care and preventing burn out while at the same time saying you had to give it your all and if a family called in the middle of the night, you answer. I question if I am selfless enough to do this work. I wonder if I am passionate enough about what I do.

Hannah was unclear about what is expected from the ideal, professional social service worker. From Hannah's description there may be varied expectations in different contexts (e.g., education, agencies with different mandates, etc.) that are not clearly articulated, or may, in fact, be contradictory; for example, students are being taught to be selfless yet to also prioritize self-care. Hannah went on to explain that as she gained

experience in her role, she struggled to balance client needs and self-care in a way that fit for her. This was as an ongoing challenge in defining herself in her work and in being recognized as a good social service worker; Hannah stated that colleagues often commented on her ability to set time for herself that was presented as a compliment but that she received more as a 'backhanded' commentary that Hannah was not prioritizing her client needs.

Carolyn expressed similar concerns during her transition into social service work. She explained that when she first came into the field, she worked for approximately one year with a very complex population – those who face the most significant and intersecting challenges. Here Carolyn questioned if social service work was a good fit; as she explained, she had a "humbling realization that this may not be for me". In fact, Carolyn left social service work for two years and had only just recently returned to her position at the time of the interview. Although she expressed that her position had a "steep learning curve", she kept telling herself she could do it. Carolyn's hiatus from social service work and her affirming self-talk demonstrate how important feeling competent and enough are in this work. Carolyn's self-talk and Hannah's example of balancing her personal and professional lives highlight the subjectivity involved in social service work. As social service workers bring themselves into their relational practice, they navigate and perform the role in a way that fits for them.

Matthew also questioned his competence within his role. He senses the expectation to be proficient, to work quickly, to be independent, and he is struggling to learn it all:

> I don't feel comfortable with things that I haven't done in awhile – I feel really new. What if something happens and I have to write up paperwork? It is a busy busy place and you can't take forever to write up paperwork. You have to be proficient. Most of the people I work with will show me things so I learn while I'm there but I'm definitely new. My last shift was a day shift at a slower shelter and I learned a lot about computer work. I'm sensitive that I haven't learned as much as I could or should. My willingness is there. I just need more opportunities and maybe that will come in time.

For Matthew, being 'enough' is connected to completing paperwork on the computer, which is an increasingly important task and responsibility in social service work. It is interesting that Hannah, Elizabeth, and Alison also discussed the importance of paperwork and the struggle to adequately represent their work, in writing, to supervisors,

and ultimately, funding agents. There is an apparent tension between engaging in relational work and writing about this work in a way that fits with performativity measures demanded by funders and the accountability culture of neoliberalism. I analyze this tension further in the upcoming section on "Resisting the 'Ideal Social Service Worker'".

While Hannah, Carolyn, and Matthew questioned their capacity to meet the expectations of the 'ideal' social service worker, Elizabeth discussed her feelings of enoughness in relation to her work being recognized by others. Elizabeth explained that she felt her work matters and that she has a meaningful impact on her clients in her role, but that she had difficulty communicating what she does with people in a way that meaningfully represents the work. She noted that people outside of the field seem to misunderstand or downplay the therapeutic aspect of her work and that her work is minimized by those who don't understand. She discussed how people outside of the field may see her work in terms of – "oh, you just…". In attempting to be recognized as a competent, effective, and professional social service worker, Elizabeth felt her work could be dismissed as "oh, you just watch TV with clients", overlooking the complexity of relational work with (in Elizabeth's case) clients with significant mental health challenges living independently. Elizabeth went on to explain that people in the field also tend to minimize their own work:

> Even hearing people say, I'm **just** a… What value do you place on what you do and how you explain it? There is a lot that rides on that. If you want people to have an accurate view of what you do, and it may be different depending upon who you are talking to, how you explain it could be very different. People in the field may know the agency or the type of work where others in other fields wouldn't. And the role and field fluctuates and changes so often.

To Elizabeth, it is important that social service workers articulate their role and the value of their role clearly, so the work is legitimized and recognized by others. She notes that the field of social service work is dynamic and continually changing, in terms of accepted and supported approaches to the work (Elizabeth used the example of moving to more client-driven recovery models of service) and these changes may not be well understood outside of the field.

When in a place of not knowing or uncertainty, participants seem to define themselves in relation to what they are not. For example, although Carolyn stated that she was unsure and in-between, she was able to resist certain constructions of herself

as a social service worker. She spoke about her previous work experience, where she felt like she was only acting as a 'gatekeeper' for shelter services. She explained this further:

> When I was discussing my experience at my last job, I meant that I was the person who allows people access to service or decides to discharge people but I had minimal relationships with the people who were being served. I felt like it didn't build on my relational skills. It was not complex. I was just tasked with discharging clients and I didn't enjoy being that door. I wasn't interested in that role.

In this excerpt, while Carolyn was not yet clear on what it means to be constructed as a social service worker, she knew she did not want to be in a position where her primary responsibility was determining who receives or does not receive service. In the example she described, Carolyn was working with highly vulnerable women with multiple barriers; in very real ways, those who were discharged or denied service were at very high risk (for violence, trauma, and death). She left that position, choosing not to submit to the expectation that she become a 'gatekeeper' for service. She did not identify with this more technocratic role, emphasizing the need to be relational - to build meaningful relationships with the people being served - as a defining aspect of her working identity. Seeing this as an example of resistance to identifying as an ideal social service worker, I turn to Butler's conceptualization of performativity to understand how participants negotiated varied, and sometimes contradictory, expectations of being a social service worker. I examine how they aligned with their role and how they worked from within the role to re-inscribe who and what a social service worker should be. I think of transition as a Butlerian performance, analyzing the participants' performances of an ideal social service worker to demonstrate how participants' "identities get done and undone" as they perform multiple and dynamic subjectivities (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 67).

Butler's Conceptualization of Performativity

Butler deconstructs identity as a stable and essential characteristic of an individual, arguing that identities are repetitive acts that are performed in attempts to meet an idealized norm. As a feminist philosopher, Judith Butler critiques the foundations of feminism by troubling what it means to be a "woman". If feminism is meant to provide a voice for women, she asks, what constitutes a "woman"? Butler

(1999) troubles the idea that there is a defining essence of womanhood. Instead, she proposes that bodies are continually produced and reproduced within culture; identities such as gender are created through repetitive performances. Butler (1999) notes that "gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 179). In other words, identity, of which gender is a part, is not produced by an internal essence but through a performance which consists of the repetition of acts, gestures, and enactments (Butler, 1999). Viable and recognizable roles or identities are culturally formed, and individuals attempt to perform these idealized roles. Yet, actors fall short of these idealized expectations, which are formed through power relations involving culture, discourse, and material arrangements. To relate this back to gender, there are cultural expectations related to being a "man" or "woman". These normative expressions of gender (i.e., masculinity/femininity) determine what is possible. While individuals may perform as a man or as a woman, the idealized expectation of manhood or womanhood cannot be achieved. As each individual "never quite inhabit(s) the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate" (Butler, 1999, p. 231), s/he continues performing towards this expectation. This repetition constructs the norms as natural and inevitable and constructs the individual (subject) as gendered; it is through their repetitive performance that the subject expresses a recognizable gender and reinforces gender norms as natural. Those who do not perform according to these norms are informally and formally disciplined through a variety of measures.

> Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions— and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (Butler, 1999, p.178).

In this excerpt, Butler (1999) explains that "discrete and polar genders" are constructed, reproduced, and sustained through performance and through the punishment of those who do not subscribe to binary gender. In other words, a subject is recognized through their performance which approximates the idealized norm. Although no one will actualize the ideal, always falling short of expectations, some subjects are recognized through their repetitive performance. Those who live outside of the idealized norm, or who are subversive in their performance, may be marked by precarity (including

increased risk of poverty, injury, disease, violence and death) (Butler, 2009). Those outside of what is deemed acceptable are not recognizable and subsequently not worthy subjects. For Butler (2009), this is political process whereby individuals perpetuate norms that allow for their own recognition but simultaneously discard others to precarity. Butler examines the socially produced subject, who is constituted and constrained through power relations, and argues that performativity determines who is "eligible for recognition"; that is, performativity is connected to who counts and doesn't count as subjects (Butler, 2009, p. iv). As she explains:

> Performativity is a process that implies being acted on in ways we do not always fully understand, and of acting, in politically consequential ways. Performativity has everything to do with "who" can become produced as a recognizable subject, a subject who is living, whose life is worth sheltering and whose life, when lost, would be worthy of mourning. Precarious life characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable. (Butler, 2009, p. xii and xiii)

Performativity is thus not merely a performance, but a process of subjectification; one is constituted as a subject through the repetition of a performative doing. That is, a subject is recognized through their performance; the subject comes into being by closely approximating the ideal category. Drawing on both Butler and Foucault, Davies (2006) explains that this process of becoming a subject, involves simultaneously both mastery and submission. That is, a subject is constituted in relationship to others; this relationship is marked by power. Power relations shape the subject in that the subject submits to the normative expectations of the prevailing material-discursive arrangements. As the subject seeks to master these expectations, these arrangements are reiterated and reproduced, and are seen as natural and inevitable. As the subject masters normative expectations, they may see themselves as capable, autonomous, and powerful; however, their construction is dependent upon their submission to the norms that determine what they can become. In her discussion of recognition and precarity, Butler (2004) explains the constraints that limit how a subject may be constructed:

> What counts as a person?...What qualifies as a citizen? Whose world is legitimated as real?…advance for me? By what norms am I constrained as I begin to ask what I may become? And what happens when I begin to become that for which there is no place within the given regime of truth? (p. 58)

Performativity and precarity are meaningful concepts for examining social services. The most apparent demonstration of these concepts is in how clients within the social service system – individuals facing significant challenges including trauma, homelessness, addiction, mental health concerns, criminal justice involvement, systematic racism, and the effects of colonization – are discarded to precarity. Due to the complex and often interacting challenges these clients face, they do not meet (are unable to meet?) societal expectations of appropriate subject positions. As they are not performing according to societal expectations, they are not recognized as subjects whose lives are worth sheltering; instead, they are often dehumanized and deemed not worthy. Similarly, social service workers are performing towards the ideal expression of their role. The participants discussed trying to perform an ideal subject position, i.e., the ideal social service worker, while being unclear on what that role entails. As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, students transitioning into social service work face unique challenges as an educational underclass seeking tenuous employment. So, while social service workers engage with clients discarded to precarity, the workers themselves are also living precarious lives. Social service workers often live outside of the idealized norm – including neoliberal definitions of "success". They face tenuous employment (e.g., contracts, part-time work, lack of benefits) and living environments, transience, and a lack of recognition in the legitimacy of their work because the people with whom they work (i.e., clients) are not recognized as legitimate subjects. Some examples of this precarity are evident in Chapter 4, where participants discussed their experiences of conflicting and often unrealistic pressures to succeed.

While my original intent was to examine how participants' identities shift from "student" to "worker", the concept of performativity clarifies that these identities are not stable characteristics but ongoing performances. Butler's conceptualization of performativity retheorizes identity, not as fixed, stable, and knowable, but as a dynamic performance within social, historical, and cultural contexts. Identity is constituted, in relation to power, within discursive and material arrangements, and contextualized by culture and history. As such, identity is both being constituted by these factors, while simultaneously being altered and undone as the factors themselves are constantly changing; I explore these factors in relation to the participants' narratives in the next section. Performativity also "produces the space of conflicting subjectivities" (Jackson, 2004, p. 675). That is, recognizing identity as performance allows for "fluid" and

"contradictory" understandings of self that are relational (Jackson, 2004, p. 673); conflicting aspects of identity can be performed in different times, spaces, and with different people. While identities are shaped by power and situated in discourse, they are always "open for reconfiguration" (Jackson, 2004, p. 674). As Jackson (2004) explains, "there is always space for reworking and resisting" (p. 675). Therefore, performativity can be subversive, allowing subjects to critique and deconstruct the identity categories to which they belong; I will explore these potentialities as I examine the participants' experiences with performing, recognition, precarity, and resistance as social service workers.

Resisting the "Ideal Social Service Worker"

While subjects are constituted through performative acts that are constrained by discursive arrangements and power relations, the ongoing process of performativity creates space for challenge and resistance. In this section, I examine how participants re-signified what it meant to demonstrate mastery of their social service worker role, altering their perception of the 'ideal' worker. The participants' dynamic definition of mastery, while beneficial to relational work with clients, is in tension with neoliberal managerial expectations. This tension can jeopardize the recognition of participants as professionals, resulting in precarity.

Hannah, Alison, and Carolyn discussed a shift in their understanding of an ideal social service worker and their relationship to their clients. For example, Hannah discussed "expertise" as an element of her work that is consistent with mastery. She explained that she often felt she was not taken seriously in her work due to her age, and I asked her about whether having her expertise recognized was important to her. Hannah explained that she wants to demonstrate mastery, or expertise, but that it is not necessary in her role:

> I like how you focused on the importance of expertise. That may be a personal thing for me. That may be me searching to be really good at something. Or wanting to have all the answers because I'm new. It is important to me but isn't really important to the job. It is important to just be present and give it your all.

Hannah does not need to know everything or be considered an expert. Mastery, for her, may involve being present and engaged with clients. The performance of social service

work, in Hannah's context, does not require "having all the answers"; instead, expertise could reflect being present and putting the clients' needs before one's own. Hannah's approach transgresses a dominant view of social service work whereby the social service worker is educated, equipped, and seen as an expert that can intervene with a client to promote positive outcomes. Hannah developed from "wanting to have all the answers" to recognizing the importance of being present with clients. In keeping with Hannah's description of needing to be present and engaged, Alison recognized that mastering her role does not involve "fixing" anyone. Within the context of her agency and the mandate she works within (which is a drop-in centre for youth with addiction, mental health, and/or homelessness operating from a harm reduction approach), she sees how power operates on her and through her and through the young people with whom she works, and through the very terrain of addiction and homelessness. She stated that "power is always operating. I'm not an expert of their life and their context. I go into my work as server, not expert." Alison recognized the power differential inherent in her relationship with clients and the structural constraints that intersect for her clients, and she tries to approach her relational work as service. She went on to explain:

> I'm not expected to fix anyone. I really get to sit in that place of not knowing what the right answer is and I get to explore that with the youth on their own terms. That feels really good in comparison to intervention-based work.

Both Alison and Hannah, as new to social service, attempted to perform their new subject positions without fully understanding what a social service worker is and does. Their subjectification, or process of recognition, was to learn how to master the expectations of the field. While they submitted themselves to the expectations of the field, they were also aware of their own involvement in maintaining and reproducing power relations and were sensitive to power in navigating their performance as social service workers. Alison recognized that "power is always operating" and rather than attempt to take a position of authority and expertise, both Hannah and Alison recognized the need to be vulnerable and submissive, by being present to the dynamic needs of the client. As new workers in the field, Alison and Hannah (and the other participants) are seeking recognition as socially viable subjects. However, it is difficult for them to determine their own worth; they never quite know whether they are fulfilling the expectations of their role or effectively addressing the needs of those they serve. Hannah explained:

> We aren't able to measure our effectiveness. Our focus is on helping at-risk and vulnerable populations – you are never really going to know how you impacted someone. It has to come from a place of feeling confident. That you did the best you could. That you used an approach that is known to help most people. There isn't a lot of certainty.

While Hannah could not know if her work was effective, she articulated the need to feel confident in her approach and to know she had done her best. Rather than measure herself against the unattainable ideal of the social service worker, increased confidence and knowledge she has done her best in her work helped Hannah recognize her own worth. For Alison, not knowing provided some freedom; freedom to be present with clients and attend to their needs, without evaluating her effectiveness by unrealistic and unattainable standards. Alison explained that mastery is letting go of the need to have all the answers; to remove the expectation of expertise:

> That mindset of not knowing takes the pressure off needing to have answers to huge structural and social problems that don't currently have answers. I work through the problem on a case-by-case basis, in terms of where can I get a meal, and it makes it more tangible. School has a very grand focus on social justice and it is humbling to recognize that making tea and checking in with someone while they watch cartoons is an act of social justice because no one else is checking in with them to see if they're okay. Recognizing that each youth is worthy of respect and dignity. I think it does make a difference. It is really just about seeing people and attending to them.

To Alison, mastery of her role involves addressing the immediate needs of the youth (providing resources for a meal, making tea, and checking in) rather than resolving huge social problems, like homelessness, addiction, and mental health. Her conception of good work emphasizes the material – a meal, a cup of tea, warm bodies, providing a safe physical space. This client-centered approach may allow her to be recognized as a good social service worker by the people she serves as well as like-minded colleagues in the field. However, Alison noted later in our conversation that the public often does not recognize the importance of this type of work. She explained that "there is pressure on us, as professionals in the field, because we are looked at like - why aren't we fixing this? Why aren't we doing our job?" in relation to resolving social inequities and "fixing" homelessness, addiction, and other complex social issues. Alison is both recognized and not recognized as a 'good' worker, depending upon the different material-discursive entanglements in which she circulates; this potential failure to be recognized in her role

holds the potential for precarity for Alison. I explore the connection between participants' performances and precarity in greater detail below.

As Alison suggests above, she has been subjected to pressures to resolve social injustices that far exceed her direct work with clients. In the experiences of the participants, their work (and subsequently, themselves as viable subjects) can go unrecognized when there are contradictory views on what the work entails. For example, as seen above, Carolyn, Hannah, and Alison emphasize that 'good' social service workers are relational, present, and humble, acting from a place of service, rather than authority or expertise. However, this subjectivity may not be recognized by agencies and/or funders who operate from a managerial perspective. As I discussed in Chapter 2 (*Dominant Discourses on School, Work, and Transition*), neoliberal ideology promotes a managerial perspective that emphasizes the measurement of pre-determined outcomes, standardization, efficiency, and individual responsibility. Hannah articulately explained the disparity and tension between relational practice and outcome-focused service deliverables:

> I find everything so formal here. In our job, we need to spend 50% of our time in the community but also need to write reports and do all of our paperwork. It is formal and you have to follow policies and protocol. Everything is documented, every communication written down, everything can be challenged. I am very relational but there is pressure to produce certain targets, goals, and outcomes. I feel like I have to sell something. And in a field where there is no right answer and there is a lack of definitiveness, how do you justify what you are doing? There are so many politics here – the government gives us funds and tells us how to use them but they are not social service workers, they don't have a child and youth care (CYC) background. They don't get it and we have to report to that. I didn't get how much that confines you and how much that shapes the field. It would be nice to have people who really get what the work is about writing policy so it can be more relational practice. In CYC we learn about the importance of relational practice but it is not respected once you get out there – all that's respected, like in business or anything else – is output.

Hannah meets the requirement to justify her work through paperwork and reports, demonstrating that she is effective at her job by meeting specific targets, goals, and outcomes. This, she explained, is contradictory to relational practice, which is foundational in the teaching of social service work. Thus, she discussed experiencing a disconnect between the forms of mastery participants are taught in their post-secondary education and what they experienced in the field. Being a 'good' social service worker

means, to funders and policy makers, being effective and efficient. Consistent with neoliberal ideologies, failing to perform personal efficacy and efficiency, as demonstrated through paperwork and outcome reporting, is considered an individual failing. Hannah stated she was unaware how much funding expectations and requirements shape the field and would constrain her work. The policies and funding requirements shape Hannah's constitution as a subject within the conditions of her work.

Alison also discussed the tension between relational work with clients and the requirements of the agency mandate or funding agents:

> It is not that staff themselves are not trying to help and trying to have good relational practice. There is only so much they can do. When we are trying to meet the needs of the client, we still have to work within someone else' mandate, someone else's expectations, and we are still expected to toe the line. That moves the focus away from the client and onto what the funder needs. There is always a tension between doing what the client needs and doing what we, as an agency, have to do to show our numbers so we can continue to get funding so we can stay open and try to help as many people as we can.

These narratives demonstrate the contested power relations involved in social service work. The participants discussed re-signifying their work as relational, re-casting expertise as the capacity to be present, humble, and engaged, rather than having all the answers. Through this altered performance, the participants are transgressing or resisting the 'ideal social service worker' and redefining what it means to do good, ethical work with clients. However, this relational work may not be recognized by supervisors or funding agents, who, consistent with neoliberal ideology, seek measurable and reportable outcomes demonstrating effectiveness and efficiency. The performance of the social service worker that Hannah, Alison, and Carolyn promote may also not be recognized by the public, who minimize the work done as, for example, "just watching TV with clients". As discussed by Alison, the public may see social service workers as responsible for resolving social inequities and injustice, without understanding the complexity of these arrangements. This threatens social service workers being recognized as worthy and puts social service workers in a precarious position.

As social service workers, Hannah and Alison exercise power over their clients. They communicated their awareness of this and approach their relationships with clients intentionally, in order to minimize power working through them in an oppressive way.

Social service workers are, in turn, constrained and shaped by power, within the agencies in which they work. They are supervised in a hierarchical system of accountability, which ultimately includes the funding agent of the agency. To be constructed as a good worker, the participants have to oscillate between subjectivities: being present and relational with clients, while also being able to articulately justify their work to supervisors and ultimately, rationalize the existence of their program to funders. In the process of being recognized as viable subjects, social service workers need to be able to work across these different arrangements (i.e., relational practice and outcome-focused managerialism), shifting the way they view their work. As they perform, the participants have the power to enact aspects of the social service worker role and to critique, deconstruct, and challenge that idealized identity from within.

Alison spoke explicitly about the need to re-signify social service work. She discussed moving away from “helping” and becoming a “meaningful advocate”. In her critique of technocratic enactment of social service roles, she discussed the importance of abandoning ideas of expertise to seek understanding of varied life contexts. She explained the need to understand intersecting societal factors that influence the agency of the clients involved and honouring what clients have been doing to navigate those oppressive factors:

> Rather than just jumping into a social work role, we need to deconstruct what it means to be in a helping profession. And if we can add one more word, we could move away from being helping professionals to being meaningful advocates. In my mind, social work assumes a level of expertise where someone who knows how to live life the best jumps in and tries to fix those who are having trouble, without taking context into account. Advocating would involve listening to all dynamics at play, trying to understand the relationships involved, looking at the systemic factors that influence the situation (intersection oppressions related to ethnicity, poverty, intergenerational trauma) and recognizing that everyone in the situation is probably doing the best they can with what they’ve got. Advocating involves helping those resiliencies become more important than the oppression. Working to meaningfully address the issues that people are facing, while taking into account the strategies and skills that they have for living in those situations. Privileging their knowledge.

Alison explained that, from her perspective, the idea of the "helping professional" needs to be deconstructed. She articulated the need to work as advocates, rather than experts who help, and to be vulnerable and submissive to those being served, as experts of their own experience. In reconceptualizing "helping professional", she is re-

signifying what social service work is and what it means to be someone working in that field. This is a response to dominant discourse which privileges the “helping professional” as an expert who works within a managerial culture, where they must demonstrate efficacy and efficiency to be recognized as viable subjects and to promote the continued funding of the programs within which they work. Alison’s call for deconstructing helping professions involves those in the field recognizing how they are being constructed (through, for example, reporting requirements and funding) and the role of shifting power relations in re/constituting social service work. This resistance to neoliberal discourse and managerial or technocratic expectations is both risky and generative – while resistance to technocratic expectations may jeopardize recognition in neoliberal environments, it also provides the opportunity for workers to generate new ideals in social service work where they can be recognized as viable subjects in novel ways.

What Does This Analysis Allow?

Examining social service worker identity as performance helps demonstrate the complexity in who a social service worker is and what it is they do. The concept of performativity clarifies that identity is not a stable characteristic but an ongoing performance and that the ‘ideal social service worker’ can be deconstructed and re-signified. As seen, participants experienced the romanticized ideals of helping professionals as "selfless" and "passionate", who work to "save" those who are marginalized. Alison discussed how she experienced pressure from others (outside of social service) who wonder why social service workers are not doing their job and resolving inequalities, oppression, and issues like homelessness, drug use, and mental illness. From this perspective, the social service worker is an expert, exercising their power-knowledge by intervening in the life course of a "client" to promote positive outcomes and resolve social problems. These outcomes, as discussed by the participants, are documented (within their own discourse) and shared to demonstrate effectiveness and secure ongoing funding. Participants like Alison, Hannah, and Carolyn discussed how this technocratic or managerial approach constrained their work, and they had to navigate ways to meet outcome-focused (i.e., funding) requirements while emphasizing the relational aspect of their work. They navigate contradictory pressures (i.e., technocratic requirements vs. relational practice) and are engaged in an

ongoing process of subjectification, in their performance as social service workers. They are living in a place of not-enough or in-between as they perform towards recognition. In seeking recognition, they may fall short and be relegated to precarity; in achieving recognition, they may regulate others to precarity.

While a technocratic approach assumes that there are specific interventions that can be used to obtain certain outcomes with clients, the participants emphasized the element of uncertainty in social service work – not knowing what they were expected to do, what would be helpful to those they serve, or whether their work was having a positive impact. Within the context of macro-level social problems (like violence, homelessness, poverty, and addiction), they asked "what can we do?". They spoke of navigating uncertainty by emphasizing relational practice – by being present with others, by providing material necessities (a warm jacket, food, a safe place to stay), and by humbling oneself and not approaching the relationship as an expert. In relational practice, social service workers do not achieve mastery – the performance never achieves the ideal subject position. The subject position is not stable and there are a multiplicity of social service worker subjects in various contexts. Instead of mastering a subject position, the participants recognized the importance of staying in a place of uncertainty – of being in-between or not-enough. Alison articulated the need to move away from the language of "helping professional". She argued for advocacy, rather than helping, and in her push for re-signifying the helping professional, wanted to redefine the work. The approach she suggests creates inseparability between the "social service worker" and the "client", redefining their relationship.

In social service work, recognizing the importance of uncertainty is important. Much like the research I examined in Chapter 3 on identity formation in job placement programs (Hull, 1993; Valadez, 2000), social service workers are expected to be experts in their field, who have a professionalized identity and can demonstrate their effectiveness. Recognizing that the complexity of client needs requires being present and open, in a place of uncertainty, takes courage. Especially when, as participants have noted, their effectiveness as social service workers is questioned – by the agency that requires reporting on pre-determined outcomes, by other social service workers who work from a more technocratic approach, and by society more broadly, as social service workers are asked why they have not resolved societal inequalities and injustice. It takes courage to recognize uncertainty as a strength and an asset, in an environment

where the need for certainty is assumed and valued. Social service workers navigate their relationships from this place of courage and uncertainty, being open and humble to the complexity of their encounters. Practically, this involves respecting and collaborating with clients and trying to diminish power differentials in the working relationship. Transition into the social service role is an ongoing performance of multiple identities, depending on the encounter. Working in a complex field, with changing client needs, knowledge, models, and funding, is a continual transition.

Together, power and performativity offer important insights into transition experiences of social service workers. While constructed in existing material and discursive arrangements, power flows through social service work and through the bodies of workers as they enact fluid, dynamic subjectivities throughout a continual transition. Social service workers can continually, in varied arrangements, re-signify their role in a way that fits for their understanding of ethical relational work, as power flows and shifts and changes. Performativity builds on this understanding of power by deconstructing identity as fixed and stable and recognizing how social service workers engage in an ongoing performance of the idealized role of 'social service worker'. Social service workers perform this role within the constraints of what is recognized as 'good' practice; these social and cultural constraints shift across time and context and in relation with others. Transgressing these expectations, or performing outside of the ideal subject position, puts social service workers at risk for precarity. Recognition, as being enough, as a 'good' social service worker, is thus relational and ongoing. These concepts allow for transition to be retheorized; transition does not involve taking on one identity, or transitioning from one identity (i.e., student) to another (i.e., social service worker). Instead, transition is an ongoing relational process. In the final chapter, I address what this concept of transition might mean for social service work and education.

What Remains to be Explored?

The analytic lenses of power and performativity helped me explore how participants navigate neoliberal values and perform multiple identities as social service workers. These lenses helped explicate the dynamic and relational process of social service worker transition, highlighting spaces of resistance to the status quo. Given my interest in improving the lives of social service clients, workers, students, educators, and

people more broadly, I was pulled in the direction of rearticulating social service work. Alison discussed the need to shift power relations in the social service worker/client relationship, to act as an advocate and to be critically attuned in each relationship; the idea of watching cartoons as social justice glowed for me. I also attended to the affective intensities of the material in the participants' narratives; I was drawn to the warm jacket, a meal, a safe place to be, as important elements of the social service worker/client relationship. Moving beyond the idea of re-signifying "social service work", I wanted to examine how social service work could be reconstituted, recognizing the importance of power relations and the material. This means moving beyond language and into the material arrangements that constitute social service work and have real implications for how lives are lived.

Karen Barad's (2003) concept of performativity critiques the primacy of language; as she states, "language has been granted too much power" (p. 1). Barad argues against a representationalist approach (where language can represent reality), moving her focus to the performativity of discursive-material assemblages. Barad (2003) proposes a posthumanist performativity,

> One that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and non-human, and natural and cultural factors. A posthuman account calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of 'human' and 'nonhuman', examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized. (p. 808)

This conceptualization blurs distinctions between human/non-human, nature/culture, and material/discursive, recognizing how these are mutually constituted and inseparable. This blurring alters the traditional idea of the subject, as a human who holds and exercises agency. In articulating my research questions, prior to interviewing participants, I was interested in the varied contexts – social, political, and institutional – that shape social service work and social service workers. After interviewing the participants and exploring our conversations, I questioned my original framing of the question. My initial focus assumed the social service worker to be primary, exercising their agency, contextualized within discursive and material arrangements. This humanist conceptualization of the subject is rejected by feminists (Braidotti, 2013), post-structuralists (St. Pierre, 2000), post-humanists (Barad, 2003) and other theorists. While performativity allowed me to rethink identity as multiplicities of performances, this conceptualization still foregrounds the human individual and their agency. While

performativity allows for dynamic identities, the concept focuses on individual human agency in the performance and construction of these identities.

The conceptualization of a stable individual, who holds and exercises agency, creates a binary of Self/Other, where the self is privileged and the other is seen as foreign and inferior and is, thus, disadvantaged (St. Pierre, 2000; Braidotti, 2013). These binaries include Man/Woman, Human/Nature, and Subject/Object (St. Pierre, 2000); in each, the first enunciation is valued and the second exists only in relation to the first. To help deconstruct the human subject, Braidotti (2013), draws on the enlightenment ideal of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, as the icon of bodily perfection, rational progress, and hegemonic cultural (i.e., European) ideals; she explains that this notion of the human subject is ethnocentric, raced, classed, patriarchal, heteronormative, and imperialist. Emphasizing the primacy of the human subject promotes binaries, hierarchies, and systems of classification that have real material affects on people's lives (St. Pierre, 2000). Although the primacy of the human subject is seen as natural and inevitable, St. Pierre (2000) argues there is potentiality in deconstructing the human subject so it can be reconstructed in more ethical ways. She explains that we have to look at "the effects on real people of whatever system of meaning our attachments produce" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 478). So, recognizing that valuing the human over nature, and valuing some human subjects more than others, has created inequality, suffering, and injustice, I now seek to examine how the human subject (the "I") is constructed in ideology, power, structures, and relations of material and discursive forces, where none of these elements is privileged in the analysis over the others.

Post-human performativity moves beyond the human, proposing fluidity between human and non-human agents, and recognizing the inseparability of elements in entanglement. None of these elements is inherently more important or influential than another; the traditional hierarchical relationship is flattened. To think through transition differently, I needed to examine social service workers as one integral element of the transition phenomenon. This phenomenon, depending on my articulation, includes other integral people and things, in an entangled relationship. Moving from the individual to the phenomenon, as the unit of analysis, allows me to explore more deeply the relationality of the people, things, space, and time that constitute social service work and the performance of transition.

In the following chapter, I explore the phenomenon of transition, which is made up of entanglements of human and material agents, seeing transition as an ongoing process of *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). Social service workers and their clients become together, inseparable and entangled. In exploring this entanglement, I emphasize the material elements that constitute social service work. I discuss the implications of examining transition from this relational materialist perspective, in terms of what can be made possible in social service work and education. Before transitioning into the next chapter, I share a swirling of my writing that demonstrates my sense-making as I retheorize the agential, humanist subject.

Swirling

Me: I don't know where to start.

Joey: In medias res.

Swirling is an understatement. So many voices, ideas, theorists, bodies, concepts, experiences clamouring together as I think with all I can muster (St. Pierre, 2011). And now, every time I write "I", I am painfully aware that there is no I; no stable and definitive subject-position. No doer before the deed. So that "I" becomes a practice of relating; an entanglement. Inseparable and indistinguishable. Coming into being, constituted in intra-action. With no words to capture it. So, "I" it remains right now - an "I" that is used and troubled simultaneously. A performative "I" that is constantly constructed through repetition (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). Until something better comes along. Perhaps "I" should be a symbol, like Prince before he became Prince again. An image-thought. Or an emoji. Same, same. But giving up the "I" is a problem too. "We retain the 'I' in order to trouble the 'I'" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 308) as renaming "I" would assume the problem of the stable I-subject to be resolved. So rather than dress "I" up with a new name, I try to be aware of the need to examine becoming and experience in ways "that complicate meanings, that enmesh our voices with those of our participants, that produce different understandings, (and) save us from ourselves" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 306). I try to recognize that I am situated in and constructed by power relations that

constrain who I can be. That constrain what stories are told and what stories are silenced. That constrain what meaning is made from experience. I am not a stable and external "I" that can provide the truth about experiences. I am becoming. My experiences have not happened – they are constantly being made in the present, constructing who I am. These "experiences constrain and limit what (I) can know and how (I) represent (my) participants or even (my) own social worlds" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 306).

The swirling is a process of thinking, being, reading, writing, doing, happening, that is disorienting and enlightening all at once. The heavy experience of trying to run through the ocean, while at the same time experiencing weightlessness. It's tricky to plug into things when everything is constantly shifting and reterritorializing. It is also terribly exciting. Maybe even revolutionary.

So, I try to begin in medias res. "Into the middle of a narrative; without preamble" according to the Oxford Dictionary. Into the middle things. A rhizomatic approach, where one could start anywhere and see where you end up. I wish you could see how I try to write this, capturing various thoughts and ideas as they swirl – starting new paragraphs, leaving half written sentences, and jumping in all directions at once. Unfortunately, the writing can't capture this. Writing gets stuck in its own words. And their linearity.

So how do I – when there is no I – write – when the process of writing is lost in its own writing – about this process? The process of research. This process of becoming. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Springgay and Truman (2018) discuss how research begins in the middle. How the speculative middle allows us to be in it and ask "what if?" (p. 4). When you are in the middle of something, it is hard to make sense of it. They say hindsight is 20/20. But luckily, as an entangled part of the research, when you are in the middle, "you are not there to report on what you find or what you seek, but to activate thought. To agitate it." (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 206). I am not

seeking to explain, to give meaning to; this is a move from representational research approaches. Instead, I take an approach that focuses on difference. Turning new ideas over and over again (Barad, 2014). Following new lines of flight. Trying to activate thoughts. Agitate thoughts. Think new thoughts:

"We go towards the best known unknown thing, where knowing and not knowing touch, where we hope we will know what is unknown. Where we hope we will not be afraid of understanding the incomprehensible, facing the invisible, hearing the inaudible, thinking the unthinkable, which is of course: thinking. Thinking is trying to think the unthinkable: thinking the thinkable is not worth the effort" (Cixous, 1993, p. 38)

We think with all we can muster to think unthinkable thoughts. And look at data that defies representation (Sommerville, 2016); data that 'glows' (MacLure, 2013). Data – whatever that is – that is inseparable from my non-existent I. I'm curious about how we really do this work. I understand that we need a new ontology; a substantive shift in thinking about how we are in the world. A shift away from the I-subject, from the dichotomy between helping professional and client, between researcher and subject, between teacher and student, to an understanding of intra-action, to a responsibility (and response-ability) and a recognition that the injustices of today will not be resolved with the systems of thought with which they were created. "If language can no longer reflect the truth, then such subjects are free to attempt to rethink and redescribe the world" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 410).

"Who am I to do this work?" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 405). I do not claim to be an expert in Deleuze. Not even close. I read through his work clumsily, grasping at the concepts. Trying to keep a loose grip on the writing as it flows through me. Feel firings and misfirings as I stumble through the concepts. I don't try to get his ideas right. Instead, I try to think as an event. I try to write in ways that allow for thinking outside of what is possible. Following lines of flight. St. Pierre (1997) notes that text and author write one another (p. 414). In my experience, this text,

my participants, our conversations, my desk, other texts, ideas, concepts, conversations, my cup of warm tea, experiences both real and imagined, readers both real and imagined, are constructed and reconstructed in entanglement. Coming into existence in intra-action. Moving away from the self allows for me to examine becoming as an inseparable element of this entanglement.

Chapter 6.

Transition as Becoming in Entanglement

Analysis

A jacket. A blanket. A warm cup of tea. These material elements become performative agents in the encounters involving participants and the young people they work with. Carolyn described an example of what she considered to be an emotionally challenging time, when a previous client returned to the shelter intoxicated, asking for his jacket and a blanket. Locating the jacket and bringing it to the youth catalyzed an encounter; the youth and Carolyn connected, discussing his decision to leave the program, his vulnerability in living on the street, and his challenges with his addiction. The jacket is not used by Carolyn intentionally in her work with the young person towards a specific end; instead, it is an integral, and inseparable element in an entanglement, creating the encounter and constituting both Carolyn and the young person as worker/client. The jacket, for a young person who lives on the street, provides warmth, a layer of protection from the elements, a hood that shields the judgmental or pitying looks of people passing by. While the young person was feeling a variety of emotions – perhaps anger and disappointment for leaving the program, stress and anxiety about where to go next, shame in returning intoxicated – the jacket was something he couldn't leave behind. The jacket drew the young person back to the program, where he, in his intoxicated state, could intra-act with Carolyn. In that encounter, Carolyn and the young person moved beyond their roles as social service worker and client, and even beyond the boundaries defining them as separate. In that moment, marked with fear, raw vulnerability, and uncertainty, Carolyn, the young person, his jacket, laughter, pain, compassion, tears, understanding, and empathy intra-act in the physical space of the program. These elements, each in their own process of becoming, intra-act to generate a new intensity.

The above foregrounds the analysis I elaborate in this chapter. I offer this excerpt to think through and anchor important aspects of my analysis, as I discuss how shifting my analysis from the individual subject to the phenomenon of transition provides a more nuanced understanding of social service work practice. My intent is that a thorough understanding of practice will allow for potentialities to reconstitute social service work, to promote more equitable lives for clients. I discuss how I created and defined the phenomenon of transition that I examine in this chapter. I then draw on several interrelated concepts to help demonstrate the complexity of transition as an ongoing, interconnected, relational performance; these include entanglement (Barad, 2007) and becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). As seen in the previous chapters, my initial analysis examined transition through the concept of power to better understand how participants navigated neoliberal ideology and demonstrated resistance to some of these values. This pulled me in the direction of exploring participants' identity as transitioning social service workers. Performativity, as a concept, built on my understanding of how power both constituted and constrained the participants, in their transition. Rather than transitioning from "student" to "social service worker", participants perform a multiplicity of subject positions; this highlighted to me that the process of transition is an ongoing performance. It also highlighted that being recognized in various subject positions is a relational process. Examining transition as an ongoing, relational process, to this point, has focused primarily on the social service workers. Foregrounding the individual human subject created tensions for me; I wanted to explore how social service workers are entangled with people, things, space, and time and how that influences their practice. In this chapter, I shift the unit of inquiry from the individual social service workers to the phenomenon of transition. To specify, I examine the phenomenon of social service workers transitioning from post-secondary to working in social services. First, I explore the concept of the phenomenon as introduced by Barad (2007) and explain how defining the phenomenon shapes what can be known in relation to that phenomenon. I then explore how entangled agents are each in their own process of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). Thinking through these concepts allows for transition to be viewed as a relational process of inseparable human and material agents, each of which is dynamic and evolving.

The Phenomenon of Transition

Entanglements

The phenomenon of transition is comprised of entanglements. Barad (2007) refutes the humanist concept of an independent I-self: a fixed, aware, and knowing subject who moves through time and space, making decisions on how to act within their environment. Instead, Barad believes we, as human beings, come into existence and knowing in entanglement with material and discursive forces. That is, we exist in relation with other human and non-human, material entities. In entanglement, human and non-human agents intra-act as inseparable and integral parts of an indistinguishable whole. The human and non-human entities that make up the entanglement are in their own process of becoming and intra-act, rather than inter-act, because they do not exist independently of one another. The entities co-constitute in the entanglement, in the encounter.

In the phenomenon of transition, there are a multitude of entangled elements, including but not limited to: students, values, care, empathy, education, workers, labour market, neoliberal institutions, classrooms, teachers, power, social service agencies and programs, meritocracy, financial ideals of success, hypercapitalism, violence, hunger, feeling "not enough", and precarity. These elements are inseparable and entangled in multiple ways. The phenomenon of transition is made of seemingly infinite combinations and arrangements of entanglements. For example, students studying to work in social services are also entangled in classrooms as physical structures (with artificial or natural light, chairs, tables, seating arrangements, laptops, connection, isolation) with deadlines, stress, pressure, discourses of what it means to be a 'good student', expectations of production (i.e., assignments, exams, and papers), attempting to balance employment and other responsibilities, in relationship with classmates, friends, family, instructors, and the wider community. Entanglements are dynamic, shifting, and each element can be reconstituted into various entanglements, depending upon the boundaries enacted. What is made to matter, as Barad (2007) discusses, is determined through a boundary making process. Transition, as a phenomenon, exists as an entanglement of many inseparable parts: me, my participants, their experiences, our conversations, discourses that construct and constrain, workspaces, culture, and educational institutions. But each of those elements is more than they appear: human bodies, gender, ethnicity, memories,

histories, brothers, sisters, children, parents, students, workers, teachers, courses, hope, grades, practicum, experiences, credentials, desks, hot coffee, stress, gratification, relationship, connection, support, clients, success, colleagues, funding agents, peanut butter toast, a good life, cartoons, a warm jacket, and on and on. These elements, and more, come into being in intra-action.

In the excerpt of analysis provided at the start of this chapter, Carolyn's encounter with the youth demonstrates entanglement. Their entanglement includes, among other things, Carolyn, the youth, the jacket, reporting requirements, cold, stress, anxiety, anger, disappointment, feeling not enough, concern, expectations of the program, laughter, tears, responsibility, questions of efficacy, and the physical space of the program. The jacket acts a non-human performative agent in the encounter. The jacket is not merely a material element used by a human actor; agency is distributed across the humans-jacket-youth-dark rainy night and so on to constitute this particular entanglement and its possibilities and openings. Thus, the space in which the encounter takes place, and the material agents within this space, are integral to the entanglement. Carolyn, as social service worker, becomes entangled with the youth, as client, their emotions intra-act; Carolyn holds out the jacket, which becomes an extension of her that the young person attaches to, so the physical boundaries between Carolyn-jacket-youth are fluid.

Infinite arrangements of entanglements exist within a phenomenon and thus, the phenomenon can be defined and explored in various ways. Barad (2007) discusses agential cuts as the boundaries enacted, defining and producing certain phenomenon. The phenomenon can be reconsidered, or recreated, through various agential cuts. That is, the phenomenon does not exist independently as something to be studied, examined, and explored; it is created through the agential cuts used to define its parameters – what the phenomenon is and what it is not. In the above excerpt, agential cuts can be drawn to define the phenomenon of transition as practice as the entanglement involving Carolyn, the youth, the jacket, and the expectations associated with their physical space. Alternatively, examining transition as practice could focus on the dialogue between Carolyn and the youth, exploring the counselling skills and techniques Carolyn embodied in their conversation. Or the boundaries of the transition phenomenon could shift to focus on time and space; Carolyn's interactions with various youth, throughout her practice, could be explored, compared, and contrasted. Agential

cuts shape how the phenomenon might be studied or examined, privileging what is made possible and what is made impossible through that examination. In my work, I have reconsidered the phenomenon of transition through various analytic frameworks; these are, in a sense, agential cuts that determine how the phenomenon of transition is produced and studied. These theories, in relation with the narrative inquiry approach and modes of analysis, constitute my research apparatus. In this, the apparatus produces phenomena (rather than merely explains it) by enacting various agential cuts. According to Barad (2007), apparatuses "are macroscopic material arrangements through which particular concepts are given definition, to the exclusion of others, and through which particular phenomena with particular determinate physical properties are produced" (p. 142). Apparatuses, then, determine boundaries, producing the phenomenon, while being part of the entangled phenomenon they are defining.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, I bumped up against tension in seeing the interview as complete, unified, and captured within a verbatim transcript. In carrying out this analytic work in this study, and as highlighted by my response to my earlier swirling on interviewing (examined in Chapter 3), I no longer see the interview as representative of the accurate experience of a fixed subject, producing a coherent narrative to capture and preserve the past (Mazzei, 2016, p. 154). In this, I am inspired by Alecia Jackson and Lisa Mazzei's seminal work on *Thinking with Theory* (2012). Jackson and Mazzei see the "interview as a failed practice" (p. viii) but work both within and against the interview. They discuss their process of reading through "interview-transcripts-positioned-as-partial-and-incomplete over and over" (p. 4), and thinking with theory, "unstable subjects, and concepts-on-the-move" (p. 5). They deconstruct and retheorize key methodological concepts (e.g., analysis, data, voice, truth, etc.) to examine interview data through different philosophical concepts, "cutting into the center, opening it up to see what newness might be incited" (p. viii). These ideas and my own experience of tension in transcribing and analyzing interview data led me to rethink the interview as apparatus. As Barad states, "apparatuses are not passive observing instruments; on the contrary, they are productive of (and part of) phenomena" (Barad, 2007, p. 142). As an apparatus, the interview is productive and determines what is made possible and what is made impossible within the research entanglement. Who is involved, what is discussed, when and where the interview happens, how those interviews are taken up into notes, memos, and narratives – these are all aspects of the interview apparatus at work, and

shape what is made possible. The interview itself is an entanglement of researcher, participants, histories, images, thoughts, experiences, sounds, the audio recorder, hot coffee, and the material elements within that time and space; this entanglement cannot be recreated. Each element of the entanglement shifts and reterritorializes, different than it was before.

In this analysis, which is in itself an entanglement, the interviews with participants are simultaneously phenomena that have happened and are happening. The interviews happened: I sat with participants in a specific time and space, separated by a table that held a small black audio recorder, engaged in their stories. The interviews are happening – or re-happening – as material elements that I have produced from our conversations: the audio recordings, interview notes, research memos, narrative accounts. These elements that I have produced, as part of the research entanglement, constitute me, as researcher, and the new social service workers, as participants. I continually take up the interview, through these material elements, in new ways. Seeing the interview as shifting, moving – not a completion but a becoming – allows the phenomenon under inquiry to be defined and redefined – through different agential cuts – and continually problematized, opening new ways of thinking. For example, I returned to the material elements from the interviews after my power and performativity analyses to re-examine the interviews through the concepts of becoming and entanglement. Below, I discuss entanglement in relation to the Deleuzian concept of becoming.

Becoming

Entanglements, made up of human and non-human elements, are dynamic, constantly forming and reforming. The elements, or agents, intra-act and then move on into new entanglements, different than they were before the encounter. In the example above, Carolyn-jacket-youth will separate and enter new entanglements, yet each element is made different by the intra-action. Each element in the entanglement is in an ongoing process of *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). Becoming is ongoing transition. It is an unfinalizable process, involving the "replacement of static conceptions of things through the creation of dynamic conceptions of processes in continual transition" (Grosz, 2005, p. 10). This process of continual transition is not distinct to human life but involves all living and non-living elements:

> Becoming is thus not a capacity inherited by life, an evolutionary outcome or consequence, but is the very principle of matter itself, with its possibilities of linkage with the living, with its possibilities of mutual transformation, with its inherent and unstable volatility (Grosz, 2005, p. 10).

All matter is becoming; living and non-living elements are created as new possibilities, in "mutual transformation" (Grosz, 2005, p. 10). Potentiality exists in becoming; it is not important what one was or what one became. According to Deleuze and Guattari (2005),

> Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. (p. 238).

Deleuze and Guattari (2005) go on to explain that "a becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification…To become is not to progress or regress along a series" (p. 237-238). In other words, for Deleuze, becoming is not a series of steps towards an end point, or a regression away from a finalized identification; it is not a path between two points. Becoming is not an attribute of an individual and it is not a linear process between a start point and an end point. Becoming, as presented by Deleuze and Guattari (2005) defies clear representation; it cannot be encapsulated in an example of individual experience. Recognizing this led me to explore my understanding of becoming in relation to the participants, myself, and our process of "mutual transformation" (Grosz, 2005, p. 10). So, while I am exploring the transition experience of new social service workers, I, too, am in transition. I am transitioning as an academic, a researcher, and as an educator, as those fields are also in a state of becoming. I am in a state of constant transition; I am becoming.

The participants shared stories that highlight the concept of becoming. For example, Alison stated that she feels like she has failed in her transition to being an adult, when she compares her life to what she sees as societal expectations of where she should be in relation to education, employment, financial security, and other neoliberal measures of success:

> We are constantly making meaning, constantly transitioning. In talking about transition, neoliberal ideas make me feel like I've failed to transition into being an adult. I'm 30. I've done a lot of pretty great

> things in my life. I'm proud of where I am. But I forget that all of the time.

In her narrative, Alison recognizes that her transition is not complete; she is constantly transitioning. She is becoming. Unlike transition, as a distinct stage with a finalizable goal, becoming is being. The idea of constant transition – becoming – allows her to recognize that she has done a lot of important things in her life and feel proud of where she is. Similarly, in describing her work in social services, Carolyn said she felt "in-between" and was "still figuring it out". This demonstrates that the transition from school to working in social services is becoming. Social service work involves multiple relational becomings, within a field which is also dynamic and becoming. This demonstrates the complexity and dynamism of the phenomenon of "transition", which may be examined as becoming in various entanglements. This shift in thinking emphasizes the ongoing nature of transition into and throughout social service practice. Not only are social service workers "constantly transitioning", so are their clients, colleagues, agencies, funding agents, conceptualizations of need areas (like addiction, mental health, homelessness), frameworks for delivering service, and other related aspects of social service work.

Examining how transition works involves changing the unit of analysis from a stable subject (within a context of social, historical, cultural, economic, and institutional narratives), to the phenomenon of transition. This shift to dynamic and changing entanglements opens different ways of understanding relationships and the complexity of lives. Thoughts, ideas, practice, discourse, and matter intra-act in entanglements, influencing not just what can be known but creating reality in each encounter. As Davies (2014) explains: "This idea of entanglement affects not just what is possible to see but what is possible to be and do, epistemologically, ontologically, and ethically." (p. 735). I return to the encounter involving Carolyn-jacket-youth to explore Davies' (2014) idea. Examining this encounter as an entanglement alters what is possible to do, in relation to social service work, and what it is possible to know, in relation to transition and social service work. If social service workers and clients, and an infinite combination of other human and non-human agents, exist in entanglement, then these differentiated roles (i.e., worker, client) cease to exist. In entanglement, Carolyn does not interact as a social service worker, a role that is separate from and superior (in terms of privilege, power, and expertise) to the young person. The entanglement alters what it is possible

for Carolyn to be: she is becoming-with the young person, and the other elements of the entanglement, as they co-constitute one another. This inseparability leads to a different ethical responsibility in social service work; there is an increased responsibility in seeing the "client" as oneself. This alters what it is possible to know, in terms of what relational work can look like and how relationality can be taught to future social service workers. I examine social service work as entanglement to alter what it is possible to do, see, and be in relation to social service work and educating social service workers.

Examining Phenomena Through Diffractive Analysis

Investigating transition as an entanglement of becoming provides new ways of exploring the phenomenon. Barad's methodology of diffractive analysis allows me to explore entanglements in a non-linear, rhizomatic way (e.g., Masny, 2016; Waterhouse, 2011) mapping new, previously unthought thoughts that allow us to remake the world in each interaction (Barad, 2007).

Drawing from Haraway, Barad (2007) explains diffraction as a concept in physics that produces a methodological approach "of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter" (p. 71). In physics, diffraction involves waves (for example, water, sound, or light waves) overlapping and interfering with one another when they encounter disturbances. A simple example Barad uses involves dropping two stones into a pond; each stone will produce a series of rippling waves that will interfere with one another. The pattern of their interference is a diffraction pattern. Methodologically, diffraction involves exploring productive difference. That is, what is produced when insights or ideas are read through one another? Like waves, are there areas of enhancement and diminishment where these ideas interfere with one another? How are these areas of interference generative?

Barad (2007) argues traditional research acts as a mirror to reflect and represent an external reality; rather than reflection, diffraction is about difference. Congruent with Barad's (2007) conceptualization of existence through intra-action and entanglement, diffractive analysis examines phenomena as an entanglement of intra-acting encounters (Davies, 2014). "Diffractive analysis can be understood as an enactment of flows of differences where *differences get made* in the process of reading data into each other,

and identifying what diffractive patterns emerge in these readings" (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013, p. 676, italics in original). That is, by reading the entangled phenomena through one another and through theory, different patterns emerge; recognizing where these elements intra-act and how they play off one another can create new understandings. Davies (2014) explains that diffraction isn't about the "already-known" but involves "making new mappings, onto-epistemological, ethical mappings, in which something new might emerge" (p. 734). Davies (2014) expands on the concept of difference by explaining:

> A diffractive methodology shifts research from the concept of difference as categorical difference to difference as an emergent process, in which subjects and objects become different in the encounters through which they emerge and go on emerging differently. Diffractive research thus breaks up linear thought where one agent acts on another in a causal relationship and opens up a space of awareness in which it is possible to see those multidirectional, emergent, intra-active interferences that Deleuze calls Being and Barad calls the world and its possibilities of becoming (p. 740).

Several scholars have demonstrated how they have used diffractive analysis (e.g., Palmer, 2011; Davies, 2014; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013) within an ontology of "knowing as part of being" (Barad, 2007, p. 341). In these analyses, emphasis is placed on exploring the "mutual entailment of discourse and matter" (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 266) by "rethinking the very act of thinking" (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 267). I examine two studies that use diffractive methodologies to demonstrate the potentiality in examining phenomenon as entangled.

In their work, Hillevi Lenz Taguchi and Anna Palmer (2013) examine girls' mental health and school behaviour, noting that mental health is normally individualized and addressed through self-care strategies, putting the responsibility for well-being on the girls themselves. Examining photos and writings from female students, the researchers engage in diffractive analysis of material-discursive intra-activities in the school environment that constitute well-being. This means seeing the participants as constituted by (and constituting) the physical environment of the school and school experience. Lenz Taguchi and Palmer (2013) describe diffracting articles, photos, web-sites, memories, and written stories, where these elements collide and interfere with one another, producing new understandings. They describe hearing the girls' experiences in light of research on overachievement and reading their ideas of overachievement through their own experiences as females in the academy. Moving beyond individual

responsibility (i.e., blaming the female student for their stress-related illness), the analysis demonstrates how “a complex process of multiple intra-acting agents…are collectively productive of and responsible for her ill-being” (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013, p. 683). This analysis challenges the discourse that those who suffer are responsible for their own well-being, moving beyond judgment to understanding the complexity of the phenomenon and new opportunities for action and thinking.

Anna Palmer’s (2011) work is especially helpful to me as she demonstrates what is made possible by thinking through phenomena within different ontological understandings. She highlights the importance of “theoretical transposition”, where the researcher installs themselves differently within their examination of the phenomenon to see what can be made visible in different theoretical/methodological arrangements (Palmer, 2011, p. 15); in Palmer’s work, she explores what can be made visible by examining math experiences through Butler’s concept of performativity and Barad’s concept of intra-action. Palmer examines the narratives (i.e., memory stories) of student teachers’ math experiences; her initial analysis examines how discursive arrangements constitute one female math student named Ella who performs the role of ‘good student’. Palmer (2011) examines the discursive practices that constitute Ella, as a recognizable subject, by examining Ella’s description of her approach to the study of mathematics (e.g., completing extra work, questioning her correct calculations). Ella performs towards the ideal subject: a hardworking student who is compliant and does what she is expected to do (p. 9). Palmer (2011) then shifts, as researcher, to examine the intra-actions involved in the story of Ella. She recognizes there are a “myriad of interrelations” involved in Ella’s memory story and she approaches her diffractive analysis focusing on the fill-in math workbook, as material agent, “to study how this performative agent interferes with, and intra-acts in, the process of subjectification in maths education” (Palmer, 2011, p. 12). She describes how agency emerges in the intra-action of Ella, her math workbook, coloured pencils, the staircase to the school door, Ella’s growing excitement in completing her math questions, the care she puts into her work, and other human and non-human agents that “can thus be understood as permeated or saturated into each other” (Palmer, 2011, p. 12). Ella is constructed as a gendered student in mathematics through the intra-action of human and non-human agents, that cannot be distinguished from one another; these material-discursive arrangements enact Ella, as a good female student in the math class, in specific ways. As Palmer (2011) explains:

> The girl's subjectivity is thus intertwined with the stairs, the air in the hallway, the school bag, other children's bodies, sounds, speed and flows of intensities. Without the environment, the scent of the paper and the dust, the beating heart in the girl's chest, the fourteen other seven-year-old pupils, the maths book and the silent classroom, she is not this specific subject. (p. 14)

This work highlights the potentialities offered by diffractive analysis by demonstrating how analyzing material-discursive intra-action allows for new ways of thinking about and understanding a phenomenon compared to other theoretical perspectives. In my dissertation, I have demonstrated similar shifts in thinking – or theoretical transpositions (Palmer, 2011) – by exploring transition through varied theoretical lenses (i.e., power and performativity) before shifting to a relational analysis of transition as an entangled phenomenon. These theoretical shifts demonstrate what becomes possible in analysis when various agential cuts are made and expand what can be taken from the analysis to help remake the world as a more ethical and just place.

As seen in these examples, diffractive analysis emphasizes intra-action and the productive tension produced by retheorizing concepts and phenomenon through other concepts, theories, ideas, images, memories, experiences, and imaginings. While traditional analysis may examine an individual within their wider context (e.g., social, historical, cultural, economic, etc.) to offer meaningful recommendations for practice, diffractive analysis shifts the unit of analysis from the individual subject to the entangled phenomenon. This is a significant distinction that has meaningful implications. Using Lenz Taguchi and Palmer's (2013) work as an example, this shift can be seen in how mental health is explored. A traditional analysis may examine the mental health of an individual within context and offer potential interventions based on the understanding of mental health as residing within a stable subject. Lenz Taguchi and Palmer (2013) retheorize mental health, by diffracting articles, photos, web-sites, memories, and written stories, to examine mental health as an entangled phenomenon. By highlighting the material and discursive arrangements that constitute mental wellness, they bring to light the complexity of wellness and illness and how entanglements may simultaneously evoke both; they state, "one material-discursive practice of doing schoolwork and studying might evoke ill-being in one situated context, but it might also evoke a sense of well-being, control and even a sense of emancipation for the same girl in another situation" (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013, p. 684). In this quote, they underscore the

dynamic and situated nature of the entangled phenomenon of mental health. They highlight that defining the indeterminate phenomenon produces it in a certain way, which then leads to specific interventions. By emphasizing the tensions that exist in defining and examining an indeterminate phenomenon like mental health, Lenz Taguchi and Palmer (2013) focus on complexity and situatedness and warn against drawing conclusions about individual experiences. Where traditional analysis may lead sequentially to specific interventions, diffractive analysis opens the phenomenon, emphasizing the need for multiple, complex interventions that are part of the phenomenon.

In the examples of diffractive research discussed above, the researchers are not explicit about their methodological process. In each case, the researchers are re-examining qualitative data (e.g., field notes, interview transcript, narrative stories), recognizing the intra-actions involved in constituting the phenomenon under consideration. This is an experimental and transgressive approach. There is no prescriptive instruction for engaging in diffractive analysis; prescriptive instructions assume an understanding of reality that is inconsistent with intra-action and diffractive analysis. Although Barad describes diffractive analysis clearly and thoroughly in her work, there is no script or description of what such an analysis should contain. In discussing working from a post-qualitative ontology, St. Pierre (2016c) recommends that researchers "focus less on repeating existing methodologies and more on calling them into question" (p. 8). She argues that researchers would be better served by being "methodologically-free", focusing on *thinking* through their inquiry, rather than *doing*. As St. Pierre, Jackson, and Mazzei (2016), explain:

> We can't tell someone how to do this new work, how to think, how to experiment, how to tip an assemblage towards the plane of immanence. Our best advice is to read and read and read and attend to the encounters in our experiences that demand our attention. If we have something different to think with, we might be able to live on a different plane of thought, a different plane of experience. (p. 106)

While there is no prescriptive method to follow, diffractive analysis provides the opportunity to think through the data, theory, concepts, and experiences in endless ways, continually reproblematizing and re-reading the phenomenon. I experiment with diffracting thoughts, images, concepts, feelings, stories, memories, and questions – mine and the participants' – through one another to examine the material-discursive

intra-actions involved in social service work. Below I discuss my diffractive analysis of how social service workers are constituted in entanglement.

Social Service Work as Entanglement

Working with the concepts of entanglement and becoming, my research shifts from understanding how individual social service workers experience their transition from school to work to examining how social service workers are constituted in entanglement. How are they becoming-with their clients? With me, in our research entanglement? How do these entanglements influence becoming? And most importantly, how do our intra-actions in entanglement provide potentiality for a more ethical, just world? In the following section, I explain how I was drawn to material agents in the narratives of two participants and explore how the encounters described are the focus of my diffractive analysis. I discuss what this diffractive analysis allows and the meaningful implications for social service work and education.

Making it "More Tangible" – A Jacket and a Cup of Tea

While each of my conversations with participants brought up various emotions, memories, images, and ideas for me, some elements of the stories created an affective response in me that I had to explore further. These encounters, in the words of St. Pierre, Jackson, and Mazzei (2016), demanded my attention. I was drawn to certain stories and material, performative agents in these stories, as examples of material-discursive intra-action. As I re-reviewed the audio and written narrative accounts, thinking with post-human performativity, becoming, and entanglement, I was drawn to a discussion with Alison where she discussed working with people who are suffering and trying to focus on making things "more tangible". In discussing what she can do within a broader narrative of social justice, Alison emphasized the need to show young people respect and dignity. She recognized that focusing on material elements (e.g., a meal, a cup of tea) can be a meaningful act of social justice:

> I work through the problem on a case by case basis, in terms of where can I get a meal, and it makes it more tangible. School has a very grand focus on social justice, and it is humbling to recognize that making tea and checking in with someone while they watch cartoons is an act of social justice because no one else is checking in with them to see if they're okay. Recognizing that each youth is worthy of respect and

> dignity. I think it does make a difference. When I was younger, I wanted to be a social worker or a teacher so I could "make a difference" or "change people's lives" and it is much less about that now. It is really just about seeing people and attending to them.

Alison's discussion of making tea as an act of social justice created an affective intensity (a flowing together of phenomenon) that demanded my attention. The importance of the material – of making things tangible – is clear in her discussion. Her idea of making tea and watching cartoons as social justice catalyzed my thinking about how material agents co-constitute social service workers and the clients they work with, in intra-action. I read and re-read the narrative accounts I had co-created with the participants. I relistened to audio of our conversations. I performed mental gymnastics trying to think through the stories (and their intra-actions with other stories, theories, concepts, ideas, and affects), intentionally shifting my focus from an analysis of an individual subject to understanding the potential intra-actions at play. Through this process of re-analyzing the interviews within a relational onto-ethico-epistemology (Barad, 2007), I chose two examples from the narrative accounts to focus my analysis and demonstrate the co-constitutive nature of human and non-human agents in entanglement. In order to highlight the material aspects of post-human performativity, I draw on Carolyn's discussion of a youth's jacket and Alison's example of making tea as social justice to highlight entanglement and the intra-action of material-discursive elements. I use these two examples of social service work practice to explore how being a social service worker works. I experiment with diffracting thoughts, images, concepts, feelings, stories, memories, and questions – mine and the participants' – through one another to examine the material-discursive intra-actions involved in social service work. I draw on my own memories and images of working in social services, discourses, concepts, participant experiences and narratives, various educational experiences as instructor and student, material elements, and the deconstructed ideas of transition from the literature (discussed fully in Chapter 2). My analysis involves re-storying the narratives provided by the participants, which focus on their experience and perspective; I shift the narrative away from a stable subject (i.e., a first-person narrative account) to highlighting the material as integral and agential within the encounter and exploring tensions and potentialities in how these material-discursive arrangements work. I explore intra-action and the importance of difference and tension as potentiality, discussing what this analysis makes possible, in relation to "breath(ing) life into ever new possibilities for living justly" in social service work and education (Barad, 2007, p. x).

Analysis: Post-Human Performativity

Carolyn's discussion of the "harder moments" of social service work demanded my attention. In response to my question about what she liked about her job at a youth shelter during our first interview, Carolyn discussed that one of her favourite things about her job is what she termed the "harder moments". She explained that the youth who come into the shelter are often street entrenched (i.e., homeless) and may have addiction and or mental health concerns. The shelter is not low-barriered (i.e., clients must meet specific criteria to receive service) and young people at the shelter must be functioning well and working on their goals to maintain their placement. Below is an excerpt from the conversation with Carolyn about a harder moment when a young person who had been at the shelter, but had chosen not to stay, returned to the shelter for his jacket:

> She noted she also finds the "harder moments" really positive as they help remind her why she wants "to work with people in crisis". Carolyn described an example of a harder moment when a self-discharged youth returned to the shelter intoxicated, asking for his jacket and a blanket. Carolyn brought him his jacket and sat down and talked to him. She said she was really struck by how he was struggling in his addiction and how vulnerable he was as he ran through a gambit of emotions (laughing, angry). She notes listening to the experiences of the youth helps her understand their hardships, why they do what they do, and how hard it can be for them to make changes. Carolyn stated that her reason for going into social service work was to be an empathic ear and show compassion because "life is really hard". She said having these meaningful conversations with youth provides a cause for reflection and makes her work worthwhile. She sees that "behind every action is a lot of pain" and that everyone is just trying, despite being lonely and sad.

This account was one of the narratives I wrote in the third person before I experienced tension with this representation and experimented with other formats for narrative accounts (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the draft narrative accounts and how I altered the format to promote additional dialogue). I also listened to the audio recording of the interview, where Carolyn is discussing this encounter, numerous times, as it provides a richness that is not available in the third person narrative account. Listening to Carolyn's discussion of how emotionally challenging it was to see the young person who had been a client struggling with addiction created a reaction in me: images of faces of the young people I had worked with came to mind; I remembered specific moments – both good and bad – with different young people; I felt the clench in my

stomach recognizing Carolyn's emotional response as a feeling I had many times with young people in crisis – wanting to help but feeling powerless.

A critical narrative approach to this excerpt may involve seeking to understand Carolyn's experience in terms of her educational trajectory, her identity as a social service worker, and the expectations (both internal and external) that shape her work. I might examine the tensions she experiences in working with the client while he is in crisis, or the tensions she experiences between the program's mandate and expectations and the client's needs. I might look at the underlying values (e.g., empathy, understanding, compassion) that guide her work and how these may be connected to her position (i.e., culture, gender, class, etc.) within societal arrangements. I could explore how Carolyn's experiences within and beyond the classroom have helped shape her response to this specific client and her practice, more generally. This approach would be fruitful and generative and could contribute to the discussion of the transition experience of new social service workers. However, this discussion would contribute to what is already known about transition (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2), and I attempt to think new thoughts and offer new understandings of transition, through the following analysis, part of which I shared at the onset of this chapter:

The jacket. The blanket. A cup of warm tea. These material elements become performative agents in the encounters discussed. The jacket is not used by Carolyn intentionally in her work with the young person towards a specific end; instead, it is an integral, and inseparable, element in an entanglement, creating the encounter and constituting both Carolyn and the young person as worker/client. The jacket, for a young person who lives on the street, provides warmth, a layer of protection from the elements, a hood that shields the judgmental or pitying looks of people passing by. While the young person was feeling a variety of emotions – perhaps anger and disappointment for self-discharging, stress and anxiety about where to go next, shame in returning intoxicated to the program – the jacket was something he couldn't leave behind. The jacket drew the young person back to the program, where he, in his intoxicated state, could intra-act with Carolyn. In that encounter, Carolyn and the young person moved beyond their roles as social service worker and client, and even beyond the boundaries defining them as separate people. In that moment, marked with fear, raw vulnerability, and uncertainty, Carolyn, the young person, his jacket, laughter, pain, compassion,

understanding, and empathy intra-act in the physical space of the program. These elements, each in their own process of becoming, intra-act to generate a new intensity.

Although Carolyn didn't discuss the physical space in which the encounter took place, I find myself imagining the space as I listen to her story. I see an image of Carolyn and the young person sitting in chairs in a foyer space, an open area except for a staffed front counter. The walls are filled with flyers, posters for services, and art created by the young people who reside there. Young people (i.e., clients) and staff (i.e., social service workers) are moving in the space in different arrangements, in their own conversations; Carolyn and the youth have pulled rolling chairs, like would be at a computer desk, off to one side, up against the wall, to talk. The jacket sits on his lap, and he methodically rubs the frayed cuff of one sleeve, as he speaks. This space, to the young person, may feel like safety, care, and connection. Returning to the program, to the physical space, constitutes him as a "client", or as a previous client who chose to leave (i.e., self-discharge) the program. The staff on-site, including Carolyn, may have concerns about the young person being there in an intoxicated state – they may be worried about his safety or the safety of other youth who are in the program, they may be worried about his emotional state and his potential to escalate. In performing their role as social service worker, they may view him as a possible problem – someone who no longer resides at the program who could trigger current clients or who could escalate and threaten the safety of the space. In their role, staff may attempt to keep him from interacting with current clients or try to move him out of the shelter as quickly as possible. While Carolyn may have thought of safety and the other youth in the program, when she sits down with the young person with his jacket, they become engaged in conversation. Although it is emotional and challenging, they are entangled and inseparable; they intra-act with his story, pain, tears, fear, her anxiety, concern, powerlessness, the jacket, the hard chairs, the open drafty space. A true encounter.

Alison also emphasized the significance of the material in her intra-actions with young people. In the excerpt below, she discussed how difficult it is to feel effective in her work, given social inequity and large-scale social issues. She recognized that making tea can be an act of social justice:

> I work through the problem on a case by case basis, in terms of where can I get a meal, and it makes it more tangible. School has a very grand focus on social justice, and it is humbling to recognize that making tea

> and checking in with someone while they watch cartoons is an act of social justice because no one else is checking in with them to see if they're okay. Recognizing that each youth is worthy of respect and dignity. I think it does make a difference. When I was younger, I wanted to be a social worker or a teacher so I could "make a difference" or "change peoples lives" and it is much less about that now. It is really just about seeing people and attending to them.

The act of making tea for someone becomes a way of being with them, of seeing them, attending to them, and honouring their humanity. Making tea and being with someone (e.g., sitting together on the sofa watching cartoons) shows the young person that they matter, that they deserve respect, and should be treated with dignity. Making tea shows caring, nurturing, warmth, support. In hearing Alison discuss tea as social justice, I thought of warmth and safety. I thought of similar instances working with youth where the pain was so significant that nothing could help, yet we sat together and drank tea. I thought of, more recently, making tea in my office for students who were struggling, emotional, or wanted to sit and connect. I thought of tea ceremony, high tea, medicinal teas, and the importance of tea across culture, history, and geography.

The tea – the making and offering of tea – becomes an integral part of the entanglement with young people. The tea performs within the entanglement, acting as an extension of the hand offering and of the hand receiving, so there are no boundaries between social service worker/client. In these encounters, I am drawn to the inseparability of human, material, discourse, and power within the entanglements. In these vital moments, the distinct elements of the entanglement are momentarily lost in true connection (intra-action). In these encounters, catalyzed by material agents, the inseparability of the entanglement becomes almost visible and tangible.

Within these encounters, I can examine ongoing processes of becoming and mutual transformation in various arrangements – the participants and their clients, the participants and myself (as researcher), myself (as educator) and students, the social service field, and education, more broadly. These various arrangements are intra-acting, inseparable, and becoming at various speeds, in varied directions. These arrangements can be explored through different agential cuts. I explain the arrangements as separate entities for clarity, although I see the entanglements I am discussing as intertwined or coming together and moving apart at various points. I also discuss the elements of the entanglements as if they are separate; again, this is for clarity, with the understanding that the performative agents come into being in intra-

action with one another and are, thus, inseparable. At one level, the participants, performing as new social service workers, are entangled with their clients in different physical spaces. The entanglement is marked by tensions between technocratic expectations and ideals of relational practice. Power flows, as an agential force, within the entanglement. Power is not held by the social service workers but flows in intra-action with clients, colleagues, supervisors, funders, reporting requirements, performativity measures, societal expectations, and questions of effectiveness. In performing towards their expected role as social service worker, clients (and other social service workers who are not recognized as meeting the ideal subject position) are discarded to precarity. The entanglement includes material conditions of poverty, precarious housing, stress, challenge, resilience, and marginalization. The elements of this entanglement are becoming; what is made to matter is dynamic. The field of social service work itself is becoming, in a state of constant transition, as the elements of the social service worker/client entanglement are transitioning within this context.

Similarly, our research entanglement is comprised of many elements: me (as researcher), the new social service workers (as participants), engaged conversations, hot coffee, interview protocol, anxiety, bustling coffee shops, the audio recorder, busy work days, reflective memos, narrative accounts, memories, images, and new connections. Researcher and participants are constituted within this entanglement, in intra-action. Within this entanglement, research concepts (e.g., representation, voice, participant, data analysis) are becoming – shifting and dynamic – and I work both with and against them. Intra-action with these concepts involved questioning, deconstructing, retheorizing, and reconstituting the concepts within this entanglement. This was an ongoing process of thinking through the research, from the middle of it. Initially in my interviews with participants, I was performing the role of “good researcher”. I intended to be thorough and ask meaningful and relevant questions to truly understand the experiences of the individual participants. However, I found, in our conversations, moments where we connected and our roles as researcher and participant faded away or were transformed. These encounters demonstrated the relational aspect of the research entanglement; the interview was not only the participant sharing their experience, it was also a shared experience between me and the participant.

I see a number of parallels between the social service worker/client entanglement and my coming into being (as educator) with my students (who are

studying to work in social services) in entanglement. Much like the social service field, the field of education is becoming and marked by tensions between technocratic (i.e., credentialing, outputs, efficiency, employability) and relational processes (i.e., learning, development, transformation). Power flows in intra-action with my students, colleagues, administrators, performance reviews, teaching evaluations, utilization, and "success rates". Educators who do not meet neoliberal expectations are discarded to precarity. This entanglement includes research productivity, promotion and tenure, contract/adjunct faculty, student support, curriculum, testing, and faculty evaluation. Much like the participants, I, too, am in transition – becoming-educator – navigating the tensions of working within the field of education; determining my role within conflicting expectations, performing as educator, emphasizing relational work and being with students while reporting my value through managerial performance measures. Power flows through this entanglement; there is the potential for resistance throughout. Existing entanglements can be deterritorialized, even momentarily, allowing for new ways of thinking, being, and doing.

Swirling

> *Everything is changing and differentiating. It is more than the participants growing, developing, and becoming increasingly self-aware as they move through their transition to social services. They are becoming. Self-differentiating. They are engaged in a dynamic process of continual transition. Change. Becoming in different directions at different speeds. They become in interaction with others; they discuss the importance of friends, family, colleagues, clients, and teachers in shaping who they are becoming. Continually connecting and disconnecting with others who are also moving, shifting, differentiating, in spaces that are similarly becoming. Always in-between. Not quite yet-ness.*
>
> *I am becoming with the participants, through our connections and interactions. Our connections are generative, constructive, and allow for new becomings. I am becoming-with the participants, "becoming-with the data" (as Lenz-Taguchi, 2012, p. 265, discusses). We come together in this research process and I am transforming. Becoming-*

researcher. Becoming-scholar. I move from examining and interpreting, representing various perspectives of a phenomenon to being part of the phenomenon. Being constructed by the data, through the relational research experience. Constructed not only in that research experience but altered as a result of it. So, I come into being differently in subsequent interactions.

What is Made Possible

Swirling

There is no results chapter. No findings chapter. I wish there were such thing as a problematize chapter, where questions are the answer. Then there would be no need to resolve anything and I – whoever that is – can stay in this place of unknowability. Except I guess scientists hate unknowability. And we are supposed to be social scientists. I love unknowability. I want to move there. I would give you the address but it would have already changed by now. It is somewhere near the corner of potentiality and justice. "We can never get to the bottom of things", St. Pierre (2000, p. 482) says. I find this reassuring. There is no bottom to get to. This creates the opportunity to continually examine and problematize how things work. Nothing is sacred. Meaning is always shifting and new subjectivities can be inscribed. Endless possibility. Unlimited potential. I am interested in this space within, where resistance and change is possible. Potential is reassuring. Possibility actualized within an ontology (or Barad's ethico-ontoepistemology) that emphasizes justice. As Barad explains, justice is not a victory narrative:

"Justice, which entails acknowledgement, recognition, and loving attention, is not a state that can be achieved once and for all. There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into

ever new possibilities for living justly. The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting." (Barad, 2007, p. x).

Ethical practice is not a prescriptive checklist of guidelines to follow, but our own and others' unknowability, becoming together in intra-action, to create new possibilities. New imaginings. Creating new possibilities with each intra-action.

Shifting my onto-epistemological approach allows for an analysis of encounters, where warm tea and a jacket are performative agents in an entanglement. Each element of these entanglements is becoming, at different rates and directions, within a field (social service work) that is also becoming. In contrast to the thematic analyses offered in Chapter 4 and 5, this diffractive analysis examines the complexity of transition, within the becoming fields of education and the labour market. While examining transition using concepts like power and performativity is helpful in identifying the tensions that exist in transition and potentialities for resistance, these thematic analyses examine the individual's experience moving through time and space. A diffractive analysis examines the movement and dynamism involved in transition, as an ongoing process of being constituted as a social service worker; the analysis highlights that transition involves a multitude of entanglements, coming together and breaking apart, made up of elements that are becoming. The focus shifts from an individual's transition, and the interventions that may assist in making this transition "successful", to understanding transition in its complexity. By examining the material and discursive arrangements that constitute ongoing transition in different ways, the emphasis moves from individual responsibility to re-imagining transition, and social service practice, in a way that promotes social justice.

Practically, an understanding of social service work as entangled creates inseparability, diminishing power differentials between "client" and "worker" and reducing the stigma associated with receiving social services. Clients of social services are often viewed as failures, who suffer precarity due to their own poor choices, and are discarded as less than human and disposable non-members of society. This results in people falling through the cracks; lack of connection and support, human lives full of suffering, and deaths that are unmournable. Recognizing entanglement promotes responsibility to and for the other, as the self (Barad, 2010, 2012). Recognizing entanglements as

dynamic and becoming allows for uncertainty and unknowability as a strength in relational work. The social service worker can be open and present to the unique needs of the client, in that time and space, given the material conditions, so an appropriate response can emerge from their interaction. This moves social service work away from pre-determined outcomes and prescriptive responses to awareness of how each encounter could promote justice. Being aware and responsive to the humanity of each interaction and recognizing that each interaction requires an intentional and unique response can save clients from falling through the cracks.

In entanglement, dynamic, transforming parts come together, such that they are no longer separate entities. Material elements perform as part of the entanglement, where individuals (i.e., Carolyn, Alison, the youth they work with) are momentarily lost within the encounter. In those instances, where the jacket, Carolyn, and the youth come together with their experiences, memories, and emotions, Carolyn and the young person are not performing towards a specific role (i.e., social service worker/client). They are being with; intra-acting as one entanglement. Being. Each element loses itself in the encounter, becoming part of the whole. Each element is then different, as they move and shift and engage in other entanglements. This encounter – true intra-action and inseparability – cannot be forced; these encounters are emergent. Carolyn did not set out to create this moment with the young person; she was open and present and responsive to the emerging encounter. She was not intending to intervene as a social service worker to elicit a specific outcome. She brought herself to, and lost herself within, the intra-action. I think this is what Barad meant in the quote about justice in the swirling above. Justice is not something that is achieved. Justice is a practice of being with; of acknowledging and honouring others. We cannot force these intra-actions, but we can be "open and alive to each meeting" and recognize emergent opportunities to lose ourselves in these intra-actions (Barad, 2007, p. x). To be willing to release the agential-I, abandon the role I am expected to fill, and "breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly" (Barad, 2007, p. x). This is becoming in entanglement. The world, also becoming, can be remade with each meeting (Barad, 2007, p. x). Remaking the world, in each meeting, has significant material implications for social service work and education.

A Possible Critique

Swirling

> *There are very good examples of post-structuralist, new materialist inquiry (e.g., Davies, 2014; Somerville, 2016; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2012; Jackson, 2010). These pieces of writing leave me feel energized and befuddled and in awe. The type of reading that sticks with you and I have to knead through their ideas again and again, folding and pressing to see how they may work. I do not want to merely apply a materialist analysis to my data. My research initially involved collecting data through interviews. St. Pierre (2016a; 2016c) warns against trying to use concepts and approaches that are ontologically incommensurate. Yet I can write, as inquiry, working through Deleuzean ideas and using writing as an empirical application (St. Pierre, 2016b, p. 2). That is, I can write to learn what I think and to think thoughts outside of what is possible; beyond a grid of intelligibility, as Foucault notes. Use writing as a way to get free of myself (Foucault) and to free life from where it is trapped (Deleuze). I do think Deleuze can be helpful in examining the event of research, the becoming that constructed me as part of an entanglement. And how understanding becoming, in entanglement, alters social service work and education.*

Methods of diffractive analysis allow for an examination of the transition from school to work in social services that opens new meanings, for example, viewing transition as becoming, blurring distinctions between social service worker and client, and recognizing the influence of material agents in the constitution of their entangled encounters. I now want to touch briefly on a potential critique of my work. St. Pierre (2017a; 2017b) argues that one who has thought with the post- philosophies (e.g., post-structuralist, deconstructionist, post-modern, post-humanist, etc.), or who has shifted their ontological understanding away from a traditional humanist perspective, can no longer think about research in the same way. These theories have permanently altered the understanding of social research, and researchers are now *Working from the Ruins* (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) of a humanist ontology. St. Pierre and other post-humanist scholars (for example, Braidotti, 2013) argue that humanism has been thoroughly

challenged and deconstructed; there are no remains of truth, reason, progress, or the central figure of an independent thinking/knowing subject to work from. St. Pierre (2016c) also warns against applying post-qualitative terms, concepts, or ideas to conventional humanist qualitative research. She argues that post-qualitative approaches like rhizomatic or diffractive analysis cannot be laid on top of a qualitative study, as they are ontologically incommensurate. Her discussion focuses on scholars applying concepts that they do not fully understand or applying concepts without awareness of the ontological traditions of the concept; to me, this is not "conventional humanist qualitative methodology". Qualitative researchers can engage critically with a variety of topics and concepts and creatively integrate concepts in novel ways; I see this as consistent with what Koro-Ljundgberg (2016) discusses as fluid and multifaceted methodologies (p. 81).

Others, like Kathryn Strom, effectively argue against placing rules around the use of Deleuzean concepts; in her work, she provides examples of how she has engaged with Deleuzean ideas to have her research critiqued by those who claim, "that's not very Deleuzean" (Strom, 2018). She argues that "'being Deleuzean' is itself a molar line that serves as an exclusionary mechanism, working to preserve high theory for the use of only a select few" (p. 104). She counters, drawing on Deleuze, that researchers should plug into various concepts and theories to see what works and what fits. As a practitioner, Strom highlights the importance of making philosophy accessible to mainstream educators and applicable to educational practice. As fields of new materiality, post-humanism, and post-qualitative inquiry become more prolific and the philosophies of Deleuze and Spinoza and others are taken up in various ways, there is a lack of agreement about whether boundaries should exist between various areas of work, and if so, where these boundaries lie and who should be responsible for policing them. Despite subscribing to a monistic philosophy that emphasizes thinking differently (including rhizomatic thought and deterritorialization), scholars seem committed to identifying themselves as belonging to one camp or another.

I am aware of the tension involved in using Deleuzean concepts and ideas in conventional qualitative research. I argue that I did not lay Deleuzean concepts on a traditional inquiry; instead, my research has been informed by post-structuralist ideas throughout and my engagement with Deleuzean ideas coincided with an onto-epistemological shift, such that my analysis remains ontologically commensurate. My

original intention, in keeping with critical narrative inquiry, was not to ascribe truth to their voice, or see their experience as demonstrative of an external reality. Instead, I saw the participants' stories as shifting, dynamic, and as one glimpse of a multitude of ongoing stories. I sought to examine the individual experience of transition, within social, political, economic, historical, and institutional contexts, exploring how these shape participants' experiences and how they contribute to these contexts. I wanted to explore how the participants and I would co-construct one another in dialogue. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, I moved away from textualizing my conversations with participants into verbatim transcripts for coding and instead, worked from audio recordings to create draft narrative accounts. Although these narrative accounts were material texts, I created them to intentionally present the stories as shifting and in-progress. My onto-epistemological shift involved moving away from a focus on the individual experience to seeing being/knowing in entanglement. The narrative accounts were not meant to accurately represent experience but allow for the 'voice' of the participants to emerge out of their entanglements (Mazzei, 2013a). I see the participants, not as fixed and knowable subjects, but as elements of entanglement, becoming at different rates in various directions. I see myself as inseparable from the research encounter, becoming-with the participants. I have demonstrated how these accounts can be read through theories and concepts, and through one another, to provide new understandings of transition (see Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). To help clarify my approach, here is an excerpt from my research journal, in which I discuss my perspective on social research:

> *Social research, for me, is one way of producing knowledge. It is not the way; social research doesn't provide absolute truth or meaning. However, it does allow for critical examination of what we see, what we do, and what we think we know. Engaging in social research allows for greater exploration of phenomena, within social, historical, political, and institutional contexts. The purpose of this exploration is to provide alternate ways of thinking. Although a phenomenon or practice may be accepted as self-evident or taken for granted, examining the phenomenon through various theoretical frameworks can help bring new understanding and meaning. Ideally, deconstructing our taken for granted assumptions and creating new understanding will challenge the status quo. Creating new understandings could mean hearing new*

> *voices, attending to the experiences of others, questioning and deconstructing what we think to be so, and recognizing the temporality and impermanence of knowledge. Questioning and deconstructing what is known creates space for new knowledge; that new knowledge could potentially be emancipatory, promoting social justice. We have an ethical responsibility to do this work – to try to look at things differently, to transgress traditional knowledge creation and to try to recreate the world in new, more peaceful ways.*

My approach, in keeping with Barad's (2007) recognition of our ethical imperative, emphasizes the ethical responsibility we (as researchers) have to do this work and to try to recreate the world. My intention is to do intentional inquiry that involves continual problematizing. "One can imagine qualitative research that does not include 'answers' per se but temporary breathing pauses, halts, and energy voids that initiate new series of moments and extensions of thought" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. 4). This is how I see my inquiry into transition – inquiry that avoids pre-determined answers but causes pause and stutters in our thinking, opening up new ways of being, new lines of flight. As I have engaged in a fluid methodology, I have been transparent about, and accountable for, the research decisions I have made. In relation to being accountable for research decisions, Davies (2014), discusses the ethical importance of each research decision made:

> Each research action, each interpretation, is an ethical matter and mattering. When something comes to matter, when it actively changes the way things are and are perceived to be, both the ontology of bodies (our own and others'), and the meanings made of what happens, are affected. (p. 735).

Shifting ontologies has provided space to analyze transition in a way that highlights the importance of becoming in entanglement and fits with Barad's notion of justice. I emphasize the importance of being willing to respond to emergent encounters and be open to pursuing justice in each meeting, by recognizing, honouring, acknowledging, and becoming-with, in entanglement. In the following chapter, I discuss the potential risks and responsibilities (and response-abilities) to engage in a more relational form of justice. What is made possible and what risks come from being and knowing through intra-action?

Chapter 7.

Risks and Response-abilities

Social service workers are a unique group who face specific challenges in transition. Students studying to work with marginalized groups in the community are an "educational underclass", a group of primarily non-traditional students who study to enter a field marked by precarious employment (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010). Social service work is tenuously funded, and workers face the significant challenge of engaging in very relational work with extremely marginalized populations. There is a high risk of vicarious trauma and toxic stress, which can lead to burnout (Cohen & Collens, 2013). Social service workers give themselves to the work, but are under-resourced and overworked, and asked to enact an ethics of care within a managerial environment. While social service workers offer themselves, in relational work with clients, they must also justify their work in increasingly neoliberal environments that operate under a business model. As seen in the narratives I have examined, social service workers in transition experience tensions between technocratic skills and funding requirements and relational practice; tensions within the self in offering themselves in relationship while maintaining appropriate boundaries; and between self and others in terms of values and societal measures of financial 'success' and comparisons and competition with others.

Current transition literature, examined in detail in Chapter 2, is insufficient in understanding the unique experience of social service workers. This literature is built upon assumptions regarding education, work, and transition that do not capture the complexity of social service workers' experiences. To summarize, transition literature accepts the dominant discourse of social mobility, assuming that education is a pathway to social and economic success. This idea – that hard work and educational attainment will lead to a good life – is sustained by neoliberal ideology that emphasizes individualism, responsibility, and competition. As seen in the narratives, the participants question and critique neoliberal values and measures of success and the related promise that hard work will lead to a good life. Participants are aware, through their relational work with others and through their own experience, that being "successful" is not the result of individual agency; people have varying degrees of unearned privilege that shapes their range of options. As Carolyn discusses below, working with people

with complex needs and abilities highlights how often the most basic measures of a good life are taken for granted by those who have them:

> I feel competitive but then I reflect on these thoughts and learn how to be grateful. Working in this field is incredibly humbling. People are dealt really shitty hands. And you forget to see how much you've been given. I get to eat three times a day. I have people who love me and I love people. Still, it is a very real struggle to remember, to be thankful, and to try to maintain balance. It is easy to slip into that competitive mindset without even being conscious of it.

The idea that "people are dealt really shitty hands" is not accounted for in neoliberal ideology. Carolyn's discussion not only highlights that people face varying (and often intersecting) degrees of disadvantage but also demonstrates her ability to critically resist neoliberal definitions of "success". The participants recognize, through their work with others and in navigating their own transitions, that being successful or having a "good life" is not synonymous with wealth or material acquisitions. Rather, the definition of a "good life" will vary based on values, abilities, beliefs, challenges, and experiences. Drawing on Carolyn's discussion above, for some, leading a 'good life' may mean food security or building positive loving connections. For those using social services, finding a warm, safe place to be, living independently, or being able to access supports when needed may be significant aspects of having a good life.

An assumption underlying much of the transition literature is that education and the labour market are meritocracies that reward individual agency and hard work and that "success" can be measured by income or earning potential. Based on these assumptions, researchers examining transition seek to maximize "successful" transitions through various interventions and supports. In their narratives, participants do not discuss transition as a distinct stage that is completed and can be assessed as successful/unsuccessful. In fact, in recruiting participants it became clear to me that defining a social service worker as new to the field was challenging. Several participants, despite experience working in helping roles, felt new in their social service worker positions. Their narratives also included ideas of continual transition. This demonstrates that the period of transition is not distinct but can be ongoing, as the social service worker, their complex clients, the agencies in which they operate, and macro level factors (like political climate, societal awareness and acceptance, and economic realities) are all dynamic and in constant transition - becoming.

Given that much of the existing transition literature does not speak to the unique experience of social service workers, I have deconstructed this literature and examined the complexity of this transition from post-secondary to work. I have challenged social mobility discourse - fed by neoliberal ideologies protecting social efficiency needs - that education is a pathway to success. I have examined labour market realities and the precarity of social service work. I have deconstructed transition as an individual experience, where a student moves through a discrete and linear process to an end point where they identify and are recognized as a worker. The 'social service worker' is not one concrete and distinct identity but comprises multiple and dynamic subjectivities. I have drawn on concepts of power, performativity, entanglement, and becoming, to retheorize transition as an intra-active, dynamic, and ongoing process. One participant described herself, as a new social service worker, as "in-between" and "still figuring it out"; this helps define transition as a state of always in-between and always figuring it out, in entanglements involving (among infinite arrangements of human and non-human agents) social service worker and client, researcher and participant, and educator and student. Within these entanglements, power flows in a complex intra-action. As power flows through the various entanglements involved in the phenomenon of transition, there is always the potential for resistance. While subjectified through power relations, social service workers are not "restricted to the power through which (they) are shaped" (Honan et al., 2000, p. 23); that is, once recognized as viable subjects, the social service workers have access to a wider range of options than was initially afforded them. As Honan et al. (2000) explain, being constructed and recognized as a subject within power relations "does not mean that you cannot take up the power so achieved in gaining that recognizability to exceed, to go beyond what those who afforded you recognition had imagined possible" (p. 21-22). Examining the experiences of the participants, to plug into material and discursive arrangements and practices, helps highlight that while social service workers are constructed in specific ways (i.e., power works on them), they are not limited to the construction that creates and recognizes them as subjects. As seen in the narratives I analyzed, there are moments of resistance in transition, where the phenomenon can be retheorized and social service work can be reconstructed.

As social service workers are always performing, there is always opportunity for rupture. In their state of "continual transition" (Grosz, 2005, p. 10), there are opportunities to deterritorialize stratified, molar concepts of what it means to be a social

service worker. One example of this is in navigating neoliberal values; even the act of stopping and questioning taken-for-granted values, discourses, beliefs, and practices provides a spark of potentiality. Although this rupture may quickly reterritorialize, these moments produce the possibility for change. Strom and Martin (2013) describe the power of deterritorializing molar thought in their project, where they engage rhizomatically with their own reproduction of neoliberal ideology in the classroom. They explain that "in that moment of escape, that line of flight, the world changes infinitesimally – in some small way, from that 'deviant' interaction/moment, our brains have changed, *we* have changed" (italics in original, Strom & Martin, 2013, p. 229). As lines of flight will always reterritorialize, Strom and Martin (2013) recommend actively seeking lines of flight in daily practice; this is also relevant to daily practices in social service work, education, and research. In these practices, there are generative opportunities to see things differently, to be different, and to make things different.

Recognizing the nuances in transition, social service work, and education has significant implications for how we relate to one another. In thinking transition differently, there is potentiality to respond differently, and to create the world anew. As demonstrated in the narratives, our response-ability, or ability to respond, involves being awake to opportunities to respond and recognizing our own ability to respond differently. Responding differently has meaningful, material implications for social service work practice, research, and education.

Our Ability to Respond Differently – Practice, Research, and Education

Practice

Understanding the complexity of transition as entanglement involves de-centering the individual and viewing relational practice as intra-action. Seeing oneself as the other, as inseparable and indistinguishable elements of a whole, creates a different level of responsibility to one another. Recognizing the inseparability of social service worker and client (among other agents in entanglement) allows conventional roles to dissipate, and various agents to come into being together. The role of social service worker as an expert who helps damaged, challenged, and marginalized clients is no longer. Instead, as seen in the analyses of the material and tangible examples of social

service work, the ‘social service worker’ and the ‘client’ disappear in a genuine, intra-active encounter. There are material implications for this shift in relational practice, in that seeing others as ourselves and experiencing ourselves as entangled within their lives and experiences could promote greater investment in the field of social services, but also increased commitment to shifting the material-discursive arrangements that sustain inequality and injustice.

Social service workers can work relationally, being critically aware of, and awake to, emergent possibilities. This could involve being aware of time and space and the influence of other material agents on their working relationships. It may also involve being intentional in their engagement with clients (and others), being open to the unique humanity of each entanglement, rather than following a prescribed or technocratic approach. Social service workers can advocate for awareness of societal factors that promote disadvantage and suffering and encourage respect and connection for clients receiving social services. This may involve resisting the hierarchies that impact both social service clients and workers. The humanity of social service clients is diminished when they are viewed as less valuable than citizens who are “successful” by neoliberal standards. This puts them at real risk for dehumanization, suffering, violence, and death. The value of social service workers is also diminished as less than other professionalized fields that engage with clients, for example, counsellors, psychiatrists, and social workers. As seen in the narratives of the participants, social service workers are critical, aware, intentional, and can resist what is to articulate what can be. Social service workers can also act as advocates in their agencies and to funding agents to encourage humanity, respect, and meaningful resources for their clients. Thinking/doing/being differently, as social service workers, has the potential to have real material impacts on their clients lives.

In entanglement, social service workers and clients could identify and follow emerging ruptures or lines of flight, within the increasingly neoliberal and technocratic environment of the non-profit agencies they operate within. These ruptures produce a moment of deterritorialization, leaving a trace or a change that remains, such that the agents of the entanglement – including the social service worker and client – are changed forever. These moments, encounters where roles disappear, and intra-action occurs, create meaningful change. Each social service worker has the response-ability

to seek out these moments and to engage in the moment, when the opportunity presents.

Research

Throughout this research on transition, I have been a researcher in transition. I have explored the becoming of my researcher-self, in this research process. I am a researcher constituted by the data and my emergent, fluid process of plugging into experiences and reading them through one another and various concepts and ideas (see Mazzei, 2013b). Lisa Mazzei (2013b) discusses data as an agent, examining how researchers are made by data. She explains that researcher-selves are in a process of becoming and are constituted in the research event. The data passes through bodies, in a way that is transformative and productive. She examines how the researcher and the participants are produced together in the process of data collection and analysis. She explains: "I am constituted by and constituting data, my selves, my participants, and my mis-understandings. I am both made and unmade in such a process." (Mazzei, 2013b, p. 777). I have been changed in entanglement in this research process. The intra-actions and new imaginings produced through this inquiry serve to "produce new analytical questions, but also…different researcher selves" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 137). New ideas, problems, and "mis-understandings" have emerged from the research event, that inform my intra-actions in other entanglements; for example, my experience with the participants shapes how I intra-act with students in the classroom, who are studying to become social service workers.

An ontological shift to examining research in entanglement has significant implications for research. Scholars are deconstructing humanist research (based on an agential-I who is separate and distinct from the phenomenon under examination), questioning representation, expanding ideas of what constitutes data, and experimenting with methods that are emergent and innovative. Most of this work is done with an intention to think differently within an ethical framework that recognizes that we (as humans, as researchers) will not be able to resolve our current problems with the same system of thought that created them. Many of these researchers recognize that humanity cannot continue along the same path. Thinking differently provides an opportunity to do things differently – to examine the purpose of social science research

and to rearticulate its role in creating new ideas, rather than reinforcing and reproducing dominant, molar understandings that support the status quo.

In this dissertation, I have deconstructed transition and questioned existing literature and its emphasis on assessing transition as successful/unsuccessful and on implementing interventions to improve successful transitions. I have also, through the tensions and messes I partially worked through, began to problematize key methodological concepts – working with and working against social science methods. Deconstructing some of the concepts that I initially took for granted early in my research process (e.g., data, method, interview, collection, analysis, voice, experience, etc.) catalyzed my engagement with post-qualitative methodology and with relational and performative post-human ontologies. Shifting my onto-ethico-epistemological understanding has created new possibilities in both theoretical and diffractive analysis of transition.

By seeing existence as entangled, researchers can ask new questions and pose new problematics, as always-becoming researcher-selves. Research can disrupt, interrupt, rupture, and cause "temporary breathing pauses, halts, and energy voids that initiate new series of moments and extensions of thought" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. 4). Research can serve a transformative function in deterritorializing molar thought and generative transgressive potentialities of what could be.

Education

Critical scholars have argued that, despite the best intentions and practices of teachers, education serves to reproduce oppression and inequality (e.g., Ellsworth, 1989; McLaren, 2007; Giroux, 2014, Apple, 2004). Kathryn Strom and Adrian Martin (2013) provide an interesting examination of this reproduction from a practitioner perspective. They examine how neoliberal ideas of school, education, teaching, and learning can be operational within classrooms, such that teachers are reproducing these ideas, and the social inequalities they promote, without being aware of it. Some scholars argue that these dominant ideas may be unwittingly reproduced, even when teachers actively attempt to deconstruct and resist these ideas (e.g., Ellsworth, 1989; Cox, Dougherty, Hampton, Neigel & Nickel, 2017).

Teaching and learning are constrained by molar segmentarities of education. Despite the intentions of teachers to resist these molar segmentarities, they flow into molecular arrangements in the day-to-day of the classroom. Seeing teaching and learning as emerging out of intra-action could help disrupt molar and molecular arrangements in education. Teacher/students would exist on a flattened plane, entangled with other human and non-human entities, as inseparable elements.

I think teaching in intra-action would involve awareness of becoming and an openness to move and flow with the emergent ideas within the classroom. As a teacher, I go into each teaching/learning experience cognizant that the classroom experience, and the enacted curriculum, emerges through the intra-action of human (me, my students) and nonhuman (affective states, uncomfortable chairs, distraction, stress, classroom, whir of overhead projector, etc.) agents. I recognize that material elements of the classroom (and beyond) construct our intra-action. I explicitly challenge the idea (with my students) that I am in charge of what happens within the class and that I can adequately plan my lessons to work through prescribed curriculum to meet specific learning outcomes. Rather than only working towards institutionally-defined learning outcomes for each course (which need to be standardized to similar courses at other institutions), I try to find new, thoughtful ways to explore learning; this exploration, for me, might involve be awake to learning in the moment (both mine and my students'), examining learning that happened in the past and can only be recognized retrospectively, and forecasting learning as it may happen in the future.

While it may be unrealistic to think ideas of teaching and learning could be completely transformed through an onto-epistemological shift, there may be molecular lines that can be altered or affected. Instead of trying to completely overhaul molar segmentarities, like teaching and learning, Barad (2007) articulates the importance and significance of remaking the world in each intra-action. As teacher, educators, and students, we have an important role in contributing to the remaking of the world, within our classrooms, in each moment. I can teach my students about relational practice by examining entanglements, intra-action, and becoming. I can explore with them how those concepts can be taken up as social service workers and what taking them up may mean for them and for those they work with. I can explore concepts and ideas diffractively, opening up new ways of thinking and new questions that can be asked, rather than presenting content as fact.

Working from a relational ontology also alters how we teach students in social service fields specifically. As discussed in Preston and Aslett's (2014) work on activist pedagogy, students studying to enter social work, social service work, and other non-market oriented disciplines could benefit from smaller class sizes and regular faculty (as opposed to sessional instructors). Creating smaller classes with regular faculty promotes a relational environment where students and teachers can explore anti-oppressive practice in a politicized environment. Creating this learning environment promotes emergent pedagogy and intra-action. Examples of entanglement, becoming, and intra-action could be drawn from the course experience to teach students about how working intra-actively with clients in their future may look.

While responding differently – from a relational ontology of intra-action – has meaningful implications for social service practice, research, and education, it is transgressive. Although we (as social service workers, as scholars, and as educators) have a responsibility to work to alter the material conditions that we are a part of (Barad, 2010; 2012), working against the status quo carries significant risks.

Risks

While the idea of working in entanglement has the potential to create equity and fairness for those who are marginalized, it could also be problematic. If "clients" are viewed as part of an entanglement by social service workers, it could further reduce the client's sense of agency and independence. De-centering the self could be highly problematic for those who have been denied a sense of self. For many marginalized people, their sense of self and individual agency has been diminished in their interactions with social services; in these interactions, significant life decisions may be made for them, by various professionals (for example, the decision to remove a child from its home, to place the child in another family, and to require the parents to demonstrate certain behaviours to spend time with their child). For "clients", being viewed as an inseparable element of entanglement could reduce feelings of self-efficacy and the perceived ability to affect change; feeling incapable of influencing outcomes could create a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, which is correlated with a number of mental health concerns (Gural & MacKay-Chiddenton, 2016). That is, current relational practice seeks to build skills and resiliency for marginalized individuals, so they feel empowered to make different choices, which will affect more positive life outcomes.

This approach, however, fails to recognize social, historical, economic, and institutional arrangements that limit individual agency and, in keeping with neoliberalism, puts responsibility for positive change on the individual. While there is an emphasis on individual agency and empowerment, the degree to which marginalized people can affect positive changes in their life and environment may be illusory (or at least constrained). As well, the idea of empowerment suggests a humanist perspective of power, in which one holds and/or gives power, rather than Foucault's explanation of power relations, where power works both on and through people. The focus, in approaching social service work as entanglement, could be on how to intra-act in an ethical manner, recognizing the interdependence (and inseparability) of all the elements (not just human agents) in entanglement.

Intra-acting ethically is transgressive. It works against the status quo of neoliberal discourse, which emphasizes individuality, personal responsibility, and competition. Recognizing the complexity of entanglement, becoming, and the potential for ruptures and lines of flight is incongruent with accepting neoliberal ideology (and its material implications) as inevitable. In intra-action, our focus shifts from ourselves to being responsible for, and intra-acting ethically with, the human and non-human agents with which we are entangled. Rather than focus on ourselves and our own success, relegating others to precarity in the process, we intra-act in a way that recognizes our inseparability.

Performing in a transgressive way against the status quo puts subjectivity at risk. If we are not performing towards the ideal, we are not recognized. Worse, we are relegated to precarity; we are not "recognizable, readable, or grievable". (Butler, 2009, p. xii and xiii). As Kuntz (2015) discusses, drawing on Foucault's concept of parrhesia (i.e., truth telling), truth telling necessarily involves putting one's membership in the community at risk. To speak and be heard as a truth-teller, one must be recognized as a citizen. However, speaking the truth, puts one's recognition as a citizen at risk. Yet, despite this risk, the truth-teller speaks the truth to transform the relations of which they are a part (Kuntz, 2015, p. 118).

Social service workers and educators who emphasize ethical intra-active practice may risk expulsion from their community; if they transgress institutional norms and expectations, they may be segregated or face pressure from colleagues and supervisors

to get back in line. Ultimately, if they do not adhere to institutional or organizational policies, they can lose their job. Social service work and education are increasingly marketized, with a focus on efficiency and effectiveness as demonstrated through pre-determined outcomes; choosing to work outside of these neoliberal expectations can lead to precarity. As demonstrated by the narratives of the participants, it is increasingly necessary to navigate the tensions between ethical, relational practice and technocratic requirements. Each of us, in our various roles, must balance our responsibility and response-ability with the risk in thinking, being, and doing differently. As everyone has unique circumstances with varying degrees of privilege, each individual has to determine the risks they are willing to take to transform the conditions in which we find ourselves.

One drawback of complexifying the transition phenomenon is the incongruence of depth and nuance with prescriptive solutions or interventions. Unfortunately, with complex phenomena, there are no simple solutions. Rather than sequentially working through a research question to arrive at an end-point or answer, diffractive approaches open up the phenomenon and explore how it works in interference with other ideas, concepts, and experiences. It is in the difference and tensions where there is the potential for new understandings. The implications of understanding how it works - where how it works is an ongoing process and not a distinct state that can be understood – are that we can engage in an ongoing process of working within and against how things are.

Is applying intra-action, entanglement, and becoming to transition, social service work, and education generative? Is it practical? It is generative in that working these concepts together is an ongoing emergent process; a rhizome where potentialities continue to erupt and branch in various directions, at different speeds. It is generative in thinking about social service work and education, as relational practices, as intra-active because it is a transgressive line of flight that will reterritorialize. It provides glimpses of what is possible and shows social service workers and educators that they are capable of responding differently to emergent potentialities.

Rhizomatic Openings

Thinking through the ideas of this dissertation has not determined whether the ideas presented are correct or justify certain interventions or solutions. Instead, it has

generated questions for me that erupt and branch out rhizomatically. As Deleuze and Parnet (1987) note: "you should not try to find whether an idea is just or correct. You should look for a completely different idea, elsewhere, in another area, so that something passes between the two which is neither in one nor the other" (p. 10). So, what is next? What new ideas will I look for? I have just begun to think through and with some of the concepts and ideas I have started to explore; there are numerous ideas that are creating affective intensities for me and demanding my attention. I am interested in continuing to explore interviews as an entanglement and examining the interview as an apparatus, as an integral aspect of the entanglement. I plan to experiment with what is possible when I work within and against the interview. I want to explore the intra-view (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012), as a performative agent that is becoming. Deconstructing and retheorizing the interview beyond a conventional qualitative technique may allow for different ways of knowing in social research. Connected to my interest in the interview, I am very interested in digging deeper into the concept of voice; examining voice as “a collective enunciation of the assemblage” (Mazzei, 2016; 2017) and exploring the “voice” of non-human, performative agents. I believe some generative experimental work can be done to explore how material agents “speak” as part of an entanglement; this could alter traditional representational approaches and allow for a focus on materiality that is easily lost in writing. Writing tends to ascribe actions and experiences to individuals; determining a way to move beyond this to “hear” from non-human material agents could alter our relationships with things. I also feel passionate about learning more about intra-active pedagogies and creating space for emergent intra-actions in the classroom (see Kuby & Christ, 2018 for example of intra-active pedagogical practices). I am passionate about learning more about how to create these spaces for politicized, critical learning and how these pedagogies influence students and their development. What can be made possible in teaching/learning differently that may result in increased responsibility to one another and the world? These are the rhizomatic openings I will continue to explore as I become, in my own dynamic process of continual transition (Grosz, 2005, p. 10). This is neither a beginning nor an ending.

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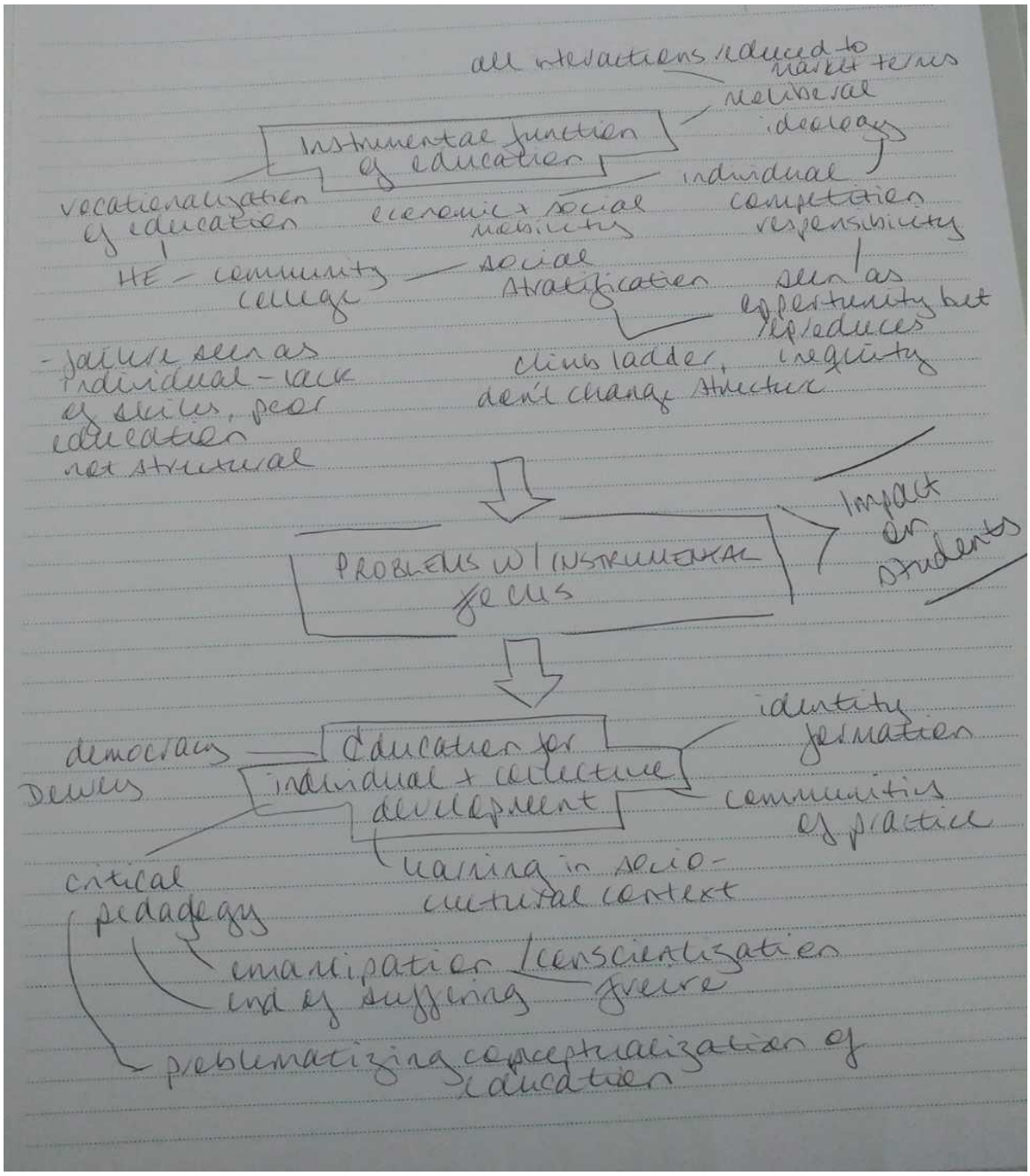
Appendix A.

Early Mindmaps of Research Interest



Aug 17, 2015

Claims:

① Education serves primarily instrumental purpose - prepare students for work
   a) result of vocationalization (since 1970s) + neoliberal ideology

② Education is criticized for not adequately preparing students for work / lack of responsiveness to industry

③ Education is promoted as necessary step to employment + 'good life'

④ focus on individual success, competition, responsible for own trajectory - no structural barriers

⑤ Education provides personal growth, identity formation

⑥ Education promotes equity through opportunity for upward advancement

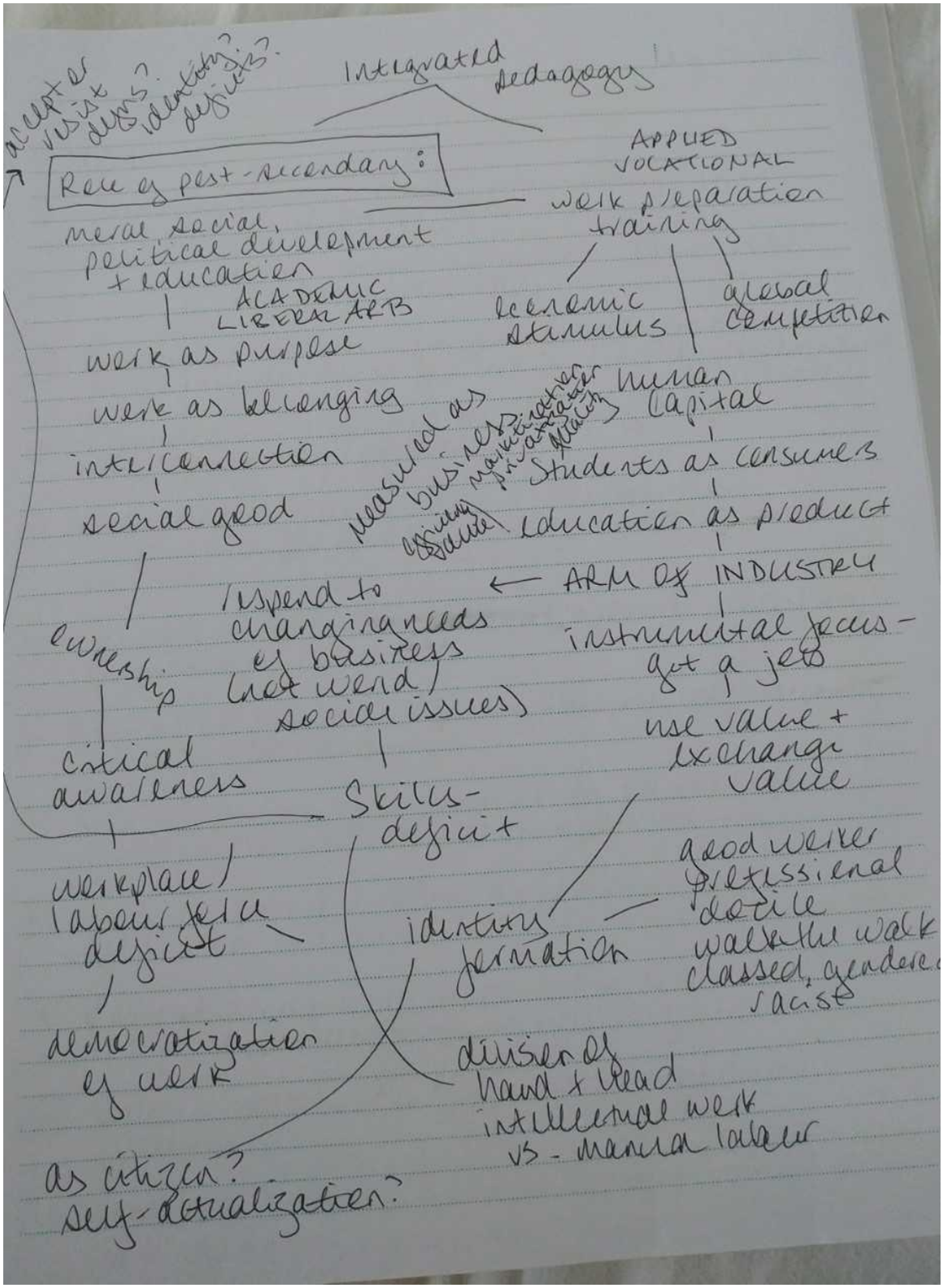
⑦ Not problematizing content of education - hidden curriculum, selective tradition

⑧ Lack of success seen as personal deficit - need more training / skills / reprogramming

⑨ Education reproduces social hierarchy - tracking students into existing strata

⑩ Lasseur marked doesn't support neoliberal premises

⑪ learning is socio-cultural context - school + work not individual process, aquisition + transfer


Integrated pedagogy
Role of post-secondary:
moral, social, political development + education
ACADEMIC LIBERAL ARTS
work as purpose
work as belonging
interconnection
social good
ownership
critical awareness
workplace / labour force deficit
democratization of work
as citizen?
self-actualization?
APPLIED VOCATIONAL
work preparation training
economic stimulus
global competition
measured as business
human capital
students as consumers
education as product
ARM OF INDUSTRY
instrumental focus - get a job
use value + exchange value
respond to changing needs of business (not wider social issues)
skills-deficit
identity formation
good worker professional docile walk the walk classed, gendered, racist
division of hand + head intellectual work vs - manual labour

Appendix B.

Interview Protocol

Current employment

1. Tell me about where you work.
2. Who do you work with? (e.g., agency, client group)
3. What is your role?
4. How long have you been here?
5. What does an average day look like?
6. What do you like best about your role?
7. What do you find challenging about your role?
8. How did your educational path prepare you for the work you are doing?

Educational experience

9. Can you describe your educational path?
10. What was your interest (i.e., goal) in attending post-secondary?
11. How did you become interested in your course of study?
12. Did you enjoy being in school? Being a student?
13. Did your education change how you saw yourself? Values? Ideas? Plans for future?

Informal educational experience

14. How did your learning outside of school contribute to your educational path?
15. What experiences contributed to your interest in your educational path?
16. What kind of messaging around school did you receive? From who?
17. How did this messaging affect your interest in your course of study?

Transition to work

18. What was it like getting a job? (this is open to allow for discussion of job search process and transition into work)
19. Can you discuss how your work compares to what you thought you would be doing?
20. What does it mean to you to do this type of work?
21. Looking back, have you met your intentions in attending post-secondary? How do you feel about this?
22. How do you feel about yourself as a worker in the field?
23. What personal challenges do you see for yourself in the field? How will you navigate these?

24. What professional challenges do you see for yourself in the field?
25. What else do you want me to know?

- Will develop second interview protocol with participants focusing on in-depth exploration of topics already explored in first interview, based on what is most salient to participant

Appendix C.

Recruitment Information

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Are you working in a helping profession?

Providing support and assistance to children, youth, adults and/or families with multiple vulnerabilities in a residential, educational, or community settings?

Working in a not-for-profit or non-governmental organization?

Are you relatively new to your job?

I am interested in talking with you about your experience transitioning from school to working in a helping profession. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Meaghan Dougherty at [redacted]

When I receive your email, we will plan a time for a 10-minute page telephone call where we can discuss the details of the study and I can answer any of your questions. At this time, I will also email you a copy of the informed consent form so you have time to review it.

If you want to participate, we will plan an in-person meeting. We can meet in a time and place that is convenient for you. The study involves two in-person interviews, approximately one hour each, as well as any additional time you think may be helpful for me to better understand your experience.

YOU: You are working part- or full-time in a helping profession (i.e., social service work). You have been working in that role for less than one year and you are interested in sharing your story of how you moved from school into your position.

WHAT: Two interviews, approximately one hour each. You will be asked questions about your current employment, your educational path, and your transition from school to work.

WHEN: May – August 2016

Please feel free to share this with others you think may be suitable and interested in participating. Thank you for your consideration!

Principal Investigator: Meaghan Dougherty
Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University
[redacted]

Study #2016s0156
"Exploring student experiences of the transition from post-secondary education to working in helping professions"

Appendix D.

Participants' Narrative Accounts

I have organized the participants' narrative accounts as I completed them chronologically. This curates, for the reader, how my thinking changed throughout the interview process and allows me to demonstrate my thinking in the changing format of the narrative accounts. I originally thought I would portray each individual participant's accounts together; while this may be convenient for grouping individual experiences together, it fails to demonstrate how my involvement in an interview then influenced subsequent interviews. I was altered by my experience with each interview, so I was different in entering the next interview; I was able to think through the ideas presented in previous interviews to shape and form subsequent interviews. Grouping individual narratives together also emphasizes a fixed and stable individual and their experience, rather than the progression of narratives as distinct and partial stories, that are told, retold, storied, and restoried (Clandinin, 2013) dependent upon time, place, audience, mood, and a number of factors. Throughout the following narrative accounts, I provide explanation and highlight aspects of the narratives, as I feel is necessary; these are presented as Curations.

Elizabeth's First Interview

Context of conversation

E and I met in a busy coffee shop in the early afternoon on a weekday. We sat at the back near the washrooms and an open foyer. Despite background noise and people walking around, E appeared focused and seemed open and genuine in sharing her experiences. She was friendly, punctual, and appeared comfortable discussing her work, schooling, and transitional experience. I thanked her for taking time out of her day off to meet with me.

Current work

E explained that she currently works as an outreach mental health worker in a transitional living program, and has worked in this role since Sept 2015. The overall goal

of the program is to promote independence among adults who are living with mental health diagnoses. She, as an outreach worker, acts as part of an integrated care team, including a psychiatrist and doctor. She says her clients vary – in age, diagnosis, and in the types of work she does with them. She currently has clients between the ages of 27 and 65 who have schizophrenia, bi-polar, anxiety, and other chronic mental health challenges. With them, she works on various service plan goals, including social and recreational needs, advocacy, exercise, and other life skills. There are five outreach workers on E's team, so although she works primarily as a one-on-one support with clients, she is part of a larger team of workers who do similar work. At times, they will get their clients together to facilitate group activities. As E plans her own flexible schedule, based on client needs, it seems she has a fair amount of autonomy. She also notes that she "balances" her work by spending time doing direct client work and paperwork.

E said that she likes that her job is never dull and that there are no "typical days". She enjoys that each day is different as it keeps her on her toes. She notes that she needs to switch her mind regularly; that is, she needs to adjust how she is going to approach different people, based on their needs, and individualize her response. When I noted that it sounds like she takes a very thoughtful and intentional approach to her work, E replied that she does try to be. This seemed important for E; she seems to value a clinical approach to her work and is finding ways to communicate what she does in a way that is meaningful.

Educational path

E completed her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a certificate in Human Services at [educational institution]. The four year program is a combination of psychology and sociology (some similarity with Social Work), with an applied focus, including three practica. In her first practicum, she was able to work with women in an addiction treatment centre. Although she said she wouldn't be interested in working in addictions long-term, she thought it was helpful to see how people lived with addiction and mental health concerns. E said it "humanized it a lot" to see how people figure out how to live well with their diagnosis. She was able to see that adjusting to addiction and mental health was "normal" for the people she worked with and she was able to see it that way rather than as something scary. In her second practicum, E did research at

Red Cross Canada in Ottawa. She enjoyed the experience and saw that it was affecting change but couldn't see it as something she would want to do long-term because she likes more front-like work, where you can see that it is helping people. E also did a semester abroad working at a child development centre in Uganda. Her final practicum was as a head counsellor at a summer camp. E recognizes that these varied experiences have been helpful to her in figuring out what she likes and doesn't like and what she may want to do (in terms of employment) in the future, however she notes that she could have been more focused in her approach (to build more experience in one specific area of practice).

E said that she always knew she "wanted to help people" and "work with people". This led her to study psychology at [educational institution]. She thought it would be a good fit because of the knowledge and information as well as the hands-on experience; she heard good things about the program from friends who had gone to [educational institution]. E said she has always been interested in other people's stories and hearing about experiences that are different to hers. In the family she grew up in, there were discussions about homelessness, addiction, and other issues as "part of life". They would "talk about the humanity of it", recognizing that it happens and that it is not something to judge. This narrative was supported by E's relationships with her high school teachers and undergraduate professors. E noted specifically her high school psychology teacher who acted as a mentor to E, shared her own experiences as a child and youth worker, and was able to label (as a field of employment) what E wanted in terms of how she may help people. E said that people can do more than they think they can; this may relate to her own experience as well as the experience of those clients she serves. She also noted that she wasn't challenged by competing narratives or by people questioning why she would want to go into this line of work.

E graduated in April 2014 and continued throughout the summer to complete her course work. After being away (in Ottawa and Uganda), E wanted to return home and spend some time taking a break, slowing down, and reconnecting with her friends and family. During that year, she worked in a coffee shop, and had casual shifts at the women's treatment centre (where she completed her first practicum). The year was also bookended by working as a head counsellor at summer camp each summer.

E has plans to continue on to graduate school in counselling psychology and is interested in intercultural trauma.

Transition from school to work

While working in her self-described "gap year" (i.e., after university), E noticed that her friends were having trouble finding work. She was concerned about her own path and whether she would experience the same difficulties. She said she found herself asking – now what? What did I do this for? Does this (education) count for anything? There seemed to be some question regarding her purpose and direction and whether or not she was on the right path to reach her goals.

After finishing her final summer as a counsellor, E wanted to find a position. She said she is used to things falling into place quite quickly and found the process of applying for jobs, writing numerous cover letters, trying to articulate how she was qualified, etc. to be lots of looking and waiting. She wasn't offered the job following her first interview. She thought she was a shoe-in because the interview had gone very well but there was an applicant with more experience. Looking back and reflecting, she notes that it was a humbling experience that caused her to dial it back. She was able to put her best foot forward but not expect that she would get the job. This was an important part of the learning process for her. And it worked out as her current job is the second job she interviewed for. The ability to look back and reflect on various learning seems to be a strength of E's.

She notes that most of her classmates were also able to find work in the field, although some are working in positions they already had or where they completed practicum. These may be less clinically-focused programs/positions than E's current role.

When she went into [educational institution], her current job is what she was hoping she would get into after graduation. That is, where E is now in terms of employment matches well with where she hoped she would be and the reason she entered post-secondary initially. She feels like she is able to use what she has learned but is also challenged to continue to grow and develop. She says there are opportunities to progress in the agency and to try various positions. This is a good opportunity because, when the time comes, she can choose between grad school and

promotion in the field and won't have to decide out of necessity (i.e., will have more options available).

E said that her experiences have shifted who she is. She said she has grown a lot as a person and was just a kid in high school. She notes that who she is at the core is similar, but different experiences have challenged her to step out more. She used to be very shy, timid, and quiet and had to step up and learn leadership skills. At the treatment centre, working with female adults, she had to figure out – who am I and what do I have to share? She recognized the importance of her education, her self, and her own experiences. E emphasized what she did have to offer rather than what she didn't have. This helped her grow more confident in herself as a person and be able to feel comfortable with what she doesn't know. She also has been able to rely on others on her team to help with this growth and confidence. She notes that she is able to take learning from her experiences. For example, one day she had to do a three hour class at the treatment centre and then do a three hour presentation at school afterward. Although she hated public speaking, she was able to get through it. She recognized that although it may suck at the time, she can live through it and look back and be proud of what she has done and see that it is good.

E said her identity has shifted moving from school to work. She was ready to "not be a student"; she wanted to let go of that identity and be more of an adult – have a job, a house, etc. She feels that her identity continues to shift, is always shifting, and that it is a good thing. In relation to her identity, E notes that she wants to continue to work on boundaries and self-care. She is an empathic person and needs to be able to recognize not to take on others' trauma as her own thing. She works with her team on this but has had difficulties with it in the past. She relates this to finding balance – just like she tells her clients that it is all about balance, she is figuring out how to balance her own roles and responsibilities. Her team takes a person-first approach – not just with clients, but with one another as well – so that helps them care for each other and subsequently, care for clients better. These relationships and the support she receives from her team seem very important for E in liking her job and feeling belonging in her role.

E also noted that she is figuring out who she is, in relation to her work. She feels that her work matters and makes an impact but has difficulty communicating what she

does with people in a way that meaningfully represents it. People outside of the field seem to misunderstand or downplay the clinical aspect of the work. She notes that her work can be minimized by those who don't understand – "oh, you just…". One example provided was that a support worker just sits and watches TV with clients. This aspect of figuring out who she is, relating herself to her work, seems to be an important part of her identity. These aspects of boundaries, self-care, and identity seem to be interrelated.

Carolyn's First Interview

Context of conversation

Carolyn and I met at a quiet coffee shop off of Main Street, with a garden patio, on a weekday afternoon. The patio was not busy and, other than some loud trucks on the nearby street, was very conducive to having a conversation. Carolyn was already there when I arrived and appeared to be relaxed and comfortable to meet. We got a drink and settled outside; I thanked her for taking time to come to meet with me.

Current work

Carolyn currently works as a Youth Worker with [agency name] and has been in that position for about two months. She is on a part-time weekend contract and then also picks up two days per week to make up full-time hours. Although the contract expires in December, she notes that there are often opportunities to apply for other positions within the agency. She noted that she was originally in a casual role but then applied for, and obtained, the part-time contract. Carolyn notes that she can continue to apply internally or return to casual when the contract expires.

Carolyn works in the crisis shelter program, which is for 16-24 year old youth (as per the agency mandate) but tends to serve mostly older youth (20 – 24 years old). Carolyn explained that it is "not just a bed to sleep in", but provides a space for youth who are actively working on their own identified goals. As a Youth Worker, Carolyn said she works with her team (other youth workers and case managers), builds relationships with the youth, and provides advocacy. She has approximately four youth on her caseload. She said it is not a "super low barriered" program – youth have to self-refer and have some desire to be there and they have to identify and actively make progress on their goals (e.g., health, employment, housing, etc.). Youth cannot be actively using

or be mandated to attend. She said the program is very structured (wake up at a certain time, leave the shelter by a certain time, etc.) and provides access to youth worker support, case management, mental health clinicians, and other external resources. She is responsible for certain shelter tasks, room checks, regular youth contact, meals, and has started a music program. Carolyn recognizes that in her role she can see "how hard life is" but also gets to see the youth working hard and, in some cases, achieving their goals. The program seems to emphasize a certain degree of discipline and individual responsibility, promoting the autonomy of the youth and encouraging them to work towards their own goals. The length of youth stay varies depending on the needs (and goals) of the youth.

Carolyn says the best part of her work is the "great moments with youth" – laughing together, hearing funny stories about their day, talking to her team. There seems to be importance put on the relationships within the context of her working role. She noted she also finds the "harder moments" really positive as they help remind her why she wants "to work with people in crisis". Carolyn described an example of a harder moment when a self-discharged youth returned to the shelter intoxicated, asking for his sweater and a blanket. Carolyn brought him his sweater and sat down and talked to him. She said she was really struck by how he was struggling in his addiction and how vulnerable he was as he ran through a gambit of emotions (laughing, angry). She notes listening to the experiences of the youth helps her understand their hardships, why they do what they do, and how hard it can be for them to make changes. Carolyn stated that her reason for going into social service work was to be an empathic ear and show compassion because "life is really hard". She said having these meaningful conversations with youth provides a cause for reflection and makes her work worthwhile. She sees that "behind every action is a lot of pain" and that everyone is just trying, despite being lonely and sad. Carolyn emphasized our human need for connection and a place to belong and noted that the youth she serves do not have that and did not have that growing up. Although these tough situations show how hard it is for some youth, Carolyn said they can be an "opportunity to let people know you believe in them".

Carolyn contrasts this work with youth at [agency name] to a previous position at [agency name], working with female adults in the Downtown Eastside (DTES). She notes that in the [agency name] shelter for older, sex trafficked women, she felt like a "gatekeeper"; the purpose of the program was to offer a bed and safe space but Carolyn

wondered “what’s the purpose?” beyond that and didn’t feel like it assisted with change. She said she likes the shelter program because and the youth population; she said she may also want to try worker with youth younger than 24 years old.

Carolyn said that the challenging part of her new position has been learning competencies. She said she is relearning lingo and terminology, remembering how to assess for alcohol and drug use, reacquainting herself with the names of paraphernalia, and remembering different mental health diagnoses. She said there is a steep learning curve for her but she keeps telling herself “I can do this”. Carolyn explicit reliance on self-talk and positive messaging is seen throughout her narrative.

Educational trajectory

In high school, Carolyn thought she would attend [educational institution] to get a degree and then go into the seminary to get a Master degree in Divinity (MDiv) and become a pastor. Carolyn started her degree at [educational institution] in history then really enjoyed geography, as a study over space. She focused on environment and sustainability and learned about social injustice. She heard about the School of Social Work in her second year and was interested, although she had no experience with social workers in her own life and wasn’t clear on exactly what social work entailed. She noted she was “learning about injustice on a grand scale but how do you work with people on the floor?” and thought social work may provide some answers. Carolyn said at this point of her education she was “idealistic” and thought “I want to save the world”. She said she told herself (another example of positive messaging/framing) that she would apply and that she would be fine either way – if she didn’t get in she would finish her geography degree with a minor in religious studies (which she really enjoyed) or if she did get in, she would complete her Bachelor of Social Work instead. She noted that at this time, she was still interested in pursuing her MDiv and thought a social work background would be a good compliment – she would be able to “help people spiritually and practically”. Carolyn was accepted in to the School of Social Work and found it was very different than her experience in human arts. As a professional degree, she was one of the youngest people in her class and most classmates had experience in social work or very clear professional goals related to social work; they also had smaller classes and much more reflective work (in contrast to academic work in geography). Carolyn noted that the opportunity to reflect was helpful to her – she noted she gained

reflexive skill and is able to reflect on bias and critically examine race, culture, gender, and oppression. She felt that what she learned in relation to strength-based, client-centered practice was congruent to who she was. Carolyn said this approach really resonated for her and she figured everyone would approach their work in this way. She was surprised to find that others do not. Carolyn finished her BSW in 2012 and applied for a job at [agency name] as she had always wanted to work there.

Transition from school to work

Carolyn obtained a women's in-reach position at [agency name] working at a shelter (noted above as well) based on her practicum and volunteer experience. Carolyn said it can be very challenging to find work without experience, which puts people looking for work in a bind. Carolyn worked at [agency name] for approximately one year – initially, she wanted to work with those who are hardest to help (face the most significant challenges) and felt that she would not burn out. Working with people in the DTES helped her come to a "humbling realization that this may not be for me" and had her questioning if social service work generally was for her. At this point, Carolyn left social service work to do church ministry work. She spent two years in the church (2013 – 2015?) doing community organizing, events, running groups, and building relationships. While doing church ministry work, Carolyn was still unsure if that was what she wanted to do. She noted a hopefulness about work involving children and youth but wasn't sure exactly what that would look like occupationally. She said she had her own crisis of faith and had to "re-evaluate and re-assess what values I have and where I want to go" (another example of self-talk). Carolyn said she asked herself – "what is it I enjoy doing and what is congruent with me and my degree?" She noted that life is short and she was giving so much in her work with the church. She felt very responsible, very restrained, and became very drained. Eventually she thought, "I just can't".

Carolyn noted that she felt "washed up" and began "looking frantically" for a social service job but thought "who will take me?". She felt that her work in the field for a year was not sufficient to qualify her for similar work. She found a posting for an international social work position in Uganda on-line; she was always interested in international work (after doing mission work in Haiti after the earthquakes) and thought "real employment" in Uganda was the opposite of being restricted and responsible within

her church ministry position. Carolyn went to Uganda for six months to work as a social worker, helping street kids through advocacy work, relationship building, visiting villages, playing, educating, and starting a girls' empowerment group. While she had to navigate cultural and language challenges, she said it was an amazing phenomenal experience that allowed her to put her values into practice. Carolyn returned from Uganda in March 2016 and got her job at [agency name] shortly after. Carolyn wants to do more international work but recognizes you have to "give up a very normal life" and that you have to really love it and commit to it. She said it is difficult to meet her own goals of what her life will look like – e.g., have own place, have a family – if she is working on international projects. She also notes that it is difficult to find paid international employment with little experience (need MSW, years of experience, project management skills, etc.) and that "everything is competitive these days".

Although Carolyn completed her degree in 2012, she feels very new to the social service field. Although she has done helping work in faith-based organizations (her church, in Haiti and in reserves throughout BC), she sees social service work as very different from faith-based work. She notes that non-faith-based social service work is more "academic" and "research based" and accepts clients on a "come as you are" basis. She thinks there is more skill and higher qualifications required in non-faith-based social service work.

The transition process from school to work is dynamic and ongoing. It is not a one step transition. According to Carolyn, she is "still figuring it out". At this point, Carolyn is looking at perhaps returning to complete additional education – maybe a MSW in child protection or clinical work to do counselling with children and youth, or education to interact with more youth and work on social and emotional learning. She is trying to think through "what are the next steps to get where I want to go?". She sees school as important in adding meaning to life and to what she will do in her future. She also notes that she is happy at [agency name] (as a non-faith-based social service agency) and that she has a general trajectory of what she values and what she is interested in doing.

Carolyn notes that the transition period causes her anxiety and that she has experienced this when she finished her BSW, when she returned from Uganda, and when she returned to social service work (at [agency name] a couple of months ago).

Her messaging is “how am I going to get a job? I don’t have enough experience. I’m not skilled enough.”. She feels that she doesn’t have the skills asked for in job postings or doesn’t have the knowledge of specific systems. Carolyn notes that she needs more experience but that experience is required to get jobs, so you need someone to take a chance on you.

Curation

I met with Elizabeth and Carolyn for their second interviews, presenting the narrative accounts above for discussion. I found that the narratives did not elicit the dialogue I had hoped; the participants highlighted errors (e.g., in names or dates) but I did not find that their stories, as presented, created more discussion of their transition experience. I decided to reframe the narrative accounts in the first person and present my response (either my verbal response in the interview or questions and responses that arose for me in creating the narrative account) directly to the participant. My intention was not to create a complete and accurate verbatim account of our conversation but to present a part of a story, as shared with me, that we (the participant and I) could then re-examine and restory.

Below, I present the narrative from Elizabeth’s second interview in the first-person format. The narrative that she reviewed in our second interview, that became the basis of this account, was the original third-person format. Because of this, my comments are primarily comments that occurred within our second interview, rather than thoughts that arose from reviewing the audio and creating the first narrative. I include these comments in red, within the context of Eliizabeth’s discussion. As mentioned above, the first narrative did not elicit much additional dialogue. However, there was an opportunity to restory some of Elizabeth’s stories into first-person accounts, which helped provide additional information on important topics (e.g., family, her concept of clinical work, identifying her work for others, etc.).

Elizabeth’s Second Interview

I gave you a copy of the summary of our first conversation for you to review. My comments are included in this summary in red.

You outlined a couple of points for clarification –

One point in current work is the people we work with are living independently with mental health diagnoses. Point for them is living on their own. We provide support for them to live independently.

And then for second practicum at Canadian Red Cross, I did do research but I also worked as part of the Humanitarian Affairs Department. I did a lot of research but I also was involved in other components like – information seeking, developing awareness of the resources available within the Canadian Red Cross, what they provide, working within parameters of organization, and how it is connected as an agency.

Then you asked a question about a phrase that appeared in the summary:

The phrase people can do more than they think they can? I can't remember what I meant by that. I'm just trying to remember the context. I think it was in relation to being more than just one aspect of their life. We spoke about how challenges are a normal part of life and that people are capable of much more and aren't just defined by their challenges. That makes sense.

Any thoughts or feelings in seeing it laid out? Actually kind of nice for me to see it laid out because I forget parts of the conversation and even while I'm reading, I am thinking oh ya, we did talk about that and it is already here.

One idea that was interesting for me was your clinical approach to practice. You seem to have a very purposeful, outcome-focused, individualized approach to your work.

We are actually careful not to be too clinical – for example, when we are running group sessions, we don't want to border on group therapy. The mental health centre may question if it is too clinical. We use more of a person-centered rather than very clinical approach. Many of my co-workers don't have the training to do those types of groups (therapy). As front-line workers, the field is moving away from clinical, outcome-focused, solution-focused approaches to a more person-centered, recovery approach. This involves asking people what they want for themselves and setting goals based on that, rather than what their diagnosis says. Our focus is shifting more into client-led recovery. The goal is to treat the symptoms of the disease in a holistic way. I sound dismissive around the distinction you draw in relation to your approach to practice ("whatever you

want to call it") but the information/distinction is important and provides context to how the work is done. It also shows the depth of your understanding in terms of your own role and philosophy.

We are moving towards this but how long someone has been doing the work, when they were educated, etc. impacts their approach. It is good because in our organization there are lots of opportunities for training; workshops on recovery-centered clinical practice, etc. Recently I did a three-day training and a big piece was asking people what their hopes and dreams are. It helped show how we can see the people we serve as humans, with hopes and dreams rather than just asking them about their symptoms. After that, I began asking questions like "if you had a job, what would your dream job be?". You can't write on paper the outcome but you see the results of showing people you care and that you are on their team and you are rooting for them. The humanity of it really shows. Everyone has those thoughts and hopes – and if they don't, those sorts of questions can start an interesting dialogue about why they don't and what they may want their life to be.

In our conversation, you said you always knew you wanted to help people struggling with different challenges and that helping people was discussed in the family you grew up in. Where did those messages come from?

I grew up in a single-parent family with my mom and my mom's parents. For Christmas, for example, we would have people over who didn't have a place to go. I think that a big part of that was a reflection of the support my mom received from others and those who had helped her raise a child on her own. In that, empathy was strong. I was able to see others and put myself in their shoes and imagine what life would be like if I was them. Hearing their stories, I could relate and see myself in those situations. I don't know if it was conscious thing on my mom's part, just what she did.

You had mentioned at times your friends were struggling with finding work and you questioned if you were on the wrong path.

Really graduation happened and I was like, oh man. I had worked so long and now it is behind you – what do I do now? Did I make a huge mistake and wrack up a bunch of student loans for nothing? It was more just the reality of the transition into a new stage of life. Similar questions come up now. I sometimes look at job I'm in and ask, could I

do this for awhile? Questions come up here and there, but it is for a short amount of time, not ongoing. You hear about how difficult it is to find a job. And if you want to find something you actually love, that narrows it down so much. Even through the time I had my gap year, I was looking at what was out there for work. So I knew, at some point, when I started looking, that these are the types of jobs that will be out there and I knew which ones I may be interested in. I remember one of my professors said that the jobs in human services you will have haven't even been created yet so having that thought is exciting. I may not even know jobs exist until I discover that - oh, that's available, I didn't know there was a job for that.

One point that stuck out during our last conversation was that you were very ready to be done being a student and be more of an adult – have a job, have a house, etc. Did you have an idea of what your next step was? I was just ready to be done with tests. Sitting in class. I really enjoyed what I was learning and what I was able to apply in life but the structure of it, I had enough. My summers were full and I felt the length of doing school for so many years. I was ready to be a functional adult. To me that meant having a balanced life of going to work, having friends, doing things, living not with family – all of those aspects. When you're in school, it is very focused on school. And then working the rest of the time.

I'm thankful for the people I have around me. The conversations we have are focused on what we are doing or what we want to do. We get together and make vision boards and plan what we want to do in the next year so it doesn't just go by. I look forward to stuff and have things I want to accomplish. In a semester at school or a calendar year, time goes by so quickly. So it can be helpful to have in your mind things you want to experience or things you want to do to give you some direction and not just settle. The people I'm surrounded by are ambitious and honest – and most come from a human services perspective. They understand the struggle for balance. They understand where I am coming from. Working out things in my own life that I also work on with clients (planning, hopes and dreams, etc.) is also why it (current job) is a good fit for me right now. It comes naturally in some elements. But you never know what is going to happen with people in general so we may have a plan and then something happens and you have to flip what you're doing and go unscripted and figure things out as you go. Whether that's with clients or in my own life.

If I have time that's limited, I want to spend it with people who are encouraging, honest, and ambitious. So, it has worked out naturally, that the people around me I value and respect and they support me.

You talked about it being important that others understand your professional role but that it is hard to articulate the role to others in way that captures it. How do you identify with that role if it is nebulous?

Even hearing people say, I'm **just** a… What value do you place on what you do and how you explain it? There is a lot that rides on that. If you want people to have an accurate view of what you do, and it may be different depending upon who you are talking to, how you explain it could be very different. People in the field may know the agency or the type of work where others in other fields wouldn't. And the role and field fluctuates and changes so often.

"What do you do?" is often a first question when we meet people. How do you frame that for yourself? And how does that affect how you define the boundaries of your role?

After I did my semester abroad, we talked about how we can answer the question - "how was your trip?". How do you encompass everything that it was? I would ask back – what do you want to know? Or what are you interested in? The question about what you do is similar to this idea – what do you want to know? What are you interested in? Sometimes it is just – I'm a mental health worker and that's the end of it. Usually when I ask a question I am thinking of something particular that I'm interested in or curious about, so I flip that back on other people when they ask me.

One thing I've learned about through this job is that we talk about the opposite of mental illness is mental wellness. We talk about people being "well" – that's a good thing, their illness isn't taking over their identity. There is more of a value than "I'm doing well" as we would say in the day to day. It means something. Mental health is comprised of illness and wellness and it comes back to balance. Where are you on the spectrum? And that crosses over to people in general, not just clients. How am I dealing with this? Am I doing well? And the answer is somewhere on a spectrum, rather than black and white.

Curation

I continued writing narrative accounts using the first-person format, but I altered my response to demonstrate my narrative (i.e., my ideas, questions, comments, thoughts) running alongside the narrative of the participant. My intention was that this would show how I was responding to and engaged as part of the interview process. This is demonstrated below, in the narratives I created from Hannah's first interview, Carolyn's second interview, and Alison's first interview.

Hannah's First Interview

I currently work as a Child Development Consultant for the [agency name]. I teach child carers in the community to be more inclusive. We get referrals from the community, meet with the child to try to determine their strengths and to figure out where the child may benefit from extra support. I also meet with families, provide consultation services and on-floor modelling, facilitate team meetings and help families access funding for support services. I provide hands-on support to youth who are under 12, mostly the 2 to 5 or 2 to 6-year-old range, who may need support related to a diagnosis (e.g., Down's syndrome, autism) or haven't been diagnosed yet and are waiting for assessment, or trauma-related concerns, trouble adjusting, or new immigrant families, who I see a lot of, who have language challenges.

Challenging! Such a wide range of barriers and challenges. Client group has very diverse needs. This must require a great degree of knowledge as well as the ability to individualize your approach.

I work collaboratively with other professionals like occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, and physiotherapists. My goal is to help educate child care professionals and empower them to do the work in a way that's more inclusive so kids can attend child care in their own community and not be segregated. Sometimes that may involve wide adjustments that can benefit every kid in the classroom (e.g., visual schedules, sand timers) or it may be addressing more child-specific needs. We want to find a way to have the children fully participate, feel respected, and preserve their dignity within their settings.

I wasn't aware that this type of work existed until my final practicum of my Child and Youth Care degree at [educational institution]. I worked in [agency name] doing age and stage assessments for atypical development. I have worked there for three months and feel like I have a lot to learn. I am always asking questions and I need to get more comfortable with my position, but I have had really good training.

I wonder what this means. Are there expectations here about how you should feel in your job? How others must feel in their job? Where do these expectations come from? What would being 'more comfortable' look/feel like?

I don't know that this is what I want to do forever but overall, it has been a positive experience so far. I am staying on for a longer contract (another year) and think it is good to get some experience in the field. This specific area doesn't really call out to me but I want more work experience before I decide what area I want to be in or whether to pursue a Master's degree.

What do I love about my job?

This was in response to my question and my language about "love" didn't seem to fit for you.

I like working with families who appreciate my efforts and I like learning from other consultants and mentors. It is also really nice not being a student anymore. I like actually getting to practice what I've learned, get my hands dirty, and figure out what skills you need. It is a lot more specific than my CYC studies.

Is this matching the skills you need to specific situations? Or recognizing what skills you need to develop further?

What I find challenging about my work is that people don't take me seriously because I'm young.

I find myself relating to this experience and remember similar frustrations when I started out in the field.

I'm almost 24 years old and the other consultants are 29 or 30. I walk into settings with child carers who have worked there longer than I have been alive and I am telling them

that I am going to observe them, make suggestions, provide resources and training and workshops and they are like – who are you? I'm constantly asked about my experience – either explicitly or it is implied in our interactions – and I feel like they don't value me or my feedback as opposed to someone who looks older.

At this point, I wasn't sure if "they" was child carers or the families you are supporting, or both? Is this also an issue of gender? Do male consultants have a similar experience of not being taken seriously? Feeling self-doubt?

I have the experience (even cross cultural experience) and more education than some of the other consultants (who have a diploma in ECE) so it is frustrating to not be taken seriously and just been seen as young. It seems like other consultants can get away with more and it feels like I'm paying my dues and constantly being challenged. In my role, there are no right answers. I provide my opinion and feedback and if that doesn't work, that's fine, we can try something else. It is trial and error to match the response to the specific kid's needs but combine no right answer with not being taken seriously and you feel like you're doing a whole lot of nothing. A lot of the time I am questioning myself and I how I look to other professionals.

Are you wondering what role you are serving? Whether your efforts are effective? Whether other people – co-workers, child carers, families – see you as effective?

Less so families. I have to be very careful in how I approach the child carers and how I suggest things. They can see me as coming in to tell them what they aren't doing right. But their lack of confidence in my support can lead to a lack of buy-in. So, they don't trust me or where my suggestions are coming from and then they don't really implement those suggestions as best as they could and then if it doesn't work, that confirms that I don't know enough or have a lack of experience. These challenges don't prevent me from liking my job but if there is no improvement I may feel ineffective or like I'm not doing the job justice.

This seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy where child carers don't value or respect your opinion as much as they may with an older consultant and they see the trial and error nature of the work as your lack of experience. I can really feel here how

frustrating this must be – very difficult to prove yourself and change people's perceptions of your work.

That is where a Master's degree comes into play - unless you have letters after your name and you have a lot of experience, no one takes you seriously. I'm giving myself some time to figure it out. When I originally went into CYC, I wanted to do counselling in a school setting but in practicum I was discouraged by the rigidity of the school system and how the teacher in charge is the head honcho and doesn't necessarily have to be receptive to the ideas and suggestions from the counsellors. The fact that teachers were able to work in a way that wasn't in the best interests of the child was discouraging and frustrating. I may still be interested in a Master's degree in counselling or possibly an MSW or a Master's in occupational therapy. I like the idea of having a profession, like being an occupational therapist, where people trust that you do have an answer to something. It is hard to not have your professional opinion respected because you can't back it up with a title.

To me this shows the importance of respect and recognition in professional identity. Expertise seems to be very important in feeling like you've successfully taken on that professional role. And expertise seems to come from self-confidence and self-awareness as well as external respect and recognition. Graduate studies/additional credentials seem to be one way of trying to gain respect and recognition from others and assert your expertise and professional identity. The importance of defining your job (your role, yourself) has come up in other interviews as well. There seems to be a need to be able to explain to others what you do in a way that makes sense for them and is accurate. There seems to be value in being able to say "I am a teacher" or "I am an occupational therapist" and the meaning that this can portray to others (even if they don't necessarily know what the role entails).

I'm not sure how I ended up here. When I was 16 years old, my parents made me volunteer for the summer. My mom worked at a community centre so I volunteered at summer camps for kids. Then I worked as a camp counsellor. There was a lot of pressure in high school from parents and teachers to go to post-secondary – like it was expected – and because that was the only experience I had, I applied to Child and Youth Care. I was lucky to get in and it aligned well with my values and I liked working with

people. Right after I got in, CYC became very popular – even when I was in school waitlists for admissions increased from 60 people to over 200 people.

This is really interesting to me. Any idea of why it became more popular? What these increased admissions may be related to? Did that sense of increasing demand influence you and your decision to remain in the program to get your degree? Do you think this is just at [your school] or CYC in general?

So, I went at the right time. But when the messages in school started to not align for me, I didn't want to just stop and not get my degree. I continued on even though I felt tension within the degree program. There was a lot of messaging about the field being about advocating and going the extra mile and giving your all to your job even though it would cause burnout and not be appreciated. Social workers would tell us that we wouldn't have a normal Monday to Friday job and we couldn't just leave our work at the office. This made me question if I could give enough of myself to relate to other professionals. There were mixed messages about the importance of self-care and preventing burn out while at the same time saying you had to give it your all and if a family called in the middle of the night, you answer. I wonder if I would've been happy doing something else and I question if I am selfless enough to do this work. I am good at work-life balance but I wonder if I am passionate enough about what I do. I always wonder if I had been able to explore other interests if I would've wound up somewhere else.

There seems to be a lot of external pressures to succeed – post-secondary, job, etc. Where is the opportunity to explore your interests?

When I was doing my final practicum at the Infant Development Program I found a posting for an internship in Uganda. I was looking at opportunities to teach English oversees and found that, so I applied and heard back. I found out that I got it and I was like – shit! I don't know if I'm ready for this. I don't know what I signed up for. It seemed too good to be true and it was the best experience I ever had. In Uganda, I worked as a Social Worker in a hospital and part-time at a daycare. I was dealing with kids who were abandoned, working on advocacy, doing nutritional counselling in a way that recognized issues with access to food, planning developmentally appropriate activities, and I started a garden project.

To me, applying for the Uganda internship took a lot of courage. It is interesting given the discussion below about constantly questioning what to do next professionally and trying to determine how your choices may impact you in the future. It seems like you took a big risk here and it really paid off. How did you decide to apply? To go? You presented as very passionate when you were talking about this – enthusiastic, vibrant, and alive. I noticed a shift in your body language and voice.

I came back from Uganda and had two weeks before I started my job with [agency name]. I had gotten the job before I left and they were willing to wait the six months for me to start. Other interns came back and were out of work or settling for the first opportunity they got. The jobs just aren't out there so I was lucky. You kind of just take what you can get.

Seeing other people unable to find work must create a lot of anxiety and pressure. Do you think it is a wider concern in social service that there aren't enough jobs? Or maybe not enough stable, full-time positions for those who are looking for work? Does that increase in admittance to CYC/more people credentialled relate to this shortage of work?

I find everything so formal here.

I took this as in comparison to Uganda.

In our job, we need to spend 50% of our time in the community but also need to write reports and do all of our paperwork. It is formal and you have to follow policies and protocol. Everything is documented, every communication written down, everything can be challenged. I am very relational but there is pressure to produce certain targets, goals, and outcomes. I feel like I have to sell something. And in a field where there is no right answer and there is a lack of definitiveness, how do you justify what you are doing? I had so much privilege and power in Uganda as a white foreigner and now I am looked at like I don't know anything about anything. I didn't like being seen as the "expert" in Uganda but at least I was heard and could use my voice for the better. There are so many politics here – the government gives us funds and tells us how to use them but they are not social service workers, they don't have a child and youth care background. They don't get it and we have to report to that. I didn't get how much that confines you and how much that shapes the field. It would be nice to have people who

really get what the work is about writing policy so it can be more relational practice. In CYC we learn about the importance of relational practice but it is not respected once you get out there – all that's respected, like in business or anything else – is output.

This juxtaposition in how power is exercised here and in Uganda (with both being problematic) is so interesting. You've experienced both sides of the spectrum – being revered for your knowledge/power and being dismissed. In both cases for variables beyond your control. I wonder about the intersection of race/class/gender in your experiences. How is the importance of output communicated in your work?

I am questioning my professional moves all of the time. I don't want to waste time.

How does this idea of wasting time fit with the exploration of your interests?

Looking back, I feel like working in a school system may have aligned well for me but I didn't give it a chance. I wish I was given more guidance in my degree and I would've pursued it further. I don't want to be pigeonholed in – that's my main concern and I don't know how to do that. I work in child development and I want to move more into social work – more counselling, more working with families. I have the skills and experience to work in this area but it is never what I intended to do. I want to stay for my contract (another year) here to build my resume and financially, it will help me. I think as an early professional that I have to pay my dues so down the line I can be taken more seriously. I'm happy to be getting this experience but I'm not necessarily where I wanted to be. There are more resources being allocated to special needs and there may be more opportunity in this area but I keep wondering if I am missing my chance to do something else. Should I go somewhere else and start again, paying my dues somewhere else? I would love to work in international and am most passionate about experiencing other cultures first hand. But is that sustainable? It is very fly by the seat of your pants. It can be challenging and frustrating – there is no stability, you work on short contracts and you never know if you are doing the right thing. Are you giving back as much as you are taking? I may want to work with immigrant and refugee populations in Vancouver. I could've said that I've always wanted to be a teacher. I was told I needed to be more focused, more specific, and that everyone wants to be a teacher. I've also always considered teaching while working in the field – maybe teach a night course on recreation for children with additional needs. There are so many options – it is exciting

but also overwhelming. Having so much choice and not knowing what to do is unnerving. I think it would be helpful to have more mentorship and follow-up for students as they move out of school. There is a need for more mentorship in society, generally. We have so much expertise we could learn from our seniors. It would be nice to have someone who checks in on you after you leave school; there aren't a lot of support services for people in their early 20s, you just have to figure it out.

Who do you talk to about life plans? Are there people in your life you can ask questions of, discuss your thoughts with?

I am thinking of going down to part-time after my year contract is up so I can take courses and prepare for grad school. That would mean I would also have time to volunteer in other areas – maybe with the Immigrant and Refugee Society. It would be a hit financially but right now I have no time to explore other interests when I'm working Monday to Friday. My main question is – what do I want my life to look like? The priority for me is to be passionate about what I do and to be respected and to be certain about my direction before I start a Master's program which will spiral me into the most debt ever. The main thing I give myself a hard time about is my commitment level – to me, so much of 'success' is giving all of yourself. I learned in my degree that that's what the field is supposed to look like. I need to find a thing where I don't look at the clock. It makes me feel guilty that it is still a job. But I feel incredible fortunate to have that job.

You clearly and really articulately communicate the tension between being grateful to have work (when some of your colleagues and friends haven't been able to find work in the field) while recognizing this is not the work you are most passionate about.

Carolyn's Second Interview

I began our discussion by explaining that I had written up a summary of our conversation. I arranged the original summary into three areas: current work, educational trajectory, and transition. I invited you to read the document and see if it is accurate in how it is represented and interpreted. We can expand, correct, change whatever you like.

I think the summary is very comprehensive. It gives me a lot to reflect on. It is interesting to read back and remember our conversation points. It really took in a lot and we did talk about a lot and I think it is pretty accurate.

This is my language and I realized that this idea of "accuracy" may not be important to you. Or important to this process.

It is kind of weird to read about my own education trajectory. I feel like I've been living it and just getting through it but when I read about it, it helps show how much I've done. So many different things but all related to helping professions. So it is super interesting to read about my transition from school to work. It seems to show some ambivalence about what my future will hold and shows that I still have a lot of questions – what will my future hold? Where I want to go with school? Where will I go? What does it mean to be a professional? I still have a lot of those questions. I think it also shows that transition can be a struggle but if you work hard, eventually you will be going through it.

It is interesting that it is presented as something you go through (as a process) rather than as something you finish (an event).

One factual thing about [agency name] - it isn't faith-based but is rooted in religious beliefs. So, we don't have religious services and you don't have to be religious to work there. We do have religious figures (sisters) but the agency doesn't teach about religion or promote religion to the clients.

I asked you about an earlier comment about being a gatekeeper. I wasn't clear on what this meant to you and you are explaining your experience.

When I was discussing my experience as a 'gatekeeper' at [agency name] I meant that I was the person who allows people to access service or decides to discharge people but I had minimal relationships with the people who were being served. It is a really great organization but I felt like it didn't build on my relational skills. It was not complex; I was just tasked with discharging clients and I didn't enjoy being that door. I wasn't interested in that role.

I discussed with you that I noticed a lot of internal, intentional messages that you talked about. Almost like a story within your story of transition. Telling yourself you could do it or that everything will work out one way or another.

I never really thought about how I process things. It is very engrained and natural. I'm naturally reflective and I am motivated to know 'why?'. I am always looking at my own ideals and values and when things come up, I ask – what is the purpose? What can I learn from this? How can I grow from this? I think I developed this kind of thinking as a teenager in high school. I guess growing up in a faith-based/Christian household you ask yourself those kinds of questions. In Christianity, we ask – what impact is my life having right now? How am I showing love? How do I love people better? How can I grow in this situation? There is a focus on love; this is a core tenant of Christianity – love your neighbour as thyself; love your enemies – so I ask myself how can I show that love to people? When I struggled personally, I would pray. And that is a reflective practice. I'm really struggling with this, please teach to me to find strength. Reflecting taught me to find strength and to find my way – it helped shaped my narrative. There are always struggles in life but there is always something you can learn from each struggle. That is an important message and probably where my self-reflection started. What can I learn from this? Having negative self-talk is very easy; it is really hard but so crucial to be your own cheerleader and reframe things in a positive way.

I explained that your positive narrative seems very genuine. Not like you are convincing yourself but that you actually trust that things will work out. You come across like you have faith, strength, and a sense of peace. Even in difficult times. Come across with element of certainty.

I have tried to convince myself that I am okay, even when I'm not at times. I try to be genuine and have integrity with myself. But often I feel insecure and am telling myself I can't do this. I'm going to fail at this. But I have to stop and reassess – is that true? Or is it just in this moment of time? Can you get through this? I look back at the evidence and my past experience and I know that regardless, each season always passes. I try to be real and I truly do believe in my core that there is always something to be taken away from each situation. There is always growth. I'm not glazing over the hard stuff. I don't want it to sound fluffy. As a person, I want to be a genuine individual – good or bad. It is very nice to hear that it sounds strong because I don't feel strong at times. But I do try to think – what life lesson can I learn from this? It sounds grand but it helps me when I'm in these situations.

I am interested in the human condition and how we make meaning of things. I remember in English class learning about common themes and experiences and that was the first experience of empathizing with others, putting yourself in someone else's shoes.

I still feel elements of competition. Being back in Canada, I look around at my peers. I should be further ahead. Where is my house? We are very competitive in Western countries. I can see why mental health is such a big issue – you are always feeling like you are not doing enough, that I am not enough. I feel those things but then I reflect on these thoughts and learn how to be grateful. Working in this field is incredibly humbling. People are dealt really shitty hands. And you forget to see how much you've been given. I get to eat three times a day. I have people who love me and I love people. Still, it is a very real struggle to remember, to be thankful, and to try to maintain balance. It is easy to slip into that mindset without even being conscious of it. I want to be genuinely happy for others and be content with where I am currently while still growing. That is the ultimate dream. I think we all really struggle with it here – how can I get the best thing or best experience? I was journaling yesterday – you know that counselling skills question, if you time travelled back to your current self, what would your future self say? I'm sure my future self would tell myself "you are so young. You should do all these things. You have so much time. You can learn that…". I remind myself of this when I am flailing and feel like shit. Imagine you've time travelled and have a second chance. Instead of focusing on all that is lost or "time wasted", I try to shift perspectives and be grateful that I have options. There is always a focus on "I can do this next or that next".

Here you seem to be talking about always trying to move on to the next thing, next goal, etc. without really spending time to enjoy where you are in the present moment.

I want to try to appreciate time without it passing me by. It is hard to do.

You should be proud of what you've done and who you are. Enjoy yourself. Have fun. Be happy. Here again I am presenting my own idea of the process being an important journey in itself. Why is that important to me?

I want to do what brings meaning to my life. I am always looking at what the meaning is behind something. Again, it is finding those big themes of the human condition. Understanding those themes, shared human experiences, helps build empathy.

I asked you about your hopes and dreams and whether there is an ideal trajectory for you. It is too big of a question – I apologize!

I am very overwhelmed by that question. Asking about hopes and dreams is a big question. Some people have that THING. I have causes I want to champion and things I believe in but I don't know what to focus on specifically. All my experiences are affirming what I want to do. I would love to work with youth, but what that looks like, I don't know. In a perfect world, I want to advance children's rights internationally, reduce global poverty, promote social justice. Even advancing the rights of one child would be meaningful. I would be so happy if I could do that. I want a career that allows for that. I want to have the freedom and flexibility to learn skills, to teach others, to advocate, to share with others. I want to be a source of inspiration. I love when people learn something new and are able to take something away – eventually, I'd love to teach others who want to do the same things as I do. The main thing that I am always thinking about is that my life will better the lives of others. That is a core value for me. And although it is a strange word in this field and in North American culture, I want to learn to love people better. I want to understand people. I want to be a genuine practitioner. Someone who is caring and has appropriate boundaries. How can I do that well? It is really strange to talk about my faith so much and I hadn't realized how much my faith relates to my career. I was very devout when I was younger. For me, my main takeaway was Jesus was a radical. He talked to women, touched the poor and that was very impactful to me when I was younger. When I learned about that, I thought about how I could live like Jesus. I want to do something that brings meaning to my life.

I sometimes assume other people think like me but they don't. And then – confusion! It is nice being in social services because there are like minded advocates. I love working with other team members. I learn from watching other styles and see how their discipline impacts their practice. Everyone is so different and I find that so interesting.

This was in reference to team members with backgrounds other than social work

I am still a little transient; I'm still adjusting to being back from Uganda. [Agency name] is great but it doesn't feel permanent. I am hoping to find something I want to study and pursue. I may apply to do my Masters in Social Work but I'm not sure what I am interested in researching.

I am very supportive of this idea. Why? Why do I attend to this? What is my role?

I am ambivalent but looking forward to when I am learning what I can learn and appreciating life. I'm a little bit in between. It can be unsettling not knowing what's next. I don't have a clear trajectory or direction. At least I can choose the next step and it will lead me down a trajectory but I want to know what step that will be. What step I **should** take.

Alison's First Interview

Back in June, I started working for [agency name]. It is a 24-hour drop in and resource centre for youth – our three mandates are youth who are street entrenched or homeless; dealing with substance use or misuse; or mental health concerns. I work midnight to 8am – that's our after-hours program. Our focus is crisis intervention and respite. You can come in for an hour – or two one-hour blocks if you are under 21 years old – basically for snacks, can make shelter calls, deal with crisis as needed. We aren't a shelter. We do operate an emergency weather-response shelter in the winter but at this time of year, you can't sleep in the centre. The purpose isn't that. We run from a harm reduction model. We recognize that youth may be engaged in activities that can be dangerous or have negative effects on their wellbeing. And if coming in for an hour can help in any way – getting food or a glass of water – that's at least something. I spend most of my time making tea and peanut butter toast. I check in and try to leave the door open in case there is anything else we can do. For most of the youth, the three areas (homelessness, addiction, mental health) intersect. Pretty much everybody. We do see a lot of youth where one of the big things they want to work on is substance use. [Agency name] also runs a voluntary youth detox – it is a social detox, not a medical detox, but you can come and stay in a safe place for awhile, be in a place where you can be clean, and we can look into other resources for you while you're here. Sometimes the original reason for doing that may be to get some sleep. Sometimes we see youth

go to detox a dozen times before anything sticks. But that is still valuable. In some cases, youth drop in at night and we can get them into detox that night, if a bed is available. We also run a safe house as well for youth under 19, a vulnerable group who would have involvement with MCFD. Which can be frustrating dealing with after-hours as there is only two social workers available after-hours for all of the province. So there isn't a lot you can do but you do need to contact them. Sometimes they are great and very helpful but we aren't a shelter so we are just reporting that the youth was here. But the door is always open.

I moved to Vancouver in April and I'm in my fourth year of my Bachelor of Social Work degree right now through [educational institution] (distance education). I finished my last (third year) practicum and then moved to Vancouver and started looking for work that I could continue on with while I finished my education. I felt like there was a lack of practical experience in the third year so even when I went into my practicum, it seemed hard to access what I had learned and put it into practice. So I am on-call, after-hours, I work one or two days a week, but at least throughout my schooling, I can work on putting my skills to use. I can have my brain engaged in practice rather than just theory.

This is interesting as most focus on work experience has been for future employment rather than improved practice and relevant learning. Why do you think this is important to you?

My third year SW practicum was in Sacramento at the gender health centre. It was an interdisciplinary team for queer and transgendered folks in the community – everything from counselling, hormone clinic, legal team, support groups, to respite programming. It is a really amazing organization and it was a huge privilege to be with them. It worked out in my favour. My husband is American and he was still stuck in California while we were waiting for his permanent residency so it worked it my favour. And one of the directors at the gender health centre was a scholar who wrote on critical whiteness that I had used in my honours thesis. Small world.

I have a degree in social anthropology. I finished my degree and thought I would work in research but hated it. I love conducting research but the ways I could do so and make ends meet was disheartening.

I believe you explained more about this but I am not sure what about the research was disheartening?

I moved to Nova Scotia and was working at an agency for folks with disabilities. I was quickly promoted to being an intake coordinator so I would liaise with case workers from income assistance, help with workshops, ensure the funding came through, and be the first point of contact for everyone coming in. I felt like I was lacking the skills that I wanted to exhibit to be able to do that work respectfully.

Very clear expectations on what good relational practice should look like. Where do these come from?

I saw issues in how things were being run, based on our mandate and how that conflicted with government mandates and how we relied on government funding to provide service. I was ethically really struggling with that. I quit to find work in a job that was more social justice oriented. I took four months to spend time with my husband in the US and decided to take the required introductory courses for BSW students and apply for BSW programs. I was accepted into all the programs I applied to so I decided to go into it. Most of the jobs I was looking at in social service that I was interested in required a BSW; my BA in social anthropology wasn't enough.

Not enough for those hiring? For you? Did you try applying for jobs? Or based on postings/advertisements?

There were a few grassroots social justice agencies I could have worked with but it would be more in an organizational capacity – like planning events and so forth – but I really wanted front-line work and I didn't have the qualifications they required.

I chose [educational institution] because of their focus on anti-oppressive practice and the distance education option. After doing a degree, the thought of sitting in a classroom for another four years was really painful. A lot of the course topics that [educational institution] covers other schools don't – they look at trauma-informed practice and narrative therapy approaches and less emphasis on strengths-based approaches. In my position with people with disability, we worked from a strengths-based approach and I saw ways that it was useful and ways it was pathologizing. A strengths-based approach is not inherently pathological but it can become so when it is so entrenched in the

mandate of so many organizations. It starts to become empty words when used as a foundation for practice. Anti-oppressive approaches are heavy in post-modern theory and we spend more time in theory conversations than we do in practice conversations but it opens up dialogue about how to be more social justice-oriented in our practice. I was excited about ways to incorporate that in my own work. We do still look at strengths-based approaches and some elements of it fall into other areas – like trauma-informed work, narrative therapies, solution focused therapies – but any radical framework can become a tool for oppression.

I don't know that I explained your ideas about strength-based perspective as well as you did. What else needs to be explained?

My experience here (at [agency name]) is different than it was when I worked at [agency name]. The whole purpose was to get people back to work. When funding comes from the government and their interest is to stop paying out money to people who are using their services, there is automatically that tension. [Agency name], on the other hand, has a lot of government funding but our mandate is still harm reduction which means we aren't pushing people into interventions that they aren't asking for. It is all voluntary programming. There are still tensions, I mean harm reduction is another idea that can be co-opted. For example, youth can come into the centre intoxicated but if they are seen with paraphernalia they can be restricted for 24 hours. And I hate restricting youth for that because where are they going to put it? Or in order to operate where we do, when youth sign the centre agreement they agree not to hangout in the one block radius of the centre. For the community so there is not groups of kids outside or people sleeping in the alleys. But one youth we have has severe anxiety so having to leave that one block radius really impacts his wellbeing. So there are those tensions that can be frustrating but not at the same level as at my old position…

Balance between individual and community?

What do I love about my job? Everybody asks me that all the time and I do but I don't know why. I still get anxiety before each shift – I'm not prepared for this, I don't know what I'm doing, I'm so not qualified. Then I walk in there and I realize I don't need to be anything – I just need to recognize that I know nothing and I am capable of responding to crisis. I'm not expected to fix anyone. I've never experienced that in a position like

this. I really get to sit in that place of not knowing what the right answer is and get to explore that with youth on their own terms. That feels really good in comparison to intervention-based work. I do recognize that we (the youth and I) aren't equals – they have to buzz into the centre, I have to check they aren't restricted, I can ask them to leave at any point – but I do try to be accessible. Power is always operating in any interaction like that. And because I'm so immersed in my BSW program and that is being driven home so hard, I can see how people may not think about it as much as I do. Other workers are pushing youth to make shelter calls where I would like to invite the conversation and explore options rather than assume the only option is to make shelter calls. I'm not an expert of their life and their context. I'm more cautious of it than others because I'm in five classes talking about it every day. In my social anthropology degree too I was really interested in post-communist countries, looking at how a shift from communism to capitalism changes the way people behave and self-regulate. So, when I started doing front-line work, I knew I didn't know what I was doing but clients thought I was an expert and that I had power that they didn't. I do have privilege but I don't know their context. I go into my work as server, not expert.

I am struck by this whole section. It is a beautiful reflection of what you do/who you are/how you practice

That mindset of not knowing takes the pressure off needing to have answers to huge structural and social problems that don't currently have answers. I work through the problem on a case by case basis, in terms of where can I get a meal, and it makes it more tangible. School has a very grand focus on social justice and it is humbling to recognize that making tea and checking in with someone while they watch cartoons is an act of social justice because no one else is checking in with them to see if they're okay. Recognizing that each youth is worthy of respect and dignity. I think it does make a difference. When I was younger I wanted to be a social worker or a teacher so I could "make a difference" or "change peoples lives" and it is much less about that now. It is really just about seeing people and attending to them.

Is setting your own expectations of the work a form of resistance? How did this change? Why is the narrative different now?

Focusing on structural inequalities and oppression can feel overwhelming. Holding onto the fact that tiny acts really do matter is part of what I love about my job. Those small pieces can help with structural change as well. We can see shifts in accessibility and reduction in stigma. It can slowly start to change. And it sometimes starts with very simple acts.

The challenges in my job right now are working midnight to 8am. It is a sacrifice in terms of spending time in the world. It can be frustrating that I'm not able to do more; for example, trying to access detox for young adults. It will be a three to four week wait. Not having secondary resources to support the youth who are accessing our services can be hard. The social stigma around substance use and homelessness can also be very challenging for someone working in that field. A lot of people would say this kind of service, this kind of work, isn't valuable.

Is this also a judgement of you, as someone who does the work?

The social attitude of "how does this service help anything?" is real. I talk to some of my classmates – who work at Insite or the Portland Hotel Society – about the work. Our program draws folks like us and a lot of our conversations are around the social stigma and the bureaucratic problems as the biggest barriers in feeling good about what we are doing. It is all the pressure from outside that makes it so difficult to sustain. It is the societal pressure. The pressure is on us as professionals in the field because we are looked at like why aren't we fixing this? Why aren't we doing our job?

Can you say more about this pressure from the outside?

A few of us (classmates) have been talking about being students in the BSW program. How do we not have careers yet? We still have at least another year of school after this to get into a masters to be able to do anything other than front-line work. Why are we not professionals yet? I don't think any of us really consider ourselves to be professionals because in society front-line work is not respected as a profession. Unless you have a masters and are overseeing a program or are working for the government. There is a misunderstanding of what social work is. That definitely impacts our professional identity.

How? What is your professional identity? How is this impacted by the "outside pressure"?

I have no idea where I want to end up. I've been thinking a lot about it. My next practicum is going to be in hospice. I've been really interested in medical social work and see it as a much needed service to help people and their families navigate extremely complex systems. There is a lot of work to be done there. I'm very interested in the death with dignity movement so I would really love to be a part of that. It should be interesting to move from youth to predominantly older people. I don't see myself doing my masters anytime soon. When I was doing research after my anthropology degree, I didn't feel like I had a right to be involved in writing about social problems if I hadn't been on the front-lines, in the mud, with everyone else, seeing it first hand. So I want to stay on the front-line for a while, despite the low pay and tough hours and hard work. It is worth it to me.

I think there are opportunities for work. They are funding 350 more social worker positions so that shows the importance of the work. I also have the flexibility to work in the US. Right now, I am on-call at [agency name] and I asked for one shift per week and I get texted at least once a day. I could be working more than full-time if I wanted to. In the summer, I worked all the time. Right now, I am taking five courses so it is hard to balance. But that kind of work is there.

Do you think full-time, stable work is also available? Or mostly on-call, casual, relief?

I am planning to finish up my degree with my practicum next year. I am really looking forward to doing my practicum. And then bam, I'm done! And I have to find work. After I finished my first degree, I did it all in three years and I had an on-campus job doing research, and when I finished I went to India. I couldn't do it with no transition.

I think by this you were meaning couldn't move directly into the workforce?

Writing papers does not prepare you for a job. They are great for learning but don't help you in the workplace. I recognize the need to find other ways to gain knowledge. I love being a student and I hate academia. It is very insular. It forgets itself, even in a practical program. When you're sitting across from a person, it is very different.

I explain a bit to you here about how I'll review our discussion and put together a written narrative that we can review and discuss together. I also touch briefly on how I'm starting to see transition as more of a process than an event.

We are constantly making meaning, constantly transitioning. In talking about transition, neoliberal ideas make me feel like I've failed to transition into being an adult. I'm 30. I've done a lot of pretty great things in my life. I'm proud of where I am. But I forget that all of the time.

Can you say more about this?

Curation

In the narrative presented below, I discuss with Carolyn the changed format of the narrative summary. She was the only participant to be presented with both the original third-person account and the first-person account, with my narrative running alongside. I was interested in how she experienced seeing and reading parts of her own stories presented in these different ways. I found this very helpful in exploring the power and impact of various "voices" in representation. Hannah also discussed her experience with reviewing her narrative account; although she had not seen a previous version of the account, she noted that reading her narrative account highlighted for her where she had been at that time and how much had changed for her. She stated she found it very impactful to about her work and her challenges, from a different position, like looking back on an old journal. Alison's responses to reviewing the narrative from her first interview also highlighted to me the importance of how the narratives are created; for her, she read through my thoughts and comments, combining several ideas that she saw as interrelated, to respond to and discuss in additional detail.

Carolyn's Third Interview

I explain to you here how I've changed the format of the narrative summary. With your first person perspective and my responses/thoughts about what we have discussed. Trying to show co-creation of meaning.

It is really interesting to read your comments on the side. Those comments, you didn't say those in the moment did you?

Some things I did and some came up for me when reviewing the conversation and writing up the summary.

I find them really interesting as I read your comments on the side. It seems different than the summary based on our first conversation. It flows differently. How you have written my story – it was more so your observations of where "she said this" and this one is very narrative. It is so different in a sense – when I read it, it sounds like the words I would use, or my language.

The other version was presented almost as fact, whereas this is a story without a beginning or an end. We are just coming into a piece of your story. Some are your exact words and some are slightly reworded.

There is a lot of flow to it. It is different to read back what I've said – in a way, it seems more vulnerable.

Because it isn't removed from you?

I think it removes that extra wall. I don't think professionalism is the right word, but maybe a more clinical wall. It is interesting. It is very conversational, organic and dynamic.

I like writing and reading this version better because it seems more alive.

Reading it back, I'm like, I still have so many questions about my future. I'm so uncertain! It is really interesting to think about our interview and to recognize that I've changed my mind on certain things but with some things I am like yep, still feel confused at times. I'm trying to find something specific. I feel like at the time, when I was thinking about the future and school, doing my masters, I thought it was the way to get to the career I wanted. Now, I'm starting to feel like – the desire is still there to continue with my education and get a career I want – but I'm starting to understand that there are so many more roads to that than one trajectory which is school. And looking back, and looking back on looking back, so many things that I have done throughout my past. Different jobs, different experiences. Linking those common themes. I don't know – I'm still like whoa. I'm all over the place. I don't know. I did really like looking back on that question of internal messaging. I think some of that helps me understand the kind of

work that I want to do and the kind of person that I am and want to be. And why I genuinely enjoy helping people.

I did a lot of talking about the process of transition. Trying to encourage dialogue. You seemed kind of overwhelmed or taken aback by the written summary. Was it too much? Lingering thoughts about this?

Have other people seen the new style of how you summarize it?

No one else has seen both formats. Just you. Is it too much? Too close?

I think it depends what you put out in your final project. It is very different to read "I" – I'm like, that's my voice! I think there is a lot left for people to interpret. For the other one, you've heard my story and you are narrating it in a certain way where it is more complete or more polished. Less personal. In this one it is more like my reflections on things. I think it depends what you want people to get out of it. It is interesting to read about when I talk about faith. That feels very close to me. But that's also because I personally wrestle with faith a lot. Do I believe anymore? Even like when I say something like "it is really strange to talk about my faith so much. I didn't realize how much my faith relates to my career". And then I talk about it more – "I was devout, Jesus is radical" – it is so close and so personal and it has impacted my practice. But it is very strange to read about it. And strange to read that I thought it was strange to be talking about it in the first place.

I talk a lot about my own reflections to you here. What was going on for me when we were talking?

I liked that part of it. I found it very genuine. You get to hear someone's process and get to reflect back on how you responded, in terms of who you are.

I point out the part that I really like about "wasting time" and that concept of feeling pressure not to waste time.

We all feel that pressure to be somewhere fast or be successful in something but where? For who? I worry about the pressure when your friends are getting married, their career, or people in accounting who are making good money, you're like, I better step my game up. But then I stop, and think for what? What am I not seeing right now?

It is that inner dialogue. You can so easily get caught up in the idea of wasted time and get sad about it. Or see time as not a waste but as what makes me who I am. It would be a waste more to feel like my life was a waste of time. I'm trying to figure this out for myself. If I can't learn how to stop and enjoy what's around me and who I am now – imperfections and all – then I am just wasting time trying to prove myself to someone else or myself. Not valuing the time I do have. Trying to see the world like that makes for a much more productive and happy life. It is super hard. Super challenging. That's the message – even growing up as a low-income immigrant kid – looking around at other people around you who have fewer identity issues. I wasn't white enough, Korean enough, Canadian enough. Never enough. Then growing up, I am reteaching myself to talk to myself in a way that's empowering.

Hannah's Second Interview

I provide the written summary of our first meeting to you to read while I explain a bit about how I review the conversation and try to build the written narrative. I asked you to note anything that stands out for you.

When did we meet? End of July? I know it is on our text messages. I am curious as I read through it…July 20.

It sounds so jaded. Wow! That is such an interesting experience, reading that. It's very validating but at the same time, seems external to myself. It is like hearing a close friend explaining what they're going through and already finding myself thinking about what advice I could give, but it is to myself. Just reading how someone else has shifted your words, it gives you more perspective. And this was in July and now we are in the end of September so there has been some time and different things that have come out of that. At that time, I was in an interesting place because I was realizing that the honeymoon phase of being back in Canada and starting a new job was over. That's what this reflects. Since then, I'm more at peace with not needing to be in the next place. It is okay to be where I am at. And I recognize all the redeeming qualities of my current job. So, I am not seeing it as a burden that I am carrying – that I am not as passionate about this as I should be. I don't see it like that anymore. It is such a great opportunity that I'm happy to be there. But I'm also excited for the future because I don't know what I am going to do but I know it will be more and that I can continue to search for fulfillment

along the way. At the same time, there is something about being fulfilled with where you are at and I think I am feeling more fulfilled than I was at the time when I was first questioning – oh no, maybe this isn't for me? I'm also feeling more comfortable in my role so the part about the families and the child care professionals not taking me as seriously – I've kind of come to a place where I care less. I feel more confident in my work and I know I can do this. When someone is not seeing results or doubting my abilities, it is really you that doesn't understand how this works. I can't come up with the ultimate solution; no one can. So, I am more confident in my role. That has changed a lot of things for me.

I don't know if confidence and my feeling of peace are related. In terms of confidence, it has grown in that I bring a lot of self-doubt into things that are new. I'm recognizing that as a pattern. But then when time and time again, I am able to do the work or exceed the expectations that I put on myself, that's what builds my confidence. My confidence has just grown in going in Monday to Friday and working on new programs with new caseloads and recognizing each client as a work in progress. And recognizing that the expectations I had on myself to be there right away aren't there – I don't know it all and I can't even expect to be there in a year. That sense of peace has come in talking through this with a lot of people with my support system. Family and friends. Lots of people have reassured me that I am in a good place – you are 24, you work in a good agency, you have your bachelors degree, etc. Again, I think I've been focusing on being consciously happy because I don't want to miss it and always be focusing on the next thing. So I feel more fulfilled.

I saw this thing about happiness and expectations. If your expectations are never met, you are never going to be happy. For a long time, I had an expectation that this career path (helping professions) would be all encompassing – it would be something I was passionate about, something I loved, something I was good at and felt confident in – it was going to be all those things for me. So it could never really measure up. So, I'm trying to adjust my expectations to match where I am right now – I just graduated, I'm really green and really good careers take a lot of time, effort, sweat, and study. I think your feelings will follow, wherever you go. Like if I go get a Master's degree and get a job, I will feel the same way – I'm brand new to that field. I was really interested in occupational therapy because it was an interest of mine to have a title. And that title meant that I could exert my qualifications and people wouldn't doubt my suggestions or

where I came from or my professionalism because I had that title. But even if I was new to that field, I'd carry my own self doubt and I would still be doubted by others. I'm still very new and it takes a lot of time.

I think here you mean in relation to becoming familiar with and comfortable in your role, in a new field or career.

In our discussion today, you said students have the best job in the world but in our last discussion you said you were so glad to not be a student any more.

That is a huge shift. I think being a student was the best for so many reasons. You're learning new things every day, you are a part of a lively community and network of people, you feel like you're gearing up to do something big. The part that isn't so fun is when you're in the fourth year and you're ready to be done. Then you get into your job and you miss that learning component. The part of being a student that sucks is all the stress. I like being in the field and making money and having more financial security and those types of things but I definitely miss the focus on learning.

Sometimes graduation can be kind of anti-climactic because it is more anxiety-producing than celebratory. Rather than being excited to be done, it can be like the bottom drops out. No more safety net. The accomplishment is great but for most people short-lived and then it is "now what?!?"

I think that's exactly where I was coming from – now what? I'm interested in being a student again because I want people to respect what I do professionally. Getting my masters is very appealing to me because then people will respect what I do more.

It is interesting that you can reflect on the summary and see where you were back then. It is just one little piece of your ongoing dynamic story.

It is like going back and reading your old journals. It feels like when I read my journal from when I was in Uganda and I can see how much I've shifted. That's really exciting. My story that I told you was coming from a deficit-based perspective. It was like - I don't know what I'm going to do. It was really hard to talk about what I loved about my job. It would have been so much easier to talk about all the things I was having challenges with. That list is so much longer. It is nice to see that deficit-based perspective because I don't feel like that anymore. This too shall pass. I was really confused and really

struggling with my professional identity. I haven't figured it all out but I feel a lot better about where I am. How fortunate am I that I get to be in a job that I get to learn a lot from, recognize I have other interests outside of this job, and be able to pursue them? I am able to educate myself, I'm able to support myself. There is lots to appreciate.

I am choosing to be excited about the possibilities in the future, rather than being concerned that when I pick something to pursue next that I am going to make the wrong decisions. I watched an amazing Ted talk on making hard decisions – it is about instead of weighing the pros and cons where when you choose something you'll always feel like you are losing something, pick what speaks to you. Instead see the options as different but both as potentially positive. And it is about your values and what is important to you. There is no wrong answer. It is a choice. And there are some foundational things I want to carry with me throughout, regardless of what specific job I end up doing. I'm going to follow what I'm passionate about and just go for it.

A lot of what I read (in the summary) is still very relevant to me. It still rings true and I remember being in that place. But a lot is still very current. I still feel like I'm constantly being challenged and I am challenged by people who think I'm young – and you said you could relate to that, which is really nice because then I know it isn't just me. Looking at the shift from being an expert in Uganda and then coming here and not being taken seriously, opposite ends of the spectrum, and not knowing how to cope. That was a burden for me this summer – how do I cope? What do I do? I'm happy that I am on the upswing and it isn't so bad and I can do this. This is part of maybe how **anyone** feels in entering a career. It takes time and flexibility and you need to learn about yourself.

Did you have any responses to my comments? How does the summary read for you? Challenging to go back and forth between what you've said and my responses?

It was helpful to see what you thought in response. It was affirming to hear that it is challenging and it is tough work. And you noting about it being hard for me to talk about what I love about my job. It **was** hard for me. The challenges were outweighing what I liked at that time.

You asked some really interesting questions throughout and they generate lots of good thoughts. Like about male consultants not being taken seriously – there literally are no male consultants. That being said, I think the issue of gender is still an important one.

This is a female-dominated field and a female-dominated sector funded by the government. Is that part of why wages are so low? Why my ECE staff are feeling so overworked and burnout and underappreciated at their work which explains why they may have resistance to me coming in and making suggestions about going above and beyond? They're all females. This alludes to a large issue of gender.

You asked if I wonder if I'm being effective – all the time! It is hard! We aren't able to measure our effectiveness. Our focus is on helping at-risk and vulnerable populations – you are never really going to know how you impacted someone. It has to come from a place of feeling confident. That you did the best you could. That you used an approach that is known to help most people. There isn't a lot of certainty.

The comments were really helpful. Every time one came up I was looking forward to seeing what you had said.

I was curious about your decision to go to Uganda. There seemed to be a lot of pressure to make the right decision and be in a certain place – the right path – and going to Uganda was a taking a real risk.

Choosing to go to Uganda was one of the most challenging decisions I've ever made. I was choosing between two jobs – one was stability and one was Uganda. I don't think I slept for three days. I was like - I cannot make this decision. That was one of the biggest risks I've ever made. It is really fortunate it worked out. It was one of the best experiences and I still have this job now. I talked through it with a lot of people in my support network and then I listened to my gut. My gut said that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity as opposed to a career that I have a lifetime to build. And that part of me still speaks to me all the time, so it can be tough being here in Vancouver working on my career. It is still telling me to look for other international once in a lifetime opportunities. I value balance – how many decisions am I basing on my gut and how many am I basing on planning for my future? Lots of millennials tend to focus on – what does my heart tell me and where is my passion leading me? Rather than – do I get a pension at this job? As much as I want to follow my passion, I still want to honour the side of me that does want to make more rational, more future-based planned decisions, including a stable career in Vancouver.

Also, in the summary, I really like how you focused on the importance of expertise. That may be a personal thing for me. That may be me searching to be really good at something. Or wanting to have all the answers because I am new. It is important to me, but isn't really important to the job. It is important to just be present and give it your all – and you'll run into people who don't value that or don't take you seriously. That's just the nature of the work. I'm starting to see that is less of a reflection on me. I'm taking a lot of onus off of myself when I see people not responding to my suggestions. When I relieved that pressure, it was less about me as a young professional. You're working with different personalities and you have to figure out where people are at and go from there. I can only do so much with how people respond and how willing they are to take advice.

Do I get to keep a copy? I would love to. I want to share this with my partner, actually. This explains what I do more than I can explain myself. It explains how a part of me is still in this place and it is really cool to read that and recognize my own growth. Your thoughts on paper make more sense to you. Sometimes you are able to hear what you think when you express something that you haven't consciously thought before. But you may lose it as the same familiar tape keeps playing in your head. It is nice that you've caught some things that I was thinking that I don't even remember I was thinking but that I can relate to. It being written makes a lot of sense and is really validating. I like it. I want to journal on it. I never knew when I signed up for this that I would feel like – not like a counselling session – but like a personal growth journey. This has been a really fun thing for me to do. There has been a lot of personal gain that I have been able to take from your project. Thank you for letting me be a part of it.

Alison's Second Interview

I explained to you how I created the narrative summary based on our last conversation and provided you with a copy to read to guide our discussion.

Oh as an update to this part, MCFD actually attended our team meeting today to talk about after hours social workers working with [agency name] more collaboratively. Right now, when kids under 19 attend the centre we notify them but nothing happens. One of the social workers said that if a youth isn't housed that's an emergency and we had to explain to them that is ALL the youth we serve and when the ministry is notified, nothing

happens so it doesn't seem to be treated as an emergency. We were able to start an interesting dialogue about what is actually available to youth who don't want to be on the street; what are their shelter options because it does sound like there are other things that can be done. It is exciting – I'm interested to see if they follow through but it is good to have the conversation.

Your first three comments all intersect for me. Do you want me to read through the whole thing and then comment?

I am happy going through it in whatever way makes sense to you.

The third one really sparked my interest about having clear expectations about what good relational practice should look like and where these ideas come from. I have noticed a lack of practical experience in my schooling process and in my experience in social research. I am disheartened by a lot of work being done that doesn't promote systemic change. I learned about good relational practice in my work in social activism. I saw how positive that could be for a small group of people, who were very involved, but how difficult it was to sustain; both financially and in terms of gaining traction with more people. There are a lot of systemic limitations. It is not that staff themselves are not trying to help and trying to have good relational practice. There is only so much they can do. There are always strategies of resistance against the status quo, but there is only so much you can do. When we are trying to meet the needs of the client, we still have to work within someone else's mandate, someone else's expectations, and we are still expected to tow the line. That moves the focus away from the client and on to what the funder needs. There is always a tension between doing what the client needs and doing what we, as an agency, have to do to show our numbers so we can continue to get funding so we can stay open and try to help as many people as we can.

You are new to the field and just being exposed to some of these ideas about agency/structure, relational practice, and anti-oppressive work in your BSW. Your focus on good relational practice seems to precede your SW studies. Where did your focus to do good relational work come from?

That's a great question and I don't know. My personal story is I moved out at the age of 15 and struggled to keep myself housed for years. I couch-surfed for almost two years and got my first apartment at 16. I dropped out of high school to work to pay for my

apartment. Getting involved in that scene - generally a group of anarchist, radical youth who were in care (I avoided any Ministry contact) – definitely exposed me to radical ideas at a young age. I went to an alternative high school that allowed students to create their own schedules, you could go there as an adult, a lot of single moms, kids who had been through substance abuse treatment programs – more of a recovery model, supportive environment. Those people that I went to school with taught me a lot and my dad worked at homeless shelters when I was growing up. We disagree about best practice and he sees harm reduction as enabling but I was having those types of conversations throughout my youth.

Your focus on experience seems to be rooted in a desire to do good work. A lot of the people I talk to want experience so they can get a job.

I'm excited to gain more experience. Experience is definitely important to me and even when I finish my degree in April I want to continue learning and improving my practice. It's always been about doing the work well. If I don't feel like I can do the work well, I don't want to be there. A lot of people hear I am in Social Work and assume I will work for the government and I will never. It doesn't align with my own personal values and ethics. I am very glad that there are people who do the work and I think they are awesome, revolutionary people but it isn't for me. I need to find a social work position that aligns with what I think is important in terms of practice. That's a constant challenge because most of the work is with government and any grassroots organization is going to pay half the salary of other places; at what point do I sacrifice some of my values to make a future in this work? Do I compromise one year of my life, go work up north and pay off my student debt? There are opportunities to "change the system from within" – big quotation marks there. What am I willing to do? That's a big one.

I think that fits with my next comment about your thoughts about "needing" a BSW (after your Social Anthropology degree). I asked whether it was your own feeling of needing to know more or an occupational requirement of the positions you were interested in.

I think it is a bit of both – an expectation in terms of the positions I am interested in and also my own desire to learn more. The positions I was qualified for (with my BA) were mostly intake worker positions – so I would work with a client and get them started but

not be able to see them through. Not a lot of one-to-one contact and I wouldn't get to see where their journey took them. I became interested in case management and the impact that could have. Ultimately I decided to do my BSW instead of going into my MSW because I thought [educational institution's] focus on anti-oppressive practice and critical theory would hugely benefit my own practice.

So your focus wasn't so much on employment or credentials as on wanting to learn for your own practice?

I felt like I needed that foundational learning. Yea, even my practicum supervisor is like just finish and graduate; I had enough work experience that I didn't need to do my third year practicum (I could have done a prior learning assessment and written a paper) but I told him that I need to do this, I need to learn how to do this. I want to test out all of these things that I have been learning. It's problematic if we are rushing through and not learning and not doing a lot of critical self-reflection; that's a problem for social workers. I think you see a lot of the consequences of that attitude when social workers aren't critically aware of power or their own place in the world and are unable to make space for the client to determine their own needs, because they are the "social worker" who knows what should be done.

Churning out the same type of social workers works well for the government agencies who won't be challenged on the structural inequities that exist. Those social workers will work within the status quo.

Rather than just jumping into a social work role, we need to deconstruct what it means to be in a helping profession. And if we can add one more word, we could move away from being helping professionals to being meaningful advocates.

Could you say a bit more about what that distinction means for you?

Historically, in my mind, social work assumes a level of expertise where someone who knows how to live life the best jumps in and tries to fix those who are having trouble, without taking context into account. I think that is the case in all areas of social work. Advocating would involve listening to all dynamics at play, trying to understand the relationships involved, looking at the systemic factors that influence the situation (intersecting oppressions related to ethnicity, poverty, intergenerational trauma) and

recognizing that everyone in the situation is probably doing the best they can with what they've got. Advocating involves helping those resiliencies become more important than the oppression. Working to meaningfully address the issues that the people are facing, while taking into account the strategies and skills that they have for living in those situations. Helping can skip over all of the strategies that we never would have considered, given we don't live in that context. Advocating allows for those skills to come forward. There's always something that people are doing, and they are doing it well. It may seem like a harmful behaviour to us but if we pause and look, we may see – hey, that's a survival skill you've got going on there. Standing beside rather than leading. Or leading from behind. It is about co-creating new knowledge – privileging their knowledge and listening and explaining this is how the world, how society sees what is going on here, how can we bring together those varied perspectives? I don't think this happens enough. It fits with the example that I gave about other workers pushing youth to make shelter calls in our last conversation – it makes a lot of sense and it comes from a really good place. But we may not know about youth's previous experiences in shelter or what risks to their safety might exist in those places; those are all important aspects of context that get missed if we jump right into wanting to move youth into shelter.

"Is setting your own expectations of the work a form of resistance?"

Here you are reading a question I had put in my comments on the written summary of our previous conversation.

This makes sense to me and goes along with the change of narrative that we're talking about. I don't think people need to be fixed; the system is built in a way that we are supposed to fix problems that are internal to the person, rather than adequately addressing how the problems are actually external. The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem. Checking in with someone when they watch cartoons is very much an act of resistance compared to – what are working on today? What is your problem and what are we going to do to fix it? I'm trying to step outside of that helping narrative but it is hard. That is how all the roles are set up. That isn't to say we don't help, it is just isn't where I start from. I don't start from – I am going to help you. I start from – I am here. So are you. We are together. Being present and holding space rather than forcing people to move into that space. It is totally their call.

I had my own experience with mental health crises when I was younger and with being forced into talking about it and needing to figure out what the problem is. "This is your diagnosis and your problem and we are going to fix it" and I didn't react well to it. So long as we are pathologizing and seeing the problems as internal to the person, we aren't fixing it. Being somewhere warm and dry can be pretty meaningful for some people sometimes. But because we aren't actively "fixing" sometimes we face public pressure – "you aren't getting these kids housed?! What are you doing?" It is in the media, politics, general public – even other resources criticize our low-barriered approach but still refer their youth to us. They don't understand that we should be supporting the youth in whatever they are facing and at least reducing the harm that they are experiencing.

This is your colleagues in the field questioning your practice and your approach to working with youth. How does that impact how you see yourself?

There's a general political trend based on capitalist economy where services are being reduced – let's get you off social assistance and back to work, let's limit as much as possible how much funding and support you get so you can pick yourself up and be capable. This trend doesn't adequately address the barriers folks are facing. There are social ideals of what you are supposed to do and who you are supposed to be. If you are dealing with intersecting issues, that has to be ridiculously hard to navigate. What I find the most interesting is how quickly and fully youth internalize those messages, and at such a young age. One of my youth told me that she was like an elephant. She said if you take a baby elephant and put a chain around its neck and tie it to something, it will stay there. It will never realize it is strong enough to break the chain. She said she is like that – she was born into addiction, doesn't know her own strength. Everything she sees, she sees as a problem in *her*. Even though she knows there is a chain, the problem still is that the elephant is not smart enough, strong enough; not that the chain was put there in the first place. How do you have those conversations about the chain when everything around you is telling you that you are the elephant? It really shows how we really internalize oppression without recognizing opportunities for resistance. When we talked about it, she was able to recognize the chain and could talk about a time when she wasn't chained. If we make space for those conversations, there are ways to fight that pressure from the outside, that social expectation that we internalize, and ways to see ways that we've always fought against it. It is so hard to fight against it, it is so

engrained. You can't change that internalization overnight. It is small conversations. It is so embedded. Even within social services, there are so many different mandates and while I practice in a certain way and challenge that oppression in my own practice, I can't change the discourse. Having conversations about the discourses that exist is harder than I thought it would be. Talking about the individual and what's going on for them has to come first, before any structural analysis. But as youth are talking about their personal experiences, I try to raise questions about structure. It is really tricky. Once you point it out, people do see it. When you make the implicit explicit, people become aware of the effects of discourse. It is just hard to figure out how to *start* those conversations.

There are good paying positions out there. I don't know how willing I am to take them. There are jobs available. I am hopeful to work in more radical grassroots organizations where they need certain skill sets but can't afford to pay for them; if I can balance that with a job that pays the bills, that would be great. I think it will be easier for me to move into the workforce after this degree; it isn't so much about the job. My education is about how I want to live my life. So the progression is more reasonable. Before it was like, you're done, jump into a 9-5 job. Which didn't seem sustainable for me at all.

I can definitely say more about my failure to successfully adult. I am 30, I have never made more than $16 000 per year. I have almost $60 000 in student loan debt. I have never been able to pay off any of it. I come from a family deeply entrenched in poverty – both of my parents have been on permanent disability for over 10 years. My dad worked in street ministries and got donations from the church; he didn't have a salary for most of my life. I live in a basement suite that is definitely illegal. That place will be renovicted any day. They get closed down if they are not suitable for people to live in; they are open to inspections and this neighbourhood has been under examination. It is constantly precarious. So, I look and compare that to my cousins who went right through college into $50 000 - $70 000 per year jobs, minimum. My 27 year old cousin is on his fourth mortgage and has been married for eight years. He bought a house at the age of 19. That is the norm in my family. For me, deciding to go back to school for a career that pays less than the degree I had to begin with, at the age of 28 – everyone thought I was nuts. I feel like there are all of these social expectations of where you ought to be when you're 30. You should have at least started an RRSP! I am able to pay my bills every month and I don't carry a credit card debt so that is the most exciting

thing I can say about where I am at. That comes with having been on my own at a very young age and learning to balance that. It all comes back into a capitalist market economy and where you ought to be within that, and that dictates how you interact with every other social institution from the work you do, to being in school, to everything. It is all embedded in that. And I've consciously resisted that my whole life. Funny that even if I don't place value within any of that, I've still very much internalized those messages. There are dominant discourses that I may not believe in but very much influence me. Being aware of that and not letting it get the better of me, is very important. Even within my own values, none of this is important to me but I make sense of myself also through how others see me. So, my identity isn't just internal – it is also relational. And if I am seen as not quite getting it right, it is going to have a negative effect on me. One of the things that really bothers me is when people at work call the youth "kids". They are probably more adult than I am in a lot of ways. They have amazing survival strategies and skills and we shouldn't patronize them. But it is funny that I don't consider myself a full adult.

How do you work through that? Or make sense of that?

I recognize that most of those things that I feel like I'm failing at adulting are not values that are mine anyway so I'm like wait, that's not my value, never mind. It comes back to resistance. Recognizing that it is an aspect of the system that I've never appreciated anyway so I don't need to worry about that. So when those feelings do come up it is questioning whether I feel like I am failing in myself or if that is something that someone else expects of me. How many expectations have we all built up about ourselves that may not be meaningful to us at all and we are totally taking for granted? What is frustrating about that for me is trying to decide whether something is my own value or is it something implicit from my family or society. An example, I got married last year and I had to determine if that was something that was based on social expectations or something that I truly wanted myself. It took a year to figure that out. This relates right back to what am I going to do with work – something that may meet certain needs but doesn't fit my values – is it my want or need or am I just giving into social pressure?

It seems to take an active process to stop and think about the messages we are receiving. It takes energy to recognize that those expectations are not our own.

Curation

I met with Matthew as I was finishing up the narrative account from my final interview with Alison. I was very interested to meet him as I initially saw him as a negative case – he was male, older than the other participants, working part-time and relief positions, and held a diploma rather than a degree. As I worked through the interviews with Matthew, and the subsequent analysis of all the narrative accounts, I recognized that the concept of negative cases (and other methodological concepts like saturation) did not fit with my understanding of reality, as limitless and unknowable. My interviews with Matthew were important in helping me question different concepts within a constructionist framework, and then a relational ontology.

Matthew's First Interview

I work two jobs. My main job is working in a group home that is part of [agency name]. They have a number of different group homes and day programs throughout the Ridge Meadows area. I have regular shifts and then I also get called out to fill other shifts; there are a lot of open shifts right now because the house has gone through a major transition with two or three main staff leaving their positions. I have been with them for about three and a half years. I started there as a volunteer in one of their day programs; I needed volunteer hours to apply for my program at [educational institution]. I got my first job in a day program there as relief; I'm still connected with them because I've built relationships there and still work with two individuals there who are in their mid-twenties and feel more comfortable with me supporting them. I have been the one individual that has been with them for years and I still see them regularly. For both of these guys, building social skills, holding down work, those are big goals for them. It is nice to have that on the side – working at the group home is more routine. I'm there, at the group home, about 35-40 hours per week.

I worked there while I was at school as well. But only about 12 hours per week while I was doing four or five courses. I did the Community Social Service Worker diploma and then I went back to do the CODS program (Co-Occurring Disorders Advanced Certificate). I graduated in April 2016. Just to give some background, I dropped out of high school in grade 11 so I felt like I failed but also that the system failed me. When I went into college, I decided I would try to take all opportunities, because in the past I

would have turned them down or passed judgement on them. For example, I ran for class rep because my friends encouraged me and I decided to challenge myself and represent the class. I was also part of the Uganda Project in 2015, through [educational institution]. It was similar – when I applied I didn't know if I even wanted to go but I knew I didn't want to miss the opportunity. When I was accepted, I got really excited, like I'm going to Uganda! It was a pretty neat experience. I had a lot of fear in terms of whether I would make a difference and if it could be sustainable. It definitely creates interest – I have started a program where I am able to support a school teacher in a small town. We sponsor her to teach students basic life skills and art and she is a pillar in her community. I needed someone there who could communicate through the internet, who could email, who could watch over the project and it was hard to connect with someone there that I could trust. I had become close friends with a Ugandan Social Worker who was working for a NGO in the area and I was able to connect with him to oversee the payment for the student's tuition. It's very informal how it has been set up, but now my brother is sponsoring someone as well and I share the information about the success of the program with everyone I can to get more support for the school and what the school teacher is doing. My role right now is to promote funding because I can't afford to go to Uganda right now. I'm hoping to go back in 2020. I would love to go as part of a project – that would be terrific. It depends on how much time I could take off my job. Ideally, I'd like to spend a few months there. Now that Uganda is done, I'm glad I didn't turn down the opportunity. I've talked to my fellow students because [educational institution] has a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) now – one of my friends is preparing to go into it – there are a lot of questions in my mind about the value of more education vs more practical experience.

I got another job near the ends of the CODS program. For my final practicum, I was hoping for an opportunity for future work. Africa was great and was something I could talk about at a job interview but I was looking for something that would lead me into work. I did my practicum at the [agency name]– a great place to do a practicum. It is a large agency – they have about 520+ employees. It is good to be on board there. I'm casual staff at the homeless shelters. My difficulty so far is that it makes sense to work at the [agency name] because it is close to home, I have benefits now – I was able to go to the dentist this morning and not have to pay – and there are still things to learn at the group home, but there is less to learn than at the homeless shelters. I feel like if I don't

take 2-3 shifts per week at the [agency name] that I am losing my knowledge rather than gaining knowledge. In October, I was working 65 hour weeks every week but I was burning out; I wanted to get hours and experience with the [agency name]. I'm worried about my connection to them and if I don't step up, there seems to be a minimum amount of hours that you need to put in as a casual. And I should be able to do that but doing that and feeing good about my work may be something different. Maybe I'm not giving myself enough credit and I'm learning more than think. Computers are not my strength and we need to use various programs – that alone is intimidating to me.

I like having the two positions because it gives me some balance. There are a lot of different locations for the [agency name]. But I basically work at one of two shelters in Surrey or Abbotsford because I am living in Mission. Unfortunately, I won't raise up the seniority list very quickly like that. It is hard to say if I will have a future there because I'm really worried about job security. I know there are people there who are taking positions that involve night shifts and temporary postings just to move up in seniority. People are bumping around from position to position, trying to get benefits. I'm not really concerned about losing my job. I had a performance review and that matters to me; I don't want to go year to year having mediocre performance reviews. I would like to reach goals in certain areas – like working two or three shifts per week – but I am averaging one shift and want to do what I can to seem valuable to the agency.

It sounds like you want to build your skills but you need more shifts to do that and you don't have enough time to dedicate to doing that amount of shifts?

I try to shoot for 50 hours per week or less, to try to keep balanced, spiritually and emotionally. There is a big difference – it is way more manageable – but the problem is, you could aim for 50 and only get 38 hours because you don't get that shift you were hoping for. Week to week, your average may be lower than what you want. It's hard to get what you want out of being a casual.

Given that you don't have a lot of control over what hours you get, are you interested in more schooling? Does a BSW factor into that at all? Long term plan?

My family wants me to see a career counsellor and have offered to pay for that. It is something in the back of my mind that I think I probably should do. I don't want to get into a degree program – I'm going to be turning 40 and I'm concerned about saving

money – I'm concerned about the price tag of education. If it were free, I'd be doing it right now. I see a lot of people with social work degrees go into Child Protection and understand that a lot of people burn out in that work; it may be a bit beyond what I am comfortable with in terms of responsibility. The road for me may be more gradual than jumping into Child Protection. I understand social workers work in hospital as well, and some people who design programs in the agencies I work for have BSWs, but I don't have a good grasp on what people do with a BSW degree.

This is very interesting to me. There may be a lack of clarity for students generally in terms of how education may fit with various employment/careers. When you came into CSSW did you have an idea of the type of work you wanted to do?

Initially, I was interested in psychiatric nursing. I heard an instructor speak about the CSSW (Community Social Service Worker) program and it sounded interesting. She was very encouraging and I didn't have any of the math or science that I would have needed for psychiatric nursing. Those are some holes in my education. Psychiatric nursing is still an interest for me but very little of my education so far would count towards that and my experience wouldn't be that applicable. Maybe some of it would be. I knew I wanted to get out of labour jobs, working for a nursery. They paid well and I worked there for about 12 years. The business got bigger and there was a lot of pressure on the family run nurseries like I worked for; the owners were generous with their pay and overtime and treating us well. They were selling the business and I thought it was time to get out of there. There was some anxiety around leaving but I knew I had to. One of the things that caused me difficulty and part of the reason I dropped out of high school was a lot of pressure, as early as grade 9, with parents and teachers asking me – so what are you going to do when you get out of school? I was in grade 9. I didn't want to think about what I was going to be doing in college when I was in grade 9 so eventually I just said nothing. I'm going to work. I'm picking up a shovel. I was disillusioned about having a career – for a number of years I thought I could just have a job and that would be okay. My dad tried to convince me that it wasn't enough to have a job, that I wouldn't be happy and I wouldn't make enough money to get by. Not that I make enough money to do what I want to do, but I am headed somewhere, I have a career as a support worker or social service worker.

For you, what would be the difference between a job and a career?

I suppose a career might provide ongoing challenges, opportunities for advancement, a higher level of responsibility, and continued learning. I have been out of school for a little while now and am sensitive to what other people are doing. One of my friends, a student in psych nursing, is very supportive in terms of me going back to school. My dad would choose to support me in going on towards a degree. But the choices I make have to be my own. They have to be well thought out – especially financially. I feel a lot of pressure to make the right choices financially, especially considered the amount of money people are paid in this industry right now.

You mean in terms of weighing the cost of going on in school and the potential benefits in terms of employment with a degree?

Yes, exactly. I have met a lot of people with the [agency name] who have diplomas or sometimes no formal education and they are in middle management because of their experience and their willingness to do a good job. Then there are brand new casuals with degrees or masters degrees, or people who are counsellors who work at the shelter as a second job – there doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason in terms of who is where in terms of their education and where they sit in the agency. There is no rule to that – so you can't tell me that magically, things will work out for me just because I decide to go back to school for three more years.

This is very interesting. Education may not have a direct relationship with employment? Are the jobs you are doing now what you saw as the kind of jobs that would be the outcome of a CSSW diploma, when you started at Douglas? Are you doing what you thought you would be doing in terms of work post-education?

Yes, but I thought I would move to a job with more responsibility in the [agency name]. I got a job with them at the beginning of my education. It is easy to get on as a casual, not so easy to get a full-time, permanent position. I have spoken with the people who have done hiring and they look at a number of different categories, education would just be one of those categories. And my education would rate highly because it is directly related to what I do. I've met people who have gone through shorter, private programs and their people skills are not well developed. They have a worker-first attitude, they talk about their own problems, complain about their hours – they are all about themselves, rather than the client. I wonder how they get hired. How they impact the

people we work with. I wanted to get into this type of work so I could be around people who didn't stereotype, who aren't racist and sexist – I have experience being around people who are those things in labour work and I didn't feel comfortable being around those types of people. I don't want to be there to experience that. I am not free of that because I am working in social services. The majority of people I meet at work, I say to myself – this is why I am in this work, because we share the same concerns for this population, we want to see people meet their goals, we are client-centered in our approach. I worry within the agencies that there are people who don't have the skill set that they should to approach the work they are doing with the right attitude. There must be a shortage but it is also because of the pay. There is a definite concern about where things are going and who gives a damn and who doesn't.

Would you consider yourself "new to the field" even though you've been working throughout your education?

At the [agency name], absolutely. I'm considered new by the management and supervisors. Even though I did my practicum there. I have a pretty good rapport with the shelter – it is really low barriered, drop in centre, roughest area of Surrey, I get recognized by the clients and I am comfortable in that environment that may be intimidating for other people. But I don't feel comfortable with things that I haven't done in awhile – I feel really new. What if something happens and I have to write up paperwork? It is a busy busy place and you can't take forever to write up paperwork. You have to be proficient. Most of the people I work with will show me things so I learn while I'm there but I'm definitely new. My last shift was a day shift at a slower shelter and I learned a lot about computer work. I'm sensitive that I haven't learned as much as I could or should. My willingness is there. I just need more opportunities and maybe that will come in time. At the [agency name], I still make mistakes. I made a medication error not too long ago on a shift I wasn't familiar with. A missed medication; it could have been worse. But it is subpar performance, in my opinion. I was worried about the client – are they okay? What do I need to do? Then the thoughts came back to me. I think my supervisors perceive that I am doing my job.

When I think about what I learned at [educational institution], I wouldn't be able to write it out on a piece of paper but I think it changed the way I look at things. They sunk in to a level where they changed who I am. We would look at different scenarios and talk about

communication, understanding, families – things that I don't give myself credit for knowing. I shouldn't just think of the end when I think about going to school because it does change who you are in a positive way. When I started school, I didn't realize it would be such a positive experience. It was about getting out of a labour job. I wanted something on my resume that would distinguish me. That's why I took the CODS program – so it would show, oh someone who has gone on beyond the diploma. And now, the big question is - is there something else? I'm pushing it to the back of my mind right now because I am saving money and enjoying my free time. Not being wrapped up in studying.

Here you seem to be saying that even if education doesn't change your employment (in terms of what you do for work) that it still can have a big impact on who you are as a person.

Overall, I'm happy. Sometimes I think I should push more to make more money. I have a pretty good understanding that you don't make more money just because you want to make more money, you have to be willing to take on more responsibility. You better be worth the money you are making. I have impatience to get where I want to go – and I don't even know where that is. But I want to get there fast. Wherever that is. I've pushed myself to work 16 hours per day, going from the shelter to the group home, sleeping four hours per night. But it isn't sustainable. It would be nice to make another $5 per hour, make a bit more money, work close to home. The positions that are available where you make more money seem a bit beyond my level of experience -I don't know if I just need to suit up and show up. Maybe I am a good candidate and I'm just holding myself back because getting a new job means being a new person and making mistakes. Over the next few years, I don't want to make decisions based on fear that I will make mistakes or be a new person and just get comfortable at the job that I am at. But I am working hours that fit my schedule, close to home, with benefits and a good pension, and that means I want to stick it out for a little while. There are still things I can learn about operating the house. I talked about – in my job interview – that this is a home where people live. It is not my home and I have certain responsibilities there, including a responsibility to show other staff what I know and help other new people learn. But my main responsibility is doing what I know how to do and be accountable for what I have to do. It depends how you look at it. If you look at it as a challenge, it will be. If you look at it as routine, it will be.

Matthew's Second Interview

Sounds pretty good. It is interesting to read. I think it is valuable to have that. Seems familiar.

I was surprised that you didn't seem to have much of a response to reading the narrative summary.

I'm thinking that a good reference is very important.

I wasn't sure if these thoughts and ideas arose after reading your narrative or if these were things you were already thinking about. I asked whether you were going through job applications, interviews, reference checks at this point. You said you were just thinking "off to the side".

You can use people you've worked with or fellow students and they can speak to how good they feel you would be for the job. They may not have worked closely with you and know you're a rockstar employee but they feel like you're a genuine person and they are willing to go to bat for you. I have a friend who is thorough in giving a reference and wanted the information on where I was applying and what the job was so she could reflect on how I would do in the position. I can't expect that everyone would be that thorough. Maybe if you are applying for a job with more responsibility and there are more explicit criteria, and there is more competition and better pay, they may have a different set of questions for the reference. Grilling the reference a little bit. And in job interviews they want you to talk about what you've done and situations you've done well and brought about positive change and that's hard to talk about when you work in an area where it takes so long to make change and it can be so difficult sometimes. And it may not be about creating change but being part of creating the right environment where change can occur. Where people can make healthy choices and healthy decisions. For example, I have concerns about some of the residents' dental health. I'm not there all the time but I may bring up my concerns in a staff meeting. In another case, a dentist said that the dental health was okay when I didn't understand how it could be. I'm not buying it. This person is non-verbal and has little to no family support – how can we advocate for them? It gets me emotional because I think we need to get a second opinion. That's what I would say if it were my family member. Do I just need to accept

it? I think, overall, my supervisor is fantastic. When issues come up, I talk to some of my co-workers who I am closer to about it. I ask them about it.

It seems like the social support at work is important to you.

The people who work there are coming from a genuine place and want to look after the health of the people who are there. There are always health issues that need to be looked after on a regular basis. If I was responsible, in a supervisory position – a reason why I wouldn't be interested in that in my agency is that there is a huge amount of work (including a ton of paperwork, which doesn't interest me too much) and responsibility and they get paid very little. I think it is a dollar or two more per hour and you have all this responsibility. The only reason I would do that in the future, down the road, is to put it on my resume as an experience. It would have to be the right set of circumstances.

I think in the next couple of months they be posting and filling the positions at the house I work at. That will narrow up the opportunity for me to block book my schedule. I've been doing five days a week for months but am actually only scheduled for three days one week, two the next. After the hiring, there will still be a lot of opportunity but I think it will be a lot less and that will give me more opportunity to pick up more shifts with [agency name]. Or utilize my spare time to take my class 4 or beef up my resume. I'm not satisfied with my level of confidence with first aid. I'll know when I'm working and I'll know when to say yes or no when I get called in for other shifts. I think it is going to be positive to have more opportunity to pick up shifts. And how I am going to use that time.

I have been able to take a number of shifts at the shelter in Abbotsford and I realize a lot of the employees don't live in that area. There is fairly high demand if you are willing to work any shift. So there is a lot of opportunity to pick up shifts at that shelter. So, I'm interested in working locally and learn more about that shelter. I can become more familiar with the population at that shelter and with the resources in Abbotsford. I think there is a hole in my knowledge there as I haven't spent a lot of time in Abbotsford in the past. I don't know a lot about it. There are a lot of people over there who need help and it is a good place for employment. It is not a drop-in so you need to have a bed there to stay there. It is a temporary shelter; I think it was a cold weather shelter and it got extended through the summer. I think it got another year or something. I think the major is supportive of it and that affordable housing is a real issue in Abbotsford. People don't

want to see people homeless and living under bridges and struggling with life. I heard on CBC news that a lot of funding for shelters has been extended – that's very positive. It'll be fantastic for me. Right now there is a lot of work because there are a lot of people who take time off in the winter, I thought that it may slow down in the winter, but everyone said "oh no, don't worry. You'll still get all kinds of calls". That rang true. My phone is ringing off the hook – I get offered shifts every day. I'm willing to go to various shelters, depending on when and where it was. But if you aren't always attending the same shelter, you aren't really becoming more valuable. You are just valuable on a temporary basis for holding down the fort – hopping around doing one shift there. Unless I had a full-time position with the [agency name], it would be hard to feel comfortable jumping from site to site. The people and the process at each site, getting that right, being efficient and being fast – that's the piece that's missing for me. It comes with more experience. Being a casual with high demand to fill shifts, I feel valued. They are grateful when you take a shift. They really need you.

It sounds like there is some benefit to picking up shifts at various shelters because you get some experience but that you'd feel more comfortable building your skills at one shelter.

As long as I have the job there, I can go along like this as long as I want to. And that's fine but is that going to be okay with me? I don't think I need to be hard on myself now; I can learn more when I can put the time in. I haven't even looked at any permanent positions. It would be possible to do two part-time permanent positions, if the timing would work and I could still have downtime. I should be looking more than I am. The amount I am working and my willingness to put work first is affecting some of my personal relationships. It influences that. Am I okay with that? Part of it is keeping my interest to work more to myself and not sharing it. If I am listening to calls for work while I am with someone, it isn't very respectful. They want to spend time with me and here I am, scanning my options, without considering other people. Maybe I'm just kind of taking advantage of it, thinking my behaviour doesn't impact anyone else, but it does, in my life away from work. Life can't just be all work. You want to be happy when you're away from work or you won't be a good example.

I ask you to examine the narrative summary and see if anything has shifted for you since that piece of your story.

It is pretty much where I am. It makes sense. I still have a lot of anxiety and uncertainty about whether or not to pursue any more education. My fear is a bit different now – not education and the act of learning – but now that I am able to save money, pay off bills and move in a positive direction, do I reverse all that? I am not even weighing my options. I could take a little bit of time to find out about different courses, build my resume, show I'm willing to learn things on an ongoing basis. They have some trainings and workshops at [agency name] – I did a bunch when I was first hired on – lately I haven't heard about any opportunities. There are a few with [agency name] but mostly on-line and I would have to change my attitude about computers. I may need to sit down and write a reflection about why I need to be more patient about computers. I don't spend a ton of time challenging myself about that. Maybe look into computer courses that would provide me some skills and show that I am willing to fill in the gaps in my own learning.

I'm grateful to be a candidate in this. My education was valuable – for someone who dropped out of high school but came back and how much work it was and how much time it took, it was really worthwhile. At the beginning, I thought it was such a big deal. But now that it is done, I can't imagine where I would be if I didn't do it. Somewhere behind where I am right now which would be in no way acceptable. The connections that I have gained are still valuable to me. It is nice to be able to help out with this. I think it adds value to what we are all doing in this field. Some of my classmates are now talking about going into the BSW program from the CSSW diploma– I had to work so I didn't go to the seminar. Maybe I'll go next year. A few other people are battling their decisions too. There are similarities and differences for everybody. I like the ideas of the personal change to take on more responsibility down the road. Take on more education and be grateful to become a new person again – but that financial piece is a huge wedge.