



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Orientation Points: Confronting the Effects of White Femininity in Community-Based Social Work Practice

AUTHORS: JILL HOSELTON, MSW STUDENT

PRESENTER; CHRISTINE A. WALSH, SUPERVISOR

What can narratives
of white female,
community-based
social workers tell us
about how the
dominant discourse
of white femininity
shapes social work
practice?

RESEARCH DESIGN

PARTICIPANTS

8 white, female identified communitybased social workers

THEORY

A phenomenology of whiteness (Ahmed, 2007)

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989)

DATA ANALYSIS

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Macias, 2015)



White Femininity in Social Work

- Social work, through the **dominant discourse of white femininity**, is a site which “**otherness**” is negotiated and secured.
- White women, through the process of colonization were subscribed the role of **moral gatekeeper**. This justified their intervention into the lives of the poor, the immigrant, Indigenous, and Black populations, along with persons marked as mentally ill or disabled.
- Because the **aim of colonization in Canada was the formation of a white settler-state**, any person who identified outside the lines of the white, wealthy, heterosexual, male were considered a threat to the colonial empire.
- White women gained power in the public sphere through helping professions such as social work, and ultimately their **position of power was contingent on the moral degradation of the “other.”**
- Additionally, **white women’s worth** was completely reliant on their ability to fulfill the **virtuosity** subscribed to them through the dominant discourse of white femininity.
- **While this is an origin story, contemporary social work continues to perform this same script**, both institutionally and through the constitution of bodies that take up the position of social worker.

Defensiveness

What is the impact of your whiteness on racialized clients?

"Well, you know, and I, rightly have reflected on this because I was very curious about your research, because there's an assumption because you are white, you're privileged... And that's not necessarily always the case. I think we, you know, we make [assumptions], you know, based on the color of my skin, that I'm privileged. And so, I'm very mindful of that even though I come from, and support people that maybe are Caucasian, I would never go to a person who is in poverty, with addictions, and they're Caucasian and say, "well, you're in a position of privilege, 'cause you're white."

CHARLIE

Future Recommendations for Social Work



- Future research must examine the operations of whiteness and racial violence at every level of social work education and practice, including international social work (Badwall, 2016).
 - Educating future social workers on the nuances of whiteness, by analyzing gender and race together, deepens students' understanding of its operations.
 - Field education is a useful middle ground between education and practice, which supports social workers to take their theoretical knowledge and put it into action (MacDonald et al., 2020).
- 