

WHEN VALUES COLLIDE: PERCEPTIONS OF ETHICAL SOCIAL WORK

WHEN VALUES COLLIDE: PERCEPTIONS OF ETHICAL SOCIAL WORK IN
NEOLIBERAL CONTEXTS

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Abstract

Critical literature on social work ethics and practice in the current neoliberal context identifies the complex tensions generated for practitioners by the restructuring of increasingly residual public programs and by the market-modelled organizations in which they work. Pressed by employing organizations' expectations to narrow and standardize their practice, social workers face collisions between their own values and the managerial and budget-driven requirements that dominate their organizational worlds. Building on the growing body of literature in this area, the research reported here examined how social workers articulate their own values and ethical commitments, understand the value collisions they experience, and work to navigate them in the interest of those they seek to serve.

A small qualitative study was conducted to explore these questions. In semi-structured interviews, five social workers were invited to share their experiences of ethical tensions generated in their organizational settings. The members of the sample all held social work degrees; their ages and length of practice experience ranged considerably and they spoke from experiences in a wide array of service sectors and settings.

Analysis of participants' experiences illuminated the texture of their struggles and their efforts to covertly and overtly challenge or evade organizational requirements that were at odds with their values and their conceptualizations of good practice. Their accounts point to the importance of politicized understandings of social work ethics. They also suggest the importance for social work education and professional

development programs to foster dialogue on the complexities of ethical action and support the development of the analytical and practical skills that enable practitioners to find the ‘cracks’ in dominant neoliberal structures and create spaces for change.

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Introduction

Over the past several decades the restructuring of social welfare and systems of social service has resulted in changes and cuts to many programs and services, and a push to provide the most effective services at the most efficient cost of time, funding, and resources. In alignment with this restructuring, the field of social work has – in some quarters - begun to shift its focus more heavily toward the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to solidify its position as an essential profession for the welfare state (Bisman, 2004), one that contributes to rather than detracts from contemporary austerity agendas (Aronson & Hemingway, 2011; Banks, 2011). The argued result is that the social work profession has found itself in an ‘identity crisis’ with respect to the moral values that once laid the foundation of social justice-focused practice (Bisman, 2004; Reamer, 2013). Over many decades and shifting debates, multiple perspectives have critiqued, argued for and against, and attempted to “develop consensus about the profession’s core values” (Reamer, 2013, p. 6). Arguably now, with the erosion of the profession’s commitment to social justice as its primary cause, social work is struggling with the “contrast between the increased professionalization...and the decreased attention to social problems” (Bisman, 2004, p. 110-111).

In this contemporary context, social workers find themselves working in very contradictory spaces and needing to navigate conflicting perspectives and expectations of their work. Literature on social work practice illuminates how a neoliberal political agenda and the managerial organizational regimes associated with it penetrate and

structure public services and generate ethical tensions at the individual level (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines, 2008; Banks, 2010; Globerman, White, & McDonald, 2002; Heimer & Stevens, 1997; Miller, Hoggett, & Mayo, 2006; Weinberg, 2010). One dimension of these accounts examines how social workers understand and ‘navigate’ their perceived ethical dilemmas. Shaping their ‘navigation’ are the organizational contexts in which they find themselves, their perceived ethical collisions reflecting conflicts between their own values and how they perform in their daily roles within the expectations and conditions for practice.

Before entering social work, I worked in organizations that did not have what I perceived as values or ethics for treating workers respectfully and creating a healthy work environment; as non-professional trade-based organizations, they were more focused on their product and revenue than on worker well-being. I found myself drawn to social work for its focus on respect and social justice – not only in its individual practice, but also as a part of a shared collective perspective by the profession. And now as a relatively new practitioner, I have found myself perplexed by some the experiences I have had in professional social work contexts. Some of the decisions or procedures of the organizations in which I have worked made me feel uncomfortable and did not accord with my understanding of professional values. It was suggested to me, however, that they were “the way things are done.” My ponderings have led me to wonder how other social workers both express and commit to their values in the face of ethical tensions, and whether or not those values align with their organizations’ and the profession as a whole.

In this research project I aimed to explore these questions by looking at how social workers perceive and navigate ethical tensions that arise from collisions between their own values and the expectations of the organizations in which they work. The project explored how social workers articulate their values, understand the collisions and their origins and finally, how they create and navigate spaces that allow for change or resolution. The study builds upon the literature in this area which is mapped out briefly below.

Literature Review

The complexities of trying to understand how some social workers' experiences of ethical tensions relate to organizational contexts rooted in neoliberal and managerial agendas requires an open perspective to conceptual and theoretical possibilities. The purpose of this literature review is to provide this context and relevant theoretical foundations by "standing on the shoulders of giants." By setting the stage through a critical review of literature, this chapter will focus on some of what has already been discussed, researched, and theorized.

I begin with a brief review of analyses of the ways in which neoliberal and managerial ideologies have come to penetrate and reshape public service organizations and the experiences of those within them – service providers and service users. The second section of the literature review will include a discussion on ethics in social work, including arguments on how ideologies influence social work ethics. Supplementing this argument, the review will present literature on ethical theories, paying close attention to the central values situated within each theory. Integrating these first two bodies of literature, the last segment examines research that has explored social work practitioners' and managers' experiences of tensions in their organizational contexts, setting the stage for understanding the structuring of individually experienced ethical dilemmas in practice.

The Managerial Restructuring of Social Service Organizations

Neoliberalism and managerialism are ideologies that reflect a changing landscape in how contemporary social service organizations are structured and how their services are delivered (Banks, 2011; Brodie, 2007). This changing landscape has dominated much of social policy and social welfare structures by changing the focus onto efficiency and effectiveness, through cost-savings and outcome-measures (Baines, 2011; Holden, 2010), reflected to meet the demands of a market-led capitalist society (Mahon, 2008; McKeen, 2006; Schram & Silverman, 2012). Driven by conceptually narrow outcome measures to prove efficiency and effectiveness, organizational structures of welfare services leave professionals feeling tensions between prioritizing standardized measures-assessment tools and their “ability to exercise their professional judgment” (Banks 2011 p. 12), with the latter usually taking the back seat.

Writing from Australia and witnessing developments directly comparable to those we see in Canada, Rees (1999) suggests similarly that professional social work and social justice values are threatened by the power and discourse of neoliberal and managerial ideologies. He poses the question “in times of cutbacks and attacks on the values of public service, how can working conditions enhance social justice and humanity?” (Rees, 1999, p. 199). His concern, like that of many other observers, is that the neoliberal demands of efficiency and adherence to narrow performance indicators come to trump the ‘values of public service’: commitments to care, to respond to human need and to address the roots of social problems. In short, the organizational contexts of social work

practice have been greatly changed as, in turn, have been the values, procedures, and underlying assumptions of practice.

Ethics in Social Work

To begin this section I will first define how I have understood and interpreted ‘ethics.’ From outside of the context of social work, Levy (1979, p. 9) gives a simple yet connotative definition that “ethics is [are] values in action.” Exploring this notion that ethics are synonymous with values, Linzer (1999) elaborates that “*the preference is the value; the action upon the preference is the ethics.* The action is ethical when it is based on the value” [his emphasis] (p. 35). In other words, ethics are actions acted upon in relation to preferred held values.

The ideologies of neoliberalism and managerialism have created systems of organizational structures that value narrow performance indicators of effectiveness and efficiency; this perspective, as Brodie (2007) mentions, may point towards an understanding of the ethical tensions found within social work. Banks (2011) argues that a current understanding of modern day professionalized social work ethics is characteristic of the “New Public Management” (NPM), a term found within the UK literature which is similar to the market-driven ideologies found in neoliberalism and managerialism discussed by Brodie (2007). Banks (2011) argues that one way the Western world understands ethics is that they are “principles of conduct or right action” (p. 7) and that particularly in social work, these principles and values reflect standardized assessments and models that are proven and ‘evidence-based.’

However, Bisman (2004) also presents a different perspective which suggests that it is not that social work ethics have become a tool of neoliberalism, but simply that the values found within professionally situated ethics have not been observed as well as they should. Bisman (2004) suggests that this may be because of a “low level of commitment to their importance, even though there is a widely held assumption that values are central to the profession” (p. 110). Fenton (2014) also adds to this debate by suggesting that these issues are not even perceived as an ethical problem; rather they are only perceived as practical. So if there is a low commitment to the values of social work ethics, even though they are thought to be essential to practice, it may suggest that there are value collisions occurring through perceived ethical tensions. These perceived ethical tensions may be the result of professionals feeling that they need to not only pursue the values of social work, but also efficiency and effectiveness as conceived by the organizational culture and values of their employers. The collisions therefore may be masked in the perception that there is a ‘low level of commitment’ to ethical values when, rather, there is an inability to enact them due to conflicting commitments to organizational values.

If the way ethics are perceived and adhered to has changed in social work, this may suggest that the values and principles are no longer congruent with what was thought as ‘accepted’ collectively. Moreover, this notion of ‘collectively’ is also complicated by competing perspectives of how ethics in social work should be taken up; these create contested meanings for the purpose and enactment of what is thought to be ‘ethical practice.’ Issues around ethical ambiguity or some of the conflicts and/or tensions may be understood from the perspective of a preference to act on one value over another

(whether professionally motivated or organizationally sustained). One way to engage in this debate is to critically look at and analyze contemporary theories on social work ethics and determine the theoretical values of each, situating the potential preference of ethical values in today's organizational contexts.

Ethical Theories

Linzer (1999) states that contemporary universal understanding of ethics has been cultivated from two central traditional perspectives: deontological and teleological. From a deontological theoretical perspective, ethics are actions based on predicated imperatives – “the rightness of an act” (Linzer, 1999, p.42) which are established “because of a past relationship that antedates the present action” (p.41). In other words, ethics and ethical decision making are influenced and mandated by previously held universal values or morals, objectively applied in doing the “right” thing. Doing the “right” thing is not so much about the emotional or sensual processes of the ethical decision-maker, rather ethics are rooted in reason and the rationality of a “moral agent” (Gray, 2010, p. 1795). For example, Gray (2010) suggests that “when a social worker respects the client, she does this because it is the right thing to do in terms of her professional values and code of ethics” (p. 1795).

Conversely, a teleological (or utilitarian) perspective would view ethics as actions that always need to promote a good outcome. Linzer (1999) states that this theory, “sees morality primarily in terms of promoting social welfare” (p. 43). From a teleological perspective, ethics are rooted in values and morals that only benefit others, suggesting that actions that do not promote wellbeing are unethical. A utilitarian theory of ethics

views “right” action as more related to virtuous and autonomous individuals in pursuit of justice for reasons outside of a singular professional obligation (Gray, 2010).

Hugman (2003) argues these theoretical perspectives share similarities because they both originate out of the modernist-liberal era, in which these are the “foundation that contemporary professional ethics have been constructed” (p.7). Contemporary theories of social work ethics therefore have developed and embraced “modernist thought [that] embodies a faith in the potential for human reason to determine truths that apply to all classes of subject, through the application of correct techniques” (Hugman, 2003, p. 6). These truths, whether based on the predicated “rights” of previously held values (deontological) or the pursuit of obtaining happiness in all circumstances (teleological) are viewed as ethical standards that are rational, objective, and universal (Hugman, 2003).

However, as modernist perspectives give way to more postmodern theories, theories on social work ethics are beginning to shift out of principles of universality (Banks, 2008). Ethical theories which view actions as either morally ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ are now regarded ambivalently (Hugman, 2003). This does not mean that ethical values and principles held by traditional deontological and teleological theories are altogether discarded as irrelevant; rather, the context and situations for adherence to similar or competing values needs to be modified, changed, and/or adapted to situational circumstances (Hugman, 2003).

Therefore ethics become perceived as necessary and sought-after, but the reasons or justifications for ethical practice may be far more complex than originally perceived.

Bauman (1994) suggests that postmodern ethics are now rooted in a “moral stance” for the “being-for-other” (p. 19). This means that “ethics is not optional for anyone in any circumstance,” and there is now a moral responsibility to ethical practice (Hugman, 2003, p. 9). This moral responsibility is, from a theoretical perspective, suggestive of principles and values that supersede any standardized or normative set of universal assumptions for ethical practice.

One interesting contemporary theory that focuses in-depth on these moral and value principles of post-modern social work ethics is virtue ethics, which has its roots in Aristotelian foundations. Virtue theory “emphasizes the priority of the individual moral agent who has acquired virtues commensurate with the pursuit of a revisable conception of the good life-the well-being of all in a defined community” (McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1015). Another suggestion for the theoretical perspective of virtue ethics comes from Gray (2010) who suggests, “our innate tendencies propel us to follow the virtues and thus find the ‘moral way’” (p. 1798). This concept of ‘moral way’ or social workers as ‘moral agents’ is based within the “inner qualities of humans – character” (McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1015). Therefore, the suggestion of this theoretical perspective is that values and morals are intrinsic, and that these characteristics carry with them our foundations for understanding and enacting ethical practice.

Instead of using pre-existing standards of ethical principles and values for ethical practice, virtue ethical theory posits that the social worker is viewed as a “hermeneutic worker – the worker acting within a reflexive-interpretive process of self and other” (McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1016). Virtue theory holds the perspective that individuals

“ought to practise good conduct in regard of others as an aspect of being human” (McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1018) which creates the assumption that social workers are intrinsically well-intended and that they will have ethics that are reflective of this nature – that they are representatives of ‘good’ moral agency (Gray, 2010; Oliver, 2014).

The last contemporary perspective of social work ethics examined is feminist theory. Hugman (2003) argues that a feminist approach to social work ethics is rooted in a relational approach which “is grounded in a challenge to the implicit ‘masculine’ identity of the ‘moral agent’ that is embedded in liberal ethics” (p. 10). Sue Wise (1995) also explains that a feminist approach to ethics highlights the power division in social worker and client relationships, and that ethical practice can help break down the mandated and regulatory practices that perpetuate oppression, marginalization, and inequality. Furthermore, ethics is about transparency and should be based in shared power relationships, rather than only one-sided or a matter for singular ‘moral agents’ (Wise, 1995).

Stemming from a feminist theory for social ethics is also the perspective of ethics of care. This theoretical framework views ethics not as duties, obligations, or social mandates, but values and principles of sincerity and genuine care (Gray, 2010; Hugman, 2003; Oliver, 2014). Similar to virtue ethics, ethics of care view “moral sensitivity towards, feelings of compassion for and the desire to care for others as the result of moral character, believing that it is one’s virtuous attitude that causes one to be sensitive to others’ needs, and not logic and rational argument alone” (Gray, 2010, p. 1798). In this way, it is not just virtues of progression towards a common good for a defined

community that guides ethics, it is the innate characteristics of a person which create a moral character that strives to help others for reasons beyond the individual (Gray, 2010; Hugman, 2003; Oliver, 2014).

While these theories of ethics are not exclusive to social work, they represent both the foundations and progressiveness of contemporary ethical theories found within the field. Linzer (1999) suggests that regardless of which theoretical perspective is adhered to, ethical dilemmas will arise when there are conflicting values. For example, if social workers adhere to a theory of virtue ethics but their organization or field of social work practice subscribes towards a deontological perspective, these two theories will at some point run into conflicting values.

Tensions and/or Conflicts in Social Work

Perceived tensions or conflicts are not new to the profession of social work and these experiences have been well documented by multiple authors (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines, 2008; Banks, 2010; Globerman et al., 2002; Heimer & Stevens, 1997; Miller et al., 2006; Weinberg, 2010). Building on the understanding that values in neoliberal organizational contexts may be incongruent with ethical practice in social work, and the theories of ethics elaborating how ethics and values may be differently ‘taken up,’ this section gives examples of ethical tensions or value conflicts from the literature.

The first example comes from a study of social workers in front-line practice in social service settings who were experiencing funding cuts and organizational change.

Aronson and Sammon (2000) found that many practitioners experienced that the “day to day realities of their jobs were at odds with their sense of good practice” and that “confining and frustrating conditions generated particular tensions and contradictions for practice” (p.175). Furthermore, when the authors describe the experiences of restrictive working conditions in which participants are also asked about potential supports for navigating such tension, they found that their concerns were returned back to them as their own “challenges to be coped with or resolved individually” (Aronson & Sammon, 2000, p. 179). Aronson & Sammon (2000) described these experiences from worker’s perceptions as an “individualization and isolation of tension” (p.179).

In another article which studied how public service professionals navigate and manage ethical dilemmas and emotional tensions, Miller et al. (2006) drew on the experiences of front-line practitioners as well as those in managerial positions. They described many as “survivors” and that they worked “in relative isolation” when it came to navigating their perceived tensions (Miller et al., 2006, p. 368). Some of their participants felt that they were experiencing “suffocating discretionary autonomy” due to the “narrow output-focused overregulation” (Miller et al., 2006, p. 368). Noting the emotional response elicited by such tensions or stresses, Miller et al. (2006) found workers feeling “anger, frustration, incredulity, confusion, disappointment, betrayal, resignation, withdrawal, caution, defensiveness, anxiety...a strong sense that the weight of responsibility rested on them, a heavy burden and cause of concern” (p. 373).

A study of social workers in hospital settings identified similar tensions. Along with restructuring of the hospital, practitioners experienced “increases in responsibility”

which “meant more complexity in the clinical problems with which they were dealing, higher volume of patients...decreased length of patient stay with the resulting increased decision making for patients at higher risk, increased pressure to discharge patients” (Globerman et al., 2002, p. 178). This increased responsibility and pressure to meet objectives was accompanied by less rather than more support and direction, and justified on the grounds that it was practitioners’ professional obligation to be effective social workers (Globerman et al., 2002). The decision-making tensions, because of competing and outcomes-based expectations of the hospital social worker role, created “muddiness” that the researchers found isolating for the practitioner (Globerman et al., 2002; Heimer & Stevens, 1997, p. 156).

In another example of experiences of tensions from social services managers’ perspectives, Aronson and Smith (2011) reported that many found “themselves swamped by the documentary requirements of accountability procedures and therefore less and less able to attend to identify ‘what really matters’” (p. 437). This inability to ‘attend to what really matters’ exemplifies incongruence between the values that the managers are ‘required’ to hold onto – the objectives and mandates of their organization – and their commitment to what they value.

It cannot be assumed that all contemporary organizational contexts are incongruent with social work values and principles or that, when there is incongruence, it always takes the same shape or generates the same tensions for practitioners. However, it is evident that the market-modelled organization of public programs that now dominates social and community public service delivery presents ongoing and difficult challenges

for those seeking to practice with a critical sense of ethics. With the present study, I aimed to contribute to our understanding of some of these challenges by inviting practitioners troubled by the tensions they experienced to speak about how those tensions manifest themselves in their work, how they understood them, how they strove to resolve or cope with them and – especially important – how they visualized possibilities for change and for sustaining ethical work. In the following section, I describe how I conceptualized and designed the small qualitative study reported in this thesis.

Methodology:

Given my interest in exploring the organizational power relations that produce ethical tensions for some social workers, I locate my research and my questions in a Critical Social Science framework (CSS), as does much of the literature reviewed above. Crucially, this framework focuses attention on possibilities for change – in this instance, on the spaces and opportunities for social workers who navigate ethical tensions. Complementing the CSS framework, I also drew on an Interpretive Social Science (ISS) perspective in order to inform my analysis with social workers' textured knowledge of the complexities of their practice and its context. This combined methodological base is elaborated below, followed by a description of the resulting qualitative design and methods that flowed logically from it.

Methodological Framework

The first framework that I found myself drawn to was CSS, and Neuman (1997) describes this lens as a critical approach that attends to structural relationships. These structures usually represent power dynamics and a CSS perspective would view these as inequities that contribute to social injustice and social disparity (McGibbon, Mulaudzi, Didham, Bartond, & Sochan, 2014; Neuman, 1997). An important characteristic of CSS is the element of change – CSS researchers do not just do research to expose these hidden power inequalities, but they move to use their research in a way that mobilizes change, particularly at the structural level (Neuman, 1997). By focusing on tensions and conflicts, a CSS approach will look at the experiences of individuals and groups in the

context of “resistance, struggles, and emancipation” (McGibbon, et al, 2014, p. 181). The potential for change, from a CSS approach, would argue that “people have a great deal of unrealized potential” (Neuman, 1997, p. 76) and that this potential is the catalyst for changing what may be viewed as the status quo.

My research also draws on elements of the perspective of Interpretive Social Science (ISS). From an ISS perspective, the researcher invites and explores subjective knowledge and meaning as a window to understanding the larger contexts or themes around them (Neuman, 1997). Moreover, from a CSS perspective, trying to “bridge the object-subject gap” is another way to purposefully discover that “facts require an interpretation within a framework of values, theory and meaning” (Neuman, 1997, p. 78). Using CSS with an ISS perspective does pose some challenges, but CSS views most characteristics of ISS as a congruent methodological framework (Neuman, 1997).

The focus of ISS research is to discover how people create and give meaning to everyday experiences within their own social contexts (Neuman, 1997). This means that the subjective interpretations of people are accorded significance, that how the social world is perceived and understood matters. Combining a CSS and ISS approach allowed me to explore the individual experiences of participants and make larger connections for social change. Critical theories in social work pose much the same question, for example: “is not all social work ‘critical’ in the sense of being committed to social as well as individual transformation?” (Allan, Pease, & Briskman, 2003, p. 1). In answering this question in the context of my research project, I also place an emphasis on the

resistance and spaces for change that social workers perceive and utilize to navigate ethical tensions.

Flowing from this methodological positioning and in pursuit of my questions, I designed and carried out the small qualitative study described below.

Sample

To pursue my research questions, I sought a small sample of social workers who experienced tension between their employing organizations' demands or culture and their views of ethical social work practice. With appropriate ethics clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB), an invitation to participate in the study was distributed by email from the School of Social Work to alumni and field instructors associated with McMaster, all people who would have social work degrees and practice experience. The invitation and email script (see Appendix A and B) outlined the purpose of the study and explained what participants could expect by being involved in the study.

A purposive sampling method was used so that I could align participants to the relevance of the research question (Mason, 2002). This was important because a purposive sample "is meaningful theoretically and empirically, because it builds in certain characteristics" toward "the argument or explanation" in which I was developing (Mason, 2002, p. 124). To ensure that potential participants would feel no pressure to take part, the recruitment email was sent out by the School office to lists that I did not see and its recipients were invited to contact me directly if they were interested to do so. Given the practical and time limitations of the MSW program and my methodological approach, my target sample size was set at five (5).

Nine (9) recipients of the invitation responded. The first five were all willing to participate and I arranged interviews with them over a period of weeks. The remaining four (4) respondents were thanked for their interest and, if they wished, I promised to send them a summary of the study results. The participants were all female, reflecting the gender balance in the profession. On other factors, they varied considerably and thus enabled some interesting reflection on the possible impact of some of their differences. In terms of age, they ranged from their mid-twenties to late fifties and their years of social work experience also ranged from three years to more than twenty years. Two participants held Bachelor of Social Work degrees and the other three held a Masters of Social Work. Participants were asked to share experiences of ethical tensions in both their current and past employing organizations and, as result, the range of settings and sectors that framed their ethical struggles was considerable and included: hospitals, criminal justice facilities, community health agencies, community shelters, and social research organizations.

Data Collection

To invite and explore participants' subjective experiences of ethical tensions and value collisions in employing social service contexts, I carried out semi-structured individual interviews (Mason, 2002), using an interview guide (Appendix C). Face-to-face interviews based on a semi-structured guide allowed me to ask open-ended questions to gain greater insight into the "knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions" that are "meaningful properties of the social reality" of my participants (Mason, 2002, p. 63). The interview guide included questions about

participants' experiences of their ethical challenges and/or tensions, how they perceived themselves (values, emotions) in relation to those tensions, and how they understood or how they enacted some form of change and resistance.

The interviews ranged in length from forty-five minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes. I conducted them in locations and at times of the participants' choosing. Two participants chose their offices, another chose an interview room at their place of work, another chose to meet at an interview room I booked on McMaster University's campus, while the final participant chose a public location in another city more convenient for them. All but one participant chose to book their interview time during their work hours.

Prior to beginning the interviews, I reviewed the purpose of the study and the structure of the interviews, including the perceived benefits and risks of participation (Appendix A, Letter of Information/Consent). Of particular significance to some participants was the issue around anonymity. There were expressions of concern that their stories and locations might be identifiable and that their status or reputation might be compromised as a result. To assure participants that their confidentiality would be safeguarded, I assured them that I would be removing all names (clients, workers, organizations) and only using generic terms to speak of the organizational contexts in which their experiences were situated. I also gave participants the option to review segments of the findings in which their data would be presented to ensure that they felt confident their anonymity would be upheld. None of the participants expressed a desire to review the segments containing their data. In reporting the study results, I have been –

as I had promised to be – scrupulous in ensuring that potentially identifying details were not included.

Once participants gave verbal consent to continue, I asked them for written consent to record and transcribe their interview. I also clarified that I would make some notes during the interview process to ensure that I highlighted significant points that I may not pick up on listening to and reading the transcripts alone.

As is important to the process of qualitative data gathering, I attended actively and reflexively in the interviews, using prompts and clarifying questions of the participants to ensure I had as full as possible an understanding of their meanings (Mason, 2002). At times, I also explained my own “meaning-making process so I [could] remain accountable to participants for what I am making of their stories as I produce my own” (Ristock, 2002, p. 43). This meant that I did not stick rigidly to the interview guide, but engaged participants further in their narratives, encouraging them to think and respond beyond the initial guiding questions. As the researcher, this also meant that I was actively thinking “on my feet” (Mason, 2002, p. 67), interpreting and reflecting on what I was hearing. Unsurprisingly, participants’ accounts of ethical dilemmas were often expressed with feeling, something to which I attended not only by listening well and supportively in the interviews but also as I analyzed the interview data subsequently (see below).

Data Analysis

Following Ristock’s (2002) approach to data analysis and in keeping with an ISS perspective, I listened to and read the interview transcripts literally and discursively

(Ristock, 2002), in other words, for content and also for expression and language. Consistent with an ISS perspective, it is the ‘what’ and ‘how’ the participant told me about their experiences that I looked and analyzed for themes and subthemes. Specifically, I used a guide suggested by Ristock (2002) to help in the analytical process of determining the ‘social contexts’ and ‘power relations’ through the meanings of participants’ accounts.

Ristock’s (2002, p.37) guide suggests first focusing on what participants were “telling me.” Through this process during my first reading, several themes emerged and I found myself overwhelmed at the richness and diversity of my data. Subsequently, during the process of my next reading, I asked the data “What does the participant’s language suggest about the way in which their experiences have been produced by the available discourses and their social positionings within those discourses?” (p. 39). Through this process I not only listened to what and how it was said, but also to what was not being said by participants. Focusing on emotions, through content and language, discursive thematic shapes began to emerge. Building on the first two processes, the third reading focused on making “comparisons with themes found across the transcripts as a way of identifying patterns and counter-patterns” (p. 39).

My CSS perspective also layered on top of this discursive and literal analysis of the text by implicating and exposing the power relationships that arose out of these themes. I strove to read the transcripts for linkages to the underlying and hidden structures of participants’ organizational contexts. One way I derived these themes from the transcripts was to ask of the data “What is this expression an example of?” (Ryan &

Bernard, 2003, p. 87). In particular, I looked for examples of articulations and commitments to personal and/or professional values, value collisions or ethical tensions they experienced, subjectivity or personal/emotional processes of these experiences, and opportunities or spaces for change or resistance.

Analyzing and drawing implications from my data also required that I analyzed reflexively (Eakin, Robertson, Poland, Coburn, & Edwards, 1996; Mason, 2002). Eakin et al. (1996) state that “reflexivity” refers to the capacity to locate one’s research activity in the same social world as the phenomena being studied, to explain the nature within the same framework as is used to theorize about the objects of study” (p. 158). This meant that I could not form opinions or interpret prematurely about the literal experiences of my participants and that I needed to constantly ask questions of the data that did not assume a pre-existing linkage (which was very difficult), but that rather the quality of the information I received was organic.

Following this analytic process and with my research questions in mind, a number of key themes emerged and are presented in the next section.

Transferability

The transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of this small study’s findings to other context or wider groups of social workers requires qualification. The findings emerge from a small sample of five (5) social workers. All were working in the same geographical area, all were women and all were white. Further, in responding to the invitation to participate in the study, all self-identified as concerned about or allude to ethical tensions in their organizational settings. While the findings are therefore clearly

not directly transferable to differently located or identified practitioners, they stimulate thinking and theorizing about contemporary conceptualizations of ethical struggles in social work.

Findings

Study participants responded to the invitation to take part in the study because its focus resonated with their work and they had things to say about ethical dilemmas in their practice that they attributed to the organizational contexts of their work. Embedded in their accounts were articulations of the values and commitments that they found compromised or challenged. I begin the presentation of the findings with these articulations, followed by analysis of how the participants found their values colliding with organizational demands, how they understood the collisions – both intellectually and emotionally – and, finally, how they spoke about possibilities for resistance and positive change.

Articulated Values & Commitments

I began my research interviews by asking participants to describe a particular instance of an ethical tension in their practice that they thought involved a conflict between their values and those of the organization that they worked for/in. In doing so, they communicated, explicitly or implicitly, the value and ethical commitments that they held and that they felt were jeopardized in the conflict.

In an explicit example of value articulation, one participant stated their own personal commitment: *I believe in a lot of communication and transparency and ensuring that everyone has an equal and equitable say.* This participant's choice to use the word *belief* suggested a strong commitment to these articulated values. This and other

participants' assertions of values were often clearly framed by a professional social work discourse. For instance, one observed that *as a social worker we have ways of being with people that are pretty ground in respect and autonomy and self-determination*. Her use of "we" suggested identification with the profession and the shared values to which others in the profession are also committed. Another participant also invoked a professional value base, highlighting her commitment to self-determination: *from a social work perspective, [I] believe in the dignity of everyone...the right to choice. The right to, to make their own decisions, the, the right to support them in making – even if I don't necessarily agree with their decisions*.

Beyond overarching professional commitments to self-determination, dignity and so on, some participants also identified commitments to particular theoretical perspectives within the profession. One stated matter-of-factly that they had *a very strong anti-oppression framework*. Another elaborated more fully, recalling how – when she was being hired – she made a point of going beyond the *standard definition they [hiring agency] wanted to hear* to explain her understanding of this perspective more fully:

...you have to practice AOP every single day and be okay with being called out that you're not that. And no one is anti-oppressive. No one ever will be anti-oppressive because it's a constant thing that we fight towards becoming. None of us are perfect in the same way none of us are going to be anti-oppressive – but we can practice anti-oppression every single day.

This participant not only stated the framework from which she practiced, but amplified it to clarify its integration in actual social work practice: an ongoing 'fight' in the daily

texture of the work. Some participants anchored their value commitments in their own personal and biographical backgrounds, helping me understand more of “why” they held or were so committed to their espoused values. They referred to the influence, for example, of their upbringing or their education. One participant reflected that, as a youth, she *felt like I couldn't not see the injustice*. Her sense of her ethics was rooted in childhood experience and a pattern (and acquired skill) of speaking up against injustice: *the more you do it the more practiced you get at it*.

Another participant suggested, similarly, that her commitment as a social worker to advocating for change came from a lifetime process that she brought to practice: *we all came in with this social justice march, and we weren't taking 'no' for an answer*.

Clearly, this social justice perspective, as perceived by this participant, was not just a value to be held and voiced but something that required action with others, engagement in a collective oppositional endeavor – ‘a march.’ Some participants identified their education in social work as a stimulus to joining the value-based ‘march’. For example:

When I was studying in social work, in fact there was a class, one particular lecture that taught us about when you're going to undertake a complaint to your institution or your agency – how to align yourself with allies, including management to get that done. And I took that advice really literally and incorporated that into my analysis of any job that I ever took.

Another participant reflected how the perspective and commitments that she had developed in her social work education had changed over time: *when I started I think I was very different – I think I've been a bit jaded by my work experience*. Invited to unpack and clarify this further, she stated that

when I started I was a lot more optimistic...very very much anti-oppressive, very much like, you know, everything – self-reflective and recognizing the power imbalance and – but I find that it's changed now where I feel a little more...I don't know, like...little bit of...just jadedness I guess about, about more the system, about what it does to, to people and how they end up.

This perception of the 'system' impacting the participant's values resonated with the exploratory purpose of this study. Her experience suggested that something happened to her values that had its origins outside her education, upbringing, or situated personal/professional values – the impact of her organizational context. The next section will provide more examples of the tensions and collisions of participants which are suggestive of originating from organizational contexts.

Value Collisions in Organizational Contexts

Invited to talk about their experiences of ethical dilemmas in practice, participants described instances where the values and commitments described above were compromised by the constraints or demands of the organizations that employed them. They all offered complex examples of instances in which organizational policies or cultures required them to act counter to their perceptions of what they thought right, instances in which their professional judgements and ethical commitments were trumped or at least challenged by organizational imperatives.

For example, one participant described working in a shelter environment and an example of a specific time where she was prevented from exercising her professional judgement in keeping with her values. The shelter struggled with scarce resources and

had a tight system of determining risk, and thus priorities for admission. In the instance she described, she felt strongly that the standard assessment procedure gave priority to a family in much less jeopardy than another. She wanted to exercise her discretion, to act on that assessment and admit the needier family. She was, however, thwarted by the agency's procedural assessment of risk which forced her to use her authority in a way she thought wrong and possibly dangerous. She reflected that, *my discretion told me to take her, but policy told me not to, and management told me not to*. She shared her distress at this situation and at having to use her authority in a way she felt wrong: *the power that I had was tremendous and I'm exercising it against someone with no power and who is at the mercy of what I can and cannot do*. For this participant, the value collision came in the form of wanting to choose the people who were more at risk, but instead having to choose who the organization dictated through its eligibility *policy*.

Another participant working in a criminal justice setting found that organizational protocols constrained her interventions in ways she judged were not in the clients' best interest. She stated: *yet I know ...that [a self-determination approach] would help their recovery, it would make them, it respects what they do, it would help build their self-esteem, and I can't give it to them*. She elaborated: *my greatest professional issue is that, the best interest of the [client] is not always the best interest of the public or the best interest of the community or the [organization]*. Her frustration at this was evident in the interview: *you've got the tools to do something, and to be told "you can't do it."*

A participant employed in a complex secondary setting observed that the source of her value conflicts lay in having to *serve two masters* as she was accountable to more

than one funder and in more than one reporting line. She talked about having to navigate opposing policies and protocols from the different organizational *masters* and this resulted in the responsibility to make things fit together and deal with consequences if it did not. She reflected: *so it's sort of like ramming the round peg into the square hole. But we've, we've come to a compromise in how we're going to do that.* Her use of the word *masters* suggested that she experienced subordination in a way that conflicted with her professional autonomy and freedom to choose, and that the collisions occurred because she was caught in the middle of competing accountabilities.

In another scenario of ethical tension presented by a participant, the pressure to perform her job effectively in funders' terms created a collision of values and accountabilities. Meeting performance pressures for this individual came in the form of *getting stats [statistics]... because my role is funding-dependent...if we don't get the statistic...then I don't have a job.* When I asked her how this responsibility was communicated to her she responded that it was directly stated to her, that in order for her to keep her job she was accountable to the funding providers and it was her sole responsibility to ensure that numbers came in. *There's a lot of pressure on me...my role is pretty important in the organization.* The collision for her was the frustration that she had to account for the value of her work only in numerical and budgetary terms, without any regard for what she may have contributed to her clients in the form of meaningful practice. Her agency valued outcomes of service that only reflected funders' needs, not quality of care – a criticism and concern that she seemingly carried in isolation.

Tensions also arose in instances in which participants did not agree with an agency policy or practice framework/model. One participant gave an example of her organization and management not *quite understand[ing] duty to report* if a child might be at risk. Instead of acting on the legal, and in her perception ethical, responsibility to do so, she shared that staff were discouraged *from calling CAS*. She added that some staff, including her, would call *anonymously from home* in order to not let her organization know they called because *you [would] get in trouble*. She presented this tension in the context of feeling concerned for the child's well-being but frustrated that her organization would not intervene. She felt that the organization did not want to be held responsible if something did happen. She described this organizational value as a *liability perspective of ethics*. Reflectively, she stated *all I think in my head is the worst has to happen before anything changes*.

Another participant described an incident where staff were trying to help a client who was disruptive and a danger to themselves and others. But because of the organization's policies and protocols and commitment to a harm reduction model of care they could not contain the client in an environment that was more restrictive for them, even though they judged it would be safer and clearly in the individual's best interests. Instead, the disruptive behavior persisted for several hours, almost to the point of creating a very dangerous situation. She stated that *they all got caught up in the...policy, policy, policy, follow the policy, follow the policy – and they did*.

The instances of value collisions described above derive from a reading of the interview transcripts for content, what Ristock (2002) terms the first, 'literal' reading.

Read ‘discursively’ (Ristock’s second approach to listening to interviews), the emotional tone of participants’ accounts was striking and revealing. Interviews often included expressions of the impact of value tensions on participants’ feelings and emotions. These personal/emotional experiences of participants illuminated the depth of impact that value collisions had on their ability to perform their roles, maintain ethical values, and sustain a sense of well-being. For example, one participant explained how policies and procedures would get in the way of providing what she deemed effective service to her clients.

When I asked her how she thought she worked within those restrictions she replied *I think I try really hard not to let it affect my practice...I try really hard to keep, like separate hats*. When speaking of *separate hats*, she makes a distinction between herself as practitioner and herself as agent of the organizational procedures and policies. Asking her to clarify a little more her commitment to wearing separate hats, she suggested, *I try really hard just to do my work with my patients – that’s the work I love*. The personal cost that came with her experience is that she felt the need to split herself personally and emotionally from a workplace role that she often felt collided with her own values for ethical practice.

Recalling a setting in which she had worked in the past, another participant described a difficult situation (described above) in which her organization’s policy on eligibility forced her to deny a very jeopardized family a spot in a shelter because another family took procedural priority. She had to communicate the decision to the single mother concerned, backtracking on previous assurances that she would be admitted and not offering any explanation. She described the phone call as *heartbreaking*. Her

strength of feeling at the time was evident in the interview and her re-telling of the experience.

After she had described a clash of values that she attributed to role ambiguity and organizational inertia, I asked another participant about the effect of the tensions for her. She responded: *that it burns like a quiet anger in me and that all it does is fuel me to eventually become management and then ensure that I never make these mistakes.* Her use of words and their force suggest that the experience had long-lasting and ongoing effects. Language of *it burns* and *quiet anger* was suggestive of the longevity of the emotions, and it also led her to *fuel* a form of resistance by becoming management and *never* making the same mistakes.

The participant who had described organizational protocols preventing her from supporting a disruptive client to safer conditions and seeing danger escalate also shared how the experience made her feel and its emotional legacy:

It's indescribable. It is indescribable because you go into social work or any other caring professions to help. And then to be standing there, knowing you've got the tools to help and being told, 'stand and watch.' And you almost want to say 'don't make me watch...if you won't let me help don't make me watch.' But you can't not. You can't reject and you never would reject someone, but then you stand and watch it. And it is sooo frustrating. You go through everything, you get angry, you get upset...you cry, you scream...and then you stand there.

Her reaction suggested elicited feelings of sadness, which led to frustration, and finally seemingly ended in impotence.

The personal/emotional impact of participants' ethical tensions significantly indicated the seriousness and long lasting affect – not only professionally, but personally as well. Their experiences were humbling for me because they demonstrated how they had to navigate such personal conflicts, sometimes in such isolation. Moreover, their experiences also suggested that there was/is incredible resilience in many of these participants because not only were they able to share these experiences with me, which made them potentially vulnerable, but they were also able to keep moving forward and trying to work towards resolution or change.

These examples of value collisions in organizational contexts illuminated the complexity and texture of ways in which participants felt that they were unable to work in keeping with their understanding of and commitment to ethical practice and the values they held. Having a clear picture of the articulated and embedded values along with these examples of value collisions, the next section will focus on the participants' understanding of the origins of their collisions and their external causes.

Origins of the Collisions

In all of the experiences of value collisions that participants shared, there were clear linkages made to organizational and external causes. While no one explicitly used language such as “neoliberalism” or “managerialism,” participants' accounts were rich with examples of the saturation of those political/ideological influences and their penetration of front-line practice. Many participants attributed the value conflicts they experienced to policies and laws. Referring back again to the difficult situation with a

dangerous client, the participant acted against what she thought was her client's best interests because of organizational policy. She stated:

'...why did we do it ?' 'We did it because it was policy.' 'We did it, we thought we were following the policy.' 'Yes you were following the policy, did it feel right?' 'No it didn't feel right.' 'So why were you doing it?' 'Because it was policy.' 'But was it right?' 'No it wasn't right, but we were following' – you know? And there you go.

This was clearly frustrating for this individual because *the law upholds* and dictated her practice. I asked her what would need to change for her to be able to act in accordance with what was, in her view, ethical practice; she chuckled and said: *ha, the laws would have to change...it's quite simple.* Her candid yet starkly realistic perceptions of the origins of the ethical collisions were clearly laid out. Much like the experience of a participant in the previous section who adapted to a *liability perspective of ethics*, laws and legislation were often a source of tension and dilemma for many social work practitioners, which is echoed in other literature on organizational constraints (Evans & Harris, 2004).

Funding cuts and loss of budgetary resources were accompanied by the technologies of surveillance and performance measurement characteristic of managerialism and austerity regimes. Participants referred, for example, to the benchmarks they were expected to meet and the outcomes they were expected to document, similar to those discussed by Banks (2011). For those participants who worked with more than one funder or reporting line, for example the participant who

served two masters, these managerial technologies required them to be accountable and attentive to multiple sources of funding, benchmarks, service outcomes, and leadership.

Similarly, the example from the previous section of the participant needing to meet benchmarks to keep her own job suggested that she had a clear understanding of the origins of the value collisions in her organization. Participants recognized that they wanted to exercise their best ethical judgement in these situations, but that they also had a responsibility to *prove* that their work, however they approached it, was fiscally accountable.

Along with expectations from the workplace to meet benchmarks, efficiency, and outcomes, participants also identified organizational inertia (or the “way things are done”) as a factor underlying the value collisions with which they struggled. One participant described the dangers of adopting a *moral myopia*, a concept defined in the literature as “a distortion of moral vision, ranging from shortsightedness to near blindness, which affects an individual's perception of an ethical dilemma” (Drumwright & Murphy, 2005, p. 6). She suggested that because of a “blind” tendency to follow the rules without question, there was a possibility for their values to be subsumed and subordinated by a predisposition to justify actions unquestioningly simply because ‘*this is the way we’ve always done it.*’ *You get into ‘this is the way it is’ and ‘this is the way it has to be.’*

In the interviews, I followed up on some participants’ accounts of organizational inertia or ‘moral myopia’ to ask what would happen if they questioned the taken-for-granted ‘way we’ve always done it’. The participant troubled by the way her organization

limited her ability to be transparent explained that the response to her questions would be: *well you can quit, we can find another [person] in your place.* When I asked her where and how directly this message was communicated, she shared that it sometimes came from conversations with management:

when you push back and complain and they remind you about the privilege of being employed and sort of the privilege of the office environment and how it's better than other jobs that people have...then it becomes coercive, as most jobs are.

Her understanding that she was expendable calls attention to the risks that practitioners may run if they choose not to comply with organizational demands – risks taken up later in discussion of change strategies and resistance.

Another value collision attributed to organizational inertia concerned a participant's frustration at the inattention to cultural competency in her organization's rules and regulations: *which is very starkly hypocritical to the social work understanding of being 'anti-oppressive' and being understanding.* When I probed to ask about her ability to work around the seemingly unexamined rules that created this tension, she suggested that her agency *is very good about that,* but then qualified her comment by asking reflectively: *but then what's the point of the rule if we keep breaking it?* Her comment raises interesting questions about ambiguities and contradictions in organizational rules and regulations. While at face value it seems illogical, they may – as Evans and Harris (2004) note and as is taken up in discussion later – offer opportunities for creative and ethical practice.

When speaking about their organizations' rules and regulations and the value collisions they generated, some participants expressed frustration that they were authored at levels far above theirs in the hierarchy and without any input or feedback from them:

For example:

my decision is informed by a policy written by people far higher up than I am and any little changes that happen come down the pipeline and when I question 'why' I can't be told because it's far too secret and far too embedded in strategic planning that I'm not supposed to know about.

She felt that her capacity for decision-making was *determined by people behind red tape that I'm not allowed to touch.* Another participant observed:

I find that where I work it's not always clear...they have, like a manual, a staff manual, but it's always changing because of the environment. There aren't really – there's always grey areas, so I find that from one day to the next our manager is saying... 'you know what, we're not going to do it that way anymore, we're going to do it this way.... it's such a changing environment, you can't really keep these strict rules and that there's a lot of inconsistency on how they're enforced.

Her observation suggests the seeming whimsy of unexplained and constant shifts in rules and their interpretation. Importantly, too, this participant recognizes that there are 'grey areas', the possibilities of which are taken up below and in discussion.

Spaces & Possibilities for Ethical Action & Change

In their accounts of ethical tensions and value collisions, participants alluded or referred directly to their ideas about or efforts resist or “push back” against some of the perceived origins of value collisions. In doing so they offered valuable insights into spaces and possibilities for ethical action and change within constraining organizational

contexts. Their observations resonate with Banks' conceptualization of the many forms that resistance takes and particularly with her distinction between "quiet challenges" and "noisy challenges" (Banks, 2011, p. 19-20).

Quiet Challenges:

As noted earlier, one participant in a secondary setting, spoke of being accountable to *two masters* as her practice was shaped by the legal and procedural policies of two governing organizations. In her mind, this was a source of tension but also of possibility: *but within that very strictly defined parameter, there is a lot of room for creativity and flexibility within that and I think part of my role is to find that creativity and flexibility that serves the people that we serve.* She and another participant highlighted how they worked within rules and regulations without actually breaking them: *we can't go beyond what's in the order, but we can manipulate within the order...that's where the creativity comes in.* The participant uses the phrase *manipulate within* which indicates again that there was not an overt breach of protocol, but an opportunity to seize for change and action in her interpretation of it.

Another participant working in a shelter-like setting described an example concerning her organization's policy on children being supervised at all times by their parent(s). However, she suggested that she and her colleagues knew that, in practice, flexibility in applying this policy was needed. She noted that they had: *an understanding that we can only pick so many fights with residents before we either damage the rapport or we are just far too stoic in our approach.* To avoid this she sometimes supervised the child(ren) by herself. I asked her if this resistance was frowned upon at her agency and

she replied *I've never been reprimanded...I just justify it as I'm supervising the child.* Therefore, in this example she did not overtly break a rule in place but instead *justified* her compliance with the rule by stating that she was supervising. In this way the rule was still being followed but the participant had worked within the rule to best serve her relationships with clients. She understood that the rule was too restrictive but also that there was an ability to enact a 'quiet' resistance (Banks, 2011, p.19-20). She also understood that the origins of the rule was also flawed, which may also have sustained her in her ongoing resistance to it.

'Noisy Challenges':

In more of an overt activist experience, one participant, with humour, gave the example of coming *close to creating a coup* with co-workers in their research organization. Asked to elaborate, she shared that she had created her own space for change, to the benefit of herself and her colleagues:

I organize with coworkers and...I organized weekly meetings where just the front-line [staff] would talk about tips and tricks that helped them work and navigate through their workload and to eliminate inefficiency for our benefit – not necessarily for the benefit of management. Management then decided to join in on these meetings and sort of, circumvent my 'unionization tactics,' but, which we allowed and now they're called staff meetings.

I followed up this example to ask whether her efforts had worked and whether the changes were sustained. She responded that the space for change was ongoing and that: *it's helped us because we can now vent, and now we vent in front of management so that they know we're human too – it's worked* and the agency front line staff became

unionized which she acknowledged feels *fair*. Moreover, the concept of having a union had been helpful in events where change needed to happen and that she felt like they could advocate against some of the tensions described because they were able *to make our voice actually translate into action* – which is similar to the idea of having a shared critical consciousness.

Overt action of collectively organizing with co-workers was framed around workload and feeling *micromanaged* rather than direct service moments, but clearly was related to the collisions this participant experienced. The participant also recognized the possible risks of her overt resistance. She described herself as: *very cocky and probably way too self-assured, so it [overt resistance] will probably bite me in my ass one day, but I'm too young and reckless to think of that consequence now*. Prompting her to clarify why she thought this might be so, she responded: *I always forget, now that I'm employed, I can be fired. Which is why I think sometimes what I do is reckless. But I'm young and ambitious enough to find other work if I don't like the fact that I'm being treated with disrespect at an agency that I am*.

Solidarity-building:

All of the participants in this study dealt with the ethical tensions they experienced differently and of course their particular settings also created different possibilities for finding supports and allies. It was evident in their accounts that ethical tensions were difficult to avoid and could be pre-occupying:

These are the kinds of tensions and these are the kinds of dilemmas that go home with you. And that needle in the back of your mind, you can't turn it off. Another commented that we [self and colleagues] talk about, we have

to...if we don't...um...I don't know where we'll all end up.

I asked participants “How do you process this or other tensions with others? Or do you tend to process them on your own? Do you think or know others have had experiences the same as you?” (See Appendix C – Interview Guide). All but one of the participants responded that they talk to some degree to other members of their organization, including *staff, an executive director, and management* who are *on-call for guidance and to help navigate* decisions.

One participant noted that their organization had *ethicists on staff* and that *as teams [they] talk about it*. Speaking about a health organization that assumes interdisciplinary collaboration among professionals, a participant observed: *we talk about it from different perspectives – because we do see it different, for as difficult as it is for the social workers to watch it, it's doubly difficult for the physicians to watch*. She continued: *they feel it from all sorts of different – so we need to talk about it or we will all get just...it will be like a black hole*. This suggested that as social workers, she and her colleagues did not always feel isolated from their own professional experiences of ethical tensions but rather also experienced and sympathized with other professionals in the organization.

One participant recollected past experience in a leadership role and the support she needed and derived from fellow managers: *I think they [managers] saw me as one of the group...and we used each other...because we all knew [some of the same experiences within the organization]*. Experience of tensions, albeit unique and possibly perceived differently by each person, are universal in the sense that it permeates each role, regardless of experience or hierarchal status.

One participant also discussed the importance of having distractions and noted the value of *dark humour* within her team. She suggested that this type of humour was a form of *survival* from the *painful* things they saw and experience. Similarly, another participant suggested that her team foregoes teambuilding exercises and would rather *get to the big stuff* around the difficult tensions and experience because *as much as our patients suffer, we take on a degree of their suffering*.

Another participant discussed the importance of solidarity outside of the organizational context as well, suggesting

what person in social work does not go to the pub...doesn't go out to somewhere and enjoy some beverage, alcoholic or not, and just completely unleash, within means of never releasing someone's name, about how frustrated they are, like, right?

Her question spoke to the universality of feelings experienced by others of the tensions and conflicts and the expectation that *they'll speak with the same fire and passion over a beer*.

Solidarity, as suggested by this participant, may not always need to lead to overt action but is still important for mutual and understanding support. Moreover, solidarity also may lead to a shared critical consciousness amongst friends or colleagues. She reflected: *it's fascinating that we all talk the same way and complain and, you know, pardon my French, bitch the same way about these concepts, but won't necessarily won't take action – and I respect that*.

During the interviews and in my effort to draw forward participants' ideas about possibilities and ideas for working toward change, I asked a broad question: "What would

need to change in order for you to act in accordance to what is, in your view, ethical judgment.” I felt initially disappointed by their responses as the question tended to generate either more information about struggles and dilemmas or references to what felt to me immobilizingly ‘large’ requirements for change, for example changing the law. I realized the importance of examining my own reaction and recognizing that disappointment is an inappropriate research response – even as it stemmed from my own impatience, as a relative newcomer to the field, to see and hope for change. On reflection, I wondered whether I could have worded the question in a way that would have been more possible for participants to engage with. It would have been interesting to see if I had asked instead: “Realistically, what would need to change to relieve the ethical tension you felt in this instance?” Or, “In an ideal world, etc., etc.”

The experiences and attitudes of hope and hopefulness for change were evident even though they were often latently expressed due to the critical and often challenging ethical tensions. The ability of these participants to articulate and understand their ethical tensions in the various contexts of the professional practice, values, and organizational settings supports the argument that social workers have strong and diverse ethical principles.

Developing the Skills for Finding & Using Spaces for Change

In the process of interviews with participants it made logical sense for the ‘flow’ (Ristock, 2002) of the conceptual discussion to ask participants what they thought could better prepare/could have better prepared them and others to understand and navigate the

kinds of tensions they shared. In this way their contributions led into a theoretical discussion on how social work ethics can be approached in theory and practice.

In the context of a very complex organization with many strict parameters for practice a participant responded:

Better prepared...I don't think there's a way you can prepare anybody. I mean we can tell, we can show, we can explain, we can read...I think that's a major consideration and I think it's a particular consideration for social workers right along – is that you have the mandate of your organization and your own personal standards, which you don't – hopefully you don't violate. But, it all forces us into, sort of a marching order. And I think it's something we don't think about a lot because it's too challenging to think about.

She felt, in other words, that the space for change does not come easily and that only experience will help practitioners become prepared for the tensions they will face. This also suggested that there is an 'inevitability' which requires a response that is often too remote that one can only 'hope' that they do not 'violate' their values.

Another participant reflected that change in organizational contexts can be accomplished by *trying to bring people along*. Clarifying further she suggested that people may not always recognize that something needs to change or have the critical consciousness that she voiced, but that it is important to allow the space and time to *let people catch up a bit*. She also proposed that part of this patience comes with experience and knowing how to be *different* in approaching change. She recommended that schools should *challenge students more on learning what ethical tension are*. She and another participant also suggested that clinical supervision is one way to guide and support

practitioners who find themselves not able to see past the emotional labour of their ethical tensions.

Building on the theme of education as a support for change, one participant shared the following:

I wish that these things could be disseminated outside of an institution, like a university. I think...I understand why employers would not wanna run a professional development session called you know, 'tensions in the organization and overcoming structural issues' – I understand why they may not think that's a benefit...[but] I think it makes the organization better...at a cost of an inconvenience or noise.

She stated that this idea would be a 'cost' to the organization which, based on literature of neoliberal structures, could possibly mean a disruption of the ethos of narrow parameters of practice and adherence to policy and procedure. However, she suggested that it would also make the organization 'better' despite being an 'inconvenience.' This participant has alluded to the idea that supportive environments could potentially alleviate the tensions from social workers and make their work contexts more conducive to ethical practice. These ideas are taken up for further discussion in the following chapter.

Discussion

This study explored social workers' perceptions of ethical tensions in their practice that resulted from conflicts between their own values and commitments and the values and demands of the organizations in which they worked. From their rich accounts of these tensions, two particular themes stood out and are taken up here for fuller discussion. First, in participating at all and in candidly sharing their experiences of these value collisions, participants demonstrated clear attachment to firmly-grounded values. Second, they were able to articulate the origins of these value collisions and to identify forms and spaces for change and/or resistance in pursuit of what they judged to be ethical conduct. These findings resonate with those in other research and literature, affirming that social workers care about their work and continue to "fight" (Fine & Teram, 2013, p. 1321) for what they believe to be morally and ethically valuable despite neoliberal organizational pressures that make that difficult (Banks, 2011).

Depth of Value Commitments

Attachment to social work and personal values came into every participant's account and was expressed in various ways. I was amazed at the resiliency and dedication of the work of some of the participants, despite there clearly being contexts that made adherence to their values difficult. It was humbling for me, as a relatively new social worker and apprentice researcher, to hear the dedication to some of the values which are at the root of social work notably, to support people through meaningful relationships rooted in altruistic and social justice principles. This was visibly difficult

for participants to accomplish and they described value collisions within complex and often contradictory working contexts. Banks (2011) suggests that it is in engagement with these difficulties and contradictions that social workers' value commitments are illuminated and tested:

In social work, complexity, uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions need to be acknowledged and used, along with the recognition that ethics is not about simple dilemmas, that is choices between two courses of action. Ethical being and action require hard work on the part of social workers – a process of constantly negotiating and working out what roles to take, questioning what we are doing and why and being alert to the dominance of the managerialist and neo-liberal agendas (Banks, 2011, p. 19).

As noted earlier, some literature suggests that values perform a predominantly latent function in social work (Bisman, 2004); they are principles and ideas that are articulated and invoked but often not really worked out in the complexities of actual practice. The findings of this study clearly do not support that view. Participating social workers expressed strong attachment to values, often with evident feeling, and the ethical tensions they described were not something that they simply accepted or resigned themselves to as 'the way it is' They struggled when recognizing that they lacked the power or ability to act in accordance with their judgment of ethical practice. Indeed their participation in this study demonstrated that they wanted to talk about the dilemmas they faced despite the difficulty and risks of doing so. Arguably, contributing to the research required candour and courage.

Banks (2011) identifies courage as: "one of the moral qualities or virtues that [are] vital for social work" (p. 19). Her observation and my experience of the study

participants draws attention to questions of personal qualities, morals and the intrinsic characteristics of individuals, as does the theory of virtue ethics (McBeath & Webb, 2002). Some analyses of social work ethics highlight more the skills and requirements of the profession and the codified articulations of occupational values (Banks, 2011; Brodie, 2007). The integration of these professional codes or standards with personal qualities and character is, however, important to recognize. It was evident in this study's participants' accounts of the biographical roots of their commitments and echoed others' research in this area (Miller et al., 2006). Clark highlights both the inevitability and the value of this personal-professional integration:

Human service practitioners necessarily express their own personal character and dispositions in their every act of professional service. This is not a weakness of training but an essential feature of the proper practice of their profession; without it, what should always be, in some measure, an interpersonal engagement becomes merely a mechanical transaction that voids the core purposes of the profession. It is right, therefore, to attend to the character, as well as the technical skill, of individuals who wish to work as professionals in the human services (2006, p. 87-88).

This integration of the personal and the professional and the contradictory positioning of social work as an occupation have always characterized the field, generated tensions and required active attention. In the current context of neoliberal restructuring and erosion of social programs and as this study has affirmed, the tensions now assume particular forms and generate particular dangers. Banks (2011) and other observers note the particular danger of the neoliberal discourse that reduces social and structural problems to matters only of residual, individualized intervention and would frame ethics only in that narrow space. They stress the importance of politicizing ethics,

of resisting their reduction to the confines of individual practice. Weinberg is particularly articulate in making this case:

Social workers would benefit, when constructing their ethical responsibilities, by moving beyond the spotlight on the one-to-one relationship between worker and client...Taking into account the broader structure and paradoxes that shape and limit practice would be a starting point (Weinberg, 2010, p. 40).

Banks (2011) echoes this call by suggesting that we not only make ethics personalized but also politicized. She states, “if we regard social work as a social movement as much as a profession or job, then we need to relate social work ethics explicitly to movements that promote practice that is variously categorized as anti-oppressive, critical, structural and radical” (Banks, 2011, p. 17). Through some of the examples that they offered to illustrate tensions in their practice, study participants captured exactly this broader understanding of ethics in social work, drawing attention not only to ethical issues in their direct practice but also in their working conditions and in organizational arrangements that failed to address service users’ needs.

The questions, findings, and analysis pose future concerns about how to foster this politicized understanding and, in turn, the skills to navigate managerial organizational forms and ideologies. Of particular concern is the social worker who may be new to the profession or who is navigating the tensions in isolation, without support. The purpose of this discussion is to give practical and theoretical suggestions that will help those individuals feel supported as a collective of social workers, and also enable to them to seek and act on the ‘courage’ implied in naming and facing the tensions. In other words,

as Banks suggests: "...caring enough to become frustrated and angry, and believing enough to continue in your work to allow change" (2011, p. 20).

Joining the 'March'

One of the study participants referred to 'the march' that she felt social workers joined, conveying an energizing sense of a collective project in pursuit of socially just aims. She and the other participants joined this march through their 'quiet' and, less often, 'noisy' (Banks, 2011) efforts to resolve tensions by working around, resisting and challenging barriers to what they deemed ethical practice. Fine and Teram (2013) suggest that the resistant actions or 'moral stands' of social workers include "overt actions" that deal "with the perceived injustice directly and openly" (p. 1314). In their research, they also found covert actions of resistance demonstrated "through less visible means that subverted agency policies by taking actions not sanctioned by the organisation in order to achieve what social workers considered an ethically preferred outcome for their clients" (Fine & Teram, 2013, p. 1314). Examples of both were found in this study and suggest that spaces for ethical practice can be found or created in and through the 'cracks' in neoliberal structures.

Banks (2011) suggests that ethical action for change "entails working in the spaces between the contradictions of care and control, prevention and enforcement, empathy and equity, ethics is definitely not about simply following rules – it is about questioning and challenging, feeling and acting" (p.19). That social workers accomplish these covert and overt 'ethical actions for change' reveals the fragility and incomplete dominance of neoliberal philosophies. There is room for social workers to exercise their

ethical discretion and to hold fast to their personal values and professional commitments. Paradoxically, the proliferation of rules and procedures can create opportunities for change and the exercise of discretion. Evans and Harris (2004) suggest that, “The existence of rules is not inevitably the death-knell for discretion. Rather, by creating rules, organizations create discretion. There is always the question of which rules apply in particular situations; a quest that does not always have a clear answer” (p. 883). As some of this study’s participants noted, having multiple and quickly-changing sets of organizational procedures produced ‘grey areas’ and spaces for uncertainty that allowed them room to manoeuvre. Clarke (2004) eloquently states that “Dominant strategies do not occupy an empty landscape. They have to overcome resistances, refusals, and blockages” (p. 44).

Similarly, Fine and Teram (2013) remind us that the foundations of neoliberalism and the oppressive structures they support are not set in stone. They are flexible and unstable, as demonstrated by the findings of this study in which participants found ways to resist and maneuver within them. These findings are echoed by Aronson and Smith (2010, p. 532) who suggest that this maneuvering “illuminates individuals’ experiences of unease and suggests how their resistance – whether small and quiet or organized and explicit – can lead to the ‘destabilizing, weakening and greater incoherence of dominant discourses such as New Public Management’” and the similar philosophies and practices characteristic of neoliberalism.

However, finding and using the cracks and spaces for change does not necessarily come easily to every social worker. Doing so requires critical analytical and practical

skills and supports. Development of these skills should not be the responsibility of the individual practitioner, yet, in this study and others like it, participants experienced themselves as fairly isolated and often as unprepared for the complexity of the organizational pressures they encountered. The question therefore is how to take these findings and make meaningful suggestions that will be beneficial and encouraging to the isolated practitioner without making spaces for change seem too idealistic or impractical for those who struggle with ‘this is the way it is.’

Pave the Way

This study has demonstrated the importance of educating and supporting new practitioners as well as seasoned veterans in understanding and navigating the ethical tensions that characterize current practice. So how do we as a profession allow space and create supports for the enactment of a politicized ethics in social work? And how can its complexities be best engaged with students and new practitioners without demoralizing them? Does it mean, as one participant suggested, waiting until experience is accumulated and the hard shell of resistance forms and practitioners learn how to navigate these tensions on their own? Or can we teach ethics in a way that permeates every sphere of social work education?

As a new social worker and thinking about my own future in practice, I find myself processing the implications of the study findings in a reflexive and critical way. My perceptions of the conflicting experience I had in my time as a practitioner are now more textured and complex. The literature that I have explored and the insights of this study’s participants have enabled me to appreciate the depths and complexities of social

work ethics and the ongoing critical debates about the profession's identity and, indeed, the very meaning of ethics and ethical conduct.

A possibility for future research in this area would be to gather perceptions on how ethical practice, in its current neoliberal contexts, affects the structural relationships to the problems social work strives to address. There are authors who have already contributed to this dialogue (Banks, 2011; Evans & Harris, 2004) in a meaningful way but their conversations for the most part are theoretical. Linking perceptions of ethical tensions to the structural conditions of social work practice is one way to allow social work to recognize how its ethical positioning shapes not only professional practice, but also the profession's values collectively.

In regards to educating future social workers, the study findings suggest that much more attention needs to be given to the theoretical underpinnings of social work ethics. For example, if there is a course on confidentiality and informed consent as an important aspect of ethical practice, students should also be taught to identify for themselves why it is important to the values of the profession, as well as their own. As Weinberg (2010) and others suggest, there is need for more teaching and learning about social work ethics as political processes rather than only matters of appropriate conduct in the immediacy of individual worker-client relations. The impacts of social structures and organizational regimes and the need to navigate value collisions can then be addressed and spaces created to identify, support, and find ways towards changing or resisting the tensions.

One participant suggested that ethical education should not stop at the doors of the academic institution but also be integrated into the structures and agencies in which social workers are employed, providing for ongoing learning and development. I agree with this idea and think that organizations could benefit from not only having ‘placement students’ but also having ‘placement agencies’ in which they would be encouraged to create a dialogue with academic institutions in way that opens up avenues for both educating and supporting social workers. Recognition from social service organizations that social work practice is complex and often challenging is one way to support practitioners and to enhance ethical conduct and practices agency wide – a collective and institutional aspiration, not only the obligation of the often isolated practitioner. Space for change and resistance needs to be a part of the ethical values framework – a recognition that ideological discourses are not totalizing. This also means that there is recognition that the tensions will be experienced, and that this means social workers are doing their job in struggling not to compromise their values. Although teaching this through practitioners’ initial education (BSW programs for many) can have meaningful purpose, the findings of this study indicate that it is a career long process. Much as unions offer a collective arena to give voice and represent workers’ concerns, social work could use a collective, meaningful voice that is aware of, encourages, and supports its professionals in the complex enactment of their intrapersonal and interpersonal commitments. The ethical tensions and value conflicts of social workers should not be diminished or reduced to individual experiences but should be supported and encouraged as spaces for change.

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DATE: _____

APPENDIX “A”
LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

When organizational constraints and practitioners’ values collide; an exploratory study of ethical tensions in social work

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Jane Aronson
School of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23783
E-mail: aronsonj@mcmaster.ca

Student Investigator:

Chad Bouma, BSW, MSW Candidate
School of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
E-mail: boumacj@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study: To explore how social workers make sense of ethical tensions and dilemmas arising from the constraints and cultures of the contemporary social/health service organizations in which they work. Attention will be given to how social workers visualize the changes that would be needed to enable them to resolve dilemmas in keeping with their views of ethical practice, and how they find supports and allies for processing and thinking about ethical struggles.

You are invited to take part in this study in May–June 2015 as part of research I am conducting for the thesis requirements in the Masters of Social Work program. I am hoping to learn more about how social work practitioners understand and navigate ethical tensions shaped by the constraints and cultures of contemporary social/health service organizations. My hope is that the study will contribute to professional debates and practices concerned with social work’s commitments to social justice.

Procedures involved in the Research: Your participation will require you to engage in an interview in which a series of open-ended questions will be asked related to your experience(s) with an ethical issue/problem/dilemma. You will be asked to commit 60 to 90 minutes on one occasion at a neutral and accessible location that you would find convenient to be interviewed: in an office on McMaster campus, at your workplace, or another sufficiently quiet and private location of your choosing. Interviews will be conducted on a one-to-one basis and, with your permission, the entire interview will be recorded and I will also supplement the recording with handwritten notes. Some examples of interview questions I may ask you could include:

- Can you tell me about an ethical dilemma or a particular instance in your practice that you think involved a conflict between your values and those of the organization/setting that employed (s) you?
- Can you tell me more about the organizational expectations/regulations that constrained and/or created conflict for you?

- What would need to change to enable you to act, in this instance, in accordance with your judgement of what you understand as ethical practice?
- How do you process this /other dilemmas with others or on your own? Do you find you're your experience is isolated to you individually, or do you think/know others have had experience(s) the same as you?

I will also ask you for some demographic/background information like your age and education.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts: The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable with (anxious, uneasy about) talking about your feelings and emotions when recalling your experiences around an ethical tension. You can choose not to answer questions that make you uncomfortable or that concern you. It is also possible that the information you provide may make it possible to identify you or your practice setting. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Potential Benefits: The research will not benefit you directly. I hope to learn more about how social workers understand and manage their experiences with ethical dilemmas. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help us to better understand how to educate and train social workers around navigating ethical tensions more comprehensively.

Confidentiality: You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. No one but me will know whether you were in the study unless you choose to tell them.

The information/data you provide will be kept in a locked desk/cabinet where only I will have access to it. Those who elect to participate will be given an identifier ("A1, B2, etc.") that only I will know to hide their identity. This identifier will also be used for my notes and transcribing and all personal or identifying information will be omitted from the transcript. Participants who feel that there may be social risks associated from their data will be given the option to have the data analysis which contains their study contributions sent to them via email to ensure that their identity has been preserved. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed.

Anonymity: Every effort will be made to protect your anonymity. To minimize any risk that you or your work setting may be identifiable when study findings are communicated, I will offer to send, for your review, the portions of the draft study findings which contain data you provided.

b) Legally Required Disclosure: Although I will protect your privacy as outlined above, if the law requires it, I will have to reveal certain personal information (e.g., child abuse).

Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. Withdrawal is an option at any time up until **August 15, 2015**, when I expect to be submitting my thesis.

Information about the Study Results: I expect to have this study completed by approximately **September 2015**. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study:

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

Chad Bouma, boumacj@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Chad Bouma of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.
- Yes.
 - No.

2. Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.
Please send them to me at this email address _____
Or to this mailing address: _____

No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

APPENDIX B

**Email Recruitment Script
Sent on Behalf of the Researcher
by the Holder of the Participants' Contact Information**

**Chad Bouma, BSW
Masters Candidate in Social Work**

Study Title:

When organizational constraints and practitioners' values collide; an exploratory study of ethical tensions in social work

Sample E-mail Subject line: Study of ethical tensions in social work – invitation to participate

Dear Field Instructor/Alumni,

Chad Bouma, a McMaster student, has contacted the School of Social Work at McMaster University asking us to tell our Field Instructors/Alumni about a study he is doing on workers' experiences of ethical tensions in their practice. This research is part of his Master of Social Work program at McMaster University.

The following is a brief description of his study.

I am hoping to learn more about how social work practitioners understand and navigate ethical tensions shaped by the constraints and cultures of contemporary social/ health service organizations. I also hope to understand how these experiences may be influenced from a broader context, including organizational structures and theoretical approaches to social work practice.

If you are interested in getting more information about taking part in Chad's study, please read the brief description below and or **CONTACT CHAD BOUMA DIRECTLY** by using his McMaster email address at boumacj@mcmaster.ca. Your decision to participate or not will be completely confidential and have no bearing on your relationship to the School.

Chad Bouma is inviting you to take part in a 60 to 90 minute face-to-face interview that will take place at a convenient time and location for you. He will work out those details with you. He hopes to learn how social workers like you, perceive ethical tension in social work and how that relates to organizational contexts, generally.

Mr. Bouma has explained that you can stop being in the study at any time during the face-to-face interviews or not answer questions but can still be in the study. He has asked us to attach a copy of his information letter to this email. That letter gives you full details about his study.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

MSW Thesis- Chad Bouma
McMaster- School of Social Work

Darlene Savoy
Director's/Graduate Administrative Assistant
School of Social Work
McMaster University

Appendix C

Interview Questions

When organizational constraints and practitioners' values collide; an exploratory study of ethical tensions in social work

**Chad Bouma, (Master of Social Work student)
(School of Social Work – McMaster University)**

- 1) Could you tell me a little about the nature of your current practice and the role that you occupy in (name of agency/ setting)? How long have you been working there? How do you see your work fitting into the organization's wider mandate and requirements?**

- 2) Can you tell me about a particular instance of an ethical tension in your practice that you think involves/ involved a conflict between your values and those of the organization/setting that employ(s) you?**

- 3) Can you tell me a little more about the organizational expectations or regulations that generated the tension for you? How are the expectations actually relayed or communicated to you?**

- 4) What would need to change to relieve the ethical tension you felt in this instance? What would need to be different to enable you to act in accordance with your judgement of what you understand as ethical practice?**

- 5) Have you shared or discussed this tension(s) with anyone previous to this interview? Why or why not?**

- 6) How do you process this or other tensions with others? Or do you tend to process them on your own? Do you think/know others have had experience(s) the same as you?**

7) Can you think of ways in which you could have been better prepared or could be better supported to understand and navigate the kinds of tension(s) you've described?

8) Are there any dimensions of your experience with collisions between organizational pressures and your own ethical commitments that I haven't asked you about, that you think are important?

END