

Editorial

Transformative social work through justice, education, embodiment, and action

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This issue of *Transformative Social Work* brings together seven papers that collectively challenge the profession to think more deeply and act more boldly in response to the social, political, and institutional conditions shaping social work practice. Across issues of forced displacement, research engagement, practicum education, embodied trauma recovery, anti-fat oppression, and macro-level learning, the contributions in this issue bring us to a central concern: what does it mean for social work to be truly transformative?

Transformation, as these papers show, is not simply a matter of innovation or reform. Nor is it achieved through rhetorical commitments to equity and inclusion alone. Transformative social work requires a willingness to confront the structures that organize dispossession, exclusion, and harm, while also reimagining the educational, ethical, and political foundations of the profession itself. The articles in this issue ask readers to consider not only how social workers respond to injustice, but how the profession might better prepare itself to challenge injustice at its roots.

The first article in the issue is a Brief Note “Deportation after resettlement: The conditional belonging of Bhutanese Americans in the United States” by Lila K. Chamlagai, Kamal Khatiwada, Karun K. Karki, and Sudarshan Pyakurel. This Brief Note sets the tone through its critical examination of the deportation of resettled Bhutanese refugees in the United States (US). Drawing on Mbembe’s necropolitics, Foucault’s biopolitics, Agamben’s sovereign power, and Arendt’s “right to have rights,” the paper reveals deportation as an instrument of state violence that criminalizes and renders vulnerable populations socially and politically disposable. In focusing on Bhutanese refugees—already displaced from Bhutan, later resettled in the US, and then forcibly rerouted through multiple countries into renewed statelessness—the authors expose the devastating human consequences of legal regimes that make belonging conditional. This paper reminds us that social work must not only respond to trauma, but also interrogate the policy systems that produce rightlessness, precarity, and social death.

The second article “Research integration into undergraduate and graduate-level social work curricula: Reflections and perspectives of a social work graduate student” by Tori Lewis shifts the focus from state violence to the future of the profession itself, arguing for increased student involvement in social work research. It challenges the divide between research and practice,

showing instead that research engagement is foundational to informed, reflective, and systemic social work. By advocating for innovative opportunities within practicum education and coursework, the paper emphasizes that students who participate in research are better positioned to connect theory to practice, understand macro-level processes, and envision themselves in roles that extend beyond individual intervention. The article broadens our understanding of what social work education should cultivate: compassionate practitioners and critical knowledge creators capable of contributing to policy, systems change, and social transformation.

Questions of how social work research is taught are taken up by Matthew DeCarlo, Amanda Parsons, Courtney Crenshaw, Adam Fominaya, Mary Secret, and Mary Stewart in “Transforming social work research methods education through open textbook adaptation.” Reporting on a quasi-experiment conducted over two academic years, the authors compare undergraduate students using a customized, free open textbook with those using a commercial textbook in a research methods course. The findings suggest that students using the open educational resource demonstrated gains in research knowledge comparable to those using the commercial text. The article highlights the transformative possibilities of accessible and thoughtfully designed pedagogical resources, while also showing that the democratization of knowledge depends on affordability, relevance, clarity, and meaningful student engagement.

This educational theme is continued in the fourth article, “The social work student as the wounded healer and their experiences in their integrative practicum seminar: An interpretative phenomenological inquiry” by Emily Murphy, which explores the practicum seminar experiences of social work students with histories of adverse childhood experiences. Centering the voices of students through an interpretive-phenomenological lens, the study illuminates how lived histories of adversity shape professional development in complex ways. The article resists simplistic narratives through deficit or vulnerability, and highlights both the strengths and the challenges that emerge when personal histories intersect with professional formation. At the same time, it underscores the responsibility of social work education to create seminar spaces that are responsive, thoughtful, and attentive to students’ readiness, well-being, and growth. This contribution is particularly important because it asks the profession to consider how learning itself can be transformative when students are recognized in their full humanity rather than merely measured against narrow standards of professionalism.

A fifth article “Trauma-sensitive yoga as a complementary tool for survivors of sexual violence and other forms of trauma: Anti-oppressive, culturally sensitive, and inclusive holistic healing” by Jeena Perna, expands the issue’s engagement with trauma and healing by examining trauma-sensitive yoga (TSY) as a therapeutic practice within social work and related care professions. Integrating yoga with trauma-informed care, the paper explores TSY’s potential to support survivors of sexual violence and other forms of trauma through the reclamation of body awareness, self-agency, emotional regulation, and healing from intergenerational trauma. The article offers an important critical discussion of cultural appropriation, emphasizing the need to honor yoga’s origins while ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in Western therapeutic settings. The article considers concerns related to accessibility, facilitator training, and the potential for

harm when such practices are not grounded in anti-oppressive and culturally sensitive frameworks. In arguing for the careful integration of TSY into trauma-informed social work, the article broadens the profession's understanding of healing and calls for ethical, well-trained, and culturally humble practice. It reminds us that transformative social work must remain open to forms of care that are relational, embodied, and responsive to the complex lived realities of survivors.

We are pleased to feature contributions from our 'Voices from the Field'. The article "Reflections from the field: Anti-fat bias in social work" by Jacqueline Rousseau considers the need to address anti-fat bias within social work. Despite the profession's ethical commitments to dignity, equity, and social justice, the paper argues that fatness remains an underacknowledged site of oppression, both within social work discourse and practice. Situating anti-fat bias within neoliberal health frameworks that privilege individual responsibility while obscuring the social determinants of health, the author shows how this form of oppression intersects with racism, sexism, and ableism. The article is significant in naming social work's complicity in the moral regulation of bodies, and urges the profession to move beyond silence and denial toward trauma-informed and anti-oppressive approaches that recognize body-based discrimination as a social justice issue. This intervention expands transformative social work by insisting that liberation must also include a reckoning with the norms, biases, and embodied hierarchies reproduced within helping professions themselves.

The final article is "Social action field placements: Preparing social work students for macro-level practice" by Tanya Smith and Valerya Edelman. This article from our 'Voices from The Field' extends the issue's engagement with education and transformation by focusing explicitly on macro practice and social action in field education. Grounded in the Canadian Association of Social Workers' commitment to broader systems change, the article identifies a longstanding gap in social work curricula: students often learn about social problems without being adequately prepared to advance political, civic, and legislative change. Drawing on more than 17 years of experience at St. Thomas University's School of Social Work, the article demonstrates how a mandatory social action field placement, alongside a co-requisite classroom course, can equip students for meaningful macro-level engagement. This paper is a reminder that field education, must do more than prepare students for direct service, considering skills to advocate, organize, mobilize, and intervene at the level of systems and structures.

The seven articles in this general issue have several interrelated themes that speak directly to transformative social work. The issue shows that social work must remain attentive to how institutional and political systems produce harm. Whether through immigration regimes, exclusionary educational models, or neoliberal health discourses, the articles demonstrate that suffering is never merely individual. It is structured, mediated, and often legitimized by law, policy, and professional norms. Transformative practice therefore requires structural analysis alongside relational care.

The articles in this issue underscore that education is itself a key site of transformation. Four of the seven papers focus directly on the formation of social workers, whether through research

engagement, practicum seminars, or macro-level field placements. Collectively, they argue that social work education must do more than transmit knowledge; it must cultivate critical consciousness, reflexivity, and the ability to translate values into action. Education, in this sense, is not simply preparation for practice; it is practice in the making.

The contributions in this issue call for a more expansive understanding of social justice and healing. Social justice is not limited to a generalized aspiration; it is grounded in struggles over rights, belonging, embodiment, access, and participation. Similarly, healing is not confined to conventional professional interventions, but is understood as relational, embodied, and shaped by culture, power, and history. These papers demand attention to people who are marginalized through borders, bodies, institutions, and ideologies, while also examining its own assumptions, exclusions, and complexities.

What emerges from this collection is a vision of transformative social work as both critical and generative. It is critical in exposing the violence of deportation, the inadequacies of conventional curricula, the challenges embedded in practicum learning, the profession's participation in anti-fat oppression, and the risks of decontextualized or culturally insensitive therapeutic practice. It is generative in its calls for rights-based immigration approaches, stronger integration of research and practice, more responsive educational supports, accessible pedagogies, anti-oppressive engagement with body diversity, ethical trauma care, and expanded opportunities for social action and macro practice.

Transformative social work is not only concerned with helping people endure unjust systems; it also asks how those systems can be confronted, changed, and reimagined. The papers in this issue make an important contribution to that ongoing work. Collectively, they call on the profession to listen more attentively, teach more boldly, reflect more critically, and act more collectively in the pursuit of social justice. In doing so, they offer not only thoughtful critique, but also meaningful direction toward a social work that is more politically engaged, more ethically accountable, and more capable of contributing to just and livable futures.

We extend our sincere thanks to all of the contributors to this issue for their insightful scholarship, critical reflection, and commitment to advancing transformative social work. We also thank our reviewers for their engagement in supporting the scholarship in this issue.

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