Thesis Abstract

Digital media storytelling and the creation of narrative texts using digital technology is an emerging social process that is being utilized by social workers as a means of engaging in critical reflection. As an emerging practice, little is known about the contributions that these texts make to critical social work knowledge; to this end this thesis considers social worker’s use of digital media storytelling as a tool for resisting and remembering and as a tool for critical reflection about their changing field.

Six digital media stories are considered in this thesis. The texts are deconstructed using multi-modal analysis informed by internet/digital media research scholarship. The layers produced through this deconstruction are crystalized using critical discourse, narrative and metaphor analysis in order to develop a complex understanding of the multi-modal and multi-vocal meaning making processes inherent in these stories.

The analysis reveals the way in which discourses and themes present in the contemporary context of social work practice such as neo-liberalism, managerialism and professionalization, are brought to life in the narratives produced by the social workers, who each tell their stories using different genres, from unique points of view, based on their individual subjective positions. The findings point to the significance of digital media storytelling as an important resources for knowledge production and knowledge
dissemination. The analysis further points to the significance of connections between and among these texts as demonstrating the tensions and contradictions that are produced through the workers’ attempts to bring to life the social justice values, goals and objectives of social work to which they are committed in a social climate that is increasingly hostile to such approaches to human service work.
Acknowledgements

In the words of Peter Maurin:

Social Workers and Workers

The training of social workers enables them to help people to adjust themselves to the existing environment.

The training of social workers does not enable them to help people to change the environment.

Social workers must become social minded before they can be critics of the existing environment and free creative agents of the new environment. In the Houses of Hospitality social workers can acquire the art of human contacts and the social-mindedness or understanding of social forces, which will make them critical of the existing environment and free creative agents of a new environment.

Scholars and Bourgeois

The scholar has told the bourgeois that a worker is a man for all that. But the bourgeois has told the scholar that a worker is a commodity for all that. Because the scholar has vision, the bourgeois calls him a visionary. So the bourgeois laughs at the scholar’s vision and the worker is left without vision. And the worker left by the scholar without vision talks about liquidating both the bourgeois and the scholar.

The scholars must tell the workers what is wrong with the things as they are. The scholars must tell the workers how a path can be made from the things as they are to the things as they should be. The scholars must collaborate with the workers in making a path from the things as they are to the things as they should be.

The scholars must become workers so the workers may be scholars.
With Thanks…

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Chapter One: Introduction

Donna Baines (2007), critical social work scholar describes social work as a deeply “contested site” (pg. 20). Baines’ statement taps into one of the enduring struggles among social workers, that is, the struggle over the representation of our work and thus how our occupation is defined and governed. It is a long saga, stretching across continents and generations. It is a story of resisting and remembering extending over more than 150 years (Baines, 2011b, pg. 8-9; Hick, 2001; Hiersteiner & Peterson, 1999; Holosko, 2003; Lundy, 2004; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011).

The enduring nature of this struggle tells its own story about the importance of resisting and remembering in the making of social work. This remembering emphasizes practices of social change and collaborative relationships with clients; this resisting stands against a unitary understanding of expertise, the pathologization of client experiences and a professional identity that separates workers from clients. Together these acts of struggle tell a story about who we are, who we hope to be and our hopes for the expression of these selves in our practice.

Bearing all this in mind, my thesis brings together two contemporary threads in this long history of struggle. One of these threads, which forms the background and analytic context of this thesis, is the tradition of social change oriented social work, or ‘critical social work practices’ as they are sometimes described (Baines, 2011b). The origins of these practices trace their roots back to progressive, radical movements in social work including traditions of feminist practice dating back to the Settlement House movements (Baines, 2011b pg. 8; Hiersteiner & Peterson, 1999; Lundy, 2004; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011).
The second thread, which is the focus of my research, is a new phenomenon that does not yet have a name. It is the recent explosion on YouTube of dozens of ‘videos’ about social work that, I will argue, constitute a new domain of remembering and resisting that may also be linked to social change traditions in social work and which, by its emergent nature, constitutes a new era in social workers’ struggle. My analysis of these ‘videos’ which can also be understood as “digital stories” (La Rose, 2012; Lundby, 2008; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009), focuses on a number of digital texts available in the public domain on the Internet based digital media sharing site YouTube. The stories I analyze emphasize social work as a form of work and social workers as workers. These texts challenge and critique conventional notions of social work and thus my analysis seeks to create a deeper understanding of social workers’ practices of resistance and remembering. This analysis considers these acts as processes that allow workers to maintain integrity and cope with the obstacles they face as they attempt to bring about social change in a society and in a professional culture where support for this kind of practice is increasingly contested terrain. To this end, this thesis addresses the following research questions:

- How are social workers using digital storytelling as a tool for resisting and remembering?
- How are traditional social work practices like reflective, empowerment and advocacy practices mediated and mediatized through social workers practices of digital media storytelling?
- How are social work discourses expressed in digital media storytelling?
Making a Case for Stories

Critical anti-oppressive perspectives seek to centre the margin as a way of promoting more emancipatory social practices (Fook, 2002; hooks, 1990; Mullaly, 2009; Scheman, 1997; Van Dan Berg, 1995). The role of ‘narrative’ (Fook, 2002; Van Den Bergh, 1995), experiential knowledge (Baines, 2011b; Adams, Dominelli & Payne, 2009; Goldstein, 1990; Holosko, 2003) and ‘first voice’ perspectives (Carriere & Strega, 2009; Sinclair, Hart, & Bruyere, 2009) in this centering process has been described as a process that allows for the reclamation of “subjugated knowledge” (Hartman, 1994; Foote & Frank, 1999; King Keenan, 2001).

From the early feminist movements (Baines, Evans & Neysmith, 1991), to the era of civil rights and libertarian movements, second wave feminism and black feminist thought, through to post-structural orientations in the field, understandings of experiential knowledge and narratives as forms of knowledge production have remained persistent (if not dominant) elements of social work epistemology and self definition (Fook, 2002; Goldstein, 1990; Van Den Bergh, 1995). The expression of these traditions has changed over time mediated by the many social, economic and theoretical “turns” emanating from the social contexts in which social work has been practiced over the last 150 years (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b; Hick, 2001, Holosko, 2003; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). Social workers’ use of YouTube and digital media storytelling is one more expression of this process, an expression that may be understood as a response to neoliberalism, a response that is facilitated by the advent of digital media technologies (Daniels, 2009; Hick & McNutt, 2002; Lundby, 2009; Kress, 2003).
Neoliberalism poses a threat to social work’s narrative traditions and to critical social work more generally (Baines, 2011a; Carniol, 2010; Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2009; Adams et. Al., 2009). In spite of, or perhaps because of this threat, social workers appear committed to practice as social change oriented work. This commitment is suggested in a variety of different ways, from the professional materials that discuss and define social work (see: IFSW.org, IASSW.org, and CASW.ca), and through research and scholarship highlighting these kinds of values and beliefs (as discussed throughout these thesis). Therefore preserving narrative traditions and reclaiming spaces and resources for a critical orientation to practice is an important strategy for contemporary social workers. In this resistance, storytelling becomes one tactic in the work of critical social work.

While narrative practices may be a persistent social work activity, they cannot be described as a dominant approach in contemporary practice. Today’s institutionalized social work favours standardized assessment models. These models frequently use scaling as a means of making particular kinds of meanings about clients and the social world that can be generalized to populations, measured quantitatively and assessed on the basis of standardized outcomes reflecting market based definitions of success and improvement (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2004, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2010, 2011).

In contrast, stories allow social workers and clients to exchange information and to build working relationships. Some of the stories shared between social workers and their clients are stories of pain, strife and difficulty. In many cases, these are stories we are not supposed to tell and stories no one is supposed to want to hear. In this context, the stories told are tales of liberation because telling the story means breaking the cycle
of silence and resisting the imperative to forget or discretely disguise oppression (Bishop, 1994; Fook, 2002; La Rose, 2009; Mullaly, 2009). Bishop (1994) brings this idea to life when she states:

[Story-telling] begins with breaking the silence, ending the shame and sharing our concerns and feelings. Storytelling leads to analysis where we figure out together what is happening to us and why, and who benefits. Analysis leads to strategy, when we decide what to do about it. Strategy leads to action, together to change the injustices we suffer. Action leads to another round: reflection, analysis, strategy, and action. This is the process of liberation (Bishop, 1994, p. 83 [and as cited in Mullaly, 2009, pg. 241]).

Bishop’s description links storytelling to the goals of anti-oppressive social work, making stories in and of themselves an important source of knowledge (Baines, 2004, 2011b; Fook, 1996, 2002; Van Den Bergh, 1995).

The stories shared between workers and clients aren’t the only important stories in social work. The stories shared between and among workers are also important stories. These stories can be their own kind of “breaking the silence”, especially in today’s work culture where “organizational silence” is framed as a form of employee loyalty (Wolfe Morrison, 2000). In contrast, other authors argue storytelling is a workplace necessity as it keeps us healthy and protects us from trauma and (Stalker & Harvey, 2002); (Mandell, 2007; Maslach, et al., 2001; Rossiter, 2001).

In my own work life, telling stories about things I can’t quite “get over” helps me cope with confusion and discomfort and with anger and with grief. Sometimes no one
understands a social work story like another social worker. While stories feel important, my own practice experience tells me they are not seen as valuable in contemporary professional social work contexts. Reflecting on my own practice life, I can see how in my BSW and early post BSW practice, narratives and storytelling were fundamental aspects of my work. Later in my practice the shift to standardized criteria and assessment forms replaced rapport and relationship building; closed questions became the new way of working, something that contradicts all that I had learned in my formal social work education and all that I learned through my hours on the job.

These questions and the forms that hold them are seen as more rigorous, empirical and efficient. They are believed to ensure workers “get to the point” of intervention. Wrapped up in these questions are understandings about the (typically) singular, fixed and finite reasons for intervention, which suggest the potential for singular, fixed and finite responses and solutions. This way of looking fundamentally changes the culture of practice, and it was well ingrained by time I completed my MSW and returned to practice. In this time period (of about 18months), a further reduction in the use of narratives and storytelling was clearly evident in the field. In its place were the standardized documentation procedures and assessment forms as a replacement for open narrative case notes.

Neoliberal policies have done a lot to restructure social processes including the delivery and design of social services (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2004, 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; Smith, 2010, 2011). More details about this are included later in this thesis; however, it is reasonable to state the desire for efficiency commonly connected to this perspective sees standardized processes and time-limited interventions
as the ways and means of achieving efficiency. These are practices that leave little space for telling tales. They draw instead on eligibility criteria, risk assessments and info-metrics to understand client problems. These tools have a downside as they tend to homogenize understandings, disregarding specific details and ignoring the rich thick tapestry made up of the lives of the people we serve (Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2011).

Standardization and work design emphasizing “flexibility” as a tool for creating an elastic/accordion work force are also a part of the neoliberal work world (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines 2004, 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Gibelman, 2005; Richardson, 2005). This flexibility makes contract and contingent workers and ‘entrepreneurial’ social work activities a desirable way of providing services. Neoliberalism also centres professionalization and regulation (Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2011). Notions of interdisciplinarity emphasized in neo-liberal approaches to service delivery create service assembly lines rather than honouring a diverse range of service activities and attention to holism, two of the hallmarks of critical social work traditions (Baines, 2011b; La Rose, 2009; Mullaly, 2007; Smith, 2011).

Notions of flexibility as they are understood in a neo-liberal context run counter to the framing of this term in critical social work discourses. Flexibility as a marker of critical social work taps into the social work tradition of generalist practice, which has argued that social work is an orientation to human service and that social workers must adapt their practice to meet the needs of clients based on the context in which they work, in accordance with goals and objectives negotiated with clients (Adams et al., 2009; Pincus & Minahan, 1977; Dominelli, 2002; Van Den Bergh, 1995). However, many
authors suggest, social workers can easily be seduced into an acceptance of new practice approaches presented as neutral shifts or service improvements that are more accurately described as a process of remaking social work in ways that serve the agenda of neoliberalism (Baines, 2007; 2011a, 2011b 2012; Bondi, 2005; Carniol, 2010; Smith 2010, 2011)

Like ‘flexibility’, the notion of ‘interdisciplinarity’ is frequently used in contemporary social work contexts as a discussion of social workers’ participation on mixed teams of service providers, often in case management practice, where ‘the team services’ are more like a service assembly line (Baines, 2004; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2011). Social work has long understood interdisciplinarity as a process by which social work knowledge is generated through the application of knowledge garnered from other professional disciplines (Payne, 2001). Social workers make use of the knowledge of other helping disciplines adjusting these to meet the social work agendas of resource provision, politicization, advocacy and social change.

In neo-liberal social work, interdisciplinarity becomes a tool for reinforcing professional identity, demarking specific professional roles and establishing expertise; interdisciplinarity is a tool for re-inscribing hierarchy and competition (Payne, 2001). In this context, interdisciplinarity is used to enforce boundaries around particular tasks and activities within human services, tied closely to particular ‘scopes of practice’ as outlined through professional regulation and licensure. Governmentality is a central feature of professional identity (Payne, 2001; Smith, 2011) as workers enforce their professional subjectivities through particular technologies of the self (Brookfield, 2009; King Keenan, 2001). In this context, social work practices like reflexivity and reflexive practice can be
used to reinforce these kinds of professional identities and divisions between workers and clients. Reflective practice becomes an act of self-policing rather than a process of self-awareness designed to enhance service to others (Baines, 2011c; Rossiter, 2001; Heron, 2005; Smith, 2011).

Standardization plays a significant role in the neo-liberal agenda by making contingency more plausible. Standardization facilitates a flexible work environment that contracts or expands based on predetermined levels of service and limits of service processes (Baines, 2004, 2012; La Rose, 2009; Richardson, 2005; Smith, 2011). In part, this kind of work relies on contract and temporary work (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Aronson & Smith, 2010; Bisman, 2004; Baines, 2004, 2011b, 2012; Gibelman, 2005; NSGEU, 2002). Contract work reinforces workers’ vulnerability, which in part contributes to workers potentially remaining silent about work related issues and concerns (Wolfe Morrison, 2000; Gibelman, 2005; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002).

Under these conditions, telling our social stories, our stories of work stress or difficulty, while protective on the one hand, can be dangerous on the other (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Issit, 1999; La Rose, 2009). In a contract setting, stories that reflect a worker’s discomfort, doubt, dissatisfaction, stress and weakness may frame this worker as a high-risk employee (Smith, 2011). These factors can reshape worklife from one of camaraderie and openness to one of competition, fear and silence (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2004, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; NSGEU, 2002; La Rose, 2009). In this way, workers, clients and their stories become marginalized. This marginalization in turn contributes to a loss of social work knowledge as stories of experience give way to “official” professional versions of social work. Pon (2009) describes this process, where
remembering is an exclusionary process that eliminates other understandings, as the “ontology of forgetting”. This practice of both remembering and forgetting as acts of remaking is a perspective that will be discussed throughout my thesis.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis focuses on Social Worker’s use of digital media storytelling as a tool of resisting and remembering and as a tool for critical reflection about their changing field. In this contemporary social landscape increasing use of the Internet as a reference source suggests that these stories will also increasingly become important social work tools for knowledge mobilization and sharing. As such, one of the contributions of this thesis is to explore how practitioner-generated digital texts provide access to subjugated knowledge. In doing so, it is important to consider the notion of forgetting and remembering (Pon, 2009) as experiences that are reflected in these texts and experiences that are produced by the audiences who watch these texts.

As described above, the effects of neoliberalism provides the pervasive context for the production of these digital texts as neoliberalism effects worker and client experiences of social work and mediates how these experiences are considered and discussed (Aronson & Sammon, 2010; Baines 2004, 2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Baines, Davis, & Saini, 2009; Bondi, 2005; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2010, 2011; Blount & Leroy, 2007). On this basis this process of inquiry undertakes analysis on six digital media stories posted to the Internet based social media site YouTube. These stories consider these tensions in different contexts and from a number of different points of view.

The first story examined (Chapter Five) is created and tubed by the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW), it is a story that serves as a reference point for
contemporary understandings of social work as a “global” profession. This Digital media story entitled *World Social Work Day 2010* ([http://youtu.be/mrJb_1j8t5Q](http://youtu.be/mrJb_1j8t5Q)), presents the IFSW’s vision and mission of expanding the social work market to the “developing world”. IFSW (then) President David Jones uses the YouTube environment to urge social workers to rise to the global challenge of bringing social work to places where it has not “gone before”. He frames this goal as a part of the practice of social change and social justice at the international level expanding the social work scope of practice to include international development work.

Jones' perspective is challenged by other social work digital stories tellers considered in this thesis. The other five digital narratives examined in the thesis focus on the experiences of workers and people involved in direct social work practice. These stories reflect the gaps that exist between the espoused values and beliefs of social work, and workers’ daily experiences of their practice. They illustrate that bridging these gaps necessitates a significant output of emotional labour as well as emotional regulation, as social workers are increasingly required to adhere to rules and norms of “professionalism” which dictate “appropriate” responses to workplace experiences (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines, 2011a, 2012; Brennan & Petit, 2000; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

Wrightkan, digital media storyteller from Hong Kong, presents us with our second text (Chapter Six) *The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker* ([http://youtu.be/DRHbJfQtbbE](http://youtu.be/DRHbJfQtbbE)). Wrightkan presents us with a story of a successful, mid-career social worker as he experiences an existential crisis about his work. Drawing on the Luis Bunuel film *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie* as a meme for consideration
of social work, the limitations of professional social work in institutional settings is considered. Wrightkan’s work suggests that social work is made bourgeois when it is undertaken in accordance with contemporary professionalized neo-liberal practice identities.

This is a deeply problematic remaking of social work, as it changes the nature of social work practice by shifting the role of the work in relationship to clients and to the traditional framing of social work as progressive and change oriented work. Wrightkan’s text provides a multi-modal experience that creates multiple layers of affective materials. These materials allow the audience opportunities to experience the workers process of reflection through sound, sound effectives, voice and visual metaphors all of which lead us to a place where the gap between the ideas of social work and the real deal of practice are physically and spiritually uncomfortable. Unable to resolve the tension, we watch the social worker “choose life” as he elects to leave his position in a job that he admits provides him with privileges, benefits and what we might interpret as access to institutional power.

The third digital media story considered in this thesis is titled Song About a Child Welfare Agency1 (Chapter Seven), created by US based tuber Erahoneybee. This digital media story considers the experiences of a social work intern in the context of her field practicum. She reflects on her experiences of technical rationality in the field by using child welfare triage codes to create a “parodic” (Bernstein, 1992; Hutchison, 1989) song that uses wit, irony and humour (Hutcheson, 1989; Prasad, 2005) to cast a shadow of doubt on the work of screening and intake in child protection practice.

1 This story was deleted from Erahoneybee’s YouTube channel in early 2013.
The fourth digital story (Chapter Eight) *The Nervous CPS Worker* ([http://youtu.be/S9oQajDZXNA](http://youtu.be/S9oQajDZXNA)) was created and tubed by TeamBettendorf, a professional foster family who present the challenges of “contracting out” child protection foster care services. The foster parents undertake personal advocacy through the digital media practice “shooting back” to air their concerns that their rights and the rights of the foster children they seek to adopt are being violated by the decisions of the Arizona child welfare authority. The authority is suspected of blocking the foster parents plans to adopt a baby sibling of children who are already in their care. In an effort to mobilize change, the foster parents video tape a home visit conducted by the service supervisor without her permission and tube this material in an effort to mobilize support from the YouTube audience for their claims of injustice. However, the YouTube audience concerns themselves with the sexuality, gender identity and morality of the worker, rather than focusing on issues of racism and procedurality that are central to these foster parents' claims against the system.

The fifth digital story (Chapter Nine), *Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* ([http://youtu.be/2VK3xYG-5fA](http://youtu.be/2VK3xYG-5fA)), presents an archival text from a BC-based aboriginal film festival event centering two-spirit perspectives and artistic representations. Here First Nations Peoples’ relationship to the child welfare system is considered through a parodic reinterpretation of the TV heroine Buffy the Vampire Slayer. These reinterpretations takes the form of *Bobbi the Social Work Slayer*, an “abject hero” (Bernstein, 1992), a dubious superhero who uses her powers to alter the trajectory of zombie social workers who threaten to apprehend the children of a First Nations family. Bobbie is an adult, wild and wacky Aboriginal inversion of the whiteness and goodness
of Buffy’s slaying style. The text is both hilarious and ironic providing an easily accessible and yet complex critique of child protection work, social workers, unions and queer identities.

The sixth (and final) digital media story (Chapter Ten) *Social Worker Overload* ([http://youtu.be/d5YG9TVNSDw](http://youtu.be/d5YG9TVNSDw)), tubed by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME, Washington State) presents a story about child protection workers and direct service supervisors’ experiences of overwork from their perspectives as bargaining union members of AFSCME. Here workers discuss their experience of advocating to management about excessive workload and participating in workload research at the request of their employer. Yet, when the employers’ own workload study demonstrated the need for 1500 new Child Protection social work positions across the State, the workers once again find themselves having to advocate to their employer to take action on the employers’ own research evidence. The digital story provides an important portrait of the effects of stress and emotional labour on social workers and presents a thick rich discussion about the disconnections that exist between direct service workers and managers and between knowing and doing. It also demonstrates the important role that union membership holds in maintaining a location from which social workers may critique the field.

All of the data chapters use a multi-disciplinary approach, including critical discourse analysis, metaphor analysis and multi-modal analysis, informed by post structural feminism and digital media research scholarship. This approach allows for the creation of connections between social workers practices of digital media use and traditional social work activities like critical reflexivity. Thus the study can also be
understood as a consideration of aspects of the growing mediation and mediatization of social work.

These social work stories activate particular social work discourses and discourses relevant to digital media scholarship. The themes and issues presented in the stories also provide a detailed account of what is concerning to social workers in practice, and what it is that affects their capacity to actualize their own ideals of social work. Some of these themes are presented explicitly in the stories while others are realized through the multimodal capacity of digital media. Thus analysis of the digital media storytelling process includes the materials in the story itself, those created by convergence and extends beyond the boundaries of the stories themselves where relevant; an extension that includes in some chapters the media field surrounding the stories such as the channel template or comments section created to as interface with the YouTube environment. In some cases this extension includes links to other digital texts beyond the YouTube environment.

The thesis wraps up with a concluding chapter that addresses the relevance of all the above to the field of social work today, including issues of policy, governance and regulation, front line practice and education for social work, as well as working conditions and reification of social work identity. Considerations of the emotional labour undertaken by social workers as they seek to bridge the gap between the ideals of social work and the realities of social work practice widen in the context of neoliberalism (Brotheridge & Gradney, 2002).

As professionalism gains greater hold over the practices of social work, workers are increasingly expected to differentiate and distance themselves from their clients by
taking on the position of “expert”. Relationships between workers and clients are regulated through the use of standardized practice activities and through professional standards that demand social workers uphold particular behavioural and moral positions that are internalized through professional education and professional development activities including individuation through the process of reflexive practice (Brennan & Petite, 2000; Webb, 2003). All of these activities may be understood as embedded within social work globalization activities (Webb, 2003). The analysis also identifies implications for further research including the importance of research that establishes connection between and among digital media stories created by social workers.
Chapter 2: Critical Social Work Theory and Practice

This thesis tells the story of how social workers use digital media storytelling to mediate and mediatize elements of critical social work practice and in doing so engage in a critique of the field. The stories told through digital narratives can be understood as stories that reflect social workers’ orientation to practice. Thus, understanding something about critical social work theory and practice is an important foundation to the analysis of these stories. This chapter seeks to establish that foundation.

Social work is generally described as the act of engaging in “caring and changing” simultaneously (Bisman, 2004). Social workers are concerned with the immediate needs of clients and engage in emotional and practical acts of caregiving in an effort to help resolve the problem situations that clients bring to the intervention process (Baines, 2007, 2011b; Bisman, 2004; Mullaly, 2009). However, caring is just one element of critical practice within the mandate of social justice and social change; critical social work requires social workers to attend to the social phenomena leading to the issues and concerns that bring them to the social work intervention in the first place (Baines, 2007, 2011b; Bisman, 2004; Carniol, 2010; CASW.ca; IFSW.org, Mullaly, 2009; Payne, 2001; Smith, 2010, 2011).

In attending to these practices of “caring and changing” critical social workers are also concerned with the histories and contexts that come to the intervention process with clients. History is also present in the agency and service delivery contexts in which the social worker functions. These poly-contextualities (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Niewolny, & Wilson, 2009; La Rose, 2012) are reflected in the digital stories that social workers tell. The stories told by social workers in the digital domain embody social work
discourses. Certain stories take up certain discourses; the narratives may adopt, critique or challenge dominant discourses, activating various histories and contexts. Or, they may animate these discourses, reflecting the failures, tensions and contradictions inherent in these perspectives (Boler, 2008; Lange, 2009; Lundby, 2008, 2009; McWilliam, 2008). Social workers perform, through their stories, their experiential understandings of these discourses, telling us things about these perspectives in ways that extend beyond what a written text reveals (Boler, 2008; Reinsborough & Canning, 2010; Lange, 2009; Lambert, 2009; Lundy, 2008; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009).

Epistemology and Digital Media Stories

Throughout this thesis, I will build on these understandings of narrative practices, presenting to you an understanding of social workers’ digital stories as practices that bring to life three particular approaches to knowing and knowledge production as narrative practices. That is, social workers engage in processes of remembering, forgetting and resisting when they create digital stories. Social workers remember certain understandings when they engage in the practice of social work; at the same time as they remember, they also suspend or “forget” other things; and finally, in the process of remembering and forgetting, social workers are engaged in the process of resisting, for forgetting and remembering can be understood as practices of accepting or rejecting certain understandings.

As Foucault (1988) suggests, power and knowledge (power/knowledge) are really two sides of the same coin. Foucault (1988) also argues where power exists resistance is also always present. Thus social work digital stories are acts of power/knowledge and resistance. In these texts we can see how resistance is a recursive process, occurring
almost constantly, like a dance played out as workers negotiate remembering, forgetting and resisting in their critical practices and in the creation of digital social work stories.

**Critical Social Work**

There are many threads that are woven together to make up this thing we call social work. Critical social work, sometimes referred to as anti-oppressive social work practice, is a specific form of social work with a distinct body of literature (Addams et al., 2009, pg. 10-13; Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2009, pg. 8 – 19; Baines, 2011b, pg. 8). A significant consideration in much of the critical social work scholarship is the centring of “workers” in the discussion of social work practice. These texts bring to life the idea that critical social work in its many forms, is a practice that is performed by critical social workers suggesting that critical consciousness is fundamental to critical practice (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b; Dominelli, 2002; Fook, 2002). In this analysis, it is the worker who gives life to this critical social work through her values and beliefs, attitudes and actions, reflections and resistance enacted in her day-to-day work.

Mullaly (2009), elaborates this view when he frames critical social work as an enactment of “conflict theory” (pg. 8 & 19). Here, social workers negotiate practice in the context of competition and tension between and among groups and individuals who occupy different social positions in a normalized social hierarchy (Brock, 2003; Mullaly, 2009, pg. 15). These social positions are the expression of different degrees and forms of power and privilege, marginalization and exploitation, all simultaneously justified on the basis of a “natural social order” (Brock, 2003; Mullaly, 2009, pg. 15).

Social change, which is the overarching goal of critical social work practice (Baines, 2007, 2011b; Bisman, 2004; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2007), is produced through
the challenges, tension and conflicts initiated in these social spaces through these normative claims about the nature of “dominant and subordinate relations” (Mullaly, 2009, pg. 19). Therefore, the role of the critical social worker is that of an “educator” and “agitator” (Hick, 2001) who fosters processes that are “critical of existing systems of social arrangements as unjust...and oppressive...” (Mullaly, 2009, pg. 19).

This leads us to consider Baines’s (2011) understanding of the “politicization” (pg. 6) of workers and clients as fundamental to critical social work. Baines challenges the idea that technical skills or imposed values produce social change, arguing instead that:

Anti-oppressive practices, like other forms of social justice oriented practice, are lenses for viewing the world, ways of asking questions and techniques for reaffirming social justice oriented social workers’ commitment to resist, expand resources to the oppressed, redistribute power and resist again in the new spaces and opportunities that open up as a result of that resistance... (Baines 2007, p. 29, and as cited in Mullaly 2009, p. 221).

Benjamin (2011) presents anti-oppressive social work as reflecting community organizing traditions, moving practice beyond attention to individual experiences. Here social work practice is a process of developing “strategies and tactics” (pg. 292). Critical social workers see their work as connected to the work that has gone before; it is an analogous relationship of practice spanning over time, not simply a unitary action. In this way, what is understood as social work practice must be adjusted or mediated to suit the
specific context of practice informed by an understanding of history (Benjamin, 2011; Goldstein, 1990; Mullaly, 2009; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011).

**Resisting, Remembering, Forgetting and Reflecting**

Benjamin (2007) emphasizes the importance of ordinary, everyday actions by everyday, ordinary social workers as fundamental to change making (pg. 197). She argues social workers should not “wait for an outstanding personality...to come along and lead us in building resistance and social movements.” (2007, pg. 198). Instead, she advocates for the tactic of “daily resistance” as an orientation to practice, a perspective that draws generously on the work of bell hooks (1990).

Hooks’ work, while not directly about social work, holds relevance for the field. Resistance as presented by hooks is a core element in anti-racist feminist identities and actions and these play a significant role in the development of critical social work (Baines, Evans & Neysmith, 1992; Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Dominelli, 2002; Flynn Saulnier, 1996; Fook, 2002; Valentich, 2011; Van Dan Berg, 1995). These perspectives frame history and context as crucial to critical social work because they tell us how current realities have come to be (Benjamin, 2011; Fay, 2011; Fook, 2002; hooks, 1990).

Reflection on previously used tactics and strategies, and evaluation of the desirable, undesirable and unanticipated outcomes produced through these actions, is a part of the process of understanding the contexts we currently face and should therefore inform social workers’ practice of daily resistance.

These understandings tie into the tradition of reflection and remembering that are present in the social work digital media stories considered in this thesis. While acts of critical practice may look to the past for understandings of how we might shape the future
through action in the present, history is a complicated matter. Critical social work scholars, informed by post-structural understandings, reject the notion of history as a single or unitary understanding (Hiersteiner & Peterson, 1999; Holosko, 2003; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2010). Histories are incomplete stories with potentially significant understandings inevitably lost or suspended in their creation (Epstein, 1999; Hartman, 1994; Pon, 2009).

The idea of lost or suspended history may benefit from exploring the notion of “erasure” (Spivak, 1988, pg. 25; Prasad, 2005, pg. 243). Prasad’s interpretation of Derrida’s notion of “erasure” emphasizes the challenges we face in creating written texts and in the process of writing as an act of technical production. In contemporary social work, written texts play a significant (and increasingly more significant) role in practice, making this understanding all the more relevant.

Textual representations of case work, and increased emphasis on formal written evaluations, are coming to be the way that social workers understand their practice and the clients that they serve (Baines, 2007, 2011b; La Rose, 2009; Mullaly, 2009; Reamer, 1998). Prasad argues, based in Derrida’s work, that writing is a process designed to create exclusionary meanings (pg. 243). Thus meanings contained within texts are created at the exclusion of other possible, potential and valuable meanings.

Similarly, Bernstein (1992) argues that textual representations are often created with unitary understandings of the meaning of words, and that this simplification of representations forecloses the potential for other kinds of explorations of meaning. On this basis critical social workers must be mindful of the process of accessing histories for the purpose of engaging in practice as still very much a process of exclusion even while it
is a process of meaning making. The multi-modal and multi-vocal nature of digital texts further complicates the use of these texts, and suggests social workers need to think about representation and the complexity present in meaning making as amplified by the convergence and layering of multiple modes of communication (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Lundby, 2008, 2009; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009).

This resistance demands social workers acknowledge that histories are not neutral, but rather are created to establish particular kinds of ‘facts,’ to display particular kinds of ‘evidence’ in order to create particular kinds of ‘truths’ (Benjamin 2011; Fook, 2002; Pon 2009). While other understandings, other facts and other representations of experiences may be obscured, hidden or made to disappear within the context of a particular text, they do not cease to exist, nor does their potential importance diminish (Prasad 2005, pg. 243).

Muller (2009) has called this process “anamnesis” and Pon (2009), drawing on the work of Lowe (1996), presents a similar understanding in his conceptualization of the suspension of social work history as part of what he terms as an “ontology of forgetting”. In other words, in social work as elsewhere, forgetting certain realities is part of making a new reality that is valued by those who hold the power to ascribe meaning in time and place (Bernstein, 1992; Pon, 2008). Indeed there is quite a vast literature on the politics of memory (Rufer, 2012) dealing with the social and discursive nature of memory and thus its role in the mediation and construction of experiences and identity. This wide ranging literature includes studies at the level of state, institutional, and individual dynamics (see e.g. Bride, 2009; Britzman 2000; Todorov, 2000; Riaño-Alcalá, 2006; Rosenberg, 2000; Simon, 2000) most of which goes well beyond my study. But some
contemporary critics argue that such a process is currently at play in the remaking of social work (Adams et al., 2009; Bisman, 2009; Bondi, 2005; Carniol, 2010; Mullally, 2009; Smith, 2011).

Muller (2009) describes anamnesis as “remembering,” a remembering that is tied closely to the concept of forgetting. He argues that social workers need to consider what has been forgotten when we relay information and reflect through narratives. Anamnesis is defined as an “…uncovering of the forgotten, the not remembered. Anamnesis assumes that forgotten things can be most relevant and that there can be important reasons for forgetting about things or persons” (2009, pg. 151). Muller’s application of the anamnesis concept is rooted within the ‘psychic realm’ and connected to the “rational and conscious but also [to] unconscious aspects of...working relations” (2009, pg. 152). Further, he suggests we need to think about the idea of “traumatic biography” (2009, pg. 152) and to consider what has been removed from a story and how these ‘difficult things’ can be reintroduced.

While Muller’s (2009, pg. 152) position on this issue is framed in client centred work, post-structural understandings support the idea that many aspects of psycho-analysis used to understand individual, internal experiences and emotions can be used to reveal much about the broader social world (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2005; Davies, 2006; Lovell, 2003; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). On this basis, Mueller’s work can be applied to considerations of social workers in the context of the field, in relationship to their work life and professional identity. This perspective can be taken up as it relates to individuals and in the context of understandings that consider social work as a subjective
position shared among people understood as members in the globalized occupational grouping of “social work”.

Much social work literature emphasizes social workers’ practice as occurring at the micro, mezzo and macro levels simultaneously (Adams et al, 2009; Baines, 2011b; Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2011; Mullaly, 2009). This understanding suggests that anamnesis, when considered within a social work orientation, makes forgetting at the individual level a process that sets conditions for “forgetting” at more systemic levels as well. It is something that can apply beyond inter-personal relationships to the practice of social workers as a group, to social work as a category of action, and as a part of the systems of social service and social policy making (Pincus & Minahan, 1977).

Much of our contemporary professional literature links the notion of social work identity with particular notions of morality, and this understanding can most certainly be linked to social work’s history as a charitable activity (Baines, Evans & Neysmith, 1991; Jennissen & Lundby 2011; Hiersteiner & Peterson 1999; Holosko 2003; Reamer, 1998). The relationship between morality and the moral qualities of the worker have been identified in contemporary understandings of social work by authors like Heron (2005, 2007) and Rossiter (2007).

Heron’s (2007) research on women’s work in social development demonstrates the relationship between the subjectivity of the ‘good helper’ and social norms around gender and race identities and behaviours. Rossiter’s work considers how social workers seem to forget the negative effects that helping has on those who receive help. Further, Rossiter (2007) considers how the nature of subordination and domination are enacted in
helping relationships and how these expressions of power are fundamental in constituting social work identity.

These perspectives draw us into the work of Ferguson (2007) who links forgetting to understandings of personal and social morality. His work presents analysis of the conditions of internment that placed Irish children in residential schools when they were perceived by child welfare authorities to have been “morally tainted” by their parents (2007, pg. 131 – 132). The parents were in turn understood to have failed their children because of their own “moral contamination”, a contamination understood as the direct result of the influence of colonization including relations with colonizers and life under colonial rule. In an effort to ensure “recovery” of both the children and the society, violence and trauma were used to induce “forgetting” (Ibid., p. 137).

Forgetting was seen as necessary because remembered ‘moral transgressions’ were understood as dangerous to society and its members as it made possible the enactments of these actions and beliefs once more (Ibid., pg. 133). Evidence of the elimination of moral ills was understood to exist only after these things were no longer remembered at the individual and collective levels (Ibid., pg. 133 – 134). Forgetting was further understood to eliminate the potential of further moral contamination; therefore the inducement of forgetting was deemed an act of prevention.²

This kind of forgetting is remade as a social good and (potentially) a spiritual or religious good. This good is necessitated and experienced individually and collectively. Forgetting history in this way is understood to benefit the society because it allows powerful actors in the society to create new possible futures (Bernstein, 1992). In this

² The work of Nuala O’Fallon and Evan Boland provide examples of narratives of remembering design to support in this kind of recovery.
way, the erasure of the past is understood to create the conditions for social change, something that will be illustrated quite strikingly in the text *World Social Work Day 2010*.

Beyond notions of moral failures, we can see this kind of forgetting as it relates to understandings of ‘virtues’ that are imposed upon people as necessary attitudes and actions as part of the making of certain subjectivities (Brennan & Petit, 2000; Reamer, 1998). In the case of social work identity, notions of “altruism” (Hiersteiner & Peterson 1999) and the economy of esteem (Brennan & Petite, 2000) are part of what it means to be a social worker. In the context of contemporary social work professionalization this means that one “becomes” a social worker by virtue of exhibiting, taking on and internalizing the subjective positions of social worker (Adams, et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b; Payne, 1998, 2001, 2007, 2010; Smith 2010). People *become* social workers rather than merely working as social workers (Adams, et al., 2009; Smith, 2010). While we can understand these processes as neutral or beneficial, we can also understand these as examples of governmentality (Foucault, 1988, Heron, 2007; Hoy Couzens, 2005; Rossiter, 2007; Smith, 2010), and as a technology of the self (Foote & Frank, 1999), designed to control workers (Baines, 2011b; Brookfield, 2009; Mullaly, 2009). These processes are demonstrated in the digital media story *Song About a Child Welfare Agency*, a text we will analyze in detail later in the thesis.

Forgetting alternatives to professional social work means that the potential for the revival of this kind of radical change oriented, grassroots focused practice is reduced, what remains can be stigmatized as an inferior kind of social work by the dominant establishment. Such approaches are at risk of being seen as untested and untestable,
unruly, unpredictable and unregulated, and therefore non-professionalized social work is made dangerous and potentially immoral, and therefore worthy of erasure. The process of taking on the mainstream subjective position of “social worker” has been shown to work against the wellbeing of individual social workers (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2004, 2012; Brookfield, 2009; Gibelman, 2005; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2007, 2010, 2011) and to work against the goals of social work (Baines, 2007; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2007, 2009). To make this idea more concrete, Brookfield (2009) suggests social workers’ subjection within the notion of “vocation” means social workers understand their work as a kind of spiritual calling that necessitates self sacrifice. While workers may understand their practice in this way, the increased marketization of social work and human services means that this framing is used to manipulate workers in order to exploit their work for profit, an issue that is considered in the text the *Discrete Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker*.

Similarly Baines (2011b), Rossiter (2001, 2007) and Heron (2007) and my own previous research (La Rose 2009) demonstrate how the idea of vocation and virtue as elements within the social work identity may make workers complicit, allowing themselves to be harmed by the work that they do. Brookfield (2009) and Baines (2004 & 2012) demonstrate how this subjectification challenges our capacities to change our circumstances and to demand that we receive the resources necessary to perform our work and compensation reflective of the skill and labour involved in social work practice. The digital story *Social Worker Overload* reflects this struggle in a narrative that creates a shared story out of the experiences of individual social workers employed in child protection.
Forgetting allows history to be remade such that what is remembered facilitates the exploitation of both social workers and clients, exploitation that is being made into a global phenomena in the name of social change and social justice. In this context, the idea of anamnesis, or the process of remembering as a remedy for forgetting, becomes an important concept. Chenderlin (1982) links memoriam with anamnesis, understanding it as the process by which one “makes to remember” (pg. 115). Items, actions and rituals are ‘brought into being’ as a practice of remembering which in turn brings about “memory” in others.

In this way, Memorial is about connecting to what might be forgotten as a means of alerting others to these histories as possibilities and to the possibility of loss. This idea of the significance of history as linked to current action and future possibilities may be linked with Benjamin’s idea of strategies and tactics that are rooted in history and context. Chenderlin (1982) considers memoriam as:

... a symbol – a work or thing or act – that is said or placed or done as to attract the attention of the one who is meant to read it and thus turn his attention to the matter symbolized. (author’s emphasis removed, pg. 116).

Memoriam is important in counteracting forgetting even when we may not be clear about what is important to remember. Pon’s (2009) perspective on the “ontology of forgetting” brings to life the idea that social work has evoked “forgetting” as a practice, we actively engaging in forgetting as we bring social work into being. The “ontology of forgetting” is demonstrated (for example) when we elect to forget about Canada’s history of institutionalized oppression and xenophobia (2009, pg. 65). Pon (2009) provides examples (through Lowe’s work) of processes that remake Canada as a benevolent nation.
by simply “forgetting” our violent and racist history, including the use of residential schools to regulate and control Aboriginal peoples, a history that implicates social workers (pg. 68). We are asked by Pon (2009) to consider whose history we are evoking when we elect to forget mainstream social workers’ roles in institutionalized oppression. This process of forgetting, as Pon expresses it, serves not only to remake the Canadian history of oppression but also remakes social work allowing us to evoke what Rossiter (2001) refers to as “innocence.”

Pon illustrates these practices of forgetting highlighting racism and oppression in Canadian society at large, a parallel that is clearly relevant to anti-oppressive social work practice. By moving beyond the contexts Pon provides to us, we can consider many other issues that parallel his examples. In this way we see “forgetting” in social work’s own history, here forgetting to remake social work as a benevolent profession in many different contexts. We can see, for example forgetting used to remake social work as a professional identity requiring particular formal academic credentials, a process that is now taken for granted in many contexts but that does not reflect all of social works past (Baines, Evans & Neysmith, 1991). This framing of social work as a “profession” occurs without much consideration of the identities and understandings that have been pushed aside or abandoned in the pursuit of this path (Baines, 2011b; Epstein, 1999; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Lindhorst, Kemp & Walters, 2009; Goldstein, 1990; Hartman, 1994; Lundby, 2004; Knochel, 2009; Mullaly, 2009; Moffatt, 2001; Reisch & Andrews, 2002; Spano, 1982). In this case, it is as Muller (2009) and Ferguson (2007) suggest, a purposeful “forgetting”.
To this end, Smith (2007) considers acts of resistance undertaken by social workers to preserve social justice oriented practices. Smith (2007, 2010, 2011) argues that neoliberalism leaves little space for practices of justice in its pursuit of efficiency. Social workers are described as finding ways and means to hide these forms of practice by engaging in what is described as taking “best practices underground” (Smith, 2007, pg. 152). From this perspective, social workers engage in many covert actions and use “forgetting” as a way of framing their choices as acceptable to agencies. Smith describes this kind of practice as represented in “stealth social work practice…impression management [and] hidden and transitory coalitions”; these practices are presented as forms of resistance that benefit social work’s critical tradition (Smith, 2007, pg. 153). While these “underground practices” might serve some positive ends they are also practices that create additional layers of work for social workers and individualize critical consciousness, risk and liability. These acts may be understood as practice of forgetting, reflecting once more our attempts to make our profession appear innocent (Pon, 2009; Rossiter, 2001).

Smith’s subsequent thesis work (2011) expands upon this understanding by considering the ways in which social workers remake social work practice through forgetting and altered remembering of histories that have themselves been acts of remaking social work values and practices. Furthermore, Smith questions the benefit of “nostalgic” remembering, arguing that romanticized notions of the “good old days of social work” may simply be another kind of forgetting (Smith 2010, pg. 106).

To bring this idea of forgetting to the level of the individual, Allen (1997) a feminist scholar, considers the idea of “forgetting ourselves.” Drawing on the work of
Ryle (1994 as cited), Allen frames the notion of ‘forgetting ourselves’ as the moments when we acknowledge that we “do not know what we are doing” and that in these moments “we are not alive to what we are doing” (1994, pg. 25 and 27 as cited in Allen 1997, pg. 104).

Allen (1997) suggests that forgetting ourselves is a process that “paradoxically entails simultaneously remembering and not remembering... [our]...own identity” and that with identity comes the understanding of the self as a “perso[n] who accept[s] and adheres to particular norms” (pg. 105). In the case of social workers these norms are largely institutionalized in official documents that in part regulate our professional identity, like the many social work “codes of…” produced by the various regulatory bodies (Bonnycastle, 2006; and see: the NASW.org [Code of Ethics]; CASW.ca [Guidelines for Ethical Practices]; OCSWSSW.ca [Standards of Practice]).

Allen (1997) suggests that forgetting oneself is often the result of inattention or heightened emotion. She suggests that we understand ourselves as people in community and as a result we are expected to adhere to rules, norms and behavioural conventions consistent with the communal space (pg. 107). In many instances the rules and norms of which we are speaking are “presupposed to be widely accepted” even though they may result in the oppression or “subjugation” of certain members of the community (Ibid., pg. 107). Thus, “rebellion or critique” may well be the reason why we are “forgetting ourselves” though these actions may not be fully conscious acts of rebellion (Ibid., pg. 109). In this way, forgetting ourselves may be a part of social worker’s practices of daily resistance.
Critical remembering is a key element of effective anti-oppressive social work. Critical reflection becomes an important aspect of this critical remembering when we consider it as a form of practice, a framing that is common within the literature (Baines, 2004; Fook, 2002; Mandell 2007; Mullaly 2009). This critical reflexive practice frames the kind of “forgetting ourselves” that Allen (1997) writes about, a forgetting that is potentially harmful to clients, to workers and to the goals of social change. However Allen also invites us to consider how in some contexts “abandoning the reserve” associated with professionalization, may itself becomes a kind of resistance, a consideration that is highlighted in the digital media story Bobbi the Social Work Slayer.

Here forgetting ourselves may be understand as an act that resists social work practices and identities that work against social change, and which seek to reduce understanding to an uncomplicated framing of social work practice as an innocent activity (Rossiter, 2001). In considering this kind of response, social workers may wish to consider the kind of moral regulation and the imposition of understandings of social workers as moral ‘models’ (Breannan & Petit, 2000; Reamer, 1998; Heron, 2007). We might understand these ‘classed’ kinds of activities as good reasons why social workers might forget themselves or may find performing forgetting an effective tool for resistance as authors like Smith (2007) has suggested.

Critical reflexive practice is an important activity that helps social workers examine the issues, concerns and understandings that may, without careful, conscious attention, remain unconscious, potentially counteracting the social change agenda of social work (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b, 2007; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2009; Mullaly, 2007; Mandell, 2007; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005). Sakamoto and Pinter (2005,
identify critical consciousness as both the process and outcomes of reflective practice. Critical consciousness brings to life Baines’ (2011) notion of ‘politicization’ (pg. 6) and evokes Chenderlin’s (1982) notion of “mindful remembering” (pg. 115). Critical consciousness may serve as a potential remedy to Smith’s (2010) caution about the potential danger of nostalgic remembering as obscuring the deficits and challenges also present in these moments (pg. 106).

Critical remembering requires workers to activate many core social work understandings brought to life by the concept of the critical social worker (Mullaly, 2007), the politicized social worker (Baines, 2007) and the anti-oppressive social worker (Benjamin, 2007/2011; Adams et al., 2009). It requires a “continuous self-reflection” that is “accompanied by action to address social injustice” (Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005, pg. 441). These perspectives present discomfort and dissonance as disruptions that invite us to reflect and act (Brooks, 2008; Mandell, 2007; Miehls & Moffatt, 2000; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005; Shragge, 2007). These experiences allow workers to potentially connect with the significance of these events allowing social workers to seize these powerful opportunities for questioning and resisting rather than simply a moment that requires a greater degree of submission to the demands of dominant practice approaches or value expectations (Fook, 2002; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005).

Critical consciousness and anti-oppressive practice are a “self-examination process” that social workers undertake to reduce “assumptions” and hegemonic thinking in practice in an effort to reduce the potential of workers “impos[ing] their own values onto their service users” (Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005, pg. 442). The worker’s subjective position and social location (Carniol, 2005; Heron 2005) are also significant because our
“social identities affect the way we perceive ourselves and others.” (Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005, p. 442). To this end, the authors ask us to consider the effect that various positions might have on social workers’ self understanding within the context of the work and the effect this may also have on service (Ibid., 2005, pg. 442).

Sakamoto and Pinter (2005) argue critical consciousness requires the “empowerment of social workers” (pg. 443). Social workers must actualize the power available to them and be prepared to make it serve social work ends and means. In this way, the authors identify possibilities for moving workers’ “dissatisfaction, pain and anger into social action...” (Ibid. pg. 447). In the digital stories selected for analysis in this thesis, it would appear that the potential for such connections do exist, but bringing this to fruition requires a deeper understanding of social media organizing and the traditions of social change communication as well as the application of more traditional community development activities in order to produce transformative outcomes (George, 2006; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Absolon & Herbert, 1997).

Narratives tell us a great deal about how social workers experience the contemporary practice landscape. The stories we tell are described as windows into our framing of, or interpretation of our experiences, which have a significant influence on our practice decisions (Bernstein, 1992). While our interpretations may be ‘personal’ they are also (at least in part) socially constructed (Adams et al., 2009, pg. 11; Brock, 2003; Heron, 2005; Jagger, 2008; Mullaly, 2009; Rossiter, 2001; Smith 2010). Thus the narratives we create are ‘telling’ and reflect the reciprocal relationship between what is happening in the field and the way that these processes affect the interactions between workers and clients.
Reflective practice is seen as having the potential to change or alter these cycles. There are many perspectives on worker reflexivity and reflective practices as elements in critical social work. Adams, Dominelli and Payne (2009) take this argument one step further, arguing that social workers need to commit to a reflexive cycle described as:

…a circular process in which workers put ‘themselves in the picture’ by thinking and acting with the people they are serving, so that their understandings and actions inevitably are changed by their experiences with others. As a part of the same process, they influence and change others in their social worlds (pg. 4).

These kinds of reflective practices allow us to see how social workers’ experience are simultaneously both shared and unique (Lundby, 2008), and how these stories help us see how workers “see the world in different ways” and in revealing “an account of a life experience that explains the narrators’ understanding of the world as part of the account” (Ibid., pg. 11; Brooks, 2008). Social work narratives, as with client narratives, reveal the social workers “explanations about how the world came to be as they see it, and what they want to achieve in working” towards change (Ibid., pg. 11). Thus we can understand the social workers’ narratives as “alternative ways of seeing;” they also tell us about the challenge of how “[t]hese views compete for influence in society” (Ibid., pg. 11).

Stories have epistemological significance in social work; understanding stories from an epistemological position returns us once more to our own history of feminist and anti-racist work (hooks, 1990; Van Den Berg, 1995; Dominelli, 2002; Dominelli & McLeod, 1989). Narratives provide social workers with possibilities that point to
“different ways of acting when we are trying to help an individual or community respond
to particular difficulties…” (Adams, et al., 2009, pg. 12).

Social work narratives are diverse, competing and conflicting, although neo-
liberals might have us believe otherwise. Social work narratives present many aspects of
practice including ‘significant issues’ in the field. While narratives are constantly in a
state of change, we must acknowledge that the contemporary dominant narratives in
social work include those that frame social work as a highly prescriptive profession;
those reflecting neo-liberal values of efficiency and standardization also loom large on
the social work horizon (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Aronson & Smith, 2009; Adams et
al., 2009; Baines, 2004, 2011b, 2012; Brookfield, 2009; Carniol, 2010; Caragata, 1997;
Fook, 2002; Heron, 2005; Mullaly, 2009, 2007; Rossiter, 2001, 2005; Pollack & Rossiter,
2010; Smith, 2010, 2011). These discourses take many forms, expressing themselves in
discussions about best practices, efficiency, evidence based practice and practice
outcomes related to individual responsibility (Epstein, 1999, pg. 10; Scott & London,
2008, pg. 159; Salas, Sen & Segal, 2010, pg. 91)

Unlike the dominant narratives named above, the majority of the digital media
stories considered in this thesis present alternative narratives, these stories might reflect
elements of the dominant discourses while they simultaneously resist these discourses.
The social workers who have elected to create and post stories on YouTube have, as
Adams et al., (2009) request, “put themselves into the picture”, thus making critical
reflective practice an embodied process. The presence of these stories activates
Chenderlin’s (1982) assertion that certain memoriam speak to the people who need to
remember – in this case these texts speak to critical social workers who understand the
importance of recalling that there are different ways of knowing, being and doing in social work, thus making it possible for them to take on this social work history as a part of the social work future.

**Knowing and Professionalism in Social Work**

While the debate over professionalization has been ongoing over the last century, in a Canadian context the last 20 years have seen these conversations linked more closely to the implementation of legislation and licensure in social work (Hick, 2011; Holosko, 2003; Jennisen & Lundy, 2011). From a practical position over the past two decades professionalism has become the preferred and in many cases the required social work identity. Professional identity legitimizes social work practice through institutionalized regulation of workers (Bisman, 2004; Brooks, 2008; Campbell, 2011; Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Hick, 2001; Lundy, 2004; Pollack & Rossiter &., 2010). Here professional organizing bodies align with government and through legislative sanction, the boundaries and activities of social work are mediated textually through practice standards that regulate behaviour, limit recognized forms of education and training and allow for the credentialization and licensure of workers (ASWB.org [FAQs] http://www.aswb.org/SWL/faqs.asp; Brooks, 2008; CASW, 2009; Hick, 2001; Reamer, 1998). From this perspective, social work is seen as a series of “technical skills” learned through authorized means, practiced by people who have been scrutinized and deemed to meet the minimum requirements established by social work institutions (Baines, 2007, pg. 9; Campbell, 2012; OCSWSSW [Criteria for Registration] http://ocswssw.org/en/applicants_info_new.htm; ASWB, FAQs,
http://www.aswb.org/SWL/faqs.asp; Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Hick 2002; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010; Reamer, 1998; ).

In this climate legitimate or authorized social work can only be undertaken by those people who meet the criteria set out by the relevant social work regulatory body[ies] in the specific jurisdiction where practice is to take place (Hick 2001, IFSW.org). This is a process that turns its back on social work history and our respect for diverse ways of knowing, learning and doing (Payne, 2001). The value and benefit of professionalization has been widely debated with many suggesting that standardization, institutionalization and regulation reflect values and beliefs not traditionally associated with social work. These alternative perspectives call for honouring a more interdisciplinary, ‘process oriented’ kind of social work that reflects many of the elements of a social movement (Adams, et al., 2009; Baines, 2007; Benjamin, 2011; Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly, 2007; Spano, 1982; Richan & Mendelson, 1973; Van Den Berg, 1995).

As a movement, social work is understood as a partnership with “people in need” designed to respond to the priorities of those partners (Reynolds, 1946, pg. 151 as cited in Baines 2007, pg. 21; Mandell 2007, pg. 3; Van Dan Berg, 1995). Thus definitions of what social work is and what social workers do must come from the people who are using the services and doing the work (Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly, 2007). It is a social work that exists for clients with workers occupying the role of “master of service”, seeking to act on the needs and requests of their clients rather than the more professionalized understanding of the “master of expertise” which requires a practice that emphasizes
needs defined and identified institutionally, and which are addressed in service of “the institution” of social work (Bishop, 2005; Ife, 2001; Pollack & Rossiter, 2012).

Many authors highlight the significance of neoliberalism in creating the current context of social work practice (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2007, 2011; Carniol, 2010; Dominelli, 2004; Fook, 2002; Ife, 1997; Mullaly, 2007 & 2009; Pollock & Rossiter, 2012; Smith, 2007, 2010, 2011). The neo-liberal agenda has fundamentally reshaped social work practice and in doing so has created many challenges for social workers. Baines (2011) reflects on the implications of neoliberalism as:

[a]n approach to social, political and economic life that discourages collective or government services, instead encouraging reliance on the private market and individual skill to meet social needs. In the social welfare arena, this approach has resulted in reduced funding for social programs, new service user groups, and workplaces with fewer resources and increased surveillance, management control, and caseload size. World-wide it has resulted in a growth in poverty, decrease in democracy, and increase [in] social and environment devastation. (pg. 30)

The challenge to progressive notions of social work by neoliberalism includes a shift from liberal humanism (in which essentialist notions of what it means to be human assign particular values to these qualities), to a perspective of liberal pluralism often framed as more “progressive” and transformative (Baines, 2007, pg. pg. 6; Ferguson & Lavalette, 2004, pg. 157). This shift fundamentally alters what we understand as social change and social justice. Liberal pluralism is described as “an understanding of the
world as a series of groups competing for resources and power...”; the groups are “believed to possess equal power, status and rights...” (Baines, 2007, pg.6).

In this context inequality is understood as differing access to resources, to opportunities and to outcomes, which can easily be “resolved” through institutional intervention and remediation services rather than through core structural change (Baines, 2007; Ferguson & Lavalette, 2004). Baines (2007) argues that while pluralism does emphasize “inclusion, diversity and attention to multiple voices and identities” this emphasis takes the form of a kind of detached “elitism” (pg. 7). Liberal pluralism gives “lip service support” while promoting “professionalized, narrow, top-down, bureaucratic solutions to everyday struggles and global problems.” (Ibid., pg. 7)

Thus liberal pluralism is said by its critics to promote “authoritarianism” (Ibid., pg. 7). This authoritarianism promotes “processes that enforce strict adherence to authority” and to “control and repression of alternative views and dissent.” (Baines, 2007 pg. 7). This leads to reduced opportunities to discuss and consider the effects of various modes of service and to pose alternatives (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2011b; Heron, 2005; Issit, 1999; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002), which may in turn drive workers’ social justice oriented work “underground” (Smith, 2007), or eliminate these altogether (Smith, 2011).

This kind of authoritarian professionalism fosters alienation (Lavalette & Ferguson, 2004) by promoting the laying of “professional turf through strategies such as licensure or registration,” by formalizing educational standards and requiring workers to “pay certain fees” to be “permitted to use the title ‘social worker’” (Baines, 2007; pg. 8). This link between pluralism and professionalism is seen to produce “an ideology and set
of practices used by skilled workers to improve job security by defining their skill set and
knowledge as unique and deserving of greater legitimacy and financial rewards than
others doing similar work” (Baines, 2007, pg. 8).

This kind of gatekeeping (Payne, 2001) can in turn devalue the traditional helpers
who have performed these social support functions in the context of their communities,
disrupting traditional forms of community support and potentially stripping assets and
capacities out of the community (Alinsky, 1978; Armitage, 2003; Freeman, 2011; Hart,
2000; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). Removal of these traditional supports, in effect,
creates the conditions by which social work becomes a necessity (Armitage, 2003;
Freeman, 2011). These changes result in marginalization that leaves “people of colour,
largely women” outside of the professional boundary (Baines, 2007, pg. 8). Many
indigenous social work authors have described this process as a form of colonialism
(Freeman, 2011; Hart, 2002). This reality is clearly illustrated in the digital media story
World Social Work Day 2010, which we will analyze in Chapter Five.

These more organic ways of knowing and doing were the means by which social
work was initially developed (Baines, Evans & Neysmith 1991, pg. 66; Hick, 2002, pg.
47). Their exclusion limits our access to traditional understandings and unique ways of
knowing and doing while it “aligns...[our] interests with other elitist professions rather
than with grassroots strugglers...” (Baines, 2007, pg. 8). This separation challenges ways
of working that emphasize the importance of the worker-client relationship (Baines 2011;
Fook, 2002; Van Den Berg, 1995). This challenge occurs despite the social worker
narratives suggesting this separation is far more difficult to achieve than neoliberals
suggest (Parada, Barnoff & Coleman, 2007; Smith, 2007).
Social work licensure facilitates “restructuring in social services” by creating a system of professional self-regulation (Baines, 2007; pg. 8; Dominelli, 2004 pg. 16). Self-regulation allows for the “transfer of a whole range of supervisory responsibilities from government bodies that employ social workers to voluntary colleges, readying government services for contracting out” (Baines, 2007, pg. 8). Baines (2007) suggests that while “professional autonomy” may be increased by licensure, traditional social work values associated with government service provision such as “accessibility, inclusivity and support for a healthy public sector” are eroded (pg.8). Promises of professional autonomy as linked to the process of licensure are rapidly undone by neo-liberal standardization and the development of competency based understandings of knowledge and practice (Campbell, 2012; Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Jackson, 1993a, 1993b; Jackson & Jordan, 2000; Pollack & Rossiter, 2012). Concerns about the effects of these changes are most certainly reflected in the social workers’ digital stories examined in this thesis.

**Many Ways of Knowing in Social Work**

Professionalization emphasizes formal academic and scientific knowledge (IASSW 2013 [New Definition of Social Work]). However, social work has historically honoured a more holistic knowledge tradition. Many scholars have sought to present understandings of the social work knowledge base that honours “many ways of knowing” (Baines, Evans and Neysmith, 1991; Fook, 2002; Gibelman, 2005; Goldstein, 1990; Hartman, 1994; Holosko, 2003). These ways of knowing extend beyond formal educational activities and have been described as a “constellation” of knowledge (Holosko, 2003, pg. 276; Gibelman, 2005). This concept emphasizes the idea that our
work includes skills, knowledge, wisdom, values, methods and sanction (Holosko, 2003, pg. 276). These ways of knowing are understood to produce the practice of social work through their convergence and act together in all aspects of our practice, present to one degree or another in each social work interaction (Adams et al., 2009; Fook, 2002; Holosko, 2003; Mandell, 2007).

Social work scholars continue to consider tacit knowledge and practice wisdom as valid contemporary ways of knowing even though neoliberal understandings downplay these perspectives (Baines, 2002; Carniol, 2010; Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2007; Goldstein, 1990; Mullaly, 2007; Mandell, 2007; O’Sullivan, 2005). These elements of practice are under pressure from the professional bodies and associations that prefer a focus on finite and measurable “knowledge, skills and activities” which fall under the notion of social work “competencies” (ASWB.org; Campbell, 2012; Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010). This view denies contrary perspectives, even about the nature of professionalism, like those long promoted by Schon (1983) who highlights the reflective and protective quality of tacit knowledge. He argues that these qualities help to mitigate some of the undesired outcomes of standardization, such as professionals ‘over-learning procedures’ which can in turn lead to an ‘overlooking’ of important context related subtleties necessary for effective service delivery (Campbell, 2012). Thus it might be argued that standardized and enforced practices of formal knowledge are another aspect kind forgetting (Pon, 2009).

Changes brought about by professionalization produce changes in beliefs about what it means to do social work and what it means to be a social worker. For example, standardization is often linked to the notion of efficiency, but research shows it is also

Changes in work design and work speed-up, which are aspects of the efficiency demanded by neoliberalism, negatively affect workers’ ability to develop tacit knowledge and to build peer relationships, both understood as protective factors (Baines, 2004, 2007; Bondi, 2005; Dominelli, 2002; Fook, 2002; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002). Research focusing on workers’ experiences of their practice has demonstrated the many ways that standardized procedures limit workers’ autonomy in practice (Aronson & Smith, 2010, 2010; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002; Smith, 2007, 2011). Furthermore, the literature demonstrates workers’ beliefs that they are challenged, prevented and/or prohibited from providing the services they understand as necessary to meet clients’ wants and/or needs in this contemporary culture of social work (Baines, 2007; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002; Smith, 2007). Their work instead adheres to a schedule of fixed criteria often tied to agency funding rather than the needs of their clients (Antle et al., 2006; Baines, 2004, 2008; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010).

These challenges to social work practice have motivated many authors to consider how it is possible for social workers to continue to engage in social change and value based practice in our contemporary practice context. Here discussions of “subversive practices” and demonstrations of the methods employed by social workers to “work around” the system become the centre of understanding (Parada et al., 2007; Mullaly, 2009; Smith 2007, 2010, 2011).

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It is clear from the literature and from my own experience that workers do, in a wide range of cases, find ways of providing a broader range of resources and services to their clients in spite of the challenges they face (Parada et al., 2007; Smith, 2007; Baines, 2011b). But, it is important to note these outcomes have a cost for workers. The need for this kind of extension places demands on the individual worker; it means more work for the workers concerned (Baines, MacKenzie Davies & Saini, 2008; Smith, 2007; Karabanow, 1999; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002). The potential to “do more with less” and to continue to “find ways around things” are limited by the worker’s capacity to commit personal resources to prop up the system (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Aronson & Smith, 2010, 2010; Baines, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2012; La Rose 2009). Brookfield (2009) argues that such actions are misguided and that these practices fail workers, clients and society by creating the illusion that services are actually available when in fact they are no longer being offered.

Sanction

The notion of “sanction” is another element in the social work knowledge constellation (Hick, 2001; Holosko, 2003). Sanction also plays a role in shaping social work practice by shaping our understanding of the legitimacy of social work practice and social work identity as it exists beyond the confines of professionalization. Historically, sanction has been understood as of kind of “grassroots legitimacy” leading to the institutionalization of social work activities. Practically speaking, sanction comes by virtue of the community; it is produced when people elect to recognize and seek out the services of social workers (Hick, 2001). When people want social work services social work is given sanction (Holosko, 2003).
Beyond this community-based process, institutional sanction occurs when social institutions like governments recognize social work. For example, when the government provides resources like money to support social workers’ service development as it did recently with the Canadian Competencies Survey (see OCSWSSW.ca) undertaken by the newly formed Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators\(^3\) (http://www.ocswssw.org/2011socialworkcompetencyprofilesurveya.htm). Another more historical example is the inclusion of social work on the occupational questionnaires included in the (former) long form Canadian census, a move by government we can understand as formally legitimizing this kind of work (Hick, 2002).

Contemporary mediation of this idea of sanction reflects an increased relationship between social welfare services and market outcomes (Baines, 2011b; Campbell, 2012; Jackson & Jordon, 1999; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010). As our profession has gained status, our work has been gradually redefined as a set of transferable skills that can be represented in texts and articulated in trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010). This is another (unfortunate) way that we may understand social work to have sanction (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2011; Westheus, n.d.). Social workers are now a commodity that can be traded and social workers can now gain access to employment markets outside of their home country on the basis of the trade of their skills (Campbell, 2012; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011; Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010; Westheus, n.d.).

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\(^3\) I have undertaken a detailed web-based search of information about the Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators and there is currently no information available to the general public beyond documentation of the official registration.
In order to facilitate this kind of commodification, the institutional regulation that makes social work ‘a profession’ is extended to allow for the regulation, measurement, audit and compliance processes to be enforced by licensing organizations at many different levels and in many different spaces (Hick, 2001; Baines, 2007, 2011; Smith, 2010, 2011). For example, in both the US and Canada state/provincial regulating bodies administer supervision of the profession but are themselves further coordinated through national organizations like the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in the US, and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and the newly formed Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators in Canada. Regulation allows for the reframing of the social work profession as a form of flexible workforce that can be moved around the globe in pursuit of work and opportunities, supporting processes of neo-colonization at the international level.

The IFSW has charged itself with the task of creating this institutionalized model of a global social work, a globalized professional social work (IFSW.org). Both Canada and the US hold membership and exert influence over the vision and mission of the IFSW. In Hick’s (2001) words the role of the IFSW is to “promote social work as a profession, link [...] social workers from around the world and promot[e] the participation of social workers in social policy and planning.” (pg. 65). The IFSW has an affiliation with the United Nations and upholds the UN convention on Human Rights (Hick, 2002, pg. 65). From the perspective of the IFSW, social work is defined in the following way:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and
social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IFSW.org[Definition]).

The IFSW, like many other social work organizations, has elected to use YouTube as means for sharing its perspective on social work and globalization. All of these competing views provide a context for the social work digital stories that have captured my attention. Most of the social work narratives presented in the YouTube environment engage with these dominant narratives now commonplace in mainstream understandings of social work. Social workers who have elected to create stories have joined in the conversations that are happening about social work.

These stories go one step further by allowing other social workers to bear witness and potentially see themselves therein. We are given access to histories that we might not have otherwise connected with. These stories invite us to consider social work practices as acts of remembering, forgetting and resisting. The presence of these stories on the internet can be seen to bring us back once more to Chenderlin’s (1982) assertion, that certain memoriam speak to the people who need to remember – in this case to recall that there are different ways of knowing and doing social work, thus making space for new possible social work futures based on the inclusion of a broader remembering of a broader range of social work histories.
Chapter 3: Digital Media Stories for Social Work

The digital media stories considered in this thesis can be understood as diverse examples of the mediatization of social work. It’s no surprise that social workers are making use of digital technologies and social media practices as a part of their daily social work activities and/or reflection on their work as the internet and digital media spaces are increasingly understood as places where new forms of knowledge production are emerging (Brushwood Rose, 2009; Dicks, Mason, Coffee & Atkins, 2005; Kress, 2003; Lange, 2009; Lundby, 2008, 2009; Markham, 1998, 2004; Markham & Baym, 2009; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009). In particular, digital storytelling has become a tool that allows for popular knowledge and representations to be created and shared with and among concerned and/or interested people.

Digital media stories allow both organizations and “ordinary” people the capacity to consider and to share what they “know” through the creation of “multi-modal...multi-vocal texts” and through the sharing of these texts on the Internet (Nelson & Hull, 2008, pg. 172). Social workers and people concerned with the practice of social work are among the ordinary people who are exploring and experimenting with digital media storytelling as a way of giving voice to a wide range of issues and understandings. Digital storytelling and story-sharing through digital media technology honours many traditions of social work knowledge production and identity formation. Digital media stories are narrative texts that may reflect social work traditions of reflexivity and reflective practice (Heron, 2005; Mandell, 2007; Moffatt, 1996; Mullaly, 2009; Rossiter, 2001, 2007).

As an emergent space of knowledge production and dissemination, social work activities in the digital domain are only now becoming exposed to professional regulation.
Social work in digital spaces is a largely unmapped terrain. This frontier has allowed some social workers to create a (small) space where more autonomous self-directed interpretations and representations of what it means to be a social worker have been created and shared. These possibilities exist because of limited institutionalized interpretations and standardization of what digital social work might mean when compared to the other more common place, material social work spaces. The lack of familiarity and knowledge about digital media and the Internet have also worked in the favour of these creators. Together these factors mean regulators (up to this point) have apparently paid minimal attention to digital practices, but in the last two years have begun to show increasing interest and concern (Fitch, 2005; Hick & McNutt, 2002; McNutt, 2000; La Rose, 2012).

In this way we can understand the digital stories selected for inclusion in the thesis and many more that remain in the public domain on the Internet reflect the possibilities of a relatively open space that have allowed for exploration of understandings of social work that extend beyond the discourses of professional social work and that honour the understandings of social work as a contested phenomena (Baines, 2011b), as a conflict based perspective (Mullaly, 2009), as a practice of resistance (Benjamin, 2011; Fook, 2002) and as a performance space for embodied forms of politicization (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b). However, these spaces are being enclosed by social work regulatory bodies who are raising a ‘moral panic’ about the dangers and ills of social media and Internet based social work practices⁴ (BASW, 2009; Horton, 2012; White, 2011). This gate keeping is being justified (by those regulators who are publishing and speaking publicly about these issues), in order to protect

⁴ John Coates and members of the New Brunswick Association of Social Workers presented on this issue at the 2010 CASWE Conference at the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick.
social workers from themselves and the potential of moral and ethical transgressions that are presented as more likely to occur when workers use digital technologies (Smyth (n.d.) [Virtual Connections]; White, 2011).

In my search of the internet, I have found that the uncontrolled and to some degree unfamiliar nature of digital spaces like YouTube seems to be serving as a repository for a considerable number of representations of social work that align with understandings of social work as processes of resistance. A framing that leans on traditional understandings of social movements (Baines, 2011b; Benjamin, 2007/2011). A considerable number of these texts reflect the traditions of “practice wisdom” (Goldstein, 1990; O’Sullivan, 2005), “tacit knowledge” (Baines, 2004; 2007) and “learning by doing” (Newman 1995, pg. 247) commonly associated with the more radical potential of social work.

The concept of analogous knowledge (Goldstein, 1990), another way of knowing that is tied to the epistemological traditions of social work (Flynn, Saulnier, 1996; Van Den Berg, 1995) may be seen in social workers’ digital narrative practices. Analogous knowledge allows the use of metaphors to help us understand meaning in context. Analogous learning helps social workers to consider how the past is present in contemporary social work and how it connects us to potential social work futures. Digital stories allows us to move from the “hyper-local” to the “hyper-global” (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007; Kidd, 2010). Which provides us with an example of how social work histories maybe mediated in local contexts while also allowing us to make connections across texts to people and places that are neither temporally nor proximally connected to each other or to the original sites of the stories (Bosch, 2010; Couldry, 2010; Elsaesser, 2008; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010; Salazar, 2010).
The epistemological possibilities of digital media storytelling rely in part on the possibilities of multi-media technology as “convergence technology” (Dicks et al, 2005; pg. 74; Markham, 2004; Markham & Baym, 2009). Digital stories are multi-media stories. While traditional storytelling may use a small range of media to make meaning (for example, voice and intonation. These mediatised stories have the capacity to use a large array of media to convey meaning and to tell and retell a story (Boler, 2008; Lundby, 2009, Nelson & Hull, 2008; Thurmim, 2008).

Multi-media technologies allow a story to convey different kinds of information on many different levels all at the same time and to transmit the ‘same’ story multiple times, in multiple places, to known (or desired) audiences and to unknown or unanticipated audiences (Lange, 2009; Couldry, 2008, pg. 49). These multi-media stories convey meaning through any combination of: 1) sound or sound effects, including music and ‘voice over’ narration; 2) visual effects including still and moving pictures, animation, video footage and text captioning; 3) hyper-linking, tagging and interactive discussion, all layered together to make up a ‘single story event’ (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

Web 2.0 technology and Internet capacities contribute to the relative availability of story-making technology (mwesch, 2010; Kidd, 2010; Lambert, 2008). This is a consideration requiring critical understanding as “relative availability” means easy access to resources like computers and electricity and to Internet access with a significant amount of bandwidth, all of which depend to a large degree on access to public infrastructure (Kidd, 2010). It is clear that digital media and the possibility of digital storytelling bring much potential; however, it is important to remember that much of its potential is the potential for inequity of access and
therefore an inequity in the nature of the stories told. In the case of digital media technology inequity is perhaps even more ubiquitous than the Internet.

That being said, many home based amateur computer users can generate a mediatised story using a basic computer and affordable store-bought software (Lundby, 2008, p. 4), free downloadable software (like Windows Movie Maker), and/or online applications available for use through internet based video platforms like YouTube. Internet capabilities and sharing infrastructures like YouTube and Vimeo provide users with the capacity to share stories to global audiences (mwesch, 2008).

Digital storytelling has been used in a variety of settings to engage populations identified as “at risk” and to tackle “social issues” (Brushwood Rose, 2009; Lundby, 2008). These practices capture what Spivak (2004) describes as “pressure from below” (pg. 73); here “ordinary people” engage in agitation and pressure and seek resources or demand resources that are often a part of dominant human right discourses, reflecting Benjamin’s (2007/2011) notion of daily resistance as the practice of ordinary people. The literature also describes digital stories as “auto-biographical literacy practices” (Nelson & Hull, 2008), “self-representational narratives” (Hertzberg & Lundby, 2008, p. 105); “locations” for identity exploration which may manifest as embracing or exposing the authentic self (Thurim, 2008), escaping from dominant “social roles” (Nyboe & Drotner, 2008, p. 162), or exploring identity more generally (Drotner, 2008); finally, digital stories can be understood as new performance spaces (Erstad & mwesch, 2010; Nyboe & Drotner, 2008).

**Storymaking Processes**

The process by which digital stories are made is also an important understanding that can hold meaning in the process of reading social workers’ stories. Some stories are created in
the context of digital media storytelling workshops, or in formal course settings. These contexts use a group process as a learning environment for participants and they usually provide storytellers with standardized preferred technological applications and approaches to making a story (McWilliam, 2008). Similarly, do-it-yourself manuals supporting “self-teaching” of specific approaches to storymaking afford users another standardized alternative to workshop or course-based learning (see: Lambert, 2008).

There are many examples of digital story telling projects around the world. Digital story projects are often community engagement strategies or linked to community based research projects. These projects support participants learning of the practice of digital storytelling in order to produce digital story texts as tools for representing their experiences within the frame of the project outcomes.

Among the examples of these kinds of projects we can consider those sponsored by community based agencies like Central Neighbourhood House in Toronto, who together with the Toronto branch of the Centre for Digital Story Telling (now Digital Story T.O.) have undertaken several projects to facilitate discussions of oppression and marginalization faced by women (http://www.thestoryproject.ca/). Other projects in the Toronto area include those undertaken by the Wellesley Institute, a community based research organization, whose projects considered population health discourses as they are brought to life in the low-income high-density neighbourhood of St. Jamestown (see: http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/?s=digital+stories).

Global examples of digital story telling projects include: projects undertaken with Japanese students to promote English language skills (Nelson & Hull, 2008); a story project for Norwegian youth exploring religious identity (Hertzberg & Lundby, 2008); and the work of
two Storytelling centres in Australia who engage in curriculum development through work with youth and teachers (McWilliam, 2008). In addition to these population-based projects, locality development is another area of focus with two of the most famous projects promoting citizenship in London England (Capture London) and Wales (Capture Wales), (Thumim, 2008).

When I began this thesis I was unable to find any storytelling projects focused on social workers as the central population under consideration. Since that time, a small number of micro projects have taken place that include two “student” digital storytelling competitions held by the Canadian Association of Social Work Education in 2012 and 2013 (see CASWE.ca). Course based components have been developed in Schools of Social Work at the University of Calgary (UToday, 2009; Walsh, Shier, Sitter; Sieppert, 2010), and as part of my own work at Ryerson University. A small group of PhD. students at McMaster University in Hamilton Ontario have also undertaken a micro project on storytelling related to their experiences in the Occupy movement (Dassinger, Jackson, Idems, Furlotte, O’Neill, Plante, van, Berkle, 2010).

While social workers may not have developed formal profession-based digital storytelling projects, storytelling projects have been undertaken with other human service and care-workers. One such example is the project NurseStory (see: http://vimeo.com/tag:nurstory) a joint undertaking of the Centre for Digital Story Telling, Colorado and the University of Colorado School of Nursing. This project focuses on documenting the practice experiences of forensic nurses studying at the PhD level. While few social workers are involved in digital storytelling projects about their work-life, stories are

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5 Undertaken in 2010 with support of the Ryerson Digital Media Projects Office.
being created. At the time of this writing, I can say from my own Internet searches that the social media site YouTube is the home to several hundred English language stories that maintain a connection with social work.

**Organic Digital Storytelling**

The social work stories found on YouTube are for the most part what I would describe as spontaneous or “organic” stories. These stories do not present or represent the kind of mediatized “discursive domain[s]” that many project based digital media stories do (McWilliam, 2008). As several authors have suggested, stories created in workshops or using particular methods reflect those method in their composition and style of presentation. For example, when a storyteller goes to a Centre for Digital Storytelling workshop, they learn the Lambert method, and their work “goes” Lambert.

As one element in this thesis work, I elected to undertake a somewhat ethnographic engagement in digital storytelling by participating in a weekend workshop at Digital Storytelling Toronto (DSTO). At this workshop I produced a digital story called *The Trouble with Stacey* (see: lonleysocialworker, 2010). This story clearly reflects the Lambert style of storytelling, but this was not my original intended project when I signed up for the workshop. At the workshop, I felt I was compelled to produce a particular kind of story. When I presented my initial narrative, it was rejected by the facilitators who were seeking a particular kind of story, with a particular linear story arch, told in a particular voice. When I attempted to resist this process, they edited my story as a method of saving me from myself, suggesting that I would not be a successful storyteller unless I did it “this” way.

I wasn’t alone in this experience. I watched these experts “tag team” the participants, editing in tandem, and when necessary separating resistant storytellers from the larger group
until we adhered to their expectations. We were expected to tell a linear narrative, to create a
text that told a story of liberal humanist essentialism. The telling was understood as a process
of catharsis. A release presented as a “eureka moment” with a slight message of social justice
that suggested that the practice of telling was an act of personal liberation. The stories had the
quality of an advertisement for the method and subtly suggest the potential that other stories
could be told this way.

The stories considered in this thesis do not present as though they have been created in
a workshop. They do not reflect a dominant style or aesthetic of story, or of story making, but
rather in my assessment reflect the storytellers’ independent story-making activities with the
exception of two text which might reflect participation in formal film making training (See:
_The Discrete Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker_). Another story titled Social Worker
Overload presents a “news interview” style of production and was clearly produced by
professional video makes. The remaining stories show a wide array of styles and use different
storytelling genres. They are mostly linear texts, although some reflect other ways of
organizing the process of telling a story and presenting the unfolding of time, as I discuss in
later chapters.

When we watch these stories, it is impossible for us to know what motivated the story-
maker’s decision to use digital storytelling as a way of engaging in reflective practice in this
particular way, focused on these particular topics. Its is doubtful that very many of these social
workers would even refer to what they are doing as digital storytelling and they might not see
their texts as reflective practice. They might simply understand what they are doing as “killing
time” or even “fooling around” on the computer. But the 'foolishness' of these texts is an
important kind of foolishness as it tells us a great deal about social work, and in fact may tell
us what cannot be told in any other way (Bernstein, 1992; Portelli, 1991). Taken as individual
texts, each of the digital media stories tells its own story, but taken together, we can understand
these very many social work stories as chapters in a much larger story. These texts can be
understood as a kind of rhizomatic account of social work, a non-linear, non-temporal story of
what it means to be a social worker, and what social work means to people who do this work
(Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010; Couldry, 2010; Elsaesser, 2009).

Digital media stories are described as “new performance space[s]”, expanding the
possibilities for individuals to create our own media with personal voices centred in these
digital texts (Erstad & Wetsch, 2008, p. 32). Socially, a significant shift is taking place as we
shift our use of traditional forms of mass media and yield to the greater incorporation of
independent digital media activities in our daily lives (Erstad & Wetsch, 2008, p. 32, Kidd &
Rodríguez, 2011). While some question the value of “autobiographical” texts, other authors
suggest that personal reflection can, under the right circumstances, be a form of knowledge
production (Denzin, 2003; Fook, 2002, 1996; Heron, 2005; Mandell, 2007; Moffatt, 1996,
2009; Richardson, 2000; Rossiter, 2005).

The idea of performance is relevant to this process of knowledge generation (Denzin,
2003). “Performance” is presented as a social work practice (Payne, 2010; Baines, 2011b;
Moffatt, 1996; Smith, 2007). Scholarship in this area frames performance as a way of
mediating social work activities, values and goals to meet the environment in which practice
occurs, or to bridge gaps in social or moral understandings of social work, a process that is
understood to be (at least to some degree) experimental and adaptive (Baines, 2011; Moffatt,
1996).
Payne (2010) argues this is commonplace and that much of social work is a process of performance. Performance is seen to provide social workers with the ability to actualize the promise of generalist practice in that, social workers may act like they are “wise” when they may not be or may not feel confident in their knowledge or actions. For example, social workers may perform professionally correct emotions; we may stay calm when we are in fact upset and we may be kind even though we may not want to be. These performances are a way of serving the needs of clients and exemplify the belief that the purpose of intervention is to centre the client (Payne 2010, 2007).

Baines (2011b) presents us with the idea that social workers may take on ‘roles’ in order to mobilize resources for clients or to engage in advocacy. These roles may mean that social workers act out what may not be a true representation of the social workers’ personality, their desire for practice or even what is “standard” practice. For example, Baines (2011b) describes how she took on the posture of a “lawyer” at the request of a client when this kind of stance supported access to necessary resources that facilitated the client’s goals (pg. 84). Similarly, Smith (2007) suggests that social workers may fain certain behaviours, thoughts or feelings when it is useful to meet the goals of serving clients or sustaining the distribution of resources to people in need.

The work of Moffatt (1996) illustrates the benefit of using roleplaying and popular theatre techniques to support social work students’ development of practice skills and consideration of potential ways and means of doing anti-oppressive practice. Similarly, many schools of social work have embraced experiential education as a method of learning both practical and abstract elements of social work (see the websites of McMaster University
While many of these considerations of performance are linked to clinical social work activities, there is no limit to the types of roles the social worker might experiment with or demonstrate in digital story performance spaces, with the exception being the limit of the social workers’ imagination. Here performance is not necessarily about the client, but may allow the social worker to explore and experiment with what Egan (1986, 2009) describe as the “shadow side,” the part of the worker that is filled with doubt and uncomfortable emotion. This discomfort and potential is seen by many authors as an important kind of knowledge, and understanding that needs to be attended to and brought into conscious awareness in order for critical work to take place (Carter-Scott, 1989, 1991; Fook, 2002; Mandell, 2007; Miehls & Moffat, 2000; Rossiter, 2001; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005; Shragge, 2007).

Internet based digital media sharing sites like YouTube and Vimeo provide a wealth of examples of these kinds of experimental texts. These texts range from social work students’ course presentations and roles plays, to the performances of spoken word poetry, satirical stories that reflect bizarre social work practice experiences, or stories that depict social workers as super-heroes or as “abject heroes” (Bernstein, 1992). Digital media social work stories show audiences that performance can extend to a range of practice contexts and can take the form of both sincere and cynical tributes to social work.

Finding these texts in the YouTube environment provides us with another interesting consideration about Internet based sharing activities. As Kidd and Rodriguez (2011) suggest, there are some opportunities for engaging in social change communication through the
Internet, however, these authors also question commercialization and market interests as placing these opportunities in jeopardy.

This point is well take, as the YouTube that existed when I began this research project in 2008 is different to the YouTube environment that exists as I conclude this project in the middle of 2013. When YouTube was first launched in 2005, this privately owned social media experiment existed was a much less commercialized environment (mwesch, 2008 [A Digital Ethnography of YouTube]). In 2006, when YouTube was purchased by Google commercialization began and has continued to deepened and over the last few years as Google has developed process for advertising, profit making and market research with (and on) YouTube (McDonald, 2009; mwivesh, 2010 [The Machine is Using Us]). This corporatization has led to many changes in the way this social media environment functions, which in turn, raises questions about whether YouTube will continue to be a place where social workers will be able to share their stories. This further invites consideration about the effect of commercialization on our capacity to locate and access these kinds of grassroots texts in the future (Andrejevic, 2009; Farchy, 2009; Kidd & Rodriquez, 2011; Wasko & Erickson, 2009).

**Digital Ways as Postmodernism**

Erstad & Wetsch (2008) claim digital media storytelling demonstrates postmodernist perspectives about meaning as a shifting and fluid understanding (pg. 23). In this view, digital stories are not simply “unique to the individual” but bring to life the collective nature of “storytelling, learning and meaning making.” (Erstd & Wetsch, 2008, 23). Lundby (2008) presents this understanding as demonstrated in stories that show us the tensions that exist between our understandings of the unique and the universal as binary categories.
In considering the relevance of tension as challenging binaries, Lundby’s (2008) research considers the contradictory tension that group identities can bring about. He emphasizes the fact that many digital stories reveal storyteller’s intent to tell a unique story while their texts reflect the common nature of their experiences through references to collective experiences. This idea of the extra-ordinary co-existing with the ordinary, or the tension of the unique and universal, is understood to make visible the social complexities that we live in our daily experiences and that are most certainly a part of social work.

Contradictory tensions are after all accepted and honoured within anti-oppressive social work traditions (Barnoff & Moffatt, 2007) suggesting once more the potential for digital media storytelling to allow for examination of understandings and experiences that may be difficult to express in words. To make this idea more concrete, anti-oppressive practice literature discusses the idea that we are both “oppressed and powerful”, that we can be marginalized in some aspects of life and occupy a centred position in other aspects of our life, and that we can have both shared and unique experiences of these processes simultaneously (Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2007, 2009; Heron, 2005; Rossiter, 2007; Razak, 2005). Digital storytelling has the potential to allow us to explore and honour these contradictory tensions suggesting that social workers may find an unexpected home in this way of meaning making and sharing meaning.

Couldry (2008) sees digital stories as taking advantage of the capacity of digital media to facilitate “production, circulation, interpretation and recirculation” as elements of storytelling processes (pg. 50). Story production or the technical and creative processes of making digital media stories is really the “manner in which” or the “means through which” understanding comes from stories. Production is an important first step in meaning making because without the story it would be impossible to share meaning. Certain styles of production
trigger certain “styles of interpretation” or certain kinds of readings (Erstad & Wesch, 2008, p. 27). Story design has certain meanings embedded within the style of the digital story, meanings that can complement, contradict or potentially overshadow content (McWilliam 2008, p. 157).

Couldry (2008, pg. 50) suggests that the meaning of stories may change as digital stories are circulated within and across digital media environments. Circulation, or the movement of stories to audiences, is something that is desirable because it allows us to get our message out. The rapid and seemingly limitless transportation of digital media presents many possibilities. While circulation is an opportunity, at times it can be a threat. As texts are circulated, they may become disconnected from their original purpose and intended audience and outcomes which can be understood as a benefit or a challenge by the storymakers depending upon what flows from these interpretations and meaning making processes.

**Digital Stories as Communicative Artifacts**

Nelson and Hull (2008) suggest that digital stories can be understood as “communicative artefact[s]...” (pg. 126). A framing of digital stories that suggests research into these texts, and the “long-term consequences” of story making practices is an important scholarly activity (Couldry 2008, pg. 50). The digital media texts produced by social work storytellers and our responses to these texts will tell us much about the evolution of social work. In the future, these stories may be important markers of change supporting processes of anamnesis.

The notion of “artifacts” brings us once more to the idea of history and context as fundamental tools for anti-oppressive practice. Benjamin’s (2007/2011) suggestion of the need to consider history and context suggest that understanding social worker’s digital media stories
as artefacts is worthwhile. Social work has a long tradition of utilizing artefacts as tools for preserving history and learning from the past, issues that have been discussed above.

Considerations of anti-oppressive social work suggest artefacts are important tools for creating a culture of resistance as a social change tactic. Benjamin (2007/2011) argues that understanding history and context together are important steps in facilitating the success of resistance. Furthermore, history needs to be understood in context in order to provide us with a deeper understanding of why things exist as they do (Baines, 2007; Benjamin, 2007/2011; Mullaly, 2009). However, we may need to ask some questions about how we come to access history in light of neoliberalism. The downward pressure on the public good (Falk, 1999) has eliminated many of the possibilities for social work history sharing or restricted our access to publicly held archival materials. Digital media sharing sites like YouTube may be one possible challenge to the retrenchment of public memory (Snickars & Vondreau, 2009). Many authors analyze the Internet and particular digital spaces like YouTube as new media archives (Burgess & Green, 2009; Haskins, 2007; Prelinger, 2009; Kidd and Rodríguez, 2010; Shoshet, 2010). These digital spaces are understood to provide us with new opportunities for access to historic data and expanding the kinds of materials that are being included in the notion of archival texts.

The importance of archival materials as ways of knowing about social work will be discussed later in the thesis, when I introduced Moffatt’s (2001) research into the life of Dorothy Livesay. Her work demonstrates how the “poet’s perspective” tells us much about the experience of social work practice, Moffatt points to the importance of artefacts as supporting considerations of more marginalized social work histories.
These hidden social work histories include information about the identities of social workers and the significance these identities have in laying the foundation of our contemporary practice. For example, this kind of archival research has revealed that a significant number of pioneering social workers embraced lesbian identities (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Lindhorst, Kemp & Walters, 2009, p. 328). The same sex partnerships shared by early pioneers of the field like Jesse Taft and partner Virginia Robinson, Jane Addams and partners Ellen Gates Starr and later Mary Rozetta Smith as well as Mary Richmond and her partner Zelphia Smith were well documented through artefacts, but not necessarily reflected in official histories (Fredriksen-Goldsen, et al., 2009, p. 328).

These identities speak to social work as a space for anti-oppression work at a very core level, in that social work may well have provided an identity that allowed these women to escape dominating identities (Heron, 2001) in this case compulsory heterosexuality. The lesbian identities held by these women may further be understood as potentially enhancing the kind of advocacy work these women did, bringing to life the importance of understandings like the notion of “double consciousness” (hooks, 1990; Van Den Berg, 1995) that allow experiences of oppression and marginalization to shape particular ways of understanding the operation of these processes in the social world.

In a contemporary context, there are many social work issues that are not reflected in the academic and professional literature but which are reflected in the YouTube environment. For example, issues of worker safety that have largely been hidden from the view of social workers in the field are discussed in several digital media texts (see: Child Welfare worker in Windsor Ontario Children's Aid Society is stabbed: http://youtu.be/bkYq2PWCuqo; Vigil held for slain Lockport counselor: http://youtu.be/KFyuUUt-69c; Butcher knife and bit of rage:
While some connection between neo-liberal practices and workplace violence is presented by a minority of social work authors in peer reviewed publications (see: Baines, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2012; Mullaly 2006, 2010; MacDonald & Sirotich, 2005), the literature tends to speak generally about these factors rather than drawing attention to specific incidents or even case study examples.

There are a frightening number of these worker safety incidents, which receive little attention, with at least one social worker dying at the hands of clients every year in the US. Official information about these events produced by the professional associations is disappointingly limited. However, communicative artefacts produced by organizations like unions or individual practices of “digital memorial” (Hess, 2002) allow us to unearth these realities and to consider the broader implications of these events. YouTube materials represent a significant tool for potentially bringing these issues to light and distributing the information through the process of recirculation (Haskins, 2007; Wahlberg, 2009).

These various ideas suggest that that the creation of a kind of social work memory space is an important application of social workers’ digital storytelling practice. Capturing, preserving and revisiting unpopular histories or marginalized histories may play an important role in keeping these practices alive. In circumstances where it is impossible to do certain types of practice, preserving these practices digitally means that these ways of doing social work may be available in future times.

Digital storytelling practices may also support our search for subjugated knowledge more generally (Hartman, 1994; Van Den Berg, 1995). Furthermore, giving social workers a view of what is happening may mobilize workers for engagement in more active kinds of

Social work is gradually taking on a more global identity. Globalization is being supported by contemporary social phenomena like neoliberalism that considers global level activities to be efficient and progressive acts, and that allow increased marketization and profit making (Aronson & Smith, 2009; Baines, 2004, 2007, 2011b, 2012; Baines, MacKenzie Davis, Saini, 2008; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2010, 2011). These processes are also operating from within, expressed through emerging social work organizations like the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). For better or for worse, understanding social work at the local level is tied to a global system of social work, a tie that is an increasingly important kind of social work knowledge.

These processes of globalizing are, in part, shifting what we understand as falling under the social work scope of practice. Both the IFSW and the IASSW have made efforts to link social work to international development activities and social development practices (The Global Agenda, 2012). This movement to link international development work to social work suggests social workers may benefit from thinking about what some aspects of development may mean in the context of social work and what similarities exist between these two fields. For example, community based education and community based media activities are central practices in international development work (Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010). These can be understood as reflective of community practice/community development ideals and activities (CLIFF, 2012; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Reinsborough & Canning, 2009; Absolon & Herbert, 1997; Weil, 1996).
Kidd and Rodríguez (2011) describe development communication as potentially an emancipatory process; these activities provide potential alternatives to mainstream/dominant media, which present information in-line with dominant and potentially dominating social, cultural, economic and political values and beliefs. Developmental communications projects (many are now called social change communication projects) often seek to develop communication capacities in both individuals and communities, while also creating infrastructures that facilitate information sharing by groups or networks of ordinary people. These projects potentially provide people with information and with places to share the things they know and want others to know about.

The act of creating materials for transmission allows for control of the contents of communication. As Kidd and Rodríguez (2011) note, this may well allow marginalized and oppressed groups to control representations about the members of the group and the group as a whole. Control of representation can be a tool that allows for resistance; this resistance challenges assumptions, stereotypes and myths that may exist about these groups and their members and which are used to justify exploitation, marginalization and domination. Anamnesis (Chenderlin, 1982; Muller, 2009) is another potential goal of these media practices as communities unearth and renew things that have been forgotten and their reasons for forgetting.

Alternative media content may allow for improved understandings of what it means to be a member of this group or community. In challenging oppressive representations, providing alternatives means that new potential selves may be explored and produced, processes that may also challenge limitations of what it means to be part of the group or community from within, something that social work and social workers may also benefit from. Kidd and Rodríguez
(2011) argue that grass roots, independent and development communications (all terms used to describe change based communication activities in the literature), actualize the ideals of social change and social development.

Development scholarship creates strong links between the emancipation of marginalized groups and oppressed peoples and the need to develop skills, capacities, knowledge and infrastructures that support and mobilize control over information sharing and representations of/about these very peoples (Couldry, 2010; Kidd, 2011; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010). Under the conditions of “predatory globalization” (Falk, 1999) that mark our contemporary context of practice, control of commercial media and mass media resources are increasingly privatized and concentrated (Couldry, 2010; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010).

As fewer media outlets maintain a larger share of the communication market, the nature of information shared is shifting (Barker-Plummer & Kidd, 2009). A number of studies in a wide range of interdisciplinary contexts from journalism to applied linguistics (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), to cultural studies and social work (Mullaly, 2009) all argue that greater media concentration and centralization means that there are fewer resources to tell stories or report events that are local (Bosch, 2011; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Kidd, 2011; Kidd & Lee, 2011) or that challenge the values and objectives of the power elite (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Mullaly, 2009). Thus challenging these realities and providing alternatives (Barker-Plummer & Kidd, 2009) is one of the actions that social workers and social development workers have and continue to use to make change.

While the idea of development communications may bring to life images of “underdeveloped places” the experiences of increased centralization over communication activities suggest important reasons that social workers might want to consider the relevance of
these practices for our work with clients and for our own professional development even if we
work in “developed” places. Kidd (2010b) has demonstrated the importance of community-
based communications during protest movements like the G8 and G20 summits.
Communication about local events, regulation and repression, resistance and protest have
proven extremely important to raising the awareness of the general public to the politics of
neoliberalism and to the protection of the rights of citizens (Couldry, 2010; Kidd, 2010a,
area demonstrated the importance of these practices during election campaigns as community
engagement /civic engagement strategies and during the Occupy movements as tools for
critique of the state (see: meganboler.net).

There are great examples of development communication activities in the context of
places we might understand as “developed”. For example, in Los Angeles, California the work
of IDEPSCA and the creation of the VozMob project for Latino Day Workers reflects many
elements of development communications allowing the community to challenge the
stereotypes that exist about Latino peoples as “illegal workers” and to afford the Latino
community a space to share important information (VozMob Project, 2010).

Community engagement strategies by organizations like the National Film Board of
Canada and their GDP project brings to life the importance of capturing untold stories of
national experiences related to the economy, stories that are not told on the nightly news
(http://gdp.nfb.ca:intro). Internet based alternative news broadcasts like “Labour Start” provide
news and information programming on topics largely ignored or under-reported by mainstream
media outlets (see: http://www.labourstart.org). Even the digital media practices of
Anonymous (see: http://www.youtube.com/user/AnonymousNewsCanada/videos?view=0) can
also be understood as a form of political or advocacy based communication and therefore fall under the umbrella of development communications.

On this basis, social work stories told by people who identify or are affected by social work can also be viewed through the lens of development communications. Given the current global economic and social realities, the implementation of structural adjustment in a number of European nations such as Ireland and Greece suggest the relevance of development communication to social work practice may continue to expand as the lines of development work and the spaces understood as developed and in need of development become increasingly blurred.

Kidd and Rodríguez (2011) suggest that the Internet provides both opportunities and threats to the idea of development communication. While digital media provides an expanded level of access to these kinds of practices, the Internet also lends itself to surveillance and monitoring by a wide variety of policing organizations. They suggest that the traditions of development communication are both reflected and challenged by digital interpretation of these practices, a reality that supports the need for research like the kind of work I am undertaking.

**What is YouTube?**

YouTube plays an important role in this thesis and in the multiple understandings of social work digital storytelling that I am seeking to develop. All of the digital texts considered in this research were discovered in the YouTube environment. When I began this thesis, YouTube was the only free Internet based digital media sharing site and while many other spaces now exist and may contain social work digital media stories I have limited my study to YouTube.
Knowing something about YouTube is an important element in the analysis of these digital media stories. YouTube is both a commercial digital media application and a web-based environment (Snickars & Vondreau, 2009). YouTube organizes its content in part through a system of user ‘homepages’ commonly known as “channels”. Channels allow storytmakers to share their work with an audience\(^6\). Channels are user controlled, and allow users to produce and manipulate multi-media materials (such as uploading, editing and effect processing on digital media files). Channels also allow for internet-based video storage and file management processes the discussion of which extends beyond the scope of the paper. Suffice it to say, that the channels serve as a sophisticated searchable global database of digital media. Each YouTube channel includes a built in info-metric system that provides statistics on ‘audience’ use of channel content. YouTube channels can be created by anyone. Individuals, organizations, and/or major social institutions like governments, political parties and mainstream media outlets all have channels on YouTube.

In these applications YouTube channels serve as windows into the life of specific organizations. Examples of social work related organizational channels include those created by the International Federation of Social Work (TheIFSW, 2010); The British Association of Social Work (BASWUK [YouTube Channel]) and the National Association of Social Work in the U.S., at the state (For example: NASWMA [chapter], NASWAZ [chapter]) and national levels (NASW).

Unions representing social workers have created their own channels at the national, regional and local levels. Unions have elected to use digital storytelling to engage their membership and to raise public awareness about the issues facing social workers in the field.

\(^6\) See section under “Personalize” http://www.youtube.com/t/about_essentials
Examples of this category of storytelling include channels developed by The Alberta Union of Public Employees (AUPE) Local 6 (YouTube Channel: AUPELocal6), the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) (YouTube Channel: WFSEc28) and UNISON – The Public Service Trade Union (UK) (YouTube Chanel: UNISONTV). Individual social workers have also elected to present digital story materials reflecting their personal understandings and experiences on their personal channels.

**Digital Stories and Technological Possibilities**

The creation of digital stories may be facilitated by institutions or embraced by individuals but the existence of these kinds of stories is made possible by the advent of digital technology. Links between digital media storytelling, Web 2.0 technology and the YouTube environment demonstrate the symbiotic relationship that exists between these phenomena. mwesch (2010) analyzes YouTube as a social microcosm that delivers up a wide variety of examples of social trends and traditional ways of being as present in the digital domain. Drawing on psychological, anthropological and sociological understandings of communities, analysis of the role and function of YouTube demonstrates how the general public uses this resource to share a range of information, ideas and narratives about everything, anything and sometimes nothing at all and social workers fall within this category of the general public.

The way YouTube is used speaks to the functionality of the Web 2.0 infrastructure, which allows hypermedia applications to exist. Similarly Dicks et al. (2005), define hypermedia as a “complex fusion of written text, sound and images...”; a fusion the authors describe as a medium with “film at its heart.” (pg. 37). Hypermedia is seen to bring to life the “cinematic imagination” and its capacity for “showing a multiplicity of perspectives and movement through time and space...” (Ibid., 2005, pg. 37).
A number of understandings stemming out of hypermedia and hyperlinking technologies are important for considering the potential of digital storytelling as a tool for critical practice. For example, “linking” is described by Wesch (mwesch, 2010 [The Machine is Us/ing Us]) as the process of establishing active connections between and among web-based materials allowing storymakers to create connections with their stories, to other stories, to web-based materials and potentially to an array of story audiences. These electronic links also reveal a kind of analysis undertaken by Internet participants. Links make visible the personal, internal, mental and/or emotional connections established by the ordinary user as well as potentially revealing the paths by which the connections were made. Hypermedia makes visible what social workers might understand as intertextuality a topic that will be discussed further in a later section of this thesis.

Within the context of social work, these new challenges to knowledge generation potentially shift prioritization of “expert” knowledge (Baines, 2007, 2011; Mullaly, 2006; Payne, 2001). Even when expertise is a desirable inclusion in social work practice the knowledge generated through anti-oppressive social work is understood to belong to the community where it is generated and the benefits of these processes should be returned to the communities (Benjamin, 2007/2011).

The process of insisting on collaboration, particularly when these partnerships include community members and people from the grassroots, is itself a form of resistance that can be facilitated by digital media storytelling shared through the Internet within neo-liberal social work, knowledge traditions emphasize positivistic forms of knowledge and centre ‘evidence based practice’ (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2011b; Ife, 1997; 2008; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2011, 2012; Trevillion, 2010). Here expert knowledge is tied to professionalization;
social workers are understood as “experts” who distribute evidence supported interventions, a framing that challenges our history generally and critical social work more specifically (Baines, 2011b; Mullaly, 2009). Professionalization focuses on formally defined and controlled types of knowledge, knowledge that is seen as scientifically validated (see IASSW.org for the new definition of social work), but social work has historically honoured a more holistic knowledge tradition (Goldstein, 1990; Hartman, 1994; Hick, 2001; Holosko, 2003).

Many scholars have sought to present social work knowledge as interdisciplinary (Payne, 2001), as a process that honours “many ways of knowing” (Hartman, 1994 pg. 15; Hart 2002; Moffatt, 2001), as a “constellation of knowledge” (Holosko 2003, pg. 276) and as the intermingling of “wisdom, knowledge, analogue and art” (Goldstein 1990, pg. 41). From this knowledge standpoint, social work’s social change agenda can be seen as the search for “subjugated knowledge” (Hartman 1994, pg. 23 and 27). Thus YouTube can be understood as a location/place where a diverse range of knowledge is shared and generated, thus taking up more progressive social work perspectives.

Further Wesch (2010) argues that the interactive nature of web 2.0 technologies makes data processing and cataloguing a commonplace and constant ambient experience. As “end users” we are uploading, categorizing, organizing, rating, reviewing, and commenting on material that originates with us as well as that which belongs to other people. This process reflects what researchers do when they engage in data coding, analysis and dissemination of findings. The presence of research related practices as a part of what digital media technology does supports Wesch’s (2010) argument that YouTube can be understood as its own form of
digital ethnography or what Dicks et al. (2005, pg. 79) describe as “open” hypermedia research.

These practices speak to the idea and possibilities for participatory research and knowledge generation as already upon us. They are a part of day-to-day life if we use technology, we just haven’t (necessarily) fully recognized and acknowledged them. The material uploaded by social workers clearly demonstrates the strength of Wesch’s (2010) argument and suggests the need for serious consideration of what is happening on the Internet and within YouTube informed within a social work perspective.

**The Relevance of Post-structural Thinking/Analysis**

The analysis undertaken in this thesis makes meaning from the many layers of information presented in the digital stories. In this context, post-structural feminist thought plays a significant role in the meaning making process of this work. In selecting this particular orientation, I am drawn to Sharon Rosenberg’s (2004) description of post-structuralism as embracing a “deep suspicion of universal claims” of “singular readings as “Truth”” and of “coherent narratives...” (pg. 36).

Rosenberg (2004) asserts that post-structuralism encourages us to “live with paradoxes, to endeavour to hold contradictions and to learn from what we might not otherwise have thought...” (pg. 36). In this way, the similarities and differences between stories, the multiple ways that story tellers present materials, contradictions and tensions in the work and the many representations of what it means to be a social worker can all exist together (in spite of these tensions) and in the analysis.

Davies grapples with alternatives to “as usual” when she considers the practice of teaching; Butler wrestles with this when she contemplates gender.

Rosenberg (2004) brings this tension to life when she reflects on her own writing process and the struggle she faces in activating post-structuralism as a practice, while at the same time engaging in writing as a technical process of producing material that will be recognized as relevant in her particular disciplinary space (pg. 36). This concept applies to social work as well and to understanding the potential invisibility of digital media stories as social work texts. Here she suggests to us that there is something both inherently counterproductive and something necessarily productive in producing an “as usual” chapter as a bridge to not as usual thinking and practice.

What Rosenberg is saying is relevant to my work, because there are limitations to a print-based thesis that writes about digital stories. Yet it is necessary to build the bridge from the “as usual” to the “not as usual” in order to promote understandings of digital media stories as social work texts, as social work knowledge production and as dissemination. I turned to digital stories because I experience a tension between the writing that exists about social work and what I know about my own experience as a social worker. These stories are important because they reflected what I know beyond words.

Spivak (1988, 2004) echoes Rosenberg’s claims about the importance of not as usual texts when she discusses the idea that as usual, written texts are seen as the primary means of sharing knowledge, while at the same time educators claim that they want to liberate people and allow those who are silenced to speak. However, when we adhere to rigid use of written texts our actions speak louder than our words; they say what we actually want to do is teach the “other” to speak and think the things we speak and think (Spivak 1988, 2004).
The digital stories I have found on YouTube brought something into alignment for me; they told me something that I know but cannot easily articulate. These stories allowed me to witness what I knew intuitively outside of myself. They helped make my internal experiences something that may allow me to connect with other people who are concerned about social workers and social work, rather than as something that makes me different, or a lessor kind of social worker. They made my experiences more real. They presented to me the kinds of deep suspicions and resistances that Rosenberg (2004) describes and which are barely tolerated in the realm of neo-liberal professionalism (Smith 2007, 2010, 2011).

But now here I am, writing about them in an as usual way, which brings to life an inherent tension among many elements of this work: the media themselves, ie. digital storytelling vs. essay or other written text; the methods and theoretical positions that challenge absolutes vs. the requirements of a process of analysis; and the underlying context in which all of this is taking place i.e. studying social work in an adult education program using digital communication practices as an alternative to trying to explore these ideas in a repressive social work culture. These are multiple processes that are occurring on multiple levels simultaneously, and in writing I am using what feels like a very one-dimensional way of talking about these layers.

Beyond these tensions and contradictions, digital storytelling demands an open-ness to the understanding of “meaning”. As multi-modal, multi-vocal texts digital stories are both a single story and the site of many meanings. There are many ways to understand a single story. Digital stories engage many of our senses at one time. It is therefore, necessary to embrace the use of theoretical perspectives that accept multiplicity of meaning, that support the concept of
“open readings” while at the same time remaining able to negotiate the idea of situated meanings and intertextuality.

Rosenberg (2004) suggests texts are important tools for meaning making in post-structuralism. Here, she situates post-structuralism within the realm of “postmodernism”. This “turn” has, in her view, allowed for consideration of meaning as extending beyond the limitations ascribed by the “author’s intent” (as cited in Rosenberg 2004, pg. 37). This perspective invites the “challenging [of] traditional forms of knowledge” and in so doing, invites the possibility of alternative media, like digital stories as potentially contributing new forms of knowledge. Traditional knowledge forms simply become “ways of thinking” not the condition necessary for meaning making.

The expanded notion of texts to include multi-modal materials requires us to consider how we might analyze these materials. Not as usual texts demand “readings” that go beyond the kind of readings applied to printed texts. Texts with multiple modes of communication also have multiple potential meanings and multiple levels and layers within these categories and conditions of meaning (Dicks et. Al. 2005; Baldry & Thibault, 2006). This multi-modality within texts requires analysis that can attend to these aspects of the text. In particular, multi-modal analysis, narrative analysis and metaphor analysis as informed by post-structuralism are the primary methods used in this thesis and they will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.
Chapter 4: Methods

Analyzing critical social workers’ use of digital media storytelling requires methods that lend themselves to considering critical social work, digital narrative texts, and the effects of sharing digital stories through YouTube. Like the stories themselves, the research field in this thesis is multi-modal, multi-vocal and multi-layered. The analysis must attend to the many layers that make up these texts as well as the situated nature of the layers within the stories, the more general context of the stories and the convergence of these layers and contexts.

The research methods chosen to accomplish these goals can lead us towards or away from an agenda of social change and social justice (Fook, 1996; Humphries, 2008; Richardson, 2000). Research is a political process and the politics of the methods used are the politics produced in the analysis (Fook 1996; Portelli, 1991; Trevillion, 2010). The layered and convergent nature of these social work stories and the level of complexity required in my own process of learning about them became very important to the process of meaning making and meaning sharing that is the point of this thesis.

I have received critique, invited and unsolicited, about the size and complexity of the project. I was cautioned about undertaking too much and using too many texts and approaches. No matter how I have tried to heed these sage words, it seems impossible to do any less analysis, use any fewer perspectives or look at any fewer texts, and still produce the kind of thesis I was hoping for. Exploring digital media stories in social work has required me to call on a pastiche of perspectives. I have tried to use an “ethnographic way of seeing” (Wolcott, 2008, pg. 41) as I attempt to accomplish these goals.
This project is in part a discourse analysis drawing on narrative and metaphor analysis. In attempting to bring these processes together I am drawing on an adaptation of multi-modal analysis by Baldry & Thibault (2006) who seek to adapt this method from its roots in applied linguistics. My own position adds yet more layers to the thesis as I am conducting my study of social work as a student in an adult education and community development program, and as a participant in two collaborative programs, one in women and gender studies and one in workplace learning and social change.

Bringing a number of methods together in a singular research project is neither unique to this work nor even a new idea. This convergence brings to mind the notion of the “pastiche” something Prasad (2005) presents as an element in postmodernisms challenge to “centuries of received wisdom about knowledge and reality” and traditions of research that abide by “scientific” rules and principles (pg. 231). This research project is meant to honour what Prasad (2005) presents as the “deliberate blending of multiple genres” as a kind of “radical reformulation of the nature of research and its representation” which pays respect to a more playful and ironic, even whimsical kind of research (Ibid, pg. 231).

**Crystallization**

Richardson’s (2000) concept of “crystallization” is another perspective that supports Prasad’s (2005) understanding of the “pastiche.” Richardson (2000) suggests that the use of multiple research methods in qualitative research provides us with a process of analysis – a process she terms a “constellation”. This concept of the constellation is described as kind of bringing together of approaches, perspectives, frameworks and knowledge forms that allow researchers to attend to multiple forms of knowledge simultaneously. Richardson further states that each research “constellation” is brought together in unique ways based on the materials
under consideration. This idea of a research constellation ties in very nicely with the social work epistemological tradition of the “constellation of knowledge” (Holosko 2003), a perspective that echoes many of the same assertions applied to the field of social work more specifically.

Ellingson (2009) presents Richardson’s original work on crystallization as a metaphor rather than a method. Since the introduction of the concept, authors have built scholarship that has moved this notion of crystallization from a metaphor to an accepted method that:

…combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the interdeterminancy of knowledge claims even as it makes them… (Ellingson, 2009, pg. 4)

As method, crystallization allows research to be a process that situates the researcher inside the project as an active, subjective participant and co-constructor of understanding (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000). This stance rejects the framing of research and researchers as “objective” and “unbiased,” turning instead to explanations of how the researcher comes to know what they know about what they study (Ibid., 2009, pg. 4-5).

Crystallization is concerned with the depth and richness of meanings in texts. Depth is realized through “many details” and through “different forms of representing, organizing, and analyzing…details” (Ibid., pg. 9), that allow researchers to consider “overt and subtle manifestations of power” from texts that reflect “analytic, narrative/artistic, [and] critical genres.” (Ibid., pg. 11). Ellingson (2009) argues that crystallization is suitable for considering
texts that include “more than one genre of… representation” which is clearly so in the social work digital stories considered in this research (pg. 9).

The presence of multiple texts in this thesis further supports the use of crystallization as method, since the perspective is designed to support meanings made across multiple texts and unique genres showing the “same experience” (Ibid., pg. 15). Multiple genres are seen as compatible because they are understood to show the details of experience informed by (in this case) the storytellers’ “vision or angle” which can further be understood as a process of “covering the same ground from different angles” (Ibid., pg. 15). These different visions or angles are described here as a process of “illuminating a topic” (pg. 15). Crystallization “liberates, excites and demands” researchers to position their work as adding to the “illumination” created by participants, thus opening up a wide range of possibilities for researchers and research (Ellingson, 2009, pg. 16).

The following sections of this chapter consider the layers of research approaches that make up the process of crystallization used in this thesis. These multiple methods and perspectives include: reflectivity, deconstruction, multi-modal analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, metaphor analysis and genre analysis. These various methods are applied to the texts as relevant and used in this examination of social work digital media stories to support consideration of the unique meaning making potentials of each of these stories.

**Critical Reflection, Reflective Practice and Reflexivity as Research**

Social work has long understood reflexivity as an important hallmark of good practice. Reflective practice can be detected in contemporary social work texts as well as those that mark the history of social work (Heron 2005; Mandell 2007; Fook 2004; Rossiter 2005, 2007; Yip 2006a; 2006b). Several authors present reflective practice as a process of knowledge
production (Fook 1996, 2002; Mandell, 2007; Moffatt, 1996; Shragge, 2007). For example, Fook (1996) argues reflection can be interpreted as research that centres practitioners and their practices in what might be described as self-study (Bride, 2009). Workers’ “self reflections” – reflection on critical incidents from practice and the work-scape in which practice takes place – are all forms of knowledge production and therefore have a place in what social workers understand as research (pg. 2). Richardson (2000) also frames reflection as a form of research. She sees the creation of textual representations of reflection as a means of sharing the meaning of experiences and the “issues” that are imbedded within these experiences (pg. 934).7

Reflection allows practitioners to gain insight into their practice and deepen their understanding of the professional techniques, theories and ideologies brought to practice consciously and with intent as well as unconsciously and unintentionally (Fook, 1996, 2002; Heron, 2005; Lister & Crisp, 2007; Mandell, 2007; Rossiter, 2007; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005). Analysis of critical incidents through reflection enables workers to develop insights (Fook, 1996; Lister & Crisp, 2007) and when these incidents are shared through digital stories, we as audiences can share these insights with the creators of these stories. Participation in group-based reflection is seen as an important dimension of reflective practice by Taylor and White (2001), who argue that social workers need to contextualize reflections of practice in relationships with other practitioners – another potential use for the type of research I have undertaken here.

Digital media stories can be understood as mediatized acts (Lange, 2009; Lundby, 2008) of reflective practice. The movement of the tradition of reflective practice from the

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7 Richardson speaks of writing and other forms of textual representation in her work. She challenges the binaries that assign different values to oral materials and written materials and therefore I am interpreting her work to apply to the creation of digital narratives and digital stories.
material world to the digital domain may in some circumstances be an evolutionary process, occurring simply because the technology makes it possible (Kress, 2003; Lundby, 2008). But, other shifts in the field are also pushing workers to engage in reflection in this way. If we wish to continue to include practitioners and their reflections in a social work research agenda, then we need to develop knowledge and processes that support knowledge production and analysis in these digital contexts.

Considering adaptations, shifts and changes in reflective practice that have occurred throughout the history of social work (Mandell, 2007; Moffatt, 2001; Shragge, 2007) can inform our work with social workers’ digital media stories and our understanding of reflection as research. Journal writing and/or correspondence and/or creative endeavours have been used throughout our history to capture and share reflective analysis of the field. For example, Jane Addams’ autobiographical writings (for example: Addams, 1910 and Addams & Johnson, 1960) can be understood as the archival records of her reflective practice. Addams used journal writing as a kind of “self study” (Bride, 2009; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). She “spelled out” her experiences and her practices of “learning by doing” (Baines, 2004; Newman, 1995) in detailed accounts that reflect the custom of ethnographic field notes (Richardson, 2000; Denzin, 2003; Wolcott, 2008). In a contemporary context we might understand her approach as “practitioner research,” a common practice in the field of education (Bogdan & Knopp-Biklen, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Through this self-study journal writing, Addams recorded and analysed events, and reflected on the meanings these had in the context of settlement work (Knight, 2006). This critical process in turn contributed to her understanding of the situational nature of ethics; it allowed her to inventory what remained undone and to reflect on what had previously been
invisible but now opened up to her as a more nuanced understanding of settlement work resulting from her own experiential learning (Addams, 1910). Adams’ reflexive texts have in turn spawned many new texts in which authors have drawn on these historical reflections to frame current day reflective accounts of practice (see: Fisher, 2004; Joslin 2004; Knight, 2006; Weber & Scott, 1935/2000).

Another example is Moffatt’s (2001) research into Dorothy Livesay’s work as a social worker in depression era Toronto. Moffatt considers this notable Canadian poet’s reflections in personal journals, letters, poems and other archival materials. Analysis of these documents illustrates how Livesay used poetry to explore injustice, oppression and societal changes that informed her social work practice and activism (2001, pg. 53). Livesay’s poetry provides readers with a unique glimpse into the ways that poverty, despair and the abject states they create get into and “under the skin” of clients and social workers. Moreover, Livesay's work draws attention to the effects of technological change and industrialization on the rhythm of life (Moffatt, 2001, pg. 54 and 67). These considerations warrant careful attention in the present era as digital media technologies also affect the way we understand social work practice and the speed at which change takes place.

Reflection in and on practice in feminist social work exposes the ways in which personal troubles are in fact social issues thus politicizing those things that could easily be used to pathologize people (Baines, 2011b pg. 83; Dominelli, 2002, pg. 109; Flynn Saulnier, 1996; Kumwee Kumsa, 2007, pg. 93). These practices of avoiding individuation have long been understood as practices of resistance and have been used as strategies for developing oppositional culture which is understood to produce conditions for social action leading to social change (Baines, 2011b; Benjamin, 2007/2011; Carroll & Ratner, 2001; Flemming &
A trend of reflective practice in feminist social work is seen in group discussions and consciousness raising groups (Cornell, 2000; Klatch, 2001; Loss, 2011). We can see these practices employed in feminist film making and other creative enterprises, including those related to significant historical events affecting women like the Montreal Massacre (for example see: Marker of Change: The Story of the Women’s Monument, and Rosenberg, 2003, 1997). More recently, we can see this practice in effect in Internet based feminist activism sites such as “Occupy Patriarchy” (see Boler, 2012).

In the contemporary neo-liberal context of social work, the spaces, places and conditions for reflective practice to occur are being squeezed out of existence (Baines 2011; Issit 1999). Neoliberalism is changing social work practice and shifting the design and development of social service workplaces such that social workers can no longer count on the tradition of reflexivity as either a tool of practice or as a source of potential practice research. This remaking of reflective practice in a new neo-liberal way creates a blurry line between the historical and contemporary neo-liberal understandings more inline with Foucault’s notion of governmentality (Brock, 2003; Prasad, 2005; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010;). While neoliberalism might claim to value reflexivity, there is a significant tension between this understanding and the way reflective practice has traditionally been used in social work (Issit, 1999; Smith, 2011). For example, there exists a friction between the idea of knowledge generated through reflexivity and the idea of expert knowledge and the fixed measurable understandings of “evidence based” work commonly associated with neoliberalism (Baines, 2004, 2011, 2012; Carniol, 2010; Heron, 2005; Rossiter, 2001, 2005; Smith, 2011). Furthermore, managerialism and audit culture infuse social work with standardized and market oriented risk management...
procedures, requiring us to consider more closely just what reflective practice becomes in these contexts (Davies & Leonard, 2004 pg. 94; Murdach, 2007).

We might understand the spontaneous social work stories created by social workers in response to all these shifts as a kind of anamnesis (Muller, 2009), as a yearning (hooks 1990), or a memorial (Chenderlin, 1982) – that honours the traditional process and use of reflective practice as a resistance to the kind of forgetting Pon (2009) sees as a remaking of social work. As a researcher, examining these reflective texts seems something akin to secondary data analysis, a research that returns us to more holistic and generous definitions of reflection that allow the text to present one angle on an issue while the researcher adds another.

**Deconstruction**

The idea of studying workers’ reflective practice as presented through digital media stories brings us now to the idea of deconstruction. The making of textual representations of experiences is a process that is seen to embody deconstruction. Derrida (1974/1976) suggests that being able to write or represent means that the author has already engaged in a process of undoing the thing they seek to represent (pg. XX). He describes this undoing as a process of seeking justice in the sense that we are able to find the ways that power operates, and doing so facilitates the reconstruction of what it is we are taking apart in potentially different ways (Prasad, 2005). In this way, undoing or deconstructing is an important part of the change process and honours the traditions of critical anti-oppressive social work.

We can understand digital media stories as reflective narrative texts as examples that show us what it is like to operate within the discipline of social work. In considering deconstruction as part of our analysis, Prasad’s (2005) interpretations of Derrida’s work suggest that deconstruction can be understood as a process of “rhetorical analysis” (pg. 24). It
allows us to consider how “thought, language and identity” are part of the process of making a particular argument or presenting a particular idea within a representation. In this way, “form and content are not easily separated” (Prasad, 2005, pg. 240) and therefore considering reflective narratives about social workers requires us to consider how the form of digital media storytelling plays a significant role in what these texts mean. The idea of these texts as digital media stories requires us to consider how it is that social work plays a significant role in what these texts mean.

Deconstruction does not seek to destroy the texts it considers, to make ground beef out of prime rib as it were; rather, it is about “opening up texts” (Ibid., pg. 241) in order to facilitate exploration of “themes and notions” as processes that “systematically exclude or inhibit other themes and categories” (Ibid., pg. 240). My consideration of Derrida’s (1974/76) deconstruction centres on written texts and their position of supremacy to other forms of communication (pg. xxxiv). However as previously suggested, several authors have challenged the framing of “texts” as somehow fundamentally different from oral communications or other texts, such as digital stories. Both Richardson (2000) and Portelli (1991) challenge us to consider how often written texts are simply a transcription of spoken word.

Prasad (2005) sees deconstruction as a process that challenges “logo-centrism”, i.e. the belief that written texts can be understood as “true and accurate representations” or as “capturing fixed meaning” (pg. 242). Deconstruction can also benefit digital texts, which are believed by some to provide us with “raw evidence,”. Here “raw” is understood as a kind of unbiased account that holds a greater truth than written or oral accounts that are affected by the “biases” and the influences of the people who create these representations (Mann, 2004; Ganascia, 2010). This framing builds on the mystique of machine based technologies as
superior to humanness; but what these perspectives forget in the fact that humans are the operators of the technology and therefore influence what is captured by the technologies used (Ganacia, 2010). Prasad (2005) suggests that the challenge of textual representations is not only the assumption that meaning created in texts can be fixed, but that it also ascribes “presupposed meaning to human activity,” (pg. 242) a meaning that can be read, interpreted and shared without question.

“Textual structures” or the rules for creating texts, is another element of Derrida’s deconstruction (Derrida, 1974/76, pg. 43 and 334). Here the rules for making and reading texts are “turned against themselves,” (Prasad, pg. 242) and in the context of digital stories can be used to consider the different devices creators elect to use in making their digital stories. Deconstruction is a challenge when we think about it as a practical act that needs to occur in order to make analysis happen. Here Baldry and Thibault’s (2006) work on multi-modal analysis helps us to consider how we might deconstruct digital texts in order to facilitate the kind of analysis for change that the authors suggest is possible.

Multi-modal Analysis

Baldry and Thibault (2006) provide a comprehensive consideration of multi-modal analysis as an effective method for analysing complex texts. The authors describe multi-modal analysis as a process by which deconstruction, is used to establish layers between elements of a text, contrasting those layers to facilitate analysis. Rather than a destructive process, this picking apart layers and contrasting them is based upon the idea that these layers remain firmly connected to the text as a whole and that the meaning of the layers is both part of the “context of situation” and the “context of culture” surrounding the text under study (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, pg. 7). This treatment of multi-modal analysis and deconstruction as tandem analytic
processes concurs with understandings of crystallization, the previously established multi-faceted approach to analysing texts discussed earlier in this thesis. Taken together they form the foundation for the methods of analysis employed in this study of social work digital stories.

Acknowledging, accepting and exploring multiple meanings is a key element of multi-modal analysis. Digital media stories are understood as multi-modal and multi-vocal texts; their meaning comes from the use of many communication modes and the convergence of these modes (Boler, 2008; Couldry, 2008; Nelson & Hull, 2008; Thurmim, 2008; Lundby, 2008, 2009). Multiple communication modes facilitate multiple voices in the text, potentially creating multiple meanings (Boler 2008, Dicks et al. 2005; Markham, 1998, 2004; Markham & Baym, 2009).

The literature on multi-modal analysis and digital media storytelling suggest that both are compatible with post-modern and post-structural perspectives. Here concepts like holism, multiple truths, open readings, representation and the politics of representation are significant understandings honoured by the theories and demonstrated in the texts (Davies, 2006; Hutcheson, 1989; Prasad, 2003; Rosenberg, 2004). Multi-modal analysis allows us to deconstruct and consider more closely the roles these elements play in meaning making.

The notion of representation demonstrated to be important to digital media storytelling throughout this thesis, underscores processes of meaning created through the use of symbols and symbolic forms (Baldry & Thibault, 2010, pg. 19; Hutcheson, 1989). Representation activates particular discourses, which may or may not be held in the conscious awareness of either the storymaker or the audience (Brushwood Rose, 2009, pg. 239). This idea is commonly understood in critical social work, which is informed by reflexivity and reflective practice (Fook 2002; Heron, 2005; Rossiter, 2001). These discourses may be further
confounding to audiences who may lack full awareness of the multiplicity of contextual, contemporary and historical meanings present in these symbols (Davies, 2004; Hutcheson, 1989).

Symbols concentrate meaning in texts and may be used to reinforce dominant/normative understandings or to challenge normativity when used to demonstrate alternatives (Hutcheson, 1989; Rosenberg, 2004). Other forms of challenge include such practices as: irony, parody, wit and humour; these methods are particularly effective when discussing taboos and “abject subjectivities” (Bernstein, 1992; Davies, 2004; Hutcheson, 1989; Prasad, 2005; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008).

Challenges to normativity may also take more direct forms like depictions of tensions and contradictions, which are strengthened by the multi-modal and multi-vocal capacities of digital media storytelling (Baldry & Thibault 2006; Hutcheson 1989). Multi-modal texts allow us to use some communication layers to ‘say’ one thing while other layers “show” another; these contradictions, disconnections or disjunctures can signal the need for deeper consideration, leading audiences to potentially seek out explanations that may extend beyond the text (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

Multi-modal analysis leans heavily on the process of deconstruction in order to facilitate the process of meaning making within texts. This deconstruction creates layers in the text. In turn, layers may be analyzed, informed by relevant disciplinary knowledge, epistemological and ideological concerns, as activated by the content and context(s) of the text. Researchers identify and apply a wide range of supporting materials to the analysis in order to explore and articulate the meanings present. In some cases meanings may reflect what is understood as “the author’s intent,” but may also reflect what post-structuralists present as
“open readings” that frame meaning “beyond the author’s intent” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Davies, 2006; Rosenberg, 2004). Digital media stories by their nature make meaning with technological capabilities and processes, and through the convergence of various communication modes (Lundby, 2008). In addition to technological resources, audience subjectivity and inter-textual understandings brought to the texts by the audiences who read them are also important aspects of meaning making and analysis of digital media stories (Baldry & Thibault, 2010; Lundby, 2008; Rosenberg, 2004).

Transcription is another part of the deconstruction process serving the dual function of defining elements to be analyzed and serving as a layer of analysis in and of itself (Baldry & Thibault, 2009; Woods & Dempster, 2011). Multimodal transcription describes and interprets multiple elements of the text, as well as elements that are external to but clearly related to the central body of the text—for example, the YouTube channel environment or the story-making method, two elements that are discussed within the data chapters.

Multiple kinds of transcripts have been created for the texts considered in this thesis; each transcript reflects a layer of analysis and/or a category of communicative activity (Woods & Dempster, 2011). These layers reflect researchers’ decisions about what to analyze in the text (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 6). Transcripts can focus on a wide range of elements such as: “sequence of events ... gestures ... camera angle ... soundtrack ... words spoken, [or] the relationship between time and use of space” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 6). Many other kinds of transcripts are possible; researchers must decide what and how to transcribe, depending upon the content and context of the story (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Rosenfeld Halverson, Bass, & Woods, 2012; Woods & Dempster, 2011). Transcripts for these texts have not been included in the thesis, it is an attempt to encourage the readers to see these stories as multi-
modal texts, with the many layers and modes of communication as sharing important meaning making functions. Links to the texts have been included to support easy access to these texts online.

Multimodal texts, like digital media stories, are “poly-contextual” texts (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Poly-contextuality supports the notion of situated meanings as open to multiple readings and interpretations based on the standpoints from which they are read (La Rose, 2012). Context and content can be understood to be co-constitutive processes, each making and reinforcing one another, or contradicting and confounding one another (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). Analysis of these complex elements of the text requires deconstruction to allow consideration of ‘how’ situated meanings and generalized meanings are made from these texts. Once more poly-contextuality allows us to consider how meaning is created by the layers in a text and invites us to consider layers of context which can in turn produce more layers and (potentially) more contexts, or what may also be understood as “co-contextualization” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, pg. 21). The meanings brought to life through these texts may also have broader cultural meanings, linking us into new systems of contextualization that are themselves nested within wider socio-cultural and political meanings.

Baldry and Thibault (2006, p. 50) suggest subdivisions present in texts are useful elements in analysis. In many cases texts can be easily divided into multiple phases. Phases are evident breaks resulting from the organization of content; a phase may be a section of a text that is “thematically homogeneous” or focuses on certain “participants” or certain “actions” or “other relevant circumstances” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 51). Phases can be nested inside one another producing “meta-phases, phases, and subphases” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 51). For example, Song About a Child Welfare Agency (see: chapter 7) presents two distinct phases:
discussion of Erahoneybee’s sore throat and discussion of her child welfare internship. The first phase has no evident sub-phases whereas the second phase can be further divided into three sub-phases: (a) narration, (b) song, and (c) reflective analysis, all of which will be presented in greater detail in chapter 7.

Phases share resource systems that create “an internal consistency which characterizes a given phase but which distinguishes that phase from another in the same text” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 47). Phases allow audiences to recognize clusters of information while differentiating one cluster from another. Phases are made visible to the audience in part through “transition points” or the “boundaries between phases” (Ibid., 2006, p. 47). Transitions “shift” viewers’ attention from one phase to another demarking the point of departure, thus contrasting the various parts of the text and therefore supporting analysis (Ibid., 2006, p. 47).

Baldry and Thibault (2006) present “questioning” as an analytical technique within multimodal analysis (p. 16). They frame it as a researcher’s attempt to make “logical meaning” from the materials available within the texts; questions make (some of) the researcher’s internal considerations explicit through externalization (Ibid., 2006, p. 16). Questions also articulate intertextual knowledge used by the researcher, allowing us to try on meanings activated in the text we are reading without foreclosing other potential meanings (La Rose, 2012).

Readings and analysis of texts supported by questions may utilize “in the text” and “intertextual knowledge” to “fill in” ambiguities or “missing” elements of a narrative (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 16). For our purposes, intertextuality is broadly defined as the “systems of meaning relations which are common to some set of texts however large or small in some community” (Lemke, 1985, as cited in Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 55). In critical social work,
intertextuality opens up the possibility for connections between digital media stories and formal knowledge, as well as other interdisciplinary materials.

The nature of ambiguities and missing pieces could itself be another focus of analysis allowing for consideration of these practices as ideological. Multiple questions also provide us with the opportunity to experiment with multiple meanings and to consider different categories of information that might support “logical” meaning-making (or sense-making) without committing to a singular meaning, once more returning us to the idea of open readings (Rosenberg, 2004; Kress, 2003; Lundby, 2008).

The concept of a “resource system” helps organize the process of analysis by organizing certain kinds of meanings and/or categories of meaning (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 18). In social work our discourses, language, locations and tasks can be seen as resource systems helping us make meaning within the specific culture of our work. These resource systems are political and reflect discourses that activate dominant and marginal understandings of social work and of the world around us more generally.

The use of resource systems in a particular text is understood as the process of “resource integration” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). Resource integration includes the use of “particular modalities such as language, gestures, depiction, gaze and so on, to serve particular functions in texts” (Ibid., 2006, p. 18). New understandings come about through consideration of both “use and function” as contributing to meaning (Ibid., 2006, p. 18). In this way, particular tools generate particular meanings in context, as well as holding more generalized social meanings; thus, the way the tools are used shapes what they mean (Ibid., 2006, p. 18).

Baldry and Thibault (2006) point out that our participation in “community” allows us to learn about specific meanings and to develop “tacit knowledge” (Baines, 2004; Schon, 1983).
This in turn allows us to identify specific meanings in specific cultural contexts and extrapolate other meanings from similar ideas or tools in different contexts (Lundby, 2009). Meanings gleaned in this way are understood as elements of the “context of culture” present within texts (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, p. 18).

Each of the digital media stories included in this thesis has a unique approach to storytelling. Therefore, each chapter includes a number of different elements of narrative and multimodal analysis in order to effectively read, deconstruct and analyze the story. Additional details on the techniques used to analyze each story are included in the individual data analysis chapters as relevant.

**Narratives and Digital Storytelling**

As Baldry and Thibault (2006) suggest, analysis must be informed by other relevant knowledge creating a kind of intertextual analysis of the digital media stories under study. There is a significant connection between digital storytelling, critical social work and the concept of “narrative”. Extensive literature on narrative exists within and beyond social work, however for the purposes of this thesis the discussion of narrative is restricted to the literature on narrative in the digital storytelling and digital media literature and in the context of narrative analysis in social work.

Hertzberg, Kaare and Lundby (2008) frame digital stories as “self-representational narratives.” As representations of the self, there is an expectation that these stories use “the experiences of the narrator as the raw material” (pg. 105). The personal nature of this material is thought to bring to life stories that are “genuine” (Hertzberg, Kaare & Lundby 2008, p. 106). As a result, the narratives, regardless of their specific content, are seen as “creative responses both to individual life experiences and to traditions of narration.” (Ibid., pg. 106).
As Brookfield (2009, pg. 301) suggests, in a social work context we need to consider what gets included and what gets left out of social work stories told as they are recorded. Drotner (2008) sees digital storytelling as a potential form of “management of the self” which he ties to a generalized social “demand for ongoing regulation” (pg. 75-76) that is clearly part of the contemporary social work landscape. Thus digital stories may contribute to the internalization of social work governmentality and this is something that must be addressed in analysis.

Fraser (2004, pg. 182) describes narrative analysis as a process of deconstruction and meaning making that relies on supporting knowledge such as theoretical, philosophical and political literatures that consider the role and function of narratives in communication and in shaping social processes. Narratives can operate in real or imagined worlds, in worlds that are “materially based” or mystically constructed, and have the potential to consider understandings of justice and “rights” held by the narrators (Fraser, 2004, pg. 180). Thus narratives can be understood as texts that reveal “beliefs” about “how things should be” (Ibid., pg. 180). Furthermore, narratives allow “people to organize their experiences into meaningful episodes that call upon cultural modes of reasoning and representation (Berger, 1997)” (authors citation, Fraser 2004, pg. 180), something that may inform social workers operating under assumptions of a unitary global social work (Campbell, 2012).

Fraser understands stories as a fundamental cultural process going so far as to argue that culture is constituted through the “ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves” (Geertz, 1975, as cited in Fraser, 2004, pg. 180). In narrative analysis culture can be understood as “conventions for living” that extend across and through all domains of life, thus social work will be affected by the culture in which it takes place and these social work identities will
affect a social worker’s understanding of their social world (Ibid., 2004, pg. 180) in the same way, social workers understanding of their work effects how they understand themselves as social workers (Adam et al., 2009; Fook, 2002). In social work, narratives and storytelling have a long history of being central to practice (Fook, 2002; Van Den Berg, 1995). However, because cultures are also made up of people who “do not always do as they are told” this may be a process that occurs by “accident or design,” (Allen, 1997, pg. 180) a perspective that reflects Allen’s (1997) understanding of “forgetting oneself” considered in Chapter 1.

To this end, Fraser (2004) identifies a plethora of social work literature that points us to the potential usefulness of narrative to challenge or reinforce social norms and/or social practices (pg. 180). Therefore, we must always seek to understand how narratives are themselves shaped and limited by the social and cultural tools that are available to us, which suggests these limits are present in the stories we tell, and in the ways we tell them, in the medium we use, the environment in which we tell these stories and the people to whom we tell these stories (Ibid., 2004, pg. 182).

Fraser (2004) advocates for the use of reflective and reflexive activities in the practice of narrative research. She suggests that it is necessary for researchers to think about our own response to the narratives shared in the context of the research. Applying this understanding to digital storytelling suggests it is necessary for the researcher to take up an ethnographic stance and to consider their response to and readings of the narratives presented to them through digital means (Wolcott, 2008). This perspective highlights understanding of the researcher as inter-textually located in readings and as a partner who co-constructs meaning by informing their readings with relevant materials like disciplinary specific texts, theories and histories.
(Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Ellingson, 2009; Fraser, 2004; Prasad, 2005; Richardson, 2000; Van Den Berg, 1995), which essentially brings us back to the beginning point of crystallization.

Considering themes presented in the narratives is only one level of analysis. Themes help us to engage in “disaggregation” of narrative content and helps create “units of understanding” that we can apply in the later stages of analysis. The discrete categories presented in the thematic process can help researchers link these themes to other analytical tasks.

One of the challenges of narrative is the tendency towards individualism and even “hyper individualism” as best described in the literature by Fraser (2004, pg. 191). The alternatives presented indicate the need for concern about “different domains of experience…[and] different dimensions of …environments” (Ibid., pg. 191). Narratives may also reveal understandings that are “structural” (Mullaly, 2009) as well as consider connections between and among people and their cultural environments (Fraser 2004, pg. 191). Finally, Fraser (2004) highlights the need to consider how we can understand links between the “personal and the political” conveyed in the narratives (pg. 193).

**Representation and Metaphors**

In the social work digital media stories I am analyzing, metaphor play an important role in conveying meaning and making meaning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and so metaphor analysis is another important aspect of the crystallization process. Metaphors are described as a way of thinking, constructing analysis, explaining, connecting ideas and facilitating deeper understandings of how people think and feel (Cameron & Maslen, 2010, pg. vii).

The power of metaphors stem from their capacity to “suggest what is not made explicit”; as we try to read between the lines of what is said through metaphor we have the
potential to access affective and cognitive processes, and to link into the political and mimetic
(Ibid., pg. 11). These concepts are particularly important in the context of Internet based
communication (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010) and when we consider the use of YouTube
as a sharing environment (Lange, 2009; Shifman, 2012; Snickers & Vondreau, 2009).
Richardson (2000) encourages us to think about metaphors as existing in every level of social
science texts, and as particularly useful for creating meanings that are “intra-disciplinary” (pg.
927). Metaphors allow us to bring “politics, values and ideological conditions from… other
perspectives into the research context” (Ibid., pg. 927). Here metaphors may allow us to
challenge limits on how certain phenomena are understood, or to say things that would be
considered too difficult to say through more direct means (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010;
Cameron & Maslen, 2010).

Metaphors are a “[l]anguage in social interaction” operating within particular
discourses, taking up or challenging the discourses at play in particular communication events
(pg. 4), or establishing connections across multiple discourses (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pg.
231). In the context of the social work digital media stories I am analyzing, metaphors inform
the audience about the storyteller’s thoughts and feelings and convey elements of the stories
through indirect means. The storytellers’ use of metaphor can inform our understanding of how
social workers remember, forget and resist in their digital stories (Cameron & Maslen, 2010
pg. vii).

For analytical purposes, metaphors are described as a “signal[s] to the researcher”
achieved by the “arrival of ‘something else’...a word or phrase which contrasts the meaning” of
what was communicated to this point (Cameron 2010, pg. 4). Sometimes metaphors are
presented through common uses of words that are “somehow incongruent or anomalous” in the
way they are presented (Ibid., pg. 4). Metaphor analysis facilitates deconstruction of these striking inconsistencies as well as the taken for granted symbols used in communication that “we process without even seeing” (pg. 4). As Cameron (2010) states, “in one case the novel requires clarification, in the other the familiar requires attention as its familiarity potentially erases the depth of meaning” (pg. 4).

Metaphors may be “embodied,” presented in “gestures and other physical movements.” (Ibid., pg. 4). Here analysis allows us to consider “physical movements” as either “a complement to language analysis” or “in their own right” (Ibid., pg. 4). Thus, metaphor analysis can reveal to us moments when “speaking or writing, listening or reading, are much more than mental processes; our bodies participate and interpret, eyes and head mov[e], skin reacts and responds…” and may in some cases “activate memories of physical experience” urging us to re-experience or reconnect with these moments either consciously or unconsciously (Ibid., pg. 4).

Metaphors can also be understood as “cognitive approaches” that serve “as a mapping between two domains of conceptual systems” (Ibid., pg. 5) and as symbols that build bridges between and across diverse understandings (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In these moments, analysis may reveal metaphors signalling connections that exist across diverse discourses, or diverse contexts, or times, which suggests the potential for connections to be made in analysis or in communication across these differences.

Metaphors are also affective tools communicating “evaluations, attitudes, values, perspectives or beliefs” and feelings through more indirect or descriptive means (Ibid., 1980, pg. 5). While a “single affective metaphor” may have limited power to make meaning, looking at metaphors across a single digital story or across several digital stories may allow us to see
“patterns that reveal speakers’ attitudes or emotions” (Ibid., pg. 6). In this way we can understand metaphors as an “affective force” which has the capacity to “set expectations” among those who are the audience for the stories or in the reproduction of the discourse. In considering the digital media stories of social work the making of workers’ emotions as a liability in professional contexts suggests that metaphors may be an important tool for understanding the emotional experiences of the storytellers.

Subjectivity is an important component in understanding metaphors as relevant to particular “communities” (Ibid., pg. 6). Here “shared metaphors” are used in particular ways, as markers of group membership and as gate keeping functions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They are also, in part, what allow us to claim particular subjective positions or to utter a “hail” to those who share these positions (Butler 2004; Davies 2006; Lange 2009). Metaphors are dynamic and changing (Cameron, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By virtue of their use, metaphors are “adapted and built on” reflecting shifts and changes within the community and the need or desire to extend communication or challenge particular understandings (Cameron, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Reinsborough & Canning, 2010).

Metaphors make connections to our experiences across time, space and context (Cameron 2010, pg. 83; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Reinsborough & Canning, 2010). This idea echoes the idea of hyper-media and Web 2.0 technologies in that our cognitive processes reflect many of the capabilities of the current technology. In this way digital storytellers reflect what they know internally, making explicit connections that are non-linear and non-proximal in the context of our engagement with these digital materials (Lundby, 2008). Cameron (2010), sums up these understandings well when she states:
Metaphors in discourse can… be connected across…event[s], from one metaphor to another and from metaphorical to literal language. They can be connected across discourse participants, and they can be connected from the moment of use into participants’ lives and experiences. We can glimpse influences from the media and politicians, and suspect the influences of many other people and events that remain unknown… (pg. 87).

Further, metaphor as a community marker is seen to produce what Cameron describes as “within group” codes. These metaphors have the potential to be read as “language conventions that often emerge as ‘characteristic’ or defining the group” (Ibid., 2010, pg. 88). These metaphors are seen to “have a key purpose in sustaining intimacy among group members, making the identity of the groups through language that is obscure or inaccessible to outsiders” (Ibid., pg. 88). In the same way that language becomes something that keeps someone outside the group, “being allowed access to within group language becomes an important marker of access to the group itself” (Ibid., pg. 88). This idea can be applied to the use of jargon by social workers generally, or to the more specific use of ideas by subgroups of social workers, or to the approaches to language use by storytellers who seek to critique social work.

**Reading and Misreading Genre**

Genre is a concept introduced in our consideration of crystallization. Ellingson (2009), Prasad (2005), Baldry and Thibault (2006) attend to genre, suggesting that multi-modal texts often require “genre specific” analysis. In order to engage in effective analysis we not only have to understand the specifics of content, but how content is organized in the underlying context – a context we might even understand as a “template” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, pg.
This can be as general as understanding the core elements of the structure of representation to be “truth” or “fiction,” an understanding that categorizes information as something materially “real” versus a representation of something that is “real” in a general sense, something that could be real (Prasad, 2005).

Within narratives there exist fundamentally different kinds of stories requiring fundamentally different kinds of engagement and analysis, even though the possibility exists that these different stories could share certain meanings. The potential for a convergence of meaning is the basis on which texts that convey meanings in different ways are analyzed (Prasad, 2005). This reading of genre “as usual” provides us with meanings that reflect both the story maker’s intended meaning, the inherent meaning of the genre and the influence of the social location of the audience on these meanings. It is a very conventional kind of analysis.

When we read and make meaning from texts we (in part) rely on our capacity to activate our previous knowledge of genres as it gives us a set of instructions for interpreting meaning in a new and unfamiliar text. But, reading genres also opens up the possibility of not as usual readings (Prasad, 2005; Rosenberg, 2004). There are benefits to reading a text through different genres as it provides us with the capacity to rethink meaning and to purposefully consider other possible explanations and meanings that are embedded, hidden or disguised in the text (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Rosenberg, 2004).

Such practices of "misreading" bring to life what Rosenberg (2004) presents as ‘beyond’ intended meaning. Reading the digital stories produced by social workers in this way can be seen as a process of knowledge production, for even the uncomplicated act of calling these texts ‘digital stories’ may go beyond the intended meaning of their creators who might see (or prefer to see) their endeavours as simply “fooling around on the computer”.

Discourse Analysis

Throughout this chapter “discourse” and “discourse analysis” have been discussed. The concept of discourse may be understood in the context of linguistics as a specific communication event, an idea that is mentioned in this thesis but which is not the meaning of discourse primarily intended here. To clarify, when I speak of the idea of discourse analysis, this is ‘discourse’ as it is understood through a Foucaudian lens, which Prasad (2005) describes as expressing multiple understandings including: “a grand domain of all statements;” the concept of “individualized group statements;” and “regulated practice[s] that account[s] for a certain number of statements” (pg. 250). Each of these framings can be detected within the digital stories considered in this thesis.

Prasad (2005) understands discourse as expressed in “speech, talk, documents and other texts” (pg. 250), a concept that reinforces Kress’s (2003) perspective of discourse as located in “some set of texts” relevant to some people with a shared understanding of who they are, a definition presented here in an earlier chapter. Prasad (2005) suggests that discourse analysis allows examination of “what can be spoken and what must be silenced” (pg. 250) and what is understood as the “truth and value” of certain “kinds” of stories. Here the individual stories tell us a lot about how social workers express certain norms, how tensions produced by these norms are present in these conversations, and how these discourses “support” or “un-support” the telling of various stories in various ways (Ibid., pg. 251).

Thus discourse analysis attends to the “discursive effects” giving “shape and form to different categories of experience and identity” (Ibid., pg. 251) represented in the social work digital media stories. The discourses present in the texts, uttered by the storytellers or the characters they create, are what make these social work stories and what make these characters
social workers. The idea that we can make meaning and share understanding via these texts shows us how social work discourse in effect makes social work exist, happen and become “real” both in these stories and in a broader sense (Ibid., pg. 251).

Discourse analysis within these digital media stories allows us to consider how particular “categories” of social work are “naturalized” (Ibid., pg. 251) and “normalized” (Brock 2003). Situated meaning in all its layers and levels of specificity is extremely important to this analysis. The idea of discourses as “formed and operated at the intersections” of where they are uttered, which in the case of digital media storytelling could mean sounded or shown in the story and then considered by audiences, suggests that we can see these phenomena as expressions of power present everywhere and in “every dimension” of social work (Ibid., pg. 251). For example, we see these in the work of Erahoneybee the Intern, and in the story created by Dr. David Jones, former President, International Federation of Social Workers. Discourses potentially make and truncate meaning at every imaginable level (Ibid., pg. 151). In analyzing digital media stories we must consider what is said, how and why, which might in turn help us decide what we want to emulate in our own expressions of social work.

Selection of Texts to Analyze

In selecting the texts that are presented in my thesis, I am drawn to Boler’s (2008) discussion of text selection, a perspective that shows much concordance with the concept of crystallization. Both concepts understand the “point of view” or the “gaze” of the researcher to be a legitimate and fundamental feature of a broad range of analytic approaches in the non-positivist domain (Ellingson, 2009; Krips, 2010; Prasad, 2005). In conducting a search for Internet based digital social work stories, I was looking for “something” but I wasn’t necessarily certain what I was looking for. As suggested, texts speak to their intended audience
(Chenderlin, 1982). We might understand this in part as the intertextual, situated meaning attracting us to particular texts.

The sheer volume of material on the Internet poses a challenge for researchers. How might we “figure out” exactly what we are looking for? How do you know when to stop looking? (Boler, 2008; Markham & Baym, 2009; Dicks et al., 2005; Markham, 1998, 2004). Furthermore, the machine learning that occurs as a researcher conducts multiple searches using similar keywords means that the computer software, search engines and specific sites like YouTube also do invisible work streamlining and ordering the offerings received (mwesch, 2010; YouTube Essentials Guide, 2011; Elsaesser, 2008). The process of finding these particular digital stories was part “chair time,” part machine learning, part “shiny crown” and part crystallization. There is a science behind it in the form of algorithms in the computer software, but it also reflects what Richardson (2000) and Ellingson (2009) suggest: the researcher, situated inside the research process, draws on internal understandings, experiential, tacit and intertextual knowledge to inform what is chosen and what was passed by.

When I began looking for social work texts on YouTube about five years ago, there were only about 100 texts. That reflected my interest in social work.

In conducting this search for social work texts, as the researcher I assessed the texts using a particular gaze (Ellingson, 2009; Krips, 2010; Prasad, 2005; Rossiter, 2001). This gaze most certainly influenced my selection as the texts that have now found their way into the thesis, these texts presented particular things that are recognizable to me; they activate particular aspects of social work subjectivities that are familiar to me and that I believe are relevant to the research questions that I am seeking to answer. These texts offered me the 'hail'

\(^8\) Accessible to me as an English language user.
described by Davies (2006) and Butler (2004), they are and as Chenderlin (1982) suggests “...the thing, or act or deed, that speaks” to the person for “whom it was intended”. These stories tell the story that I want to relay to others (Portelli, 1992). This process is a form of inter-textuality (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Prasad, 2005), or a kind of inter-subjective knowledge that makes certain texts more relevant than others for my thesis project.

To provide a little more detail about this process, when I first entered into the PhD Program, I began with a keen interest in understanding social workers’ experiences of work and the conditions of work that prevented them from achieving the social change and social justice goals that social workers aspire towards and are captured within our code of ethics and in the definitions and statements that are codified in documents related to social work professionalization. This interest was born out of my own experience in the field. Experience that included work as a community organizer and as a union organizer in my work places (even when I was paid to do clinical work). This experience led me to conclude significant gaps exist between what we could accomplish as workers and what was expected of us based on the various discourses about the purpose and possibilities of social work.

On this basis I wanted to ensure these interests and experiences became a central part of my thesis work. The challenge was finding a way to research what I was interested in and so much of my early work focused on creating concordance between the ideas and values and methods and methodology for the research, particularly given the pressure for social workers to engage in more positivistic empirical work. I knew it was important to implement a research project that could allow me to work with the complexities and layers of these issues. In trying to find the right methods and processes, I decided to explore the topic through a variety of different means in order to consider what exactly I meant when I talked about complexity and
layers. This exploration led me to the Internet and to considerations of how the “digital domain” might be useful for social workers.

Through various searches of the Internet I discovered that many unions all across the globe use the Internet as a means of sharing video based materials about labour organizing. Much of this material related to the social service sector and by this fact to social workers. While this material was important, it was also sometimes quite dry and boring to watch. The bulk of these texts were hours of picket-line activities shot by amateur videographers and shared on YouTube. These materials were often grainy, shakier, and without a specific focus or purpose, beyond perhaps the idea of baring witness to what was taking place. Other union made texts focused on clips of local news coverage related to specific labour actions (bargaining, protests and strikes), or speeches given by union leaders. None of these texts felt like something I would be able to use to create a research project as substantial as a thesis. Eventually, this search process led me to Erahoneybee’s Song About a Child Welfare Agency. When I first saw this digital story (a name I could only given the text after the fact), I found it very intriguing, so intriguing I was bent on trying to figure how I could find more of these “things”.

At this time I was also studying Institutional Ethnography at OISE. I had taken a course with Roxana Ng and a workshop with Dorothy Smith and was interested in some of the key issues addressed in their research. This experience led me to wonder if there might be someway to use an “I.E.ish” approach to considering these digital texts. In thinking about this I felt that he traditions of IE might be a bit difficult to translate into the digital domain. Playing around with search terms as I looked for more materials led me to beginning to search
for concepts like “Internet ethnography” and “digital ethnography” which eventually lead me to find Michael Wesch’s (2010) work on Digital Ethnography and YouTube. Wesch’s work opened the door for me to access a variety of new literature and a new language that allowed me to search for more possibilities. This material turned me on to a variety of other literatures and a language that helped me become better at negotiating YouTube. This helped me engage in a more organized search that yielded at first about 90 and over time about 125 digital stories that related to social work.

During this time I also considered the possibility of creating my own project in which social workers might consider social work through digital storytelling, however, after taking a digital storytelling workshop (as I mentioned earlier in this chapter) and looking at the formal scholarship on digital storytelling I realized that it might be better to look at texts that already existed and to get a more in-depth understanding of these texts.

In order to find the digital stories that I have used in the thesis I searched a number of terms repeatedly over a period of about two years. There terms included: “social work”, “social workers”, “social work + strike”, “social work + labour”, “social services”, “child protection” and “cps”. I also searched for other terms like “AOP social work” and “critical social work” but these did not yield a different range of texts. I also availed myself of the technological capacity of YouTube and the machine learning the platform undertook based on my searches. YouTube drew on what it learned from the terms and choices that I made and offered me other digital stories for my consideration. The stories selected for my thesis came from these searches and from the offerings that YouTube made to me. Of the about 125 digital stories that I assembled through my searches I culled stories from this list on the following basis:
• I eliminated digital stories that focused more generally on social work activities, such as techniques for interacting with clients, school projects about Jane Addams, university promotional videos about social workers and stories where clients were the primary focus of the text.

• I emphasized stories in which social workers were the point of the story, and where critique of the field was present.

• I then selected from among these the stories those that included innovative ways of conveying this information and stories that presented my interest in understandings that emphasized the work of social work and that fit together in some way.

This selection process was inductive. There was no selection criteria developed prior to my beginning to search, rather I immersed myself in the process, learning as I went a long and using what I learned to develop greater skill in using the resources to access the kinds of texts I discovered I was looking for. Originally the final grouping included two more stories but these were eliminated because I was also concerned about the size and scope of the thesis and a goodness of fit between the stories included and the expertise that was available to me.

As I did this I also created stories and posted these to YouTube in an effort to try and understand from an experiential position what this all meant. I experimented with other social media forms and other digital media sharing sites like Vimeo, but in the end, the timing of the project and a need to be able to create some boundaries around the research field (something that is seen as a real challenge for researchers in this area (Dicks et al. 2005; Markham & Baym, 2009)) meant that I focused my work on texts found in the YouTube environment.
The following 6 chapters provide you with analysis of the digital stories considered in this thesis; each chapter demonstrates different elements of this “constellation” or “crystallization” used to illuminate social work digital media stories. Each chapter contains a reading of these stories, one reading, my reading, which even though it is a subjective reading is informed by my history of social work practice and inquiry into critical social work practices, and the value of digital story-telling as a means for communicating these readings to you as interpretations that may be useful to social workers as sources of knowledge, histories and traditions.
Chapter 5: World Social Work

World Social Work Day 2010 (http://youtu.be/mrJb_lj8t5Q) created by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is a digital media story that plays a central role in this thesis and therefore it is the first story presented. This digital media story conveys the IFSW’s vision and mission of global social work, a vision that centres on expansion of professional social work into the “developing world”. This story is narrated by (then) President Dr. David Jones who uses YouTube as a platform from which to urge social workers to rise to the challenge of expanding social work as an international development practice. This expansion is designed in part to include places where social work as a profession does not currently exist. Jones frames this goal of this kind of market expansion as a practice of social change and social justice.

Phase Analysis

World Social Work Day 2010 can be divided into two phases based on the natural divisions in this text. These segments may be described based on their content as 1) Jones’ address and 2) singing children. In the first phase, Jones narrates the audience into an understanding of social work rooted in Jones’ place as the president of the IFSW, a powerful global social work organization. This segment takes up most of the four minutes and 30 seconds comprising this digital story. In this phase, we see Jones in the foreground of the image. He is framed in the computer screen from mid-chest to the top of his head with a seemingly endless blue sky behind him. The sky is empty and still except for a slowly circling hawk at screen centre left. Behind Jones we also see the background of what he will later tell...
us is a ‘slum’. This visual element is highlighted from time to time through minor camera movements, which present an expanded view or different angle on this “place”.

The second phase of the story, the singing children, takes up about the last 10 seconds of this digital media story. In this segment, we are presented with images of children dressed in uniforms singing with their teachers. This phase clearly shows a connection to the first phase based on location, but other connections are not made explicit. These two phases will be analyzed in sequence, therefore I will now return to my consideration of the first phase and consider the second phase towards the end of this chapter.

In the first phase, we see Dr. Jones, standing pale and pensive in the sunshine. He tells us that he is standing “in this location” in “the Mathare Slum” in Kenya, to provide viewers with a visual metaphor about social work and to raise our awareness of World Social Work Day. Jones’s presence on the screen can be understood as an embodied presentation of social work (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b). Jones ‘becomes’ social work, representing the profession through his actions, attitudes, words and behaviours.

Affiliation

Lange (2009), describes the linking of “professional content” to a personal message as a particular narrative technique. In this kind of narrative the “business” motives of this kind of story are disguised through personal and informal style of presentation (pg. 83). This personal address is a story told by an official representative of a formal global social work organization. This genre humanizes an institutional project by emphasizing Jones as a symbolic spokesperson for social work. In this text, Jones becomes to social work what Mr. Clean is to housekeeping, Aunt Jemima is to breakfast and Ronald MacDonald is to fast food. This story style provides the audience with a “feeling of being connected not to a video, but to a person
who shares mutual benefits or interests” (pg. 83) and in this way it is a digital story that can be described as a practice of “affiliation.” (Lange, 2009).

As a practice of affiliation we can understand *World Social Work Day 2010* as a story that taps into one aspect of YouTube’s capacity for social networking (Lange 2009). Affiliation is an important part of what makes social networking ‘cook’ (Davies, 2006; Lange, 2009). Affiliation gives value (Spivak 1985, 2004) to the practice of social networking. We can understand YouTube and the practice of digital media storytelling (more generally) to support group communication. Audience members may share a “common” space where they may foster and maintain their sense of “membership” within a group (Burgess & Green 2009; Elsaesser, 2009; Lange, 2009; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009).

These processes of social networking build on and amplify what Lange (2009) describes as “feelings of attraction to people, things and ideas…” (pg. 71). Such ‘affiliations’ are established on the basis of varied criteria such as “institutions or ideologies” and are reflected in the “overt content” and “subject matter” of digital stories (Ibid., pg. 71). Jones’s institutional connection to social workers and the values and beliefs promoted by the IFSW are the basis on which he attempts to “affiliate” with his audience, a process that reflects our traditions of the making of a social work identity (Baines, 2011b; Hick, 2001; Holosko, 2003).

This idea of the “social network” (Lange, 2009) and its role in establishing and affirming connections and membership, it is (to a large degree) the function of the IFSW, virtually and in the material world. The IFSW does, after all, claim to represent more than “half a million social workers,” (Hick, 2001, pg. 65) located globally in 80 different member nations (TheIFSW (2011); IFSW.org: About the IFSW [Presentation of the IFSW: Membership] ).

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9 Which is a very limited list of possible connections that might facilitate networking.
This function is further expressed in the IFSW’s self-defined role of “promot[ing] social work as a profession, linking social workers from around the world and promoting…[their] participation …in social policy and planning.” (Hick, 2001, pg. 65)

The IFSW’s authority to undertake affiliation comes from the sanction it holds (Hick, 2001; Holosko, 2003) from powerful global institutions like the United Nations (UN), and national social work regulating bodies who themselves hold membership in the IFSW (Hick 2001). We might understand this practice of affiliation as multi-directional: the IFSW connects social workers with the mandate of the UN and the regulators, while at the same-time connecting these organizations with global communities of social workers. The authority held by the IFSW is further held in place by the organization’s commitment to uphold the UN Convention on Human Rights and to create for itself, on behalf of the social workers it represents, a place for social work in this fight for rights as codified by the UN (Hick, 2001, pg. 65).

In part, this process of making right through rights (Ife, 2008; Spivak, 2004, 2005) is the making of social work. The IFSW is, after all, fighting for human rights by expanding the field, by establishing professional social work where no professional social worker has gone before, and then in turn, fighting for social justice in these newly made social work spheres. This exercise of “naming and claiming” (Smith, 2010, 2011; Heron, 2007) is facilitated by creating new institutional systems of social work “where they do not exist” and in doing so supports the need for the IFSW to continue to exist (IFSW.org: [Aims of the IFSW] para. 2). This process relies (in part) on the support of already established affiliates like the social workers Jones addresses through his digital media story. In creating the affiliation with social
workers, he relies on a number of already entrenched discourses that allow social workers to make meaning from his address.

**Professionalization and Social Work**

This idea of digital texts as tools of affiliation relies in part on the process of interpellation (Lange, 2009), or subjection (Foucault, 1988; Davies, 2006), through which audiences interpret and reinforce subjective positions offered to them through the texts with which they are engaged. In offering social work subjectivity, Jones is offering a very specific understanding of what it means to become a social worker. The IFSW presents an understanding of social work as a “profession,” a definition that the IFSW understands as the central method of creating a global commonality among social workers. Thus the subject positioning of ‘social worker’ is perhaps the most significant aspect of the affinity produced in the IFSW’s digital story. However, it is unclear whether the IFSW’s audience really shares a common understanding of the position “social worker” or even knows what it is that the IFSW is asking them to take on.

The concept of “professional social work” and the application of professionalization as a globalizing process, bring to life Pon’s (2009) understanding of forgetting. The IFSW’s framing of social work as a “profession” which unifies or standardizes practice, disregards other understandings of social work (Baines, 2011b; Campbell, 2012; Dominelli, 2002; Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2009). Not all social workers embrace what the IFSW is promoting; not all social workers agree with this understanding of social work as a profession (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b; Campbell, 2012; Carniol, 2010; Fook, 2002; Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Mullaly, 2009). Many social workers argue against professionalization (Aronson & Smith, 2012; Baines, 2011b, 2012; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009). Yet, there is little mention of this
conflict within the IFSW’s commentary on global social work either in the context of Jones’s address or in the context of the IFSW’s materials more generally.

Lange (2009) suggests that affinity texts produced for professional contexts, establish connections on the basis of the “intricacies of the work” and are “attempting to maintain feelings of connection with potential others who identify or interpolate themselves as intended viewers of the text” (pg. 71). Interpolation is described as a form of labour requiring audience members to understand themselves in particular ways and to project this “self” on to the text they are reading (Ibid., 2009, pg. 71).

In the case of World Social Work Day 2010, the intricacies that Jones presents are the intricacies of the IFSW’s work; they are the intricacies of managerialism and professionalization (Baines, 2011b; Mullaly, 2007; Murdach, 2007; Smith, 2010, 2011). The work Jones describes as social work, is more specifically the ‘social’ work of networking and affinity building (Lange, 2009). To this end, he discusses the global social work community and a conference that was taking place in Hong Kong. He discusses goals and possible actions on these goals, which include determining the need for a global office, and he muses about the location for this office.

World Social Work Day 2010 reflects the notions of “affinity videos” as “messages without a purpose” or simply as messages about the work of “connection” (Ibid., pg. 73). As social workers we might understand these processes to be rapport and relationship building, but in the context of neo-liberal social work they are considered to be relatively unimportant (Baines 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Smith, 2011). Looked at from this perspective, Jones’s message really doesn’t say anything, but rather points us in the direction of a number of possible futures: conferences, offices, challenges and decisions that the IFSW must make about how
and where to ‘practice.’ He tells us that these practices – conferences, offices, organizational decisions -- are important.

Jones suggests that he is interested in what social workers have to say. He advises the audience there are still decisions to be made about the future of social work, yet he does not provide concrete information about how the audience might join in this decision making process. Jones suggests that social workers need to get involved and that this can take place by “staying tuned”, a statement that places responsibility for awareness and participation firmly on the shoulders of the audience. Not “staying tuned” means disregarding the advice of this social work authority, which means possibly missing the opportunity to help shape the “future” of global social work, which assumes that the IFSW will be successful in globalizing social work.

Digital stories focused on professional contexts like the IFSW’s story, are intended for specific audiences. Affinity practices maintain a “labile field of communication” necessary because of the potential “instability of…social networks”. Thus Jones’s address can be understood as an exercise in helping the social work community see itself as a community (Lange, 2009, pg. 73).

This kind of digital media story relies on insider knowledge and situated knowledge for meaning to be made (Lundby, 2008; Erstad & Wetsch, 2008; Nelson & Hull, 2008). More generalized readings of these texts, without insider knowledge are less meaningful or downright confusing (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Lange, 2009; Lundby, 2008). For unintended audiences the “references” included in these texts may not be read in the way the author intended, a factor that opens up the possibility of additional unintended meanings (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Lange, 2009; Lundby, 2008; Rosenberg, 2004).
Situated Knowledge and Ambiguity

Our ability to ascribe meaning to *World Social Work Day 2010* is enhanced by previous knowledge of the definition of professional social work, awareness of the IFSW and awareness of what social work means more generally. The more situated our knowledge of these concepts, the deeper the meaning we potentially gather from and assign to the story (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Lange, 2009; Lundby, 2008). And, with the importance of situated meaning in mind, we come across instances when ambiguity is used as a device by the on-screen narrator (Bennet & Edelman, 1985). For example, Jones describes the place where he is standing using different descriptions and names each time he mentions it. He first tells us he is in front of the “Mathare slum” then shortens this to simply “Mathare”. Sometimes he says “Nairobi”, sometimes “Kenya”, sometimes simply “Africa”; at times this “place” is a subject while at other times it is an object.

In directing attention to “the slum”, Jones speaks generally of challenges that social workers need to take up. However, these challenges are unspecified and unnamed. He fails to mention many issues that might be considered central to any story employing a Kenyan slum as a backdrop. For example, race is never mentioned, nor poverty, nor politics, nor colonialism, nor globalization, nor global policies (like structural adjustment) nor the specific problems of this specific place (Hake & Ross, 1969; Hay & Harris, 2007.) Yet, Jones issues a “challenge” to social workers, insisting this “place” is to be “remade” – in his ambiguity he invites his intended audience to substitute an assumed set of understandings about the specifics of this place for other challenges that we understand as “similar” in our own contexts (Bennet & Edelman, 1985).
The use of different references to “place” continues, deepening and normalizing this ambiguity (Brock, 2003; Razak, 2005). Sometimes Jones names this place ‘Africa’ generally, other times he calls it “Nairobi, Kenya” more specifically, and occasionally he uses the very specific “Mathare slum” (as opposed to, say, the Mathare Valley). As the audience we can understand this ambiguity in different ways: we can interpret it as mere sloppiness, or a kind of neo-colonial habit whereby the privileged do not learn the proper names of things related mainly to the colonized, a kind of “laziness” committed by white people like Jones and me who can’t be bothered to learn enough about Africa to identify specific nation states or territories as we spill our ignorance across the continental plane in the name of justice and rights. The ambiguity in how the “place” in the story is named also allows “Africa” to be substituted for the idea of social work as a global phenomenon. Jones may well be saying: “Africa is a place where social work is practiced, the kind of social work recognized by the IFSW” as he “challenges” social workers around the world to “take up” IFSW-approved practice to “remake” other “Africas” where ever these are and what ever challenge they might present.

**Multi-modal Analysis**

As a digital text, *World Social Work Day 2010* conveys information using multiple communication modes. The layering of these modes and their convergence creates still more layers of meaning. As previously mentioned, the visuals in this text are quite simple – a head and shoulders image before the backdrop of the slum. Similarly, the sound in this digital story is minimal, consisting mainly of verbal statements made by Dr. Jones and a few seconds of background noise, like the sound of someone shovelling gravel, which may or may not be intended as metaphor.
What stands out most in this digital media story is Jones’s voice, layered over the content of what he is saying. His voice, tone, intonation and accent all tell us more than his words alone. As I listen I find myself asking: is that a British accent that I detect? The voice, combined with the context of the story, make Jones’s subjective position his nationality, race and ethnicity of central importance (Heron, 2005). A British sounding man describing a slum in Kenya has meaning when we consider Kenya’s history as a British colony. That meaning is made more striking by the fact that Jones himself uses “place” to present the potential for social work to be further globalized (Razak, 2005). Still another layer of meaning emerges when we notice that this story shows a place where the lingering effects of British colonialism are manifest but there is not one word about this spoken in the voiceover by the British sounding devoted Dr. Jones.

In this moment, Jones embodies what Pon (2009) discusses in his description of forgetting as an act of remaking. What remains unclear to me is whether Jones’s choice of this “location” is a process seen to bring in to being a kind of atonement or if this is another one of the colonial moments that Pon argues result from social work’s forgotten history of participation in colonization, exploitation and cultural genocide. This raises the question - Did Jones make this digital media story so we would remember, or is he hoping we have forgotten? Is forgetting a suggestion that all is resolved and that all moral culpability has been rendered unnecessary (Ferguson, 2007)?

This digital media story is presented as a personal message from Dr. Jones who engages with us as though he is already in relationship with us, the audience. This assumption of recognition is a kind of subjectification, i.e. the being “seen by the other and the self as the desired subject” that post-structuralist theorists describe as important to making and
maintaining identity (Davies, 2006, pg. 426). If being a social worker is desirable to viewers then Jones message says, “I want you”. The audience may hear “I want you” or “Jones wants me” or “the IFSW wants me” or even “Jones, the IFSW and/or Social Work want me”. Jones “hails” the social work community, and the social workers that know who they are listen. But, we also know that much of what he speaks about – the conference, the world of global administration and the setting of a global agenda – is really more about a social work elite. What he does not speak, what he does not acknowledge, suggests to me that we do not share a common social work.

This ‘hail’ is a hail to the social work elite. This is reflected in Jones’s way of discussing the Global Social Work Conference that is to take place in Hong Kong later in 2010. In introducing this topic Jones casually mentions “the conference” as though everyone knows what a conference is and knows about this conference in particular. He does not clarify what it means to participate in a social work conference. He dangles this information before us, keeping us in suspense by not telling us which conference he means until the very end of his communication.

Jones casually mentions “Hong Kong,” the location of the conference, in a manner that suggests we will see him “there” as if going to Hong Kong is for this entire audience something obtainable, even ordinary, and of course desirable. For those who cannot go to the conference, a substitute connection is offered through a continued virtual engagement with Jones via the “web” where we can “see him there” in Hong Kong. But Hong Kong is, among other things, a former British colony, and just as with Kenya, the colonial relationship and the depth of meaning of seeing Jones “there” is never discussed or even acknowledged.
**Discourse Analysis**

Jones’s address activates many discourses, which we can elect to take up or to leave down in our consideration of this digital media story. What is said and the way that Jones speaks about these various topics tells us a great deal about how he understands social work, social workers and tell us something about the ideology in operation as he frames these ideas.

For example, Jones presents us with the idea of “at risk places” when he speaks about the “challenge” posed by the Mathare Slum. In eluding to risk, Jones draws on particular categories of risk. This risk is in part about the potential value of materials in the slum and their potential to effect capitalism, stock market activity and elements of “futures” trading (Spivak, 1985, 2004). In a neo-liberal world this kind of risk requires attention (Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2011). It must be controlled and “managed” because it may interfere with efficiency and profit making (Spivak, 2004). Spivak (1985) suggests this is “an echo of marketization”.

Jones’s risk making is further suggested in his description of the slum as one of the “biggest in Africa” which assigns a value to the risk that this place holds. By doing so Jones makes this place worthy of attention (Lange, 2009) using particular neo-liberal discourses. Jones’s quantification makes risk recognizable to those who have the power to help him reach his goal, the goal of deploying social work to solve the problems he has pointed out. His presentation of the risk discourse makes his argument readable by the audience he seeks to mobilize, an audience not simply comprised of social workers but also individuals and organizations, such as the United Nations, that control money and resources for international development work (Spivak, 1985). Jones is using his power to speak to those who can bring about change from an inter-governmental or investment based location, which once again
activates elements of the human rights discourse and the UN’s mandate in international affairs. (Hick, 2001; IFSW, 2005)

Jones’s risk making and subjection of social work as a partner in international development are potentially their own kind of risk when we consider these ideas by drawing on Spivak’s (2004) understanding of the “traps” within the human rights discourse. Jones suggests social work’s capacity to “make things right” requires that we first engage in a process of “making things wrong” (Spivak, 2004; Rossiter, 2007). Here once more the role of the IFSW and social workers is centred in Jones’s discussion as he brings to us suggestions of “wronging” and “righting” that require expert knowledge (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Spivak 2004, 1985; Mullaly, 2007). Here “white knights” of the so-called developed nations of the West step in, experts appointed by those who are positioned to certify expertise and declare what is wrong and how it must be fixed (Spivak, 2004). This fix generally requires the involvement of the West in the form of people, instructions, resources and rules assembled from the “global stage” which really means the West (Hay & Harris, 2007; Spivak, 2004, 1985). Jones indeed suggests this when he states that “social work” could (or should) do anything about this slum, a slum the size of Burlington, Ontario, a place that has been in existence for several dozen years.

Behind Jones, the slum is a very concrete and acute example of Western “making wrong” and therefore unleashes the potential of a social work “making right” project. This social work righting of wrongs comes layered on top of a number of other “right making” projects that indirectly created slums in the first place (Hake & Ross, 1969; Hay & Harris 2007; Stockwell, 2006). We can also read the Mathare slum as a marker of the harms brought about by British colonial rule, the displacement of industrial workers, the legacy of Structural
Adjustment policy and control of the state by the International Monetary Fund, and the ebb and flux of “new” industrial activities like the work of Gulf Oil (Hake & Ross, 1969; Hay & Harris, 2007; Stockwell, 2006).

Throughout the digital media story Jones is positioned as a kind of bridge between the slum and a “hospitality and tourism training centre,” he mentions in his story. This training centre can be understood as another kind of marker. Visually, the slum behind Jones can be read as a metaphor of a “past to come” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), a past to be made by social work and other development activities like the hospitality and tourism training centre and the visitors who come to see and know Kenya.

These visual elements layered on top of what Jones is saying activate Spivak’s (1985) notion of the “modern ‘idealist’” (pg. 73). Here idealism is a project where globalizing organizations make “internal political philosophy” the goal of “foreign policy,” (Ibid., pg. 73) to bring about an ideological social transformation through global policy like the UN convention on human rights that the IFSW upholds. (Hick, 2001; IFSW, 2011; Nossal, 2007) In Spivak’s (1985) view this “pressure from above,” or the engagement of the power elite in change making, is a counterpoint to the idea of “pressure from below” or what might be understood as grassroots community engagement, the kind of citizen engagement which might be mobilized by an army of social workers (pg. 73).

Spivak (1985) argues this idealism is a capitalist ideal. Here considerations of the slum are reframed in terms like “untapped human capital” (Jackson & Jordan, 2000) and the potential value of the land taken up by the slum (George, 2006; Hay & Harris, 2007) which can be seen as the risks implied in Jones’s earlier discussion. In unpacking the idea of human capital, the concept of “labour power” becomes important. Here we understand “labour power
is not work” but rather the potential value of labour “once used” (Spivak, 1985). Part of this value is what labour actualizes in making material the potential of the “creativity of capital” (Ibid., 1985, pg. 73). Untapped labour power is a resource waiting to be spent, the potential value of which is the anticipated gap between the cost of the labour and the value of its production.

There is a lot of labour power in the Mathare slum and it appears to be quite reasonably priced – cheap enough to make training a profitable investment for the global tourism and hospitality industry. It is hard to argue that the increased income from being employed will not improve the lives of the people living in the Mathare slum, so training them for jobs available in hospitality seems like the proverbial “win win” situation. However, there is trouble in the notion of job training as a remedy for slums (Jackson & Jordan, 2000) and in particular the training of people in hospitality and tourism where workplace abuses occur on global scale and are well documented (Hotel Workers Rising, 2011; Pearson et. Al, 2007).

Social workers are also part of the labour power Jones identifies; we are very present in the ambiguity he creates. Slum dwellers can become hospitality and tourism workers with social workers’ support and social workers can make this their work, their “challenge” with the support of the IFSW. There is perhaps even some loose understanding, based on the mandate of the IFSW that slum dwellers can be social workers and continue to work in their community in a way that will be recognized by the IFSW should they elect to become “professional” social workers (Hick, 2001; IFSW, 2011). Perhaps when next we see the IFSW in the foreground of the slum, a school of social work may be strategically placed next to the hospitality and tourism training centre.
Jones acknowledges social work as a practice when he speaks of the social workers doing “the work” as deserving to be remembered on this World Social Work Day – it is however, unclear how they are understood the other 364 days of the year. Jones encourages these laudable yeomen “doing the work of social work” to consider global poverty as a “challenge” that can be taken up by coming to Mathare, or they might “claim and name” (Smith 2011, Heron 2007) their own challenge in some other location and set about the work of “making right” there. While Jones presents this possibility as an opportunity, this framing can be understood as a kind of reification and minimizing. This idea of a social challenge with a parallel social work process minimizes the uniqueness of this reality, disregards the histories that have made this reality and re-inscribes capitalist discourses in several different ways that are at odds with who and what social workers claim to be.

Jones’s paralleling of social work with international development reaffirms the blurring of the boundaries between these two disciplines. The desire for an understanding of social workers as key players in international development is presented to us repeatedly, making it clear that one of his purposes is to create an alignment between the work of international development and the work of social workers. These ideas are presented to us through Internet based materials produced by the IFSW (see: IFSW.org) and reaffirmed most recently at the Global Social Work and Social Development Conference in Stockholm Sweden (July 2012) (http://swsd2012.creo.tv/sunday).

In this way we can understand Jones’s practice of forgetting why the slum exists and his remembering of the slum as something to be improved, as a part of the integration of international development work with social work. The framing of this place in this particular way may be both purposeful and unconscious. This forgetting and remembering (Pon, 2009)
requires a further forgetting of what led to the creation of the slum and what it is that sustains the slum as it is. It further requires a remembering of understandings that frame the slum as undesirable while forgetting the utility and possibilities of the slum as it may be understood by its residents (George, 2006). Framing the slum as undesirable makes it a space that requires intervention. More specifically, it requires a social work kind of social development intervention.

Jones does not present the Mathare slum as the only possible social work project. Rather his ambiguity allows social workers to apply their own meaning to the place and to use this understanding to create their own civilizing project (Bennet & Edelman, 1985; Heron, 2007; Spivak, 2004) in their own community or another international location. Jones’s challenge is concrete while its political meaning remains ambiguous, opening up the possibility for social workers to make multiple interpretations of the meaning of the slum.

However, what Jones has not left ambiguous is his particular remembering of what constitutes professional social work. His narrative brings to life particular understandings of social work as a profession, and as the official representative of the IFSW it is a very specific framing of social work. Thus Jones’s suggestion that social work has a more open understanding may be another kind of ideological activity, another kind of forgetting. The IFSW’s particular understanding of social work as a “global professional social work” is constituted from multiple institutional points and which comes to pass by virtue of a complex set of interdependent relationships that can appear at first glance to be completely separate and apart from one another.

The network of professional organizations and institutions can make professional social work appear to be a notion that is shared by many independent organizations creating a
multiplicity of power relations (Foucault, 1988) that hold professionalization in place. However, a closer look at the system suggests that rather than a multiplicity of professional perspectives with shared goals and outcomes, it is a unitary goal and outcome positioned to appear as though it is a global phenomenon springing out of the rightness of the thing. The illusion created by this representation does much to make professional social work appear to be something that occurs as a result of multiple players coming to some natural agreement because of the inherent value, and the potential value this holds (Spivak, 1985).

The IFSW’s system of institutional relations creates a web of organizations that together produce international social work at the national level, including systems of regulation, administration, education and credentialization. Social work subjects are constituted through their recognition of and participation in these specified kinds of actions which are most often made through the education process, the regulatory process and governmental and community sanction (Hick, 2001; Holosko, 2003). Sanction is in turn, reflected by employers and service users who come to expect and demand human services that are understood as social work (Hick, 2001; Holosko, 2003). This may be further supported by organizations like the UN who argue for the value of social work and international trade in professional workers, when social work is recognized as a professional credential that allows individuals to access global employment mobility on the basis of holding these credentials (IFSW.org).

The IFSW’s role is to create a global vision of social work and to proselytize this vision at the global level. The IFSW provides supports and resources to countries wishing to develop professional social work (Hick, 2001; IFSW.org). Where this desire does not exists, it is created through the IFSW’s proselytization (Jackson & Jordan, 2000). The IFSW then creates resources and supports in the form of social work institutions that reproduce the IFSW’s brand
of social work. The IFSW both creates a market for social work, and for tertiary professional services like education, licensure and regulation, while at the same time it expands its global reach into the countries that elect to adopt the IFSW’s ways of being, knowing and doing as a result of these outreach activities and affinity practices.

Through these actions, the IFSW creates social workers by helping indigenous helpers to re-understand what they have always been doing as social work (Crosby, 1991). This re-understanding in turn captures the labour of the community and reimagines it as social work. As social work becomes “known” it in turn becomes understood as a profession and in accordance with the IFSW’s position seeks to move this kind of caring into self-regulated professional social work in accordance with global standards. With the advent of the regulation of the work and the workers, the IFSW has an important reason to exist by virtue of the presence of the newly constituted and subjugated professional social workers.

The IFSW’s hand in this process of creating a global regime of social work is also tied into power systems that we might understand to reside above them. The IFSW proudly promotes its relationship with the United Nations and its status as an organization with standing in a number of UN contexts. (Hick, 2001; and see: IFSW.org) This relationship suggests that the UN relies on the IFSW’s understanding of social work in framing and thus in acting on “social workish” things. In other words, when the UN talks, acts, supports and resources “social working” this “doing” is predicated on the IFSW’s social work as a subjective positioning.

The IFSW’s global social work is a practice that is constituted from multiple positions nationally and internationally. Professional social work relies in part on education and academic credentials. The IFSW is in turn connected to the process of testing these credentials
for minimum standards both at the individual and institutional level, and the certification of these activities made at multiple levels at the same time.

The significance of Jones as the representation of social work is also important when we consider the idea of the internationalization of social work as a practice of empire (Heron, 2007; Lovrod, 2005). The IFSW generally and Jones more specifically have made strong connections between social work and international development work (The Global Agenda, 2012). These connections activate yet another set of discourses on the project of international development work as a neo-colonial practice and as a practice of empire (Spivak, 2004, 2005; Heron, 2007). Heron’s (2007) work on international development and helping identities frames social work and international development work as closely related to notions of bourgeois identity as a universally desired subjectivity.

Heron argues that helping is closely linked to projects of civilizing and these kinds of projects are understood as “best” undertaken by the “ideal bourgeois subjects” who are, like Jones, “white males.” (Heron, 2007; Razak, 2005). Thus Jones’s position as the representation of social work in the context is made all the more telling and all the more problematic. The social work stories told across the other texts considered in this thesis are people whose bodies and identities are not nearly as ideal as Jones and so their stories speak to the challenge of trying live up to the kinds of social work ideals that IFSW promotes (Heron, 2007).

The second phase of World Social Work Day 2010 presents us with a more concrete example of issues of international development work and the idea of race and corporality presented by Heron (2007) and Pon (2009). This second phase of the story is very short lasting, a mere 10 seconds. The visual elements in this story are a sharp contrast to the image
of Jones standing pale and pensive in the sunshine. In this segment we are presented with images of young, black, children dressed in uniforms, singing with two adult women.

This image bears few connections to the first segment beyond the fact that the endless blue sky shown beyond the children, appears to be the same sky shown behind Jones in the first segment of this story. This scene of singing children and the women standing with them is neither explained nor introduced by Jones. This scene seems to suggest the same hopefulness Jones presents to us in his discussion of social work and World Social Work Day 2010. However, the brevity and detachment that this phase brings with it makes it difficult to read. It is difficult to speculate on how the IFSW hopes these children will be understood. If the children are being used, symbolically, as a metaphor of the future (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), then we might also understand these children to create an understanding of the importance of child protection work in social work. However, it is unclear if we should read these children as (potentially) social work clients or perhaps as the future of social work.

Placed thus in the final scene, the images of the children are also granted an ambiguous importance; one might say these children are given the “last word”. However, the lack of discussion of these images, or even a simple explanation by the on-screen narrator to guide the audience into this new phase of the story, gives a sense that the inclusion of the singing children and women was not well thought out. We can as easily understand the images of these children to be an after thought as the ‘last word’ in the story. It is an ambiguity that in many ways amplifies the challenges present in the practices of forgetting that Jones perpetrates in the first half of the story.
Intertextual Connections

In moving into the other chapters of this thesis we can consider *World Social Work Day 2010* as connected to many social work digital texts when we consider the conventions of internet based research and digital media scholarship. In this context, applications of these encourage us to create links across digital texts. (Boler, 2008; Dicks et al., 2005; Hine, 2008; Markham 1998, 2004; Markham & Baym, 2009; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009). In looking at the remaining digital stories included in this thesis, connection to the work of David Jones and the IFSW will remain an important aspect of meaning making. We might understand these texts as providing us with a glimpse into the “challenges” that Jones invites us to take up.

Dr. David Jones presents us with a version of what it means to be a social worker and to do social work. Jones’s words rain down on social workers all across the globe because of his status as an official and globally recognized social work authority. Some of the tensions, contradictions, remembering and forgetting brought to life in *World Social Work Day 2010* are represented, at least to some degree, in the stories told in the remaining digital stories. Intertextuality is reflected in the subsequent texts, sometimes through the challenges presented by the storyteller or in the conflicts highlighted, or simply in the dominant discourses they present.

While Jones encourages us to look out at the world and see where challenges exist, I prefer instead to look into social work itself and into social workers’ lived experiences of practice as the challenges that social workers need to take up. Thus the digital stories in the remaining chapters challenge the idea of professional social work as a universally desirable kind of social work or even as the best way to go about making social work goals and objectives happen in the world. While these stories are quite different than the story Jones tells,
echoes of the discourses of social work presented by Jones are still present in these stories. They are present in what is remembered, forgotten, and resisted, in what is shown to create conflict and tension, and in what remains unresolved for these storytellers.
Chapter 6: The Discrete Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker

The story told by Dr. David Jones in the digital media story *World Social Work Day 2010* ([http://youtu.be/DRHbJfQtbxE](http://youtu.be/DRHbJfQtbxE)) encourages social workers around the world to see Hong Kong as an important social work place. As the location of the 2010 Global Social Work and Social Development Conference, Hong Kong is the birthplace of a “new” social work agenda. The agenda Jones refers to is more specifically titled *The Global Agenda For Social Work and Social Development: Commitment to Action* (2012), a document developed and published by the IFSW, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW).

The Global Agenda (2012) establishes a series of goals and practices that the IFSW and its member agencies endorse as the proper and preferred approach to creating a contemporary global social work. The Global Agenda (2012) presents priorities and actions understood as necessary to make this goal a reality. Jones describes it as “our agenda” in the closing lines of his digital media story, on this basis we might understand The Global Agenda (2012) as a document that effects all people who understand themselves as social workers, whether or not they are aware the document exists.

By narrating an understanding of Hong Kong as a significant place where social work is constituted and practiced, Dr. David Jones’ words have encouraged me to include a Hong Kong based digital media story among the texts considered in this thesis. A few digital media stories produced in Hong Kong were accessible to me as a unilingual English language speaker. Wrightkan’s digital media story *The Discrete Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker* is a powerful critical social work digital media story that presents the perspective of a direct service social worker in practice in Hong Kong. It is a story that allows us to consider
the complexity of what the IFSW is proposing, and what they are remembering and forgetting as they engage in this mission of globalizing social work.

*The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker* is the story of a “successful” worker who holds a position in an institutional social work setting. The story illustrates the tensions among contemporary practice realities including: restrictive work environments, professional identities and the values and beliefs of social work. The Bourgeois Social Worker is a character who experiences a moral crisis that he seeks to resolve through reflective practice. The story presents a paradox: the Bourgeois Social Worker appears successful but his professional success becomes a personal failure. Success is presented as a costly achievement, one that requires significant personal sacrifice, both material and moral. In the end, the Bourgeois Social Worker reflects himself out of his status as a professional social worker, electing to leaves his position, “choosing” as he describes it “something else,” which he understands as choosing “life.”

My analysis of *The Discrete Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker*, requires me to work across difference and to read a story that takes place outside my own culture and locality, thus bringing to life the capacity of the internet to allow for non-proximal and non-temporal connections (Lundby, 2008; Elsaesser, 2008). At the same time, the story allows the Bourgeoisie Social Worker and me, as members of a shared community of social workers, to share many of the same understandings because of our social work subjectivity.

In undertaking analysis of this story, I think it is important to restate that I am reading this story through the lens of critical anti-oppressive social work and digital media scholarship. Therefore, I am not taking up what some (Pon included) might understand as a “cultural
competency model” (Fook, 2002; Pon, 2009) of reading Wrightkan’s10 narrative. In approaching my analysis of The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker I am seeking to engage in an open and yet situated reading that uses inter-textual understandings of social work (Rossiter, 2005). This reading is only one possible reading, a reading that is occurring from my “angle” (Ellingson, 2009). Other people, other social workers, will undoubtedly understand this story in different ways because they bring with them different histories and different views.

My reading may extend the story beyond, or fall short of, Wrightkan’s intent (Rosenberg, 2004; Lundby, 2008). Despite this, my reading can generate important information or make knowledge. My reading is just one of the many truths that audiences might gather from this story (Rosenberg, 2004; Hutcheson, 1989) and it suggests what the possibilities might be for meaning making from social work digital media stories posted on YouTube.

Reading and analyzing this story in this way becomes important when we remember that part of the point of the IFSW’s work is to develop a global social work that adapts to local needs (IFSW.org), a social work that is fluid enough to allow for multiple understandings of practice excellence to emerge, an excellence that depends on multiple contexts for its understanding (Baines, 2011b; Fook, 2002). However, I have shown in the previous chapter through my analysis of World Social Work Day 2010 that this liberal pluralist notion of a ‘relativist’ social work can quickly give way to a kind of neoliberal remaking of this perspective (Baines, 2011b; Lovrod, 2005; Taylor & White, 2001; Payne, 2001; Prasch, 2005).

10 It is difficult to determine on the basis of the YouTube channel if Wrightkan is a person or the channel name taken by a storytelling collaborative – something that is suggested based on the names listed in the credits of the Discreet Charm.
Analysis of the YouTube Channel

The media field around The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker is the first thing we experience as we connect to Wrightkan’s work. Considering this field enhances our understanding by providing us with an additional layer of context. As discussed in Chapter three, “channels” are YouTube’s system for organizing user content. Channels allow users to upload and classify digital media texts and to express to their audiences general information about ‘who’ they are and the nature of their digital media practice (Kessler & Schafer, 2009; YouTube Essentials Guide, 2011;). Channels share information through text, images, metaphors and symbols (colours, background patterns) and other templated structures that provide an overall appearance to the channel and that serve to organize the meaning that is made from the channel (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; YouTube Guide, 2011; Kessler & Schafer, 2009).

Wrightkan’s YouTube channel claims Hong Kong as its point of origin. The 61 digital texts shared on the channel cover a wide range of topics. Many of these are stories are about everyday events, others are stories about the work of social work. The story offerings range from highly produced film style texts to raw video footage without any post-production editing. A connection exists between the makers of the channel and the Hong Kong Social Workers General Union (HKSWGU) as several of his texts relate to his involvement with this organization. This suggests that Wrightkan is familiar with a framing of social work as work and an understanding of social workers as workers.

Among these texts, The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker is a digital story that illustrates the capacity of digital media stories to convey meanings using multiple communication modes simultaneously. The multi-sensory experience of this story conveys
information visually, allowing us to see this social worker’s reflective practice through his actions, to hear his processes of reflection through voice-over narration, to read about his experiences through subtitles, and to experience rhythm as a metaphor by listening to the story’s sound track which features drumming as the dominant voice. The use of particular styles of film, lighting and visual effects as well as editing add “production” as yet another layer of meaning making present in this story (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). All these layers converge to produce the thick rich experience that is *The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker*.

The title of this digital media story is a powerful meaning-making element. It tells us something about the authors’ intent thus warranting more careful consideration. The title immediately informs our reading of genre in this digital media story. *The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker* can be read as a reference to another film, or what is commonly considered in digital media scholarship as a “meme” (Bernstein 1992; Reinsborough & Canning, 2010; Shifman, 2012, 2013). In this case Wrightkan is inviting us to establish a connection with the famous 1970’s film *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie* directed by Luis Bunuel (1972).

**Intertextuality**

The parallel created through the mimetic use of the title invites us into an intertextual reading of this digital media story informed by knowledge of the original film (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010; Lundby, 2008; Lange, 2009). Wrightkan’s use of references to Bunuel’s film ties into a significant body of interdisciplinary scholarship that uses this film as an analytical text and the title of the film as an analytical metaphor. The range of scholarly literature that references Bunuel’s film is varied and includes considerations of: bureaucracy
(Cistelecan, 2011), performativity (Izurieta, 2008), surrealism (Rejda, 1981), attraction (Begin, 2006), innovation and growth (Silvergerg, 2002), feminist economics (McCloskey, 2010), new digital media (Kinder, 2002), post-modernism and modernism (Fuentes, 1999) and narrative (Wu, 1999). Of particular note are applications of the metaphor of *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* to notions of middle class identity as significant in place-based/locality scholarship across a wide range of national and regional contexts. This scholarship includes consideration of the middle class in Poland (Buchowski, 1996), Russia (Mesropova, 2009), the USA (Donoghue, 2006) and more regionally in Newport, Rhode Island (Hodge, Beaudry & Elia, 2003; Whitney, 1984).

The frequent use of this film title as a reference to particular themes and representations since the 1970’s suggests there is value in deconstructing the meaning of this title in more detail. The idea of being “discreet” as used in the title can be described as the undertaking of “speech and actions” designed to “avoid embarrassment,” maintain “confidentiality” or remain “unobtrusive” (as defined in http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/discreet?q=discreet). Thus notions of secrecy, covertness and selective acknowledgement as codes of behaviour bring us back to the idea of resisting, remembering and forgetting as we consider this text.

The concept of “charm” also holds meaning in the title and therefore in the analysis. The term is sometimes defined as a “blessing,” a “spell or incantation” or the “infusion” of something with “holiness, divine will or one’s hopes” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charm). Charm can also be defined as the experience of losing control should one receive a “charm” or be ‘charmed’ a process that suggests the altering of a personal consciousness. People who possess ‘charm’ as a personal trait or attribute are described as having “charisma, or positive
personal characteristics” which in turn draw people to the charming person (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charm). In this way, we can understand bourgeois codes of behaviour to produce a kind of control of others (through discipline, desire, mystique and/or coercion) which extend to the expression of particular kinds of attitudes and behaviours that are maintained through the recursive nature of the desirability of bourgeois identity.

**Bourgeois[ie] Subjectivities**

A relationship between bourgeois identity and the role of social work has been established by Heron (2007) who suggests helping can be associated with processes that allow abject subjects to gain greater status (Heron, 2007; Bernstein, 1992). People who take on helping roles often do so out of a desire for personal moral redemption or as a means of gaining or maintaining greater social status and upward mobility, desires that may be conscious or unconscious (Heron, 2007; Bernstein, 1992; Brennan & Petit, 2000).

Professionalization in social work further reinforces this idea of increased social standing and moral recognition for the worker. Hupattz’s (2010) work on “professional respectability” shows how particular codes of behaviour produce the kind of respectability associated with middle class identities and required in professional identities. In this way professionalization is a kind of “making” middle class. In the case of social work, this making includes the normalization of certain behaviours through “sanction” and codification (Brock, 2003; Brenan & Petit, 2000; Hupattz, 2007).

These sanctioning processes make certain actions, performances, values and beliefs necessary for recognition as a social worker while others become prohibited (Butler, 2004; Goldstein, 1990; Hick, 2001; Holosko, 2003; Jagger, 2008). These requirements frequently extend beyond work activities into the realm of the personal/private, requiring particular
actions of respectability and middle class identity to be a part of the social worker even after work hours (Hupattz, 2007; pg. 72). In this way being respectable requires “doing respectability”, and what is enacted and embodied goes beyond class, encompassing gender, race and other identity markers (Heron, 2007, pg. 72). Heron (2007) points out that social work identities activate notions of bourgeois identities that are constituted through the framing of an “ideal subject” who is a white, male, heterosexual, able bodied Christian. Thus those of us who do not fall into the category of the ideal subject are always lacking, always having in some way to prove our worth, morality and authenticity (Brennan & Petit, 2000; Brock, 2003; Jagger, 2008). This is in Brookfield’s (2009) estimation a factor that is used to manipulate workers, to keep them complacent and to prevent them from mobilizing for their own best interests.

An ideal subjectivity is a difficult thing to maintain, particularly if the social worker embodies identity positions that are understood to be in a “lacking” state (Brock, 2003; Heron, 2007; Titchkosky, 2005). Buchowski (1996) suggests the Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie presents to audiences the “light and shadows of bourgeois life” which at times are presented as paradoxically so “light” as to become “unbearable” and as “highly dubious.” (Ibid., pg. 9) This idea suggests to us that Wrightkan may be inviting consideration of the dubious nature of professional social work and the dubiousness of the subjects who are understood to maintain this position.

**Professionalization**

Wrightkan’s questioning of the benefits of professionalization challenge understandings of the reward of professionalization that organizations like the IFSW suggest will result from globalization. Research suggests that the social mobility, respect, authority and other rewards that social work regulators claimed would result from professionalization have largely failed to
materialize (Antle et al., 2006; Canadian Association of Social Work, 2001; Baines 2004, 2011, 2012; Carniol, 2010; Hupattz, 2007; Mullaly, 2007; Reisch & Andrews, 2002). His story suggests that our desire for this kind of recognition has a cost as the practicality of professionalization eliminates a number of other aspects of social work that workers also desire (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines, 2004, 2011, 2012; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2010, 2011).

The comparison of institutional social work and the middle class lifestyle is a significant theme presented in this digital media story. Analysis of the representations of middle class identity presented in The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie show the middle class to be “profoundly complacent…self satisfied and self-serving” and to maintain understandings of the world as “all for the best, even when plainly not the best for all…” (Buchowski, 1996, pg. 44). Understanding the nature of this critique in the original text makes professionalization a self-serving act, one that benefits regulators, produces complacency, depoliticizes workers and propagates middle class values, which further serves to depoliticize the profession. This professionalization makes social workers politically impotent because challenging the system means challenging the place the profession has carved out for itself.

David Jones does not address connections between professionalization, bourgeois identity, class status and upward mobility considered by Wrightkan. Jones does not question how the kind of privilege that allows for social workers to identify the “wrongs” of the world and to “right” of these wrongs as experts. Nor does he consider the effects of the hierarchy among social workers and between social workers and their clients. While Jones’ does not speak of these things, they are present in his silence about the Mathare slum as a residual outcome of colonial exploitation both new and old (Hay & Harris, 2007; Hake & Ross, 1969) –
exploitation perpetrated by traditional colonial powers like Britain and neo-colonial powers like the International Monetary Fund and Gulf Oil, and in the ‘training opportunities’ that make residents of the slum ready for new kinds of exploitation in hospitality and tourism (Hotel Workers Rising, 2011; Jackson & Jordan, 2000; Pearson, 2007). Jones’s silence on these subjects may very well be a reflection of the discretion required by professional social workers like Jones who hold positions of regulatory authority. This silence is itself a discourse (Carter-Scott, 1989, 1991; Prasad, 2005; Rossiter, 2005), one that reflects Pon’s (2009) notion of forgetting and promotes the idea that professionalization contributes to outcomes that are “all for the best… if not the best for all” (Buchowski, 1996) by installing social workers as gatekeepers to employment programs and other resources.

**Multi-modal Analysis**

Scholarship on the film *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* describes the film as playing with narrative traditions through “disruptions of narrative expectations” (Hogue 2001, pg. 44). Wrightkan also uses this technique in his critique. He disrupts our narrative expectations through the layering of multiple modes of communication in ways that challenge rather than reinforce traditional understandings of congruent identities. This disruption can be understood as a resistance to the reifying and hegemonic effect of these expectations and in doing so points out that other possibilities exist (Butler, 2004; Jagger, 2008).

The multi-modal capacity of digital storytelling allows Wrightkan to present critique using several communication modes simultaneously, including: voice-over narration, the rhythmic drumming soundtrack, captioning and subtitles, visual images and genre. The narrator speaks in French slowly and rhythmically, but the rhythm is uneven, broken by uneven periods of silence consistent with the genre of German Impressionist, another reference to the Bunuel’s
film. We experience the tone and intonation of the narrator’s speech even if we cannot understand the language she is speaking. The use of uneven breaks in the dialogue and uneven edits in the visual materials creates a tension for the viewer who cannot easily predict when the next phrase will be uttered or the next image shown.

While the tone of narration is important, the style of the verbal material provided through narration is also important (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Lange, 2009). The voice of the narrator sounds female. This is an interesting choice given that the Bourgeois Social Worker is presented as normatively and “hegemonically” male. While the choice may mean very little (and if so our analysis can be said to extend the meaning beyond the author’s intent), it is interesting to interpret this aspect of the story as a metaphor in and of itself. It raises a number of questions that suggest possible readings of this information, such as:

- Does the incongruity between the gender of the narrator and the gender of the worker have an intended meaning?
- Does this incongruity suggest that the voice of social work is a female voice?
- If the voice of social work is female, what does this tell us about the nature of social work and its foundation in feminist and womanist activism?
- How might this female narrator of social work lead us to consider the idea of social work as maintaining a feminine consciousness?
- How might this female consciousness lead us to consider a unique position, a particular moral understanding, a different kind of voice (Gilligan, 1982) as it were, which guides the morality of social work?

Another layer in this digital story is the “sound track” (Baldry & Thibault, 2006) which presents for us an additional non-verbal voice that enhances the overall meaning of the story.
The sound of drumming is a constant background to the other modes of communication that make up this digital media story. The rhythm of the drum may represent heartbeat or history (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). As a metaphor of “heart,” the drum beat suggests the sound might be the Bourgeois Social Worker’s heart, a heart that reminds us of the core desire of social workers but which can be easily ignored because of its constant presence.

The visual materials in the digital media story provide information on multiple levels. They provide us with an image of the social worker’s actions and attitudes that extend but do not necessarily reinforce what is being presented in the soundtrack of the story. These actions deepen the meaning of the words expressed. Many of the actions and behaviours shown create metaphors that suggest a relationship between reflection and action (Mandell, 2007; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005, Yip 2006a, 2006b).

Wrightkan’s visual style choices further reinforce mimetic connection to Bunuel’s film. *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* is described as falling into the genres of “Surrealism” and “German Impressionism” (Kinder, 1999). Echoes of these film styles in *The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker* give this digital media story a dream-like quality. As a genre, German Impressionism is described as relying heavily on silence, convention and narration (Kinder, 1999), and these elements are clearly present in *The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker*.

The social worker’s feelings and thoughts appear to be linked to his action. His actions are also part of what he contemplates in reflection. Thus, his action and reflection each reinforce the other in what has been described as a co-constitutive process (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Mandell, 2007; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005; Yip 2006b). This process brings about what we might understand as a kind of “praxis” with multiple layers of reflection and action.
resulting in the social worker’s deepened understanding of his circumstances (Fay, 2011, pg. 75; Ross, 2011, pg. 258). Particular moments of action shown in the story – for example, when the Bourgeoisie Social Worker packs up the contents of the desk – convey the idea that the social worker is taking back his power.

Similarly, other actions undertaken by the social worker can also be understood as metaphors. On several occasions in the story the protagonist looks in the mirror. More than merely checking one’s appearance, the act of looking in the mirror is a symbol of self-reflection linked to self-awareness and morality (Egan, 1986, 2009). When the Bourgeoisie Social Worker looks in the mirror he is symbolically testing his moral integrity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

We can read what we take to be “thought” and “felt” by the Bourgeoisie Social Worker in the captions, which translate the story from French to English. The tone of the narration layered over the rhythm of the drumming has an hypnotic effect which is reinforced by the content of the narration and the fractured images. Thus viewers are lulled into a state similar to the protagonist’s as the story of his ambivalence toward his chosen field unfolds.

Together this experience is rather like joining the Bourgeoisie Social Worker in his stream of consciousness: we gain access to his internal thought processes and reflections through the elements included in the digital story. In his reflection he discusses the tension between compensation, wages and benefits, work design, workload, work-life and his own desire and sense of self by alluding to symbols that indicate the presence of these things in his life. His communication through metaphor relies on audience members’ situated knowledge of things discussed in the digital story (Lundby, 2008), such as “MPS” which can be read as the Civil Service Master Pay Scale (http://www.csb.gov.hk/english/admin/pay/42.html).
suggesting the level of wages this social worker is paid. However, MPS can also be understood as a kind of liability insurance required by professional social workers in Hong Kong (http://www.medicalprotection.org/hongkong/membership/join). We are unable to determine which of these this worker is referring to from the content in this digital story. The weight of the moral conflict faced by the Bourgeois Social Worker ends in the worker’s apparent decision to terminate his employment, which is implied through his actions and reinforced through information provided in the subtitles. Quitting is for the Bourgeois Social Worker the action that results from his reflection (Yip, 2006a, 2006b) – it is his resistance (Benjamin, 2007/2011).

Another interesting dissonance created in the story comes about through the convergence of these communication modes. Convergence presents us with a disjuncture created between the racial identity of the social worker, the language spoken by the narrator and the language of the story’s subtitles. The narrator speaks in French, the subtitles are in English and the racial appearance of the social worker is “Asian”. From the information provided in Wrightkan’s channel profile, we know that he lives in Hong Kong and therefore we might presume his “nationality” to be Chinese although this may be an error or misinterpretation. Hong Kong’s history as a British colony, complicates this understanding, so nationality and cultural identity are amorphous when we think about the Bourgeois Social Worker.

The presence of these four different identity markers, might be used normatively to create particular meaning about who the social worker is. This may lead us to experience a level of dissonance because of the mix of race, gender, complicated nationality and linguistic traditions presented in this story. In this case these markers do not reinforce normative
understandings of gender, racial and national identity as uniform categories (Fook, 2002; Razak, 2005; Poon & Ho, 2011), or as phenotypes that order the meaning of identity.

In establishing further parallels between the film *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* and the digital media story the Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker, Russel (2005) suggests repression and self-discipline are fundamental tasks of middle class identity; self-discipline and repression extend to all aspects of life for the middle class. Russel (2005) and Kinder (1999) suggest the sexual and political repression considered in the *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* is produced through violence and used as a means of explain the production of violence. This repression and violence is shown to occur at the individual and societal level. When this violence is exposed, it is often dismissed by the bourgeoisie as a kind of “bad manners” or as a kind of miscalculation and remade as a breach of the compact that makes middle class identity exist, rather than a matter of real harm with moral culpability (Bernstein, 1992; Davies, 2006; Rossiter, 2005). We can understand this analysis to suggest a parallel with the creation of professional social work identity. Social workers in professional contexts are expected to engage in a kind of self discipline and discipline of others (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011ba; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2007, 2009).

Wrightkan invites us to consider the social worker and his experience in an institutional setting through the lens of these understandings. While a variety of understandings of professional social work exist, one of the core ideas in this framing is the marking of particular kinds of behaviours, attitudes and beliefs as necessary attributes of the social worker’s subjective position (Adams, et al., 2009; Baines, 2011ba; Hupattz, 2007; DeMontigny, 1995; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005). Social workers are meant to subscribe to professional standards,
codes of practice and codes of behaviour applied when they take on this social work identity (Adams et al., 2009; Bonnycastle, 2006; Bisman, 2004; Reamer, 1998).

That being said, there are particular interpretations of professional social work that suggest social workers must occupy particular kinds of social positions. With these positions come particular kind of social performances that require displays of particular kinds of regulated behaviours, expectations that extend beyond the workplace and into the personal lives of workers (Brookfield, 2009; Hick, 2001; Hupattz, 2010; Payne, 2001; Reamer, 1998). In this way, social workers as “professionals” become regulated and “disciplined bodies” a subjectification that creates a set of boundaries and conditions that separate them from other professionals, from other lay helpers who are not professionalized and from clients (Carniol, 2010; Payne, 2001; Mullaly, 2007; Hupattz, 2010). These boundaries are set in the literature produced by the regulating bodies (Carniol, 2010; Hick, 2011; Payne, 2001) and enacted through the workers’ practices of governmentality (Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005; Smith, 2007, 2010, 2011).

This kind of coded behaviour and the “boundaried” relations between social workers and clients is maintained in part by a mystique that surrounds what social workers do and how we do what we do. This mystique is created, enforced and maintained through particular uses of language and through sanctioned epistemologies (Baines 2011b; Fook 2002). Social work is as Richardson (2000,) suggests, “worded into existence,” coming to be known through the foregrounding of certain kinds of knowledge and the back grounding or disregarding of other kinds of knowledge. This becomes in part, the purpose of professionalization, and in part, the desired effect of professionalization (Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2009). While this kind of framing
of social work may be heartily embraced by some it is also contested by many other people (Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2012; Smith, 2011).

In order to maintain boundaries and the resulting mystique, professional organizations and associations who create and promote this kind of social work, demand a significant amount of ‘forgetting’ from the social work “community”. It is forgetting and discreet behaviour that maintain this kind of social work, a forgetting that Wrightkan, the Bourgeois Social Worker, and I appear unwilling to undertake. The costs of professional identity presented by the Bourgeois Social Worker becomes a matter of the unavoidable collateral damage that comes with the other benefits, even if these benefits are not those desired or sought by this social worker.

In this way, the violence of repression presented by Russel (2005) and Kinder (1999) can be paralleled with the frustration experienced by the Bourgeois Social Worker due to the loss of the social work activities and values that he desires. He expresses frustration with the design of his work, with paper work superseding direct client contact, with possibilities of practice being reduced to funding applications. He is frustrated that his identity as a social worker is reduced to a “business suit” and “business mind”. Wrightkan’s representations of the frustrated social worker brings into focus the idea of “over skilling” as a technique of repression, in which the capabilities of the worker far out stretch the needs of the job while the demands of minimum qualifications for employment are presented as ever increasing (Jackson & Jordan, 2000).

Wrightkan’s consideration of social work as more than funding applications, paper work and business thinking is a sentiment reflected across a broad cross section of the social work literature which suggests political labour, work for social change, critique of employers,
funders and society at large, politicization and collectivisation of clients are fundamental aspects of social work practice (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; Fook, 2002; La Rose, 2009; Mullalay, 2007, 2009; Pincus & Minahan, 1976; Smith, 2011 & 2011). However, the literature also suggests that in our contemporary neoliberal context these aspects of practice have been largely stripped away, replaced with administrative, managerial and actuarial functions (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines, 2004, 2011a, 201ab; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2007, 2010, 2011). Clinical practices have in many cases been replaced with case management activities, which have reduced the work to an assessment, eligibility and monitoring role (La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2011). For many social workers this kind of work is experienced as a form of repression (La Rose, 2009) in which, as the Bourgeoisie social worker suggests, workers are left with an idle mind and busy hands.

Power is another central theme presented in The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie and reflected in The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker. Within The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie, “relationships of power” are explored through themes such as “sex, politics and everyday life” (Russel, 2005). The film satirizes the use of power as expressed through the imposition of middle class values and identities, through the imposition of binaries and through individual relationships as symbols of “national identities and international relations” as well as through “euro-centrism” (Ibid., 2005 html).

The film The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie suggests that intimate relationships are microcosms of relationships that occur at a macro level (Russell, 2005). Corruption is shown among the socially valued characters in the film. They are shown to be opportunistic and to engage in conduct that preserves their own powerful positions and, by virtue of maintaining power, they are further able to continue their immoral activities (Kinder, 1999, 2002).
Wrightkan responds to this theme when the Bourgeoisie Social Worker is unable to reflect his way out of his conflict, and after having attempted to do so, elects to leave his job. To remain in the system as the Bourgeois Social Worker experiences it, is to continue to participate in recreating the system. To remain in this work, as he states, is “to choose” to become this kind of a social worker. It is to give into the colonization of social work and to accept middle class values of moral recognition and upward mobility as a substitute for social change.

Wrightkan presents the Bourgeois Social Worker as a discontented character. He is discontented with all that we as social workers are told should bring us professional satisfaction (Antle et al., 2006). Rather than being outraged by this dissatisfaction, the Bourgeois Social Worker is shown in a state of quiet crisis that he experiences and attempts to resolve through reflection, which eventually leads to action. We can in part see this as a demonstration of the power of reflection and its capacity to bring about change (Heron, 2005; Mandell, 2007; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2007; Rossiter, 2001; Yip, 2006a, 2006b).

On the other hand, we can understand this as a practice of professionalism, for a professional social worker is expected to maintain a presentation of control, to eliminate or repress feelings and emotions, to be obedient and compliant to authority, to be discreet with our troubles assuming them to be individual realities and thus to be complacent in their reproduction (Hupattz, 2007; Payne, 2001). The social worker shown in the digital story is the consummate professional social worker – even in his own existential crisis he keeps his self awareness and troubles to himself.

This brings us once more to Pon’s (2009) idea of remembering and forgetting. Here, the character of the social worker presents reflection as a necessary aspect of professional practice, yet he forgets the importance of breaking silences, fostering connections, building
communities, politicizing individual issues as well as organizing and mobilizing for change (Baines, 2011b; Fook, 2002; Hick, 2001; Mullaly, 2007), none of which are mentioned in this digital media story.

Ferguson’s (2007) work on remembering and forgetting suggests that the idea of forgetting can be a device that is used as a means of reclaiming morality. This idea demands that the social worker avoid behaviour that suggests they are in any way contaminated with what might be understood as the elements of the things that the social worker should not be (Brennan & Petit, 2000; Ferguson, 2007; Hupattz, 2007; Reamer, 1998). The rules and boundaries of professionalization suggest that professional social workers should not be like clients, or display client-esque qualities (Brennan & Petit, 2000; Reamer 1996; Van Den Berg, 1995). The presence of behavioural tendencies like strong emotional reactions, rule breaking, questioning of authority or self-advocacy could threaten the social worker’s professional identity (Allen, 1997; Baines, 2011c) and could ruin it for all the other professionals (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Smith 2007, 2011).

This story emphasizes the tensions between the values of social work, the worker’s desire to engage in particular kinds of social work and the contexts of contemporary practice (Baines, 2011b; La Rose, 2009; Smith 2010, 2011). Still more tension is produced when we consider the desire for the recognition and status of professionalization and while professionalization further limits what we can be, what we can do and how we might do it (Brennan & Petit, 2000; Smith 2007, 2010, 2011). Thus, Wrightkan’s story illustrates the power of employers to maintain, even in the context of professionalization, the power to shape the reality of work-life as a daily-lived experience, because of the control they maintain over the conditions of work, wages and workload (Baines, 2004, 2011, 2012; La Rose, 2009). These
controls supersede the power of professional identity and the codes of conduct presented in the professional regulatory texts. The conditions of the workplace can make the conditions of professionalization almost impossible to meet and the conditions of professionalization make the actions necessary to create workplace change forbidden.
Chapter 7: Song About a Child Welfare Agency

Erahoneybee like David Jones and Wrightkan, is a Tuber who uses digital media storytelling as a tool for considering social work. She like these others is a part of the global social work community and her digital media story Song About a Child Welfare Agency (http://youtu.be/uA9PPndeZ1A) tells us about her experiences during an internship in a child protection services agency in the State of Massachusetts, U.S.A.

Her practices of forgetting, remembering and resisting are shown to us through reflection taking the form of verbal ventilation and performance. She uses social work jargon, triage codes and standardized assessment procedures in unintended ways. She uses parody, wit and irony to transform these technologies into a song that reflects her experiences of child protection service work. She show us the moral tensions inherent in professional social work and the mental and physical costs she bears as a result of her work as an intern.

Digital technology plays a significant role in allowing me to consider this social work narrative. A few years ago it is unlikely that I would have been able to see and hear Erahoneybee’s Song about a Child Welfare Agency. She is both geographically and temporally disconnected from me (Lundby, 2008; Couldry, 2008), but the advent of digital technology has momentarily bridged these gaps providing Erahoneybee with a global platform from which to share her digital story (Kidd, 2010; Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010; Couldry, 2010; Markham, 1998, 2004; Baym, 2010). This technology has in turn allowed me access to Erahoneybee’s digital media story. This is now part of my understanding of child welfare and part of what I know about social work. I am able to share with Erahoneybee (who I do not know beyond the digital domain) a social work experience in much of the emotional richness that real-time, in-person
interaction allows. However, Erahoneybee’s removal of this digital story from her YouTube channel in early 2013 (after this chapter was already written), also demonstrates the shifting and contingent nature of these connections (Snickars & Vondreau, 2008).

Attending to the multi-modal and multi-vocal nature of Erahoneybee’s story means attending to a number of different layers of meaning simultaneously (Lundby, 2008; Thurmim, 2008; Baldry & Thibault, 2006;). Although her story is only 54 seconds long she provides us with a thick rich story of her experience. She uses many modes of communication in the story and within each layer multiple levels of meaning are present, still more layers of meaning are created through the convergence of these modes, their contexts and meanings.

Erahoneybee’s story communicates meaning through the design of her YouTube channel, (Snickars & Vondreau, 2009; YouTube Essentials Guide, 2011) and through the genre, phase, visual and auditory elements of the story. Analysis of the story includes consideration of social work discourses activated in the narrative, allowing us to understand the “context of situation” and the “context of culture” of the child protection social work that Erahoneybee represents (Baldry & Thibault, 2009; Dicks et al., 2005; Lange, 2009; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009).

Erahoneybee’s channel, which is still active on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/user/erahoneybee), is a gateway into this digital media story. Her channel design reflects what we might describe as a normatively “feminine” style (Daniels, 2009; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Erahoneybee has dressed her channel in various shades of pink and presents images of tiaras, jewels and “cuteness” with an overall “princess” motif. As the entry point for viewing her digital media story this feminine style may influence how
we read her (Daniels, 2009; Ringrose & Barajas, 2011). Considerations of femininity and gender normativity may inform and benefit our analysis or it could, in another context, constitute a significant layer of analysis in and of itself (Sol, 2012). It is a topic that we will revisit later when we consider some of the visible messages relayed through her digital story.

Close observation of this channel allows us to learn a considerable amount about Erahoneybee’s online character while still leaving her offline identity largely unknown. This online profile tells us that she is a college student from somewhere near Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.. The info-metric measurements activated within her channel set-up (YouTube Guide, 2011) frames *Song About a Child Welfare Agency* as one of her most popular stories, having received 1472 views (as of February 9th 2012) with most of her other stories receiving less than 100 views. The comments function of the channel set is operational but only a handful of comments were made about this digital story. The bulk of these were provided by subscribes who complemented her generally on the digital and contribute very little to my analysis. Based on the channel materials we also know that Erahoneybee did not use this channel for almost a year but we don’t know why. In early 2013 Erahoneybee removed a number of her stories from her public channel view including *Song About a Child Welfare Agency*, we don’t know why she has chosen to do this, but it certainly is a loss to the social work knowledge base.

Erahoneybee’s digital media story like David Jones’ *World Social Work Day 2010* is an address. Erahoneybee speaks to an assumed audience, but unlike Jones’ she engages in her reflection as a part of her ongoing Tubing practice. Erahoneybee’s style of digital media story can be described as a v-log, or video-log (Lange, 2009). Erahoneybee has more than 100 channel subscribers, with whom she builds affinity by posting her personal reflective
narratives on a regular basis. As personal autobiographical texts, we can also understand these v-logs as digital stories. Among the many stories she has shared only a very few of these stories (about 4 texts out of the original 76 posts) focus on her child protection internship.

**Phase Analysis**

While *Song About a Child Welfare Agency* is a short digital media story at about 54 seconds in length, it is a dense text that contains a thick rich social work story. The story has multiple layers, and its complexity makes analysis a challenge. In this context, subdividing the text using phase analysis is a helpful way of approach this text. While World Social Work Day 2010 could be divided into two distinct phases. Erahoneybee’s text includes both phases and sub phases (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

To revisit the process of phase analysis, we are dividing the text into segments or phases, in order to create smaller “units” for analysis; these phases or segments are created on the basis of shifts in topic or “discourse actions”\(^{11}\), or when changes occur in the “theoretical assumptions” embedded in the story (Cameron 2010, pg. 149). Creating phases does not separate these segments from the whole text, but rather allows contrasts to be created or layers for analytical purposes; these segments remain a part of the whole texts and part of the total meaning of the text (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

Two distinct phases are present in *Song About a Child Welfare Agency*. The first phase focuses on Erahoneybee’s discussion of a recent sore throat and swollen tonsils. The second phase focuses on her experiences of work in the Child protection sector. The second phase can

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\(^{11}\) Here discourse is a reference to the term as it applies to the study of linguistics.
be further segmented into three subphases: 1) introduction, 2) song and 3) reflection/conclusion.

**Phase One**

The first phase of this story begins with a story that is already in progress, we join Erahoneybee already in mid-sentence, we hear her state:

“It sucked…this one…Weird I am not sick…”.

Without an introduction the audience is left to watch and listen as a way of “making sense” of what is happening in the story. This experience of joining a scene mid-action, is not unlike social work field work, social workers frequently arrive unannounced and unexpected which means joining conversations and stories already in progress (Adams et al, 2009; Fook, 2002). Joining the story in this way makes the story a “non-linear” story, as linear stories start with a beginning point and travel through the story from the beginning to end.

The title of this digital story *Song About a Child Welfare Agency* doesn’t seem to relate to what we see and hear as Erahoneybee begins her story. Erahoneybee is shown in the centre in the screen, she speaks directly to the camera bouncing and swaying as she speaks. Her physical appearance is almost child-like, pretty and youthful. Her appearance seems to contradict the seriousness of the topics presented in the title. At first glance, the title of the story suggests she may potentially be a child protection client, perhaps a “ward” or a teenage mother.

As the phase unfolds, Erahoneybee is presented in a living environment; she is framed with the backdrop of a “messy bedroom”, which could be an important clue to the meaning of the story if she is indeed a client, because it would suggest that she lacked life skills or was
experiencing difficulty coping with stressors in her environment. However, the “seriousness” of this messy room may well be mitigated because she is young and therefore can be excused based in part on stereotypes about young people’s disinterest in house-keeping (DeMontigny, 1995; Rossiter, 2005).

What is most interesting about this phase is the role the speed of the sound track plays in meaning making. When we watch this first phase of Song About a Child Welfare Agency we see and hear the action taking place in a "sped up" mode, that is, at a speed that is far faster than the speed at which it was recorded. The effect of speed on both the visual and auditory elements in this text occurs simultaneously (Couldry, 2008; Kress, 2003; Lange, 2009; Lundby, 2008; ). The speed of this story makes Erahoneybee seem more like a caricature then a real person. The verbal materials remain audible but the distortion produces an a-typical human voice as Erahoneybee speaks.

The altered state of her voice makes it hard to hear what she is saying. It produces a tension. It is easy to gloss over what she is saying because of the speed, yet the not-as-usual nature of this speed also reads as a demand for attention (Blount & Leroy, 2007; Land, 2006). It is unclear what this speed is supposed to mean and I find myself asking:

- Is the speed a way of incorporating something that doesn’t really fit because of a limitation on time but which is important enough to be included?
- If so, what is important about her being sick?
- Does this speed suggest fast forward as a kind of metaphor about the future?

Verbally, Erahoneybee tells us about her sore throat and swollen tonsils. She tells us about her trip to the doctor, the medication she is taking and her anticipated recovery. She provides a
self-assessment, suggesting she made herself sick by bragging about not getting sick, only to then find herself with a sore throat and swollen tonsils.

The movement to a new phase of the story is marked by an abrupt edit and a change of speed in the playback of the material; the style and topic of the story change as do the many of the visual elements of the story including Erahoneybee’s hair style and her location in the room. This second phase can be sub-divided in to three shorter segments, these are: 1) introduction, 2) song and 3) reflection/conclusion.

**Phase Two: Introduction**

Erahoneybee uses the first sub-phase of the second phase in the story as a kind of “introduction”. The change in speed in this second phase of the story is a change from faster than real time to “normal” or “regular” speed. The sudden change is a sharp contrast and makes this “regular” speed of playback feel much slower when contrasted to the faster and distorted prior segment (Gane, 2006). She narrates herself into the text and introduces herself to the audience. She tells us she “works as an intern in a child protective services agency” which in turn helps establish a relationship between who she is in this story and the title reference to child welfare.

Through this narration Erahoneybee states: “I work as an intern” she does not say “I am an intern”. These statements can be seen to reflect understandings of subjectivity and subjection (Smith, 2011; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Davies, 2006). Here statements are read as “verbal strategies” which are significant in revealing “the way in which subjectivity is understood” by this narrator (Portelli, 1991, pg. xii).
The meaning that Erahoneybee makes for us through this statement is predicated in particular understandings of social work identity and acceptance or rejection of these identity positions (Butler; 2004, Davies, 2006; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). We can understand Erahoneybee’s phrasing as resistance to the identity “child protection worker” or even that of ‘intern’ (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Smith, 2011). She clearly states that she “works as” an intern; this wording does not claim these tasks and activities as a way of framing or defining herself (Davies, 2006; Smith, 2011). In the context of professional social work, this is a problem as social work internships are framed within social work education as a form of interpellation and as processes designed to transform students into social workers (Razak, 2002; Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 2003). We can understand Erahoneybee’s refusal to accept this self-definition as an achievement if we interpret it as a marker of resistance, or as a failure within standardized understanding of professionalization and professionalism and the educational processes they sanction (Razak, 2002; Royse, Dhooper & Rompf, 2003).

Another marker of the shift to the second phase of the story is a change in Erahoneybee’s hairstyle. We see Erahoneybee’s hair in a casual “ponytail” in the first phase of the story, in the second phase her hair appears in a more youthful “pigtail” style. It’s a significant change, a playful hairstyle, which may suggest a change that goes beyond her hair to include her mental or emotion state. This section of the story relies heavily on wit, parody and irony and so perhaps we can understand it as a sign that she is beginning to “play” or to “perform” (Denzin, 2003).

In narrating us into this second phase of the story Erahoneybee states: “I sometimes turn songs into other songs depending on what’s on my mind”. This statement is followed by an abrupt edit, bringing us to the second sub-phase of this segment of the story.
Phase Two: Song

After the abrupt edit, Erahoneybee is shown in another part of the room, and we see her from a different angle. She launches in to a song, wagging her finger to the beat. She sings:

Screen in, screen out.
Tell me all of your doubts...about this family...would you please?
File 51As, File 51Bs
Pass this on to investigations please...
Unsupport this, Support this
Now could you bring it to assessments?

Erahoneybee’s song tells us something about her experience of her work through the ironic use of triage codes and child protection jargon. She uses these in unexpected and unintended ways, strung together and sung to the tune of a song titled “Closing Time”\(^\text{12}\) (Semisonics, 2009; Geffin Music Publishing). We can understand this song and the simple and ordinary way that Erahoneybee talks about creating it as a practice of “daily resistance” (Benjamin 2011, hooks 1990).

Erahoneybee’s use of “song” is a clever kind of resistance. While critical, her actions adhere to many of the ethical rules of social work, making this a resistance practice that almost becomes invisible (Smith, 2007). Her physical self, her body is part of what makes this happen. Her femininity and apparent sweetness and the stereotype of the “frivolity of youth” (Thomas, 2007) make Erahoneybee’s song something that, on the surface, appears to be

\(^{12}\) we know this based on intertextual readings of other digital stories on her channel.
Erahoneybee’s resistance can also be understood as an ethical act in that she adheres to the letter of many social work regulations even as she resists being made into a social work intern (Royse et al., 2003). It is ethical because even in this resistance she respects confidentiality and is discreet in her disclosure. She never tells us where she works; she does not tell us anything about the clients; she never expresses an opinion about the work; nor does she ever speak a word of criticism against the agency or clients she serves. She simply shares her experiences at work mediated through a parody of public domain information in the form of standardized codes (Parton, 2008). She turns the meaning making capacity of the codes and jargon against themselves (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010); she is discreet in a social work kind of way. She is professional in her cynicism.

Erahoneybee’s role as an intern makes this resistance excusable, risky and important. She is not a “celebrity”; she is not a “charismatic leader”, she is a fairly ordinary, on-the-ground social worker in training (Benjamin, 2011). As a student reflecting on her internship, she may be excused under the categories of learning and inexperience; resistance is something that can be learned away as she is subjectified (Brock, 2003; Foucault, 1988; Hoy Couzens, 2005; Jagger, 2008).

In the role of learner, showing us her discomfort is a powerful act in that it suggests by her ordinary status, the ordinary nature and potential that these experiences are also potentially common-place. For Erahoneybee, it seems that the way the work unfolds is a significant challenge that she needs to face and reflect upon (Egan, 1986, 2009; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005; Yip 2006a, 2006b); a challenge never mentioned by David Jones.
Considering this text in this way, we might ask how many more Erahoneybee’s there are and what if anything we need to do to change the contexts that shape these experiences; this kind of assessment of the situation brings to life the best in critical anti-oppressive social work practice (Baines, 2011b; Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2009). Another option open to us is to forget the political and forget the need to make connections between affected people (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b; Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2009). We could focus instead on the individual storytelling and the uniqueness of this story (Brushwood-Rose, 2009), which would support a move to pathologize Erahoneybee in accordance with the contemporary neoliberal models (Bisman, 2004; Baines, 2004; 2012; Maslach et al., 2001). This kind of individual pathologization remakes workers responses to their work-life from resistance into illness by labeling the worker with syndromes like burnout (Brock 2003; Maslach 2001; Wolfe-Morrison, 2000; Siebert, Siebert & McLaughlin, 2007).

Erahoneybee’s song may also be understood as a form of reflective practice. Students like Erahoneybee are trained to use reflective practice. Reflection is part of placement learning and students are expected to consider the effect of their identity and history on their experience of clients and their practice more generally (Baines, 2011b; Heron, 2005; Mandell, 2007; Rossiter, 2001; Yip, 2006). Like interns, qualified social workers are expected to use reflection as a process that helps us access and articulate through what theories we are drawing on as we engage and act (Lister & Crisp, 2009; Mandell, 2007; Rossiter, 2005), to consider how our identity and our social location influence assessment and practice and how these things influence client’s experiences of social work (Adams et al. 2009).

Reflective practice is integrated into social work education at multiple levels of the curriculum (Mandell, 2007; Rossiter, 2001, 2005; CSWE.org; CASWE.ca). This integration is
understood to promote the internalization of this practice by students. In this way, reflective practice becomes an *orientation* to practice rather than a technique (Baines, 2011b; Fook, 2002; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005; Mandell, 2007; Mullaly, 2007). As an orientation reflexivity becomes a ‘politic of practice’ (Adams et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b; Fook, 2002; Rossiter, 2005).

These contexts help us making meaning from Erahoneybee’s reflection. It suggests we might understand her song as a process of externalizing the discomfort she is experiencing in her placement, discomfort with the design of child protection (Mandell 2007; Sakamoto & Pinter 2007). This externalization is understood to support a deeper examination of these issues (Yip 2006a, 2006b; Issit 1999). Her performance shows us the powerful discomfort she is experiencing, witnessing in this way, has the potential to have an equally powerful effect on the audience (Sakamoto & Pinter, 2007). Sharing this story in this way also implicates us (the audience). Her reflection presents us with frustration, a frustration that links us into Wrightkan’s consideration of frustration as a kind of repression.

**Phase Two: Reflection/Conclusion**

After completing her song, Erahoneybee steps outside of her performance and tells us about what she sees as a potential meaning that could be made from the song she sings. Her reflection takes a turn from “reflection in action” to “reflection on action” and finally to “reflection on reflection on action” (Yip, 2006a, 2006b; Mandell, 2007). In this moment of ‘reflection on reflection’ she states:

“I am not a bad person really, it’s just that you have to have a sense of humour when you do a job like this…”.
She pauses, looking away from the camera. Her face shows discomfort and her eyes are diverted. She looks back into the camera, and as the final statement in this digital story says:

“Okay I am a bad person.” (Rapid edit to black screen)

This final reflection suggests Erahoneybee sees negative connotations to using humour, parody, irony and wit (Hutchison, 1989; Prasad, 2003). It suggests that boundaries exist around the appropriate ways of knowing about experience and processing experiences (Brennan & Pettit, 2000). These binaries may limit understandings of experiences by allowing only one potential truth in any situation (Fook, 2002; Rosenberg, 2004; hooks, 1990; Mullaly, 2009). This kind of binary is heartily embraced by neoliberalism and expressed in the kind of assessment models and practices that Erahoneybee is using in her work (Swift, 2011). Just as she might assess something to be abuse "support this", or not to be abuse "unsupport this", we might also understand something to either be “funny” or “not funny”, as discrete and fixed binary categories which fall into a hierarchy. Erahoneybee tells us that by making something serious into something funny she becomes a bad person.

**Social Work Discourses**

The binaries that Erahoneybee presents to us as she performs her song and presents her reflection are important considerations that demand us to move beyond the context of the digital media story and to inform our reading with other relevant scholarship and social work discourses (Baldry & Thibault 2006; Ellingson, 2009; Fraser, 2004). As an intern, Erahoneybee is being taught a particular kind of thinking, a “logic model” as part of her social work subjectification (Fitch, 2005; Hennessey & Sawchuk, 2003). A logic model that is presented in her song through the inclusion of the child welfare jargon and triage codes, it is a
model that draws on binary thinking and embraces modernist understandings of absolutes (Goodman & McFadden, 1996; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2010; Trocme et al., 1999). The logic Erahoneybee is learning and using reflects the tensions of forgetting and remembering that Pon (2009), presents to us.

Learning this logic model appears to be creating a kind of “parallel process” in Erahoneybee’s experiences, as her song and reflection suggest that she is learning to apply this logic to her own self (King Keenan, 2005; Rebman 2006; Mothersole, 1999). She is internalizing this “training schema” (Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005). She is assessing her postmodernist approach to reflection through a modernist lens and leading Erahoneybee to forget that she does not have to feel or think in a binary. We can see how this binary understanding is affecting her understanding of self (Brock, 2003). She now sees herself as a “bad person” because she elects to use humour, with irony and parody as the means of reflecting on her experience as an intern.

When we think about critical anti-oppressive social work, postmodern and poststructural perspectives and their challenging of this kind of normalization, this logic model becomes only one possible way of understanding Erahoneybee’ digital media story. In this context, Erahoneybee is well grounded in her use of humour. Humour, wit, irony and parody become a process of critique, effective and powerful political meaning-making activities (Hutcheson 1989, pg. 93; Shepard, 2005; Sorensen, 2008), common forms of resistance (Prasad, 2005, pg. 230; Reinsborough & Canning, 2010) and, as such, also can be understood as critical social work practice (Benjamin, 2007/2011). Erahoneybee’s choice of humour, parody, wit and irony as the means of deconstructing her experience is consistent with social work practice oriented in a critical perspective. The use of ironic parody can bring to light
disjunctures that exist between ideals and realities, and between values and actions (Hutcheson, 1989; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Shepard, 2005) which are important forms of knowledge when we are seeking to create social change through social work.

Hutcheson (1989), suggests parody can be understood as “ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality” (pg. 93), allowing for particular kinds of meanings to be made, particularly effective when highlighting abject subjectivities and taboo subjects (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Surely child abuse and the work of determining what actions and outcomes are constituted as abuse could fall into these categories, particularly when the parody or irony is used to challenge the ways that the relatively powerful speak to these issues.

Hutcheson (1989) describes this kind of parody as an act of “contest” against our “humanist assumptions” about “originality and uniqueness” and assumptions about “capitalist notions of ownership and property” (pg. 93). Erahoneybee brings this purpose to life when she challenges the capacity of child welfare systems to claim particular codes and jargon as having particular meanings while also being reserved for exclusive use within this system. She challenges the exclusive framing of experiences of abuse through the technologies of triage codes and assessment regimes. She appropriates these standardized tools to create her song and through her song appropriates their meanings for her own purposes.

Hutcheson frames parody as indirectly acknowledging embedded histories (Hutcheson, 1989, pg. 94). Here the “wit and ridicule” of parody can be understood as an “art form” that teaches us by using a “wide range of forms and intents – from the witty ridicule to the playfully lucid, to the seriously respectful...” (ibid. pg. 94). These understandings can be extended to notions of “pastiche” which allows us to consider parody as adapting “context and continuum
with the past” (Ibid. , pg. 94). These practices can be described as remembering, bringing to life the context of memoriam that Chenderlin (1982) presents.

Erahoneybee’s song rests on history, a history that has led us to the reality of standardized neoliberal child protection practice. This history allows Erahoneybee to imagine that something else is possible. Her discomfort highlights the conflict between what she is experiencing in the field and the idea of social work as a practice that centers social change, social justice and emancipation as desired phenomena. Her externalization of her experiences of this conflict and her sharing of this story on YouTube allow social workers around the world to potentially share her experience. These experiences may provide these workers with an opportunity to remember what they have forgotten.

By repurposing the child welfare coding and child welfare activities in her song, Erahoneybee turns the power of these tools against themselves (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010). She takes the “signs and objects” (Hutcheson, 1989; Baldry & Thibault, 2006) used by the system and highlights the “supreme absurdity” of these tools and of the system that holds these tools in high esteem, as well as pointing out social workers’ complacency as they participate in the process of allowing these technologies to constitute the practice that we undertake (Brennan & Petite, 2000). Erahoneybee shows us how experiences of child abuse and responses to abuse are remade from “rare, singular, valuable” incidents into different kinds of events that can be seen as 'the same' for some purposes (Hutcheson 1989, pg. 93, Smith 2010). She demonstrates through representation how coding strategies are “de-naturalizing forms” using irony to expose the politics deeply imbedded in these tools (Hutcheson, 1989, pg. 94 - 95).
Erahoneybee’s story also reflects what Hutcheson describes as “surrender” and “abandonment of control” (Ibid., pg. 230). Erahoneybee’s use of the triage codes and other jargon as the basis for her song may be understood as a kind of homage to these symbols and their meanings (Brennan & Petite, 2000). In using these to activate humour and parody (pg. 230) we can understand this as a performance of “giving over” which then becomes a form of resistance. This act indirectly highlights how empty these categories really are, but how richly symbolic they have become (Hutcheson 1989). Erahoneybee’s song exposes the emptiness of the “technical rationality” of these kinds of standardized practices (Baines, 2011; La Rose, 2009; Mullaly, 2007).

Erahoneybee’s digital media story can be analyzed as a kind of parody of process, a kind of “true fiction” a “real representatio[n]” (Hutcheson, 1989; pg. 95). She uses the “real” (actual) triage and assessment codes, and the ‘real’, in the form of the actual processes of her work to produce a critique, which abstracts these technologies from their intended contexts. She then uses these materials to produce a song that becomes what Hutcheson describes as a “false thing” (Ibid., pg. 97). To clarify this understanding, Erahoneybee uses the correct codes and processes in an incorrect context, yet the codes still do the same things that they do in their original context (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010). Erahoneybee makes the codes a tool for expressing and exploring her experience of the work of child protection, while these codes are intended to explore and express information about child abuse.

This parody of process highlights the way in which these kinds of standardized codes take on a life of their own in the environments where they are in common use. These technologies march forward and begore themselves on everything that is before them (Hutcheson 1989, pg. 95). Yet, this system of meaning does not come from the experiences of
abuse. They are technologies that obscure particular approaches, logic models and ideological perspectives (Goodman & MacFadden 1996; Trocme et al., 1999). These systems of meaning constitute abuse when applied to information about the acts, activities and experiences of abuse in the context of institutionalized child welfare (Hennesey & Sawchuk, 2003; La Rose, 2009; Parton, 2008; Smith, 2010, 2011; Swift, 2011).

**Intertextual Analysis**

Making meaning from Erahoneybee’s story can also be enhanced by intertextual knowledge. For example, the intertextual knowledge I have gained from reading Erahoneybee's YouTube channel and watching some of her other digital media stories is something that I am bringing with me to my reading of this story. From this material I know that Erahoneybee is a student attending college in the US. This information suggests that she is most likely attending a program that is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the US based educational regulator for social work.

The process of professionally accrediting schools of social work is a process that means we can access information that tells us to a large to degree, what she is learning in her program and what she is expected to know and be able to do when she leaves school. Accreditation includes ensuring a standardized curriculum is in place and that this curriculum links social work learning to a system of standardized competencies (see CASWE.org [Accreditation Standards]; ASWB.org, CSWE.org [Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards] (ASWB, 2010; Campbell, 2012; Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010). This standardized learning suggests that Erahoneybee's experiences in the field would be ruled by the competencies and the other elements of standardized curriculum that she is exposed to (Campbell, 2012; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010).
Erahoneybee’s discomfort may be further linked to her understandings of the goals and objectives of social work practice which are represented in the rules governing social work education. Her understanding of these goals extends far beyond the technical-rational and administrative function that she experiences in her internship and parodies in her song (Adam et al., 2009; Baines, 2011b; Bisman, 2004; Mullaly, 2009). These expectations are formed in part by history taught to her as part of her social work education; this is another kind of remembering. We might understand this social work education as a part of the reason why she is reflecting on these particular things, and perhaps even the way that she is reflecting (Hutcheson 1989, pg. 95). The curriculum may account for why she is reflecting at all, which we might read as a success of social work education, it appears that she is learning (among other things) to resist.

But Erahoneybee’s resistance is only a partial aspect of her learning and internalization. The words of Erahoneybee’s song also reflect her understanding of the child welfare system. She uses “ordinary” child welfare jargon common to the screening department of a child welfare agency with ease. These codes are reflective of particular approaches to social work practice one that can be understood as part of neoliberal standardization (Baines 2004, 2007, 2011, 2012; Richardson, 2005; Smith, 2010; Swift, 2011). Unlike social workers’ vision of work beyond standardizations, here “technical rationality” in practice seeks to reduce risk and increase bureaucratic and technocratic ways of engaging in social work (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2004, 2007, 2011, 2012; Mullaly, 2007; Parton, 2008; Richardson, 2005). The use of alphanumeric coding is a kind of ordinal ranking system, a resource system reflecting particular ways of understanding social problems and beliefs about the best ways to resolve and improve these problems.
It is unclear whether Erahoneybee is conscious of the effects of neoliberalism on her experience of her internship, but we can analyze her song as highlighting the presence of neoliberalism in child protection work and her capacity to use this way of knowing to make meaning. This framing activates complex socio-political discourses, ideological process and philosophical orientations. This reading of the song requires a fairly detailed understanding of social work, and the contemporary debates raging in the field. Thus this aspect of 'making meaning' from Erahoneybee’s song requires previous knowledge of particular situated meanings and a specific kind of inter-textual reading in order to make sense (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Lundby, 2008).

Erahoneybee’s song also reflects the practicalities of the everyday work of child protection case screening processes. In this kind of work, allegations of abuse are rated as eligible or ineligible for service. The appropriate and standardized response to abuse is assigned to cases based on a set of criteria that are used to grade, or triage the cases (Swift 2011). Workers’ in these settings “screen in” cases when they determine that the information provided makes a case eligible for service, alternatively they “screen out” determining a case does not warrant service or is ineligible for service (La Rose, 2009; Parton, 2008; Payne, 1998; Smith, 2010).

Screening in and screening out is the “case work” or “clinical work” in this part of child welfare intervention. It is undeniably gate-keeping work (Brock, 2003; La Rose, 2009; Goodman & McFadden, 1996). Closing cases by deeming them ineligible also means managing workload, it produces potential shifts in funding levels as service is funded on the bases of “piece work” (Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002; Mullaly, 2007). The work of ‘screening’ is in part a process of screening the people who make child
abuse allegations and determining the reliability of allegations based on perceptions about the reliability of referral sources and the information they provide. The codes assigned to cases represent elements of risk understood as significant in child abuse cases generally; the specifics of the cases are organized into these general categories, the details rounded up or rounded down to meet the ‘appropriate’ criteria (Parton, 2008; Payne, 2001; Smith, 2010, 2011).

This process remakes the “doubts about a family” that Erahoneybee sings about into “allegations reported,” which in turn can become a “case” if the allegations fit the criteria of “supported” understandings of abuse (Smith, 2011). This case, together with the workers’ assessment, and the other information collected through the screening processes converge, creating an ‘audit of risk’ (Smith, 2011; Ministry of Children & Youth Services, 2000) for the case which is represented through the alpha numeric codes (La Rose, 2009; Parton, 2008; Payne 1998; Trocme, et al., 1999, Smith, 2011). The process of organizing risk in this way depends on processes of “ordinal ranking” (Lin, 2008) within the specific case on the basis of generalized understandings of risk (Goodman & MacFadden, 1996; Trocme et al, 1999;).

The alphanumeric codes used help social workers to meet the government requirements of standardized child welfare practice. These alphanumeric codes have clinical meanings in the context of these systems, but they do not in and of themselves constitute clinical knowledge (Swift, 2011). The letters and numbers in the alphanumeric codes speak to predetermined ordinal variables that are seen to exist in child welfare cases. Its not that other things aren’t present in cases, it is just that those with the power to establish the criteria for child welfare have identified what they believe to be the core elements or characteristics of cases. They place certain things in the foreground, representing them as more important and more risky,
while they background others seen as less significant and therefore less relevant to the issue of risk in different ways.

These ranking processes allow for a kind of “cluster analysis” of case findings which in turn allows for the assignment of particular standardized responses, resources and treatment activities in accordance with the assessment outcomes. The use of simple and finite numeric codes are central to including technology as a way of representing the complex reality of child welfare practice, and so Erahoneybee’s song is as much an ode to technology as it is an ode to child welfare practice.

**Technology and Social Work**

The binary logic that Erahoneybee presents to us through her song can be understood as a modernist orientation to social work practice, but can also be linked to the influence of automation and computerization in social work practice (Fitch, 2005; Hennessey & Sawchuck, 2003; McNutt 2000) The alpha-numeric codes shared by Erahoneybee can be analyzed as tools of automation, tools that create particular and standardized ways of foregrounding and back-grounding information that meets the needs of computational software (Fitch, 2005; Brüggemann & Patil, 2011; Hennesey & Sawchuk, 2003; Moffatt, 1993; Parton, 2008).

Assessments that foreground and background information are built on a logic that suggests the most important and least important factors can be translated from a particular case and applied across many cases. This process relies on a finite number of possibilities and the assignment of standardized meanings to particular representational characters, which are in the case of Erahoneybee’s experience, the letters and numbers used in the triage codes.

The process of assigning a rank to a particular case through this coding process has
meaning that extends beyond the clinical aspect of the work. Lin (2008) describes ordinal ranking as a fundamental element of “machine learning”. Here computers are provided with a number of resources that inform them about how human’s make decisions and this in turn allows the computer to undertake these decisions in place of humans, or to act as a check and balance against human decisions. These kinds of computer activities are seen as relevant in social science practices. Lin (2008) argues that the machine learning processes facilitated through ordinal ranking processes have produced, in many cases, outcomes that demonstrate computers can become as reliable as people making these same decisions (pg. 7). Thus the social workers role becomes one of translation, remaking what is important in the case into a language that the machine can understand and make a decision about.

Wesch (mwesch, 2010 [The Machine is Us/ing Us]) presents us with a consideration of the role that the Internet plays in developing computer logic a logic that seeks to reflect an understanding of how humans think and process information in our daily lives. He suggested that our constant interaction with computers through the use of the Internet and other technologies allows computers and their programmers to undertake an ethnographic study of humans and human’s daily lived lives. Through our use of information, responses to and interaction with various forms of digital media we are teaching “the machine” how humans think and how we process and organize information (Fitch, 2005; mwesch 2010 [The Machine is Using Us]).

This process of machine learning is also taking place in the workplace. The normalization of the kinds of data coding Erahoneybee describes, are shifts in work activities. These shifts reflect “media-logic” as an approach to interaction and decision making processes that are remaking social work. By extension these practices create the potential for a gradual
shift from human decision making to machine decision-making in social work practice and other human services initiatives. These are realities that social workers have been invited to forget as we undertake the automation of social work practice.

The ongoing implementation of standardized processes and computerized assessment checklists further limit the kinds of “mental space” and creative possibilities open to social workers. As we limit these, we may be increasing the potential that computer technology may eventually replace the human social worker. If all humans are allowed to think and do is limited to that which ‘the machine’ can capture, then we will find little difference between the machines and people doing the same work. This may potentially be the evidence necessary to move people out of the whole process. These ideas of media logic are important when we consider the idea that social workers are already turning over much of the functioning of human service to machines. We are in danger of experiencing forgetting on many levels in this scenario, which suggests that remembering is an important practice of resistance in context.

To return this discussion to the specifics of Erahoneybee’s digital media story, Erahoneybee sings to us, about the triage codes “51A” and “51B”. In both the Ontario and Massachusetts child welfare systems, the use of codes 51A and 51B means something specific. Both locations use these codes, but this doesn’t necessarily mean the same thing in these two different jurisdictions. While I know specifically what these codes mean in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth, 2000; OACAS, 2006), I am not certain what they specifically mean in Massachusetts. I know that in Ontario, the codes 51A and 51B are used within the “Eligibility Spectrum” model of screening and triage in child welfare cases (OACAS, 2006). It

\[13 \text{ In spite of research to clarify the meanings.}\]
remains unclear if these codes hold the same meaning in these two child welfare systems; nevertheless, I can still read these codes in my context and apply what I know of them to Erahonebee’s story, and make plausible (if incorrect) meaning.

The codes Erahoneybee sings can be understood as totalizing processes when used in their context, because they transform and reduce individual life experiences (Hutcheson, 1989) into particular bureaucratic categories of abuse. This process remakes behaviours and/or the characteristics of families hold a meaning in relationship to these technologically constructed categories (Baines, 2011b; Smith, 2011). In this process, other possible meanings of these experiences tend to disappear from view, or be forgotten.

Erahoneybee's story tells us something without requiring that we share the same context and without (necessarily) possessing extensive situated knowledge of this context. For example, in applying what I know of the child welfare understanding of a 51A or 51B, I understand these codes to specifically mean we are concerned with a “care giver with a problem” (OACAS, 2006). The nature of the problem is further specified by the choice between these two specific codes. In this way, 51A reflects a situation where a caregiver already has a child welfare history in which the caregiver has been investigated for child sexual abuse and the abuse has been substantiated (Ibid, pg. 77). Code 51B presents a scenario in which the caregiver was previously investigated for physical abuse of a child and the abuse was substantiated (Ibid. pg. 78). Here, in the practice of standardized child welfare, remembering is reserved for making a case for intervention.

Erahoneybee advises us that those who report allegations of abuse are invited to “tell” their “doubts” about “a family”. Here the telling of doubts functions within the totalizing
process to facilitate more finite categorization. Here aspects of coding are used to filter information gathered. The result is like smoke being used to determine if there is a fire; but “smoke” also becomes the lens through which other information will be understood. Smoke tells the worker to look for fire. In this way, doubts move from the “possible” to the “probable” as the screening social worker formulates, raises questions from this formulation, gathers doubts, supports them with facts and applies the appropriate code as necessary information is screened. The coding system reminds the worker of particular things they are expected to attend to, everything else they are invited to forget (Parton, 2008; Smith, 2010, 2011).

In deconstructing the specific codes that Erahoneybee sings, we understand how families are remade through assessment. Here conflicts, stress, poverty, abuse, violence, illness and a myriad of other lived experiences are remade as “deserving” or “underserving” of intervention (Swift, 2011). However, the deconstruction of the codes also shows how these standardizing processes remake some core concepts of social work such as the concepts of “deserving” and “undeserving”. These terms have historically been associated with British Poor Law practices of assessment to determine whether charity should be dispensed to the people requesting resources. In this context, the notions of “deserving” and “undeserving” were practices associated with assessment of the moral character and the personal circumstances that led people to be in need (Finkel, 2006; Hick, 2001).

Historically deserving people were seen to require charity through “no fault” of their own (Finkel, 2006; Reamer, 1996). The ‘undeserving’ were seen to experience problems as a result of their own weak character, moral failure and vice (Finkel, 2006; Reamer, 1996). But here, in the context of current child protection practice, ‘deserving of intervention’ relates to
notions of risk rather than notions of social morality and need (Fitch, 2005; Hennesey & Sawchuck, 2003; Reamer, 1998). Here to deserve intervention means that a family situation is risky-enough to deserve a de-facto kind of state intervention, or, risky enough that it potentially leads to other costs in the immediate future. It is a framing of risk as Spivak (1985, 2004) suggests that threatens capitalism and economic growth, a risk that is shown in Wrightkan’s story and used by David Jones to suggest the need for social work in Nairobi Kenya in the IFSW’s digital media story.

Eligibility coding practices homogenize experiences into limited definitions. Yet, these totalizing acts rarely completely “subsume other modes of interpretation” (Hutcheson, 1989, pg. 65). These other possible interpretations appear to be apparent to Erahoneybee, who reflects this crack in the totalizing process in her digital media story (Adams et al, 2009). She cannot simply accept the coding, she cannot simply accept the method, or the process through which she became implicated in it. She challenges the meaning of these processes and technologies by engaging in her parodic interpretation through song (Shepard, 2005).

However, she is only able to maintain her resistance for so long, eventually showing acceptance of these realities and showing signs of normalizing these understandings. At the end of her story her reflection leads to her self-definition as a “bad person”. She feels the need to highlight the contradictions present in the child protective services sector rather then simply accepting them as best practice. This digital story brings to life the “stickiness” (Smith, 2010) of reflecting the experiences of human beings in technological representations bringing us once again to the practices of ordinal statistics.
This application of meaning making produces for Erahoneybee a cognitive dissonance (Brooks, 2003) that we share as we connect with her digital media story. The emotions Erahoneybee shows are emotions that I am sharing with her and in some ways this is breaking the social work rules. Good social workers, those who are morally good and professionally good, do not connect in professional work on the basis of feelings; rather we “empathize” with clients (Egan, 1986, 2009; Hupattz, 2007; Reamer, 1998). Empathy here is understood as a framing of feelings as logical outcomes of experiences rather than as shared experiences (Reamer, 1998). We might understand this as a way that standardised or even machine learning has influenced social work practice, creating a post-emotional understanding of relationships (Fitch, 2005; 2008; Wesch, 2005).

Erahoneybee’s willingness to engage in this self-reflection, while consistent with human service traditions, can also be understood in other ways. These practices can be an internalization of neoliberal regulation and control (Ganasxia, 2010; Hutcheson, 1989; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Smith, 2011). Erahoneybee moves rapidly from resisting professional identity and normative power to adopting self-surveillance, bringing to life Foucault’s notion of governmentality as a process of daily life (Davies, 2006; Ganasxia, 2010; Smith, 2011). She leaves us with an unresolved dilemma, a dilemma that is a microcosm of the tensions workers face in human service work more generally.

Heron (2007) suggests the importance of considering issues of the moral economy embedded in helping practices. In this way, helping activities are exchanged for social markers that contribute to understandings of the self as properly moral, good and innocent (Heron, 2005; Rossiter, 2001; Reamer, 1998). These understanding are important particularly when linked to normalizing processes and to normative construction of gender. There is a significant
body of literature that suggest social work was, for many women, a way to transgress gender roles and norms (Baines et al., 1991).

For women, acts of transgression have historically been both linked to and mediated by helping work (Heron, 2007). This work becomes both the system of exchange by which increased social standing and morality are achieved (Baines et al, 1991) and the method by which one can atone for one’s challenge to normative notions of femininity which are also facilitated by helping activities (Heron, 2007). In Erahoneybee’s case, the mediated challenge to authority and normative power-relations are further tied into this tension between helping as productive of the normative moral self and destructive of this normative self (Heron, 2007; Rossiter, 2005).

While Erahoneybee’s story maybe uniquely hers, there is much that social work students, practitioners, field instructors and regulators can learn from what Erahoneybee has to say. A deeper look at the various topics she considers invites us to develop a deeper meaning from the story she shows us. Cut backs and technical rational activities are used to necessitate and facilitate work speed up (Baines, 2004; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2007; La Rose, 2009). In “cutting” out aspects of this work, it appears that reflection is a part of what is removed from the work (Issit, 1999; La Rose, 2009). The process of talking about these changes is deemed unproductive in a neoliberal context, yet stress and health are also seen as important issues and so the two discourses conflict. Many questions can be asked about the case of Erahoneybee’s swollen tonsils and sore throat discussed in the first phase of this story, with a view to understanding it as potentially a symptom of work stress, a stress that may in part be about emotional regulation and silencing (Baines, 2011c; Baines, MacKenzie Davies, Saini, 2008; Scott, 2004).
Erahoneybee ends her digital story by telling us that she is a “bad person”, a statement that is reinforced by her non-verbal communication and that suggests resignation (Egan, 1986, 2009). While she refuses to subjugate herself as a child welfare worker throughout the story, it is clear that in the end she pays a cost for her resistance by internalizing the mainstream meaning of resistance as something that is deviant (Brock, 2003). Reflexivity may be one of the social work practices most often hailed as an important part of critical social work practice, but it does not protect her from internalizing mainstream framings of what it means to be a good social worker (Yip, 2006a, 2006b). In the end, her interrogation of her use of humour as a means of speaking what could not be spoken is undone by her reflexivity, which begins to take on the form of normalization (Epstein, 1999; Margolin, 1997; Prasad, 2005; Rossiter, 1997), through which she decides that she is a “bad person” in this final sub-phase.

This ending to the story invites us to ask a number of questions about the tensions that critical reflective practice brings to social work in neoliberal times. Erahoneybee is not the only digital media storyteller who is sharing her experiences of reflexivity as a form of self-policing in the context of the YouTube environment. Nor is she the only social work storyteller who is speaking about the disjunctures that exist between the ideals of social work identity and the real-deals of practice. Considering other digital media storyteller’s tales from the field helps to make thick rich stories from these singular texts of critique.
Chapter 8: The Nervous CPS Worker

The digital media stories created by Erahoneybee, Wrightkan and Dr. David Jones each present an individual narrator who shares a personal/professional narrative with the audience. The stories considered in Chapter 8, and the remaining chapters of this thesis present the perspectives of multiple actors within each individual story. These stories present the perspectives of several people and the interactions of these people and their perspectives to create narratives about social work. These texts and the more collective nature of these narratives reflect notions of the critical social work tradition of linking individual experience to group processes, a linking that is undertaken in the hope that these connections will foster collective action.

Like the texts created by the individual storytellers, these multiple actor texts present reflections that allow for consideration of the opportunities and challenges that are part of contemporary social work. The understandings that emerge from the multiple points of view add even more complexity to already complex meanings made possible through the medium. These texts suggest the potential that moving stories beyond the level of individual expression holds for story making as a practice, and for the processes of meaning making that flow out of story sharing.

The digital media story *The Nervous CPS Worker* ([http://youtu.be/S9oQajDZXNA](http://youtu.be/S9oQajDZXNA)) is the focus of this chapter. It is a digital media story created as a tool for self-advocacy but it is also a text that presents notions of resisting, remembering and forgetting that take place as the actors interact with one another and through what the story shares with its intended and unintended audiences. The story makes meaning through a process of “showing” what happens
during a child protection “home visit”. In this commonplace social work event (Ferguson, 2010; Jones, 2011; NSGEU, 2010) we see a child protection supervisor attend a private foster home under contract to the state child protection authority. As we watch this home visit unfold we also witness a conflict between the foster parents and the visiting social worker. This conflict centers on the rights of foster parents Katie and Jeff Bettendorf to adopt a child named Marissa who is the sibling of a family of children in the Bettendorsf’s care (Katie 2005, January 11).

**Linking and Analysis**

The meaning made from this story depends in part on the capacity of digital media technology to create links among digital media texts (Baym, 2005; Dicks et al., 2005; Markham, 2004). These foster parents are avid social media users who maintain a YouTube channel and a number of family blogs, all of which further enrich the meaning we glean from *The Nervous CPS Worker*. They are transparent with their identities and experiences, identifying themselves, the foster children they care for, their biological children, the social workers and themselves\(^{14}\) as they tell their story of a family that challenges many of our contemporary understandings of what family life should look like.

These reference materials inform us that the family was currently in the process of adopting Marissa’s siblings and they express a desire to adopt Marissa as well. Katie and Jeff Adopting Marissa is presented an act of justice because Marissa is understood to have a “right” (Ife, 2008) to a relationship with her siblings. Katie and Jeff create this digital story because

\(^{14}\) At points they use pseudonyms for the foster children, but eventually they begin to use the names that we can understand to be the legal names of these children, including the name Marissa, who is a child not in their care, but who is in foster care.
they believe their efforts to adopt Marissa are being blocked by the Child Protection Service (CPS). In order to garner support for their bid to keep the children together, they elect to share this story with the general public through use of YouTube, an act that can be understood as a process of self-advocacy.

The capture and sharing of this social work intervention on YouTube leads to a number of potentially unintended readings of the story, for example, the story also shows us the practice of child protection as a form of practice that relies heavily on standardization and documentation (La Rose 2009; Mullaly 2007; Smith 2010). Thus, we can understand this form of practice as a textually mediated form of social work. Much of the interaction occurring between the foster parents and social worker in this story focuses on a discussion of documentation and forms, and the significance of “who” is included and excluded on a specific form. These inclusions and exclusions are meaningful beyond the context of the specific interaction and this specific form. The interaction and the use of these forms points to the presence of multiple organizations and layers of bureaucracy involved in this case. The need for cooperation among multiple organizations also shows us the effects of “contracting out” on social work practice (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2007; NESGEU, 2002).

Analysis of The Nervous CPS Worker requires attention to genre and to the visual and auditory elements in this story. The media field, in particular the “comments” section on the YouTube channel, plays a significant part in the meaning making that occurs in this analysis. The social work discourses activated through this digital media story are also important elements to be considered. And, connections between and among the multiple forms of digital
media narratives and social media practices used by this family are significant in making meaning from this digital media story.

**Genre Analysis**

The genre of this digital text is particularly noteworthy and is therefore an appropriate place to begin our analysis. The creators of *The Nervous CPS Worker* describe themselves together with their children as “Team Bettendorf”. They employ a style of video making termed “shooting back” or “sousveillance” (Ganascia, 2010; Mann, 2004, 2005). This form of storymaking may be described as an activist practice as its primary purpose is to create change (Baines 2011a; Fraser, 2004; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004; Hick & McNutt, 2002). Sousveillance story making uses digital narratives to leverage claims about the use of power, and the meaning of its use (Ganascia, 2010; Mann, 2004, 2005; Woodman, 2010). Showing power thus is an act of resistance because it exposes that which was invisible – and invisibility is part of the processes by which power is held (Bishop, 2002; Mullaly, 2007). Therefore, making power processes visible unleashes the potential for change to take place (Foucault, 1988; Bishop, 1992; Benjamin, 2011; Fraser, 2004; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004).

The digital material generated in sousveillance stories can be understood as “evidence” that supports claims about the existence of these kinds of power processes and their mental, emotional and material effects (Ganascia, 2010; Woodman, 2010), it is a perspective that relies largely on a modernist framing of truth as a singular element within fixed binary (Fook, 2002; Hutchison, 1989). Within the framing, the presence of this evidence allows for “claims making” which can in turn be used to argue for and win shifts in the way particular systems function or individuals interact (Bishop, 2002; Fraser, 2004; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004; Hick & McNutt, 2002).
As Mann (2005) and Ganascia (2010) point out, the practice of sousveillance relies in part on the capacity of Web 2.0 technology to make the creation and transmission of digital video materials possible and accessible in relative terms. Terms that Kidd (2010) points out include the technological, social, economic and political process that are a part of what makes these resources accessible to some, inaccessible to others and controlled by a few.

Power is to some degree shifted when people like Team Bettendorf make these stories, but the texts gain greater power and meaning through online sharing (Boler, 2008; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010). Through online sharing the Bettendorfs have substantially raised public awareness of their experiences, creating the potential for the mobilization of a critical mass of people in support of their cause. *The Nervous CPS Worker* has been posted on YouTube for approximately six years on the “Team Bettendorf” YouTube channel (http://www.youtube.com/user/teambettendorf). This digital media story has been viewed 47,435 times (as of May 30, 2013) with approximately 450 comments listed in the feedback section of the channel template; the comment section will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

**Visual Analysis**

The visual elements of this story are one of the communication modes important to the overall meaning of the story. The visuals gain greater meaning when considered with other elements of the story. They are simple, consisting primarily of video shot from a camera placed in a static location. The visual elements are still, suggesting the camera is mounted somewhere on a tripod, and change only when the camera is relocated or when post-production editing is added to the text.
The visual elements allow us to divide the text into two distinct phases. A change in location and some editing work (a fade to and from black) make two distinct segments in this digital media story. The first phase takes place in the family dining area, which is marked by a wooden table surrounded with benches and chairs. A large clock is mounted to the wall, displaying the time to be about 3:40; we can surmise it is p.m. rather than a.m. because the kitchen is aglow with ambient daylight.

What is missing in this scene is as telling as what is present. There are no kids visible or audible, no children enter when the foster parents and social worker arrive in the kitchen, a notable absence given that this is a story about child protection work and this visit is taking place in a foster home where twelve children live. We know this context in part because of the title of the story and the description of the story provided on the Team Bettendorf YouTube channel. We may also understand the absence of the children as a metaphor of the child protection practice that currently exists, a neoliberal kind of practice that focuses on risk, standardization and documentation which we can understand as a kind of forgetting about the children who are meant to be the centre of the practice (Pon, 2009). We never see the children during this digital media story although we do hear a baby cooing in the second phase.

A caption at the bottom of the screen is another important visual element in the story that remains present and unchanged throughout. It reads, “Meeting with Kelli Corbitt – 02/01/2006” and serves as a constant reminder of the object of this digital media story, as well as providing us with specific information about the events depicted in the story. Together with the other visual material this caption informs the audience that Kelli Corbitt is the social worker visiting the Bettendorfs’ home.
As the story unfolds, Katie the foster-mother introduces Kelli the social worker to Jeff the foster-father. Kelli is wearing a striped button-down shirt and jeans, Jeff a t-shirt and shorts, and Katie jeans and t-shirt. At first glance, Kelli appears energetic and relaxed as she acknowledges Jeff. But, when she is informed the family is videotaping the visit she openly objects. Her objections are disregarded and Jeff declares that the taping will continue. Kelli’s tone becomes stern as she states that if that is the case she will not “do the visit.” Jeff’s responds with a shrug.

The physical responses and verbal interaction between Jeff and Katie suggest they are in conflict, yet their behaviour also suggests that they don’t really know one another. This disconnection between the response of the actors and the history as presented raises many questions about the back-story to this meeting:

- What is Kelli walking into?
- What does Jeff believe is about to happen?
- Why is this visit being taped?
- How is this relationship created and influenced by external forces?
- What is the symbolic meaning of this meeting?

At the end of this discussion, Kelli expresses her need to see the children, a request that holds meaning for audience members who possess prior knowledge of child protection practice. Any home visit requires that the social worker see all the children involved with the child protection service and so Kelli cannot responsibly leave this home without at least seeing that the children are well; to do so would be to violate a policy and to fail to meet the standards of practice (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007).
Katie advises Kelli that the children are “…upstairs, …sleeping.” Once more, what does not occur is as telling as what is taking place. There is no discussion about the fact that the children are sleeping in the middle of the afternoon; it appears that forgetting what time it is is another aspect of this interaction. This phase of the story ends as Katie, Kelli and Jeff leave the room and the image of the clock fades to black.

The second phase of the story begins with a fade from black. We see another room in the house. The camera lens is now trained on a sparsely furnished living room, a door visible at upper screen left. At lower screen right a set of stairs can be seen but they are for the most part obscured by the angle of the camera. Kelli and Katie descend into frame from the stairs. Kelli is once more met with the camera, and she is again clearly agitated by its presence. As she reaches the bottom of the stairs the camera blocks her from moving beyond the landing. Kelli pivots and paces slightly in the small space afforded to her, eventually leaning her back against the wall at the bottom of the stairs. She appears furious but is in control of her anger; she does not forget herself in this moment (Allen, 1997), remaining polite but detached, ‘professional’ in her response.

Katie stands with her arms folded across her chest looking relaxed as though nothing is amiss. Jeff is out of the view of the camera but his voice is clearly heard posing questions to Kelli. In this moment the parents appear compliant, but their compliance is a performance (Jagger, 2008; Smith, 2007). Their compliance reflects the ‘letter’ of what it means to work ‘with’ a social worker, to be professional in their conduct; their behaviour also tells us that they do not embrace the spirit of collaboration with this worker, rather they are engaging in a subtle resistance (Benjamin, 2011; Smith, 2007, 2010).
The conversation in this phase of the story requires specific knowledge of child welfare policies and procedures in order for the audience to make sense of what is taking place. As the conversation proceeds the foster parents and the worker debate the need for a pre-adoption home study, a debate steeped in technical language and child welfare jargon that reinforces the messages relayed in Erahoneybee’s *Song About a Child Welfare Agency*.

Kelli and the Bettendorfs deliberate over the need for signatures on a form. Questions are raised about the children listed on this form; Katie and Kelli engage in an exchange about the inclusion of Marissa and instructions given by various staff members about the form. The conflict continues to deepen as Kelli, Katie and Jeff discuss an adoption home study. At this point Kelli informs us that the foster parents are employed by a foster care agency called HRT, and under its contract with the State of Arizona the parents must abide by the procedures required by the State. In the end, the foster parents conclude that Kelli is telling them they will not be able to adopt Marissa and that the children will in Jeff’s words “be split up.”

Kelli does not respond to these questions directly; she remains fixed on the rules and the documents required by the child welfare authority. After more debate the Bettendorfs refuse to sign the form. At this refusal Kelli declares this is all she “needed” – a phrase that suggests cooperation between the parties has ceased and a more authoritative phase of intervention is likely to follow (Dumbrill, 2011; Smith, 2010). The visit ends at Katie’s prompting. Katie and Jeff escort Kelli to the door. Kelli leaves, and the image fades to black.

The exchange between Katie, Jeff and Kelli is structured largely by the child welfare rules, norms and procedures connecting these three people. For those unfamiliar with these processes, the story isn’t really about anything. It is a confusing conversation about a form and
the parents’ refusal to complete it. Kelli’s reliance on the form as the reason for her visit demonstrates how exchanges between social workers and foster parents are frequently textually mediated communication events. This conversation also shows that even in a relationship where much is shared between foster parents and social workers their unique roles in the system mean that unique understandings and expectations are also present but not necessarily acknowledged in interactions.

While the foster parents and child protection workers may have been engaged in a shared conversation, they were not participating in a shared process of meaning making. Because the Bettendorfs’ service as foster parents is governed by a contract, the foster parents and the case supervisor have unique goals and unique roles in child welfare practice (http://hrtaz.com/how-to-become-a-foster-parent/). Contracting out further suggests that both foster parents and social workers have good reason to maintain their unique positions in the system and the meanings these positions offer to them (Payne, 2001); this uniqueness is after all what gives them “professional status.”

The foster parents and the social worker may be invested in these meanings and the roles they maintain, this does not mean that other meanings or actions are unavailable to them. However, from what we see in this digital media story both the foster parents and the social worker ‘forget’ these other possibilities. They forget the history of holism and integrated services that was once the way child protection services operated (La Rose, 2009).

In this way the exchange we witness can be read as a microcosm of the fundamental problems in social work presented in the concerns about remembering and forgetting that Pon (2009) raises – concerns that suggest these new structures and new ways of remembering and
forgetting bring with them new processes through which oppression may be perpetrated. For example, if we open up our perception of social work to include understandings more reflective of critical social work values, Kelli’s response to the Bettendorfs is a less than ideal performance of social work even if it is an acceptable kind of child welfare interaction (Baines, 2011b; Fook 2002; Smith, 2010). Yet, given the challenges Kelli is presented with as a result of the Bettendorfs’ resistance, her response becomes a reasonable human response even if not a professional response.

In her professional position, Kelli is expected to remember her role and to remain firmly rooted in this professional identity regardless of what she experiences during the home visit (Allen, 1997). As a result, we see Kelli focus on the forms and the rules, without much concern for relationship or rapport building, as a kind of self-protection practice. We might understand the worker’s emotional withdrawal as self-protection more generally, a response to the foster family’s practice of self-advocacy.

Considering *The Nervous CPS Worker* as a practice of sousveillance invites us to consider how this style of digital media story creates a parallel process (Keenan, 2005; Rebman, 2006; Mothersole, 1999) to the surveillance practices imbued in the child welfare system. The Bettendorfs undertake surveillance on Kelli the social worker in response to her monitoring of their foster care service. Both the foster parents and the social worker are a part of the larger child welfare system, one that is fundamentally built on practices of surveillance (Fook, 2002; Moffatt, 1999; Smith, 2010).

Subjugation becomes an important aspect of the analysis of this sousveillance digital media story (Foucault 1988; Brock 2003). Surveillance can be understood as a process of
dominance, corresponding to social processes that place some people in positions to watch other people (Mann, 2005; Monahan, 2006; Ganascia, 2010), a watching that is, in the case of child welfare practice, a socially sanctioned activity assigned a professional status (Moffatt, 1999). Sousveillance, or the act of watching the watchers, can therefore be understood as an act of resistance (Benjamin, 2011; Fook, 2002; hooks, 1990; Mann, 2005), an act that resists the processes that subjugate people in this way and sanction this subjugation (hooks, 1990; Butler, 2004).

Surveillance is often framed as a form of protection or prevention and in the context of child welfare it is an element of practice seen as necessary and desirable (Moffatt, 1999). Unintended effects of any invasion of privacy are seen in this context as a necessary evil by the powers who create and regulate these surveillance systems (Ganascia, 2010, Monahan, 2006, Mann, 2004, 2005). Protection through surveillance is afforded to people or property because of an understanding that risk and vulnerability are present (Moffatt, 1999; Smith 2010, 2011). In this way, resistance by sousveillance is an act through which people considered “at risk” question the benefit of protection by surveillance; this questioning may well extend to questions about the nature of ‘risk’ (Monahan, 2006; Moffatt, 1999). Thus sousveillance can be understood to raise suspicion about the ‘watchers’ and the process of watching as posing risk to the subjugated people, a risk that is perhaps as great as that for which they are receiving “protection.” This kind of resistance is a form of remembrance, an act of anamnesis (Muller, 2009) that brings to life Pon’s (2009) suggestion that protection can be harmful and a form of oppression.

Social work’s long history as a practice of social surveillance extends beyond the use of digital media computer technology (Moffatt, 1999; Smith, 2007). Thus we can understand the
actions of the Bettendorfs’ as a kind of mediatization of social work practice (Krotz, 2009; Livingstone, 2009; Schrott, 2009). Neoliberal social work as context also mediates this tradition of surveillance; suggesting that “case management practice” can be understood as largely a matter of surveillance (Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; Mullaly, 2007; Smith, 2011). Here surveillance is remade into a practice “coordination” with social workers monitoring and matching clients with the services identified as “appropriate” based on standardized understandings of the clients’ problems (Dumbrill, 2011; Smith, 2010, 2011), an idea that we have seen reflected in Erahoneybee’s digital story and again here in the Nervous CPS Worker.

This idea of case-management as surveillance is present in the arrangements that exist between HRT, the foster care agency that employs the Bettendorfs’, and the Arizona child protection service (http://hrtaz.com/how-to-become-a-foster-parent/). The multiple layers of surveillance facilitated by the contracting out of services is another reflection of neoliberal ideals expressed in social work practice. Risk remakes surveillance into a clinically necessary activity and a way of caring for children (Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2010). Similarly, parents are remade as clients and then as cases to be managed, tying them into surveillance on this basis as well (Smith 2010, 2011; Mullaly, 2007, 2009). Attitudes towards social work and social workers in neoliberal times also make social workers “suspect” and therefore open to surveillance from other bureaucracies and their agents who also have a role in providing service (Baines 2011; Carniol 2010; La Rose 2009; Mullaly, 2007; Smith, 2011).

Analysis of The Nervous CPS Worker allows us to see these multiple layers of surveillance. Social workers watch and are watched from above, and now with the technological possibility of digital media from below. The possibilities of sousveillance...
suggest a cultural shift is taking place, a shift that normalizes this kind of gaze and in the process of doing so creates a new kind of power relationship (Kidd, 2010; Ganascia, 2010; Krips, 2010; Mann, 2005; Nystrom, 2010; Prasad, 2005). In this culture everything we say and do is watched and for the most part recorded (Mann, 2004, 2005). Watching is facilitated by cameras, passcards, echo pens, IP addresses, and by coworkers, as the interactions between Kelli and the Bettendorfs suggest. There is no doubt that Foucault’s predictions of the disciplinary society and governmentality in the creation of a social panopticon are now embedded in social work (Brock, 2003; Moffatt, 1999).

As previously mentioned, Katie and Jeff Bettendorf are professional foster parents contracted to the child protection service employing Kelli Corbitt. As “professional” foster parents the Bettendorfs are trained, certified and their services sold by the corporate entity HRT, an organization understood to hold expertise in foster care training and supervision (www.hrtaz.com/about). While the Bettendorfs’ relationship with HRT may be presented as a process that protects and supports foster parents and children, the involvement of multiple agencies and organizations in this process of service provision means that the Bettendorfs experience multiple monitoring processes (http://hrtaz.com/about/history/).

Regardless of their relationship with HRT, the Bettendorfs clearly feel the need to protect themselves and to resist the power relationships they experience in their contract to the Arizona child protection service (Dumbrill, 2011; La Rose 2009; Moffatt, 1999). The choice of self-advocacy on the part of the foster parents invites us to consider the liminality faced by foster parents in this contracted out system. We gain insight into this liminality through the possibilities that digital media storytelling provide for a “showing” of the unique and intimate challenges faced by the Bettendorfs. Through this digital media story we see that the
Bettendorfs’ world, their family life, is open to constant surveillance by social workers who can attend the home, set limits on what takes place there, and demand access to the children without giving a reason (Moffatt, 1999). As contractors, these foster parents face scrutiny from many different parts of the child welfare system and from multiple workers who may or may not share the same approach to practice (Gibelman, 2005; Mullaly, 2007; Smith, 2010). We can see also that the workers who do this work are often stressed (Baines, 2004; 2012; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2010) and approach families as Kelli does – coolly distant at best and fragile, brittle and angry in many moments.

Sousveillance video making can be a matter of creating “evidence” which is a fundamental part of neoliberal social work (Baines 2011; Humphries, 2008; Smith 2010, 2011). In this way we can understand sousveillance as a response to the constant demands for practice that can be empirically measured and assessed from a logo-centric position (Fook, 2002; Munro, 2004; Smith, 2011). Capture of events using digital technologies facilitates the “showing of truth” to power (Epstein, 1999; Baldry & Thibault, 2006). This application of digital video recordings rests on understandings of technology as an “objective” source of knowledge (Krips, 2010; Ganascia, 2010; Moffatt, 1993; McNutt, 2000), a kind of knowing that is understood (in this framing) as more reliable than the human eye and traditional forms of documentation and assessment (Mann 2003). We might understand this as a digital practice of making a “defensible decision” (Mullaly 2009; Fook, 2002).

In this context, machines and their technologies are framed as unproblematic and objective (Fitch, 2005). Humanness, on the other hand is understood to get in the way of truth and as contaminating the events with subjective meanings believed to taint what is known (Moffatt, 1999). This framing of digital media is challenged by several authors who argue
tensions exist and assumptions embedded in an understanding of ‘capture’ as a neutral phenomena; capture is after undertaken with an end in mind and influence by the context in which the practice is employed (Ganacia, 2010; Monahan, 2006; Kidd, 2010; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010). For example, context is argued to play a significant role in the meanings that can be made from materials produced through digital technologies (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

The politics of the Internet also effect meaning when digital materials are shared this way. Once again many influences on meaning remain present, such as site ownership and controls which can affect access and distribution of materials (Kidd & Rodríguez, 2011). Sousveillance practices are criticized for emphasizing individual concerns and highlighting individual acts without linking these individual “guerrilla” acts back to collective action or structural practice (Ganascia, 2010; Monahan, 2006). This disconnection is believed by some to limit the political possibilities of the approach and the potential for bringing about change (Kidd, 2010, Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010; Woodman, 2010).

Bearing all this in mind, we may learn by means of this sousveillance story, how the Bettendorfs see themselves as wounded by their interactions with Kelli, a wounding they describe in detail in their blogs (Katie, 2006: February 1; Katie 2006: January 31). But while they seek a collective response, they do little to link this perceived injury back to larger political contexts, economic realities or social forces. Their analysis does not speak to structural issues or link Kelli’s action to her role in the system. Instead, they vilify Kelli as a person, making her the ‘social work monster’ who ruins this family with her consent form, a framing that Adams et al., (2009) describe as an outcome of professionalization and the framing of social work as an embodied process.
Understanding Kelli and what she does means attending to her place in the larger system. While the child welfare system maybe a monster, Kelli can as easily be understood as a social work minion. However, in choosing to frame Kelli in the manner they did, the Bettendorfs forget that they too are a part of the same system. They like Kelli, have subjectified themselves by becoming professional foster parents (Davies, 2006, Foucault, 1988) who receive wages in exchange for their childcare services. The need for their services arises through acts of surveillance perpetrated against the parents of the children the Bettendorfs now care for by workers like Kelli. They are all cogs in the same machine.

Values play an important role in social work (Goldstein, 1990), but the “constellation of values” that constitute ethical social work are not necessarily agreed upon (Baines, 2011b; Campbell, 2012; Rossiter, 2001; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010). Both Kelli and the Bettendorfs believe that what they are doing is right and in the best interest of the children. The Bettendorfs’ values become important to this practice of sousveillance when we contextualize it as part of their child protection work, which in turn must be understood in relation to social work and linked to child welfare legislation.

Analysis of this digital media story shows how particular values play out in the assumptions of both the foster parents and the social worker and the expectations each of these parties holds around the outcomes of the case. This story shows how particular beliefs about race (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003), family composition, the balancing of blood ties and social ties (Hicks, 2003), best practices in child development and child attachment theory (Cooper, 2010), the importance of social work identity (Hick, 2001; IFSW.org), notions of self determination (Reamer, 1996), and beliefs about the benefits or desirability of diversity and difference operate in this case (Adam, 2003; Brock, 2003; Weedon, 1999).
Race is a significant issue in this digital story yet it is never spoken about, a reality that once more returns us to Pon’s (2009) consideration of social work’s challenging relationship with race and policies of assimilation. Race also connects *The Nervous CPS Worker* to *World Social Work Day 2010* in which David Jones considers the challenge of slums in Kenya while never discussing race and racism. This trend continues as we watch the Bettendorfs and Kelli Corbitt who are (or appear to be) “white” people, argue over the status of mixed race children placed in the care of the State. Other digital texts created by and about the Bettendorfs inform us that they wish to pursue inter-racial adoption (Katie 2006, July 2; Katie 2005, November 22). Pon (2009) describes inter-racial and inter-cultural practice as an area of social work where significant tension exists.

**Inter-Racial/Inter-Cultural Adoption**

Inter-racial/inter-cultural adoption is a particularly challenging area of social work rife with contradictions and disagreements over the threats and opportunities posed by these kinds of family relationships (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996; Sinclair 2009; Thomas Bernard & Marsman, 2009). Social work’s global track record of enacting inter-racial/inter-cultural adoption is not stellar. This history demonstrates social work’s role in colonization (Pon 2009; Sinclair 2009, Thomas Bernard & Marsman, 2009). We may well be witnessing a re-enactment of this history as this cast of white people argues over the right to control the bodies and status of the racialized children in this case.

The presence of this digital media story on YouTube is in part a reflection of this complicated history. As the Bettendorfs levy a claim of injustice because they are being prohibited from adopting “Marissa”, they also argue this is a violation of their rights, the rights of the children for whom they provide care and a violation of Marissa’s rights to a connection
with her siblings (Katie 2006, July 2; Katie 2006, February 7). Yet this story can just as easily be read as a response to the kinds of concerns Pon (2009) raises. In this framing, preventing the Bettendorfs from adopting Marissa is a kind of remediation. We can even understand the Bettendorfs’ protest in this case as a statement against State policies, past and present, resulting in harm to children in similar circumstances to Marissa (Pon, 2009).

Restrictions on inter-racial and inter-cultural adoption often rely on scholarship that suggests adoptive children benefit from connections to cultural communities of origin and the ability to “pass” as a natural member of their adoptive family (Crawford, 1992; Moriel, 2005; Sotiropoulos, 2008; Rottenberg, 2003; Thomas Bernard & Marsman, 2009). While this perspective is disputed, it is upheld by many concerned groups (Rottenberg, 2003; Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996; Sinclair, 2009; Thomas Bernard & Marsman, 2009) and is still embedded in many adoption policies and procedures (Hicks, 2009).

These ideas about the benefit of “passing” and “preservation” are concepts wrapped up in the normalization of biological families and a belief in the truth and value of phenotypes (Moriel, 2006; Weedon, 1999). These layers of normalization produce stigma (Brock, 2003) which is felt by adopted children and their families, and can in the context of inter-racial adoption be understood as a form of racism that stems from beliefs about the importance of ethnic and racial purity and racial superiority (Rottenberg, 2003; Scannapieco, & Jackson, 1996; Weedon, 1999).

Mixed race biological families may suffer similar stigma (Moriel, 2005; Sinclair, 2009). However, mixed race adoptive families may be exposed to multiple layers of stigma and interlocking oppression amplified by multiple subordinate identity positions that are a part
of the family’s social location and intersectional identities (Carniol, 2010; Heron, 2007, 2001; Sinclair, 2009). Marissa will not pass as a biological child of Katie and Jeff Bettendorf, but the potential stigma that this brings is something the Bettendorfs are already (most likely) familiar with, as most of the other children the Bettendorfs hope to adopt or have already adopted are mixed race.

The fact that the Bettendorfs have already engaged in inter-racial and inter-cultural adoption indicates they may be successful adopting Marissa based on their capacity to make a case about the rightness of this action. In considering this we must also contemplate “whiteness” as a social phenomena that can harm children of colour. Considering “whiteness” requires us to understand the Bettendorfs as “white” (Brock, 2003; Heron, 2007). While we cannot be certain of their racial identity, their “whiteness” is palpable in their physical presentation, in the image of their home and in the things they say and do in their digital texts (Katie, 2006, July 2; Katie, 2005, November 22.). If we understand whiteness as more than simply an aesthetic presentation of race (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003; Heron, 2007), we can understand whiteness as an ordering system that uses white racial identity as a principle that places white people and imperial ways of knowing and doing as the most socially valuable way of knowing, doing and being (Brock, 2003; Heron, 2007).

Whiteness is a kind of cultural currency that allows for access to resources and privilege, both deserved and unearned (Bishop 2009, Carniol, 2010; Heron, 2007; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003; Weedon, 1999), a currency that works best when embodied in a person with white skin but present also in people of colour when they perform whiteness through their behaviours, attitudes and values (Weedon, 1999). We can understand “whiteness” as a colonial force that dominates other identities and dominates practices that are a part of what constitute
these identities (Heron, 2007; Razak, 2005). Observing and analyzing the Bettendorfs’ digital media story clearly demonstrates whiteness in operation: they actively participate in commonplace practices of white supremacy and enact white ways of knowing, including the collection of ‘evidence’ to support their case. That being said, they are at the same time, not so white as to preclude parental intimacy with children who are not white.

The Bettendorfs’ whiteness is important because they are adopting mixed race children. It is a practice that brings up social work’s own traditions of white supremacy and our complacency in the implementation of governmental policies of assimilation and cultural genocide perpetrated on racialized people (Hart, 2009; Pon, 2009; Sinclair, 2009; Spivak 2004, 2008). Inter-racial adoption brings up the harm that social work has caused with its right making projects, often undertaken to enact scientifically proven benefits and evidence based practices, which can be read as Eurocentric “white” knowledge (Hart, 2009; Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996; Sinclair 2009; Weedon, 2009), concepts we have considered in the David Jones World Social Work Day 2010 digital media story.

These histories lead to child welfare practices that question the suitability of white parents who seek to adopt racialized kids. Parents are screened for their suitability to parent (Hicks, 2001). Where racialized children are to be adopted potential parents are screened to ensure they will not exploit the children, (for example) on the basis of unconscious selfish desires such as the kinds of “good self making projects” that Heron (2007) speaks of in her considerations of whiteness as a significant element in international development work. Some parents may want to be seen as social martyrs (Brookfield, 2009; Heron, 2009) and to claim moral goodness by virtue of “sacrificing” their white privilege by adopting racialized children (Heron, 2005; 2007; Moriel, 2009, Rossiter, 2007; Rottenberg, 2003; Sinclair, 2009).
Adoptive practice promoted by social work organizations concerned with Black and Aboriginal/Native/First Nations identity, emphasizes the importance of creating concordance between the race and ethnicity of kids and their adoptive parents (Gailey, 2000; Moriel, 2009; Rottenberg, 2003; Thomas Bernard & Marsman, 2009). Passing as “biologically related” becomes in some ways more important than being biologically related. Children who look like the people by whom they are parented are believed to be less likely to be questioned about their relationship to their parents, thus reducing the child’s lived experience of adoption stigma. That being said, international adoption practices continue to facilitate trans-racial adoption and promote the global trade of children (Bowie, 2004; Sotiropoulos, 2008; cite). Here class and economic status become important factors in assessing the safety of racialized children who may be cared for by white people.

If you can afford private inter-national, inter-racial adoption then it would appear it is an acceptable practice (Bowie, 2004; Sotiropoulos, 2008). However, if the state is involved in the process through child protection intervention the practice is seen as “risky business”, perhaps because of the state’s historical involvement in assimilation and cultural genocide. It suggests the market is seen to neutralize or account for risk (Spivak 2004). This raises questions about whether money creates a tolerance for the acquisition of children as artefacts (Spivak, 1986) – something loosely referenced in the digital media story World Social Work Day 2010. Alternatively, it may suggest that parents with money are believed to be less likely to be racist. Or, perhaps money is seen to allow the purchase of resources to compensate for the effect of stigma?

Another best practice in foster care and adoption suggests that where possible, sibling groups should be kept together (Gailey, 2000; Lorkovich, Piccola, Groza, Brindo, Marks,
Kinship and blood ties are seen as important and the loss of these connections is understood to be harmful to children (Lorkovich, et al., 2004; Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996; Sinclair, 2009). Yet, “ideal” limits on the number of children in a family also exist (Rosling, 2012) and therefore limits placed on the number of children who are allowed to live in a single ‘foster home’.

The concept of an ideal family size is yet another normalizing discourse (Brock, 2003) embraced by social work regulatory bodies. It is a perspective openly embraced and promoted by the IFSW during their most recent conference in Sweden in 2012 (see: http://swsd2012.creo.tv/sunday/hans_rosling/d1p8-hans_rosling). The “ideal” family is hetero-normative, and consists of two biological parents and two biological children; this model is ideal because it is believed to limit world population growth (Rosling, 2012). For families like the Bettendorfs with five biological children and five adopted children and another group of four foster kids (for a total of 14 people), this kind of norm is bad news. It’s another way that normalization may lead these children to experience stigma.

While all of these ideas point to the injustices the Bettendorfs’ foster kids may be facing, there may be some good reason for the child welfare authority to be concerned about race and racism in the Bettendorfs’ home. A closer look at the family blog reveals the Bettendorfs do have an “interesting” relationship with race. Katie Bettendorf muses about her children, a reflection that produces statements about the children’s appearance. For example, she refers to “Marissa’s dark skin” in a manner that suggests Marissa could be objectified by this “good” white woman (Katie, 2005, November 22). This statement of colourism suggests that these kids maybe at risk of the kinds of racism Pon (2009) suggests we need to attend to and that child welfare standards are meant to address.
As a child under the age of two, Marissa is by child welfare best practice standards “highly adoptable” (Pon, 2009; Sinclair, 2009). Marissa is not now living with any of her biological siblings. In fact, she has never lived with her biological siblings (Katie, 2006, April 5). On this basis, the agency may well feel there is little harm in placing Marissa for adoption outside of her sibling group, and based on Katie’s blog entries her current foster parents (not the Bettendofs) are already petitioning to adopt her (Katie, 2006 January). The tensions between the risks and benefits of Marissa’s adoption are many and these issues are tied to social work history and the meanings that the histories have beyond this digital media story. It is hard to know what is in Marissa’s best interest (Katie, 2006, February 8; Katie, 2006, November 5; Katie, November 7, 2006).

**Audience Comments**

The comments section of the Team Bettendorf YouTube channel extends the narrative of *The Nervous CPS Worker* beyond the confines of the digital media story. This element of the YouTube channel allows audiences to share their responses with the storymakers and other audience members. The active and longstanding conversation present in the comments section is unique among the texts considered in this thesis and is therefore being included in the analysis.

This practice of commenting allows the global audience to participate more actively in the process of meaning making related to this story. The level of participation is unique among the texts as most of the other stories included in this thesis have few (if any) comments. The comments tell us something about how the audience understands *The Nervous CPS Worker* and the ‘plight’ of the Bettendofs. As previously mentioned, sharing this story on YouTube has allowed the Bettendofs to raise awareness of their experiences and their concerns about the
treatment they have received from Kelli Corbitt and the Arizona child welfare authority. But sharing the story in this way does not guarantee the audience is reading the story in the way the Bettendorfs intended. The comment field around The Nervous CPS Worker contains around 500 comments. Comments continue to be added by audience members even six years after this story was posted. The topics raised in the comment field are wide ranging and include issues of “adoption, racism and parents’ rights”, and foster parents’ rights. As well, there is a discussion about the abusiveness of child protection workers and the significance of greed in case workers’ decision making activities. Many respondents comment on their personal experiences of abuse inside and outside of the system.

What is perhaps more surprising is the presence of a significant number (about 10%) of comments focusing on Kelli Corbitt’s gender and sexuality. These comments emphasize her choice of clothing, her posture and bodily movements, as well as her manner of speaking as some how abnormal (Brock, 2003) and unfeminine (Butler, 2004). This assessment of Kelli’s gender performance and identity by a noteworthy number of commenters, creates an understanding that frames Kelli as somehow lacking because she does not fit into the normative gender binary (Butler, 2004; Jagger, 2008).

These comments are virtually unchallenged by the Bettendorfs. From a critical social work perspective, this apparent lack of concern about the abusive nature of these comments and the homophobic, hetero-normative and gender-normative content of their channel, undermines the validity of the rights-based claims underlying the Bettendorfs’ advocacy.

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15 With one exception in which Katie Bettendorf suggests that one commenter “cool it”.
practice (Ife 2008; Reamer, 1998; Rossiter, 2001). It appears that the Bettendorfs remember some rights, while they forget some others.

Links to the other digital texts created by the family provide some explanation for the lack of in their activation of rights based claims making. Katie and Jeff describe themselves as “conservative Christians” (Katie 2005, January 11; Jeff 2009, October 1), an identity that suggests their lack of response to xenophobic and homophobic comments is rooted in understandings of morality as fixed and tied to specific deontological concerns (Reamer, 1998). As residents of the state of Arizona, their beliefs maybe be reflected in social policy and in community attitudes, which may further explain Bettendors’ comfort with these attitudes.

Upon closer examination, the homophobia and xenophobia present in the channel comments are echoed in some of the personal/family blog posts, suggesting that Katie and Jeff share this sentiment with their audience. Katie’s homophobia is also reflected in comments she makes about homosexuality as morally and spiritually wrong in her family, and when she expresses hoped for outcomes for Marissa (Katie, 2006, November 7).

Some comments on the Team Bettendorf YouTube channel link Kelli’s gender performance to her capability (Butler, 2006; Jagger, 2008) as a social worker. Here gender and sexuality become wrapped up in historical myths about the relationship between morality, gender and sexuality (Brook, 2003; Hicks, 2003). Kelli is described as a “dyke,” a “whore,” a “witch,” a “carpet muncher,” a “bull dagger” and “butch” in the comments; Kelli is digitally/virtually “queer bashed” and threatened with violence, her gender policed by the Bettendorfs’ followers (Poon & Ho, 2008). The comments section is also riddled with sexist
and anti-Semitic statements. The commenters connect Kelli’s role as an agent of the state to government intervention, which they see as an unwelcome intrusion into the rights, liberty, and freedom of citizens.

The comments about Kelli Corbitt’s gender and sexuality and her moral capacity as a social worker are questioned in some of the comments. A questioning that is understood to support the Bettendorfs and their rights making claims. These comments suggest that because Kelli is a “gender failure” she is a moral failure (Adams, 2003; Butler, 2004; Brock, 2003; Hicks, 2009; Hoy Couzens, 2005; Jagger, 2008; Sangster, 1996). This moral “lacking” places her professional status at risk (Brennan & Petitit, 2000; Reamer, 1998; Shields, 2008) and suggests she lacks the moral authority to make a reasonable assessment of the Bettendorfs’ capacity to adopt and parent Marissa. This is an antiquated argument that offers no understanding of oppression or the effects of normalization (Brock, 2003).

These arguments rest on an understanding that a woman, who cannot get even her femininity right (an already lacking state), is unworthy and unable to assess parental character and behaviour, particularly when those people possess normative morality expressed through normative gender performance and heterosexuality as the Bettendorfs do (Adams, 2003; Bulter, 2004, Jagger, 2004; Kinsman, 2003; Sangster, 1996). Gender performance plays a central role here and is linked to sexuality in these comments (Sangster, 1996). Morality and the historical normalizing discourses that link mental illness, criminality and homosexual are also present in these arguments (Adams, 2003; Kinsman, 2003). They are used to discredit Kelli’s ability to assess the Bettendorfs’ eligibility to adopt by discrediting her capacity as a social worker.
The Bettendorfs are misguided in their failure to challenge this kind of thinking by their audience. It could after all be as easily turned against them and their non-normative family. The arguments used to frame Kelli as unnatural and immoral are the very same arguments used to call into question the morality of non-biological parenting arrangements and to challenge the rightness of inter-racial/inter-cultural adoption. We can understand this inaction as undoing what the Bettendorfs hope to achieve through their self-advocacy (Bishop 1994; Mullaly 2009; Reamer, 1998; Razak 2002; Smith, 2010).

We can also understand these comments, based on the relationship that exists between the Bettendorfs and Kelli Corbitt, to be a kind of online workplace harassment. This “digital harassment” raises questions about the need to understand the digital domain as an extension of the workplace. Social media blurs the boundaries between the workplace and the private social world when people use these spaces to interrogate their work.

For many social workers advocacy practice is a form of social work that actualizes social work’s social change goals. The Nervous CPS Worker invites us to consider advocacy practices in the field in a different light. Much of the scholarship on advocacy demonstrates a process that operates on a continuum (Hardcastle & Powers 2004, La Rose, 2009), or a political spectrum (Fraser, 2005), beginning with collaborative engagement, moving on to more conflict based activities only as collaboration proves unfruitful (George, 2006, Hardcastle & Powers, 2004; La Rose, 2009).

For many of us the idea of challenging the status quo can be a very appealing activity and the desire to “fight the good fight” can make the conflict-based practices of advocacy more “fun” than the negotiated collaborations that are often part of what makes advocacy happen.
Collaboration requires patience which can be difficult when the desire for change produces a sense of urgency (Foucault, 1988; George, 2006). I believe this is one of the things that leads social workers away from advocacy work. Advocacy is a practice requiring a delicate and deliberate ethical engagement that seeks to balance “process and outcome” – a balance that appears to have gone horribly wrong for the people involved in the story *The Nervous CPS Worker*. 

Possibilities for advocacy practices that emphasize collaboration and resistance to normalization could be the basis on which the Bettendorfs and Kelli Corbitt create a contingent solidarity (Foucault, 1988; Hoy Couzens, 2005). The Bettendorfs have created for themselves a non-normative family comprised of adopted children, biological children, and foster kids where some people share blood ties to some but not all of the other people in the family, while others share social ties exclusively. Some members of “Team Bettendorf” are older but have lived in the family for less time than younger people. Some people look alike, while others look nothing like any other member of the family. This mish-mash of people and connections means that this family could easily be defined as a “queer family.”

**Queerness**

In using the term queer in this context, I am framing queer theory as a useful perspective for considering challenges to normalization and allowing for “the politicization of social categories by facilitating critique…” (Eng, Halberstam, Estemban-Muno, 2005, pg. 1). While queer theory is most commonly aligned with sexuality studies and considerations of gay and lesbian identity categories, queer theory can be used in ways that extend far beyond these contexts (Eng. et al., 2005; Scheman, 1997; Smith, 2011). The perspective’s concern with
“identity, kinship and belonging” and contextualization within the “political” and “historical” supports the relevance of considering a digital media story that focuses on foster care and adoption through this lens (Eng et al., 2005; Hicks, 2009; Scannapieco & Jackson 1996).

Eng et al. (2005) present contemporary queer studies that bring “…critical attentions on public debates about the meaning of democracy and freedom, citizen and immigration, family and community, and the alien and the human in all their national and global manifestation” (pg. 2). The Bettendorfs’ story tells us they are concerned with being accepted and having their desires honoured and sanctioned on the basis of “rights” and notions of what is morally “right” (Ife, 2008) as they relate to practices of foster care and adoption.

Their desire to extend the idea of family to children with whom they are not biologically related and with whom they do not share a racial or ethnic “connection” can be understood as a demand for a social “openness” and an “open reading” of “people and positions” in family contexts, readings that are consistent with what queer theory seeks to produce (Eng et al., 2005 pg. 3). Queer theory further promotes the idea that access to rights and acceptance of life practices that run counter to dominant normalized understandings is possible. It is a perspective that suggests these ends can be achieved without sacrificing one’s values and beliefs or being remade as political subjects (Ibid. pg. 3; Scheman, 1997). By considering the Bettendorfs through the lens of queer theory we are invited to mobilize “a broad social critique” by "rethink[ing] relationships of intersectionality and normalization from multiple points of view” (Eng et al., 2005, pg. 4).

One of the queer elements in the Bettendorf home is the size of the family (teambettendorf.com/about-us/). By social work standards they have “too many” children. The
ideal family consists of two biological children and their two heterosexual parents (Rosling, 2012). This framing of the ideal family is supported by child protection services through ties to the IFSW.

The critique of Kelli Corbitt’s gender on the TeamBettendorf YouTube channel is another queer element that requires analysis. While I do not find Kelli to be particularly unfeminine, there is most certainly a possibility that this worker could be sexually queer or gender queer. Kelli appears for the home visit dressed in a button-down shirt and jeans, with a somewhat athletic posture and authoritative stance – not the kind of conservative Christian womanhood that Katie displays, but the gender roles in the Bettendorf home also appear somewhat arbitrary, given that the boys sew and the girls use computers (teambettendorf.com/about-us/).

Both the Bettendorfs and Kelli Corbitt display some non- hegemonic identity positions. The different kinds of queerness that these people share could be the basis on which they might form an alliance. The Bettendorfs might find that Kelli (assuming she is queer) is extremely effective at mobilizing resources for other people who also live a queer existence, even if their queerness is not the same as her queerness (Hicks, 2009). The potential that Kelli’s dress and demeanour are embodied forms of gender resistance suggest that Kelli could be an ally to the Bettendorfs by resisting the normalizing processes that are a part of adoption screening (Hick, 2009; Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996), but it appears the Bettendorfs and their followers are unable to see or embrace this possibility. Instead the Bettendorfs collude with the audience by promoting an image of Kelli as the immoral dyke who is working against them when in fact the Bettendorfs are working against themselves.
This story raises a lot of questions about the working conditions faced by workers and the role that digital technology might play in our work as we move forward. YouTube allows an in home visit to become a globally accessible digital text exposing the worker and the children to risk and harm. While regulation of social media use in social work may be the simple answer, the use of social media isn’t really the issue here. This story illustrates how social media makes public all that is part of social work practice, all that is risky, all that is unresolved, all that is hateful in the work that we do. Regulation won’t resolve the issues but it will make them less public, making the need to address these concerns appear less urgent.

The Bettendorfs’ activism is at the same time both a success and a failure. They accomplish one set of advocacy goals while they break another set of advocacy rules. As Hansen (2004) suggests, advocacy practice can be understood as a kind of:

…”double-voicing” of the “confrontational” and the “invitational,” a site where resistance is always contaminated by identification, where activism is complicated by emotion… (pg. 22, author’s emphasis).

The Bettendorfs are contemporary, if not ideal, social work subjects. Kelli is an ideal social work object, as the Bettendorfs have constituted her through this digital media story. All of this together suggests there is still a lot of work to do in social work to build solidarity and working relationship among people who work within the same system.

The Bettendorfs present us with a ‘story’ about their experiences with the child-welfare system. The tale they tell is an act of self-advocacy created to leverage support for their cause and to demonstrate the ways in which uncaring workers violate their rights and the rights of their foster children in a biased system. However, when placed in its larger context the
narrative created by the Bettendorfs becomes undone. It illustrates Pon’s (2009) message about the challenges of seeing social work as a “good” in light of our history of wrong making, but in this case “it is not immediately obvious who the good, the bad and the ugly are…” (Moriel, 2005, pg. 180). The events depicted in the story when placed in their broader socio-political and economic context reveal how these influences shape the interactions between the worker and the foster parents. Considering these underlying influences blurs the line between victims and villains, a line the Bettendorfs’ try to draw. Dissolving the binary in this narrative shows the complexity of what is taking place, resulting in a tale of competition between versions of “better and worse” and “right and wrong” rather than a story of definite wrong doing and moral supremacy (Brennan & Pettit, 2000; Ife, 2008; Reamer, 1998).
Chapter 9: Bobbie the Social Work Slayer

The digital media story *Bobbie the Social Work Slayer* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VK3xYG-5fA) is a satirical look at a child protection systems’ interactions with aboriginal families. Like Erahoneybee’s *Song About a Child Welfare Agency*, *Bobbie the Social Work Slayer* uses parody, irony and humour to consider the challenges present in contemporary social work. However, where Erahoneybee uses humour to reflect on her own experiences of this work, *Bobbie the Social Work Slayer* uses these conventions to consider themes related to social work’s history with First Nations people as clients. *Bobbie the Social Work Slayer* highlights themes brought to the fore in *The Nervous CPS Worker* and within our last digital story *Social Worker Overload*, presenting us with social workers who fail to live up to the complex ideals of social work and to the challenges posed by racism and cultural oppression when attempting to live these ideals. Like the other texts in this thesis, *Bobbi* considers remembering, forgetting and resisting as fundamental aspects of what allows social work to take place in contemporary neoliberal contexts.

*Bobbie the Social Work Slayer* is hilarious in its presentation, yet the topic it deals with isn’t funny at all (King, 2005, pg. 105). This paradox draws (once again) on the postmodernist traditions of parody, irony and wit as resources that make analysis of emotionally difficult topics more accessible for reflection (Hutchison, 1989; King, 2005; Shepard, 2005).

Meaning is conveyed in this parody through prudent use of both auditory and visual elements. The auditory material is predominantly made up of dialogue, which is cleverly scripted although not always well delivered by the actors. The visuals are multi-layered and meaning can be gleaned from both the foreground action and the background setting. Post-
production editing and effects as well as film techniques create movement, visual action that further enhances meanings. Title and credits round out the formal information provided to the audience.

The story also gains a significant amount of meaning from the contexts imbedded in the narrative. The meaning of First Nations identity, native humour and two spirit identities are extremely important to meaning making in *Bobbi*. This story brings to life Pon’s (2009) understanding of forgetting in both the text and subtext of this story. It also engages the power of humour, irony, wit and parody as practices of analysis and forms of critique.

Understandings of trans-racial and trans-cultural social work practice are very clearly present in this text. We are reminded of social work’s historical failure to work effectively across cultural differences. It reminds us also of the enduring legacy of the harm born out in the daily-lived experiences of marginalization and oppression in the lives of Aboriginal individuals. We are also reminded that marginalization is not a totalizing experience – within marginalization there are powerful understandings and ways of engaging in resistance. This text also explores issues of marginalization that exist within marginalized communities. It challenges assumptions about “who” saves and who gets saved and how even heroes can have their own abject subjectivities and yet produce good for the people they seek to help (Bernstein, 1992).

**Visual Analysis**

*Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* presents us with the story of a family visited by zombie child protection workers. These undead social workers seek to apprehend the children of this family. These workers may be zombies, but they are in full compliance with the rules,
regulations and best practices of child welfare legislation, arriving equipped with a court order that supports removing the children.

At the hands of these monster social workers, the parents are powerless to prevent the apprehension. However, they are “saved” when Bobbi the Social Work Slayer, an “abject hero,” (Bernstein, 1992) arrives on the scene and rescues the family from the clutches of the evil social workers. Bobbi’s slaying power is commanded in part by using the workers’ own tools against them; for example, Bobbi uses the social workers’ status as unionized workers to prevent them from crossing a picket line that she creates with her superpower. The story uses comic book conventions and memes drawn from feminist science fiction fantasy to present a social work story that is queer, in the richest tradition of this theory (Wolmark, 1994; Watson, 2005). In these and other ways, Bobbi the Social Work Slayer brings to life understandings of native humour as central to the practices of resisting, remember and forgetting presented in this story.

The video opens with an “ideal family” (Hicks, 2009) – mother, father, son and daughter – gathered together for an evening in front of the television. This image of the nuclear family becomes less ideal as we take a closer look at the family’s living environment. Rather than a sturdy, comfortable ‘family home’, the “home” occupied by this family presents as a “welfare hotel”. Here the furnishings and possessions scattered in the room suggest these folks are living all of their life in one room. Their kitchen appears to consist of a bar fridge and microwave oven. Litter box and stroller sit in close proximity to the TV set. The comfortable place to relax is the floor.
This notion of the “welfare hotel” holds both specific and symbolic meaning. It is a type of housing that suggests this family is experiencing either “a crisis”, or some chronic issue that prevents access to more stable, permanent, affordable housing. ‘Welfare hotels’ are a highly stigmatized form of housing, symbolic of “emergency” situations experienced by people receiving social assistance and without other kinds of support (Bennett, 1990; Cayote, 2008; Hayes, 2012).

While this kind of housing may be readily understood in this way, further meaning emerges through deeper examination. Decreased state support for social welfare makes a myth of the idea that any available affordable housing option is “temporary”. What we once understood as a temporary housing solution for crisis situations has become, in the neoliberal era of retrenchment, often a permanent kind of housing as the notion of temporary is now a kind of resource that serves people in situations that extend over much longer periods of time than could reasonably be termed ‘an’ emergency.

“Welfare hotels” are a kind of housing with a reputation for being “substandard” and “risky” (Bennett, 1990; Hayes, 2012). What was once understood in social work circles as a scary symbol of everything wrong with the U.S. social welfare system (a symbol that allowed us to thumb our noses at our friends to the south) is now as much part of the social service infrastructure in urban and suburban Canada as ever it was in the U.S. In many Canadian communities, just like in the U.S., these hotels and motels have become a substitute for affordable long-term housing. But, hotels and motels are only re-purposed as emergency housing when they fail to turn enough profit in their original use (Bennett, 1990; Hayes, 2012).
Placing people with no other housing options in unsuccessful motels turns the poorest and most marginalized into a contingency market for bankrupt hospitality enterprises. Moreover, this connection between social work and the hospitality industry connects us back to *World Social Work Day 2010*, suggesting that hospitality and tourism training and social work might have a few more things in common than apparent at first glance.

While “welfare hotels” may have a bad reputation, these rooms function as home for many people living in poverty (Bennett, 1990; Cayote, 2008; Hayes, 2012). *In Bobbi the Social Work Slayer*, it is clear this family is at “home”. We see mother, father, daughter and son relaxing on the floor of their room in front of the television. The scene is visually peaceful, but it is disturbed by the sound of static from the TV set. In spite of poor reception and the annoying noise, the “mother” character in this story is absorbed in the program she is watching through “snowy” reception.

Closer observation of the screen reveals this woman is looking longingly at a barely visible scene of a well-appointed dining room. Considering this scene as a metaphor, the image conveys material comfort, family and security. Yet the snowy, unclear picture on the TV screen suggests this is something of a "snow job," something that is only partially true, that brings with it other kinds of loss and contradictions. It’s hard not to consider the relationship between snow and whiteness, and between colonialism and dining rooms.

The visual elements of this story include a lot of “movement” created by camera work and post-production editing. This movement gives many scenes in this digital media story a chaotic or confusing character. This “movement” relies on changes of camera angles and editing techniques. Although this video does not employ many post-production effects, those it
does serve to mark changes from one scene to the next and keep the story moving in a progressive linear manner. The motel room is the sole location in this story, although we see it from many levels and from several different angles, which suggests multiple cameras were used.

Our gaze is pointed first at the image of the mother watching television and then directs us to the image of the “father” figure who is shown snoring away curled up with the children on the floor. The image of sleeping children suggests peacefulness, warmth and safety (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). But around the children there is debris, a bottle of water, a beverage can and a glass juice bottle. At the back of the scene we can see a cat litter box too close to the place where people are relaxing.

From this visual the scene changes and we slowly see the camera pan across other furnishings in the room including a folding chair, a lamp, an armchair and a child's stroller into view. As the camera angle widens we can see that the television is resting on two folding chairs rather than a proper TV stand, a bar fridge and microwave oven. A stuffed bear and leopard print pillow cushion the children as they sleep. They are dressed in day clothes.

This image of relaxation and peacefulness is disturbed by the sound of three well-spaced knocks. An abrupt edit follows this sound and the visual cuts to the door. Another abrupt edit shows the television screen where a monkey is holding a telephone, winding the cord around it, symbolic perhaps of the “monkey business” that is about to unfold. This image, like that of the dining room, is shown through snowy reception. One more quick edit moves us back to the image of the door, followed by a fast cut back to the father who moves from a state
of sleep to alert confusion. He is heard sighing as he gets up off the floor to respond to the knocking.

Another edit brings us back to the image of the television. As the shot widens we can see that there are in fact two televisions balanced on the chairs, one small and one large. One television is blank, the other now shows a snowy bright white image. On top of the second television is a baseball cap, a remote control and a set of “rabbit ears” (antenna) covered in tin foil which can be understood as a home made device for improving TV reception. Hanging above the TVs is a banner of Bruce Lee in a stylized kung-fu pose ready to use the power of his opponents against them (Sorenson, 2008, pg. 181).

The image cuts back to the door as the father character moves into the scene. The actor occupying this role performs in a slap-stick way. He moves towards the door bending to look through the peep-hole. A dialogue takes place between the father and the unseen visitor who remains on the other side of the door:

Father: “Hello.”
Voice from the door: “Mr. Johnson?”
Father: “Yes. Who is it?”
Voice from the door: “Social Services”

There is an abrupt cut to an image of an open window covered with a grid of anti-theft bars. In the window we see a Zombie holding a paper described later in the dialogue as a "court order." The zombie’s hands are covered in dirt. Its face is whitened and covered with sores and lesions. It reaches in through the open window and through the bars pulling itself against the window while attempting to push its head though the bars. The zombie growls and howls, a scream is heard.
There is a fast cut back to the image of the door, which is now open. Here we see a zombie who holds up a social work identification card. This zombie begins to speak:

“We are here for your children... Ha, Ha, Ha...”

The camera angle changes to show another zombie social worker crawling across the floor. The crawling zombie and the zombie in the window growl and screech, and the crawling zombie declares:

“You are unfit parents”.

Here rapid editing and camera work create a sense of confusion. The camera angle and verbal sequence are not aligned and they jump rapidly back and forth from one image to another. There is yet another abrupt change in the camera angle. From this point of view we see the father returning to his children and clustering the family together pulling them into his chest. The children are awake now and both parents hold one another and their children. The children huddle against their parents. The girl child covers her ears with her hands. The boy looks distressed. He cries out and whines.

As the camera moves back to the social workers, the Mother character yells:

“Get away from my babies! Get away!”

The crawling zombie social worker grabs hold of the father’s arm as he moves closer into the family grouping. The zombie social worker standing near the door says:

"Give up, Mr. Johnson. You are Mr. Johnson? We have a court order.”
The camera angle abruptly changes again as a new character arrives on scene. Here a dark haired woman wearing a black bra with gold studs, gold armbands and a cape appears. She is further adorned with a large plastic sword. She grabs the court order from the zombie social worker and yells:

“You know where you can put this!”

She motions that she is stuffing the order up the rectum of the social worker. The zombie social worker leans forward, his tongue hanging out of his mouth.

A few seconds later a fight erupts choreographed to the song “Kung Fu Fighting” (Douglas & Appaiah, 1974). Slapstick, stylized fighting occurs and the zombies are beaten back by the superhero. As the fight ends the camera shot refocuses on the family. The mother asks:

“What are you doing Bobbi?”

‘Bobbi’, it appears, is the name of the superhero character who has helped this family escape the grips of the zombie child protection social workers. Bobbi replies:

“I am drawing an 'on strike line'. These social worker zombies are union workers. They would never cross over a picket line.”

The Father then proclaims:

“Good thinking Bobbi!”
At this point the zombies appear to lose their power. They begin whimpering, barking and growling but with much less energy than before. As Bobbi motions with her sword that a “picket line” is being cast, the zombie social workers declare:

“Shit. No overtime.”

Bobbie replies:

“That's right! Who's your daddy, bitch?!”

As Bobbi continues to stand her ground, the zombie social workers retreat. They are dragged from the room as the Mother and Father proclaim together:

“Thanks Bobbi!”

The camera pans in to a close-up of Bobbi who proclaims:

“Where there is injustice in child protection. Where there [are] gaps in social services... Until somebody rips the hanky out of my left ass cheek, I will be there to fill the crack!”

Bobbi grabs her crotch to emphasize the word ‘crack.’ We then cut away from the crotch shot and back to a head and shoulders shot of Bobbi. The frame freezes on the close up of Bobbi and the credit “Bobbi the Social Work Slayer” appears across the screen.

Context of the Story

Bobbi the Social Work Slayer is a wild and hilarious story to view. The general context of this story provides us with some information about its purpose. The video was produced for the 2003 imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival held in Vancouver, BC and tubed by
DGAProductions. The presence of this digital media story on YouTube can be understood as an extension of the live community Festival to the digital media environment (Shifman, 2009; Lange, 2009).

The relationship of this story to the imagineNATIVE Festival is an important aspect of meaning making. This video was part of an event entitled *Children of the Rainbow* held during the 2003 festival. As a special themed event, *Children of the Rainbow* was an evening of performance art, film and new media honouring two spirit artists’ works, which I will further discuss below. Duane Gustant Aucion produced the event (DGAProductions, 2007 [OutLook TV]) and appears to be behind the *DGA Productions* YouTube Channel that houses *Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* and many other digital stories produced from festival works. Bobbi is a fairly popular text having received 2116 views (as of August 13, 2013). Beyond this brief information pieced together from a number of Internet based texts and a review of Aucion’s acting CV online (http://www.myspace.com/dgaproductions), I have been unable to find additional references to the *Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* digital story.

Here the concept of YouTube as a “digital archive” is a useful tool for understanding the capacity of digital media story telling to support memorial and remembering. YouTube can be understood as a place where histories are collected and shared (Snickars & Vondreau, 2009; Green & Burgess, 2009). The accessibility of YouTube to the general public allows us to re-understand an archive as a place that supports more grassroots approaches to collecting and preserving digital materials (Burgess & Green, 2009; Wahlberg, 2009). This in turn allows for more open access to archived material than might be available in more traditional or formal private archives (Burgess & Green, 2009; Ellessauer, 2009). As a public archiving space, YouTube allows people to make their own decisions about what they post as tools of

Seen as an archive, YouTube may be understood as one of the remedies to the kind of forgetting Pon (2009) cautions us about, a kind of forgetting that can be a remaking of history. It is often said that history is written by the ’winners’ i.e. the power elite that controls the creation of texts that mark what is to be remembered and by default what is to be forgotten (Mullaly, 2009; Burgess & Green, 2009; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009).

The alternative that YouTube provides may be understood as a dramatically different kind of archive (Burgess & Green, 2009; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009). YouTube as it currently operates is an archive maintained by people who have access to the Internet (Snickars & Vondreau, 2009; Burgess & Green, 2009), the vast majority of whom would not be understood as a power elite even though they might be privileged in many regards (Kidd, 2010).

Two Spirit People

Bobbi the Social Work Slayer is but one digital story on the DGA Productions YouTube channel, which describes itself as dedicated to “2 spirited productions with humour as its backbone” (DGAProductions [Channel]). Literature on two spirit identity presents the notion of a First Nations’ framing of gender and sexual liminality (Cooper, 2008; Heath Justice, 2008), a perspective that is described by some as having significant spiritual meaning (Cooper, 2008; Heath Justice, 2008). However, it may also be understood as a linguistic expression or conceptualization of the presence of both male and female traits within a single person (Scoufield, 2008, pg. 165). Native scholars have liberally associated the term “two spirit” with
gay and lesbian identities and queer liberation movements (Cooper, 2008; Heath Justice, 2008; Scoufield, 2008).

These points of connection suggest the term queer and the concept of queer theory are perspectives that have a relationship with two spirit selves (Scoufield, 2008) and therefore are important tools for understanding *Bobbi the Social Work Slayer*. However, it is important to remember as well that queerness and queer theory as mainstream Eurocentric understandings do not replace the full meaning of two-spirit identity, nor should their use be understood as a collapsing of this knowledge.

**First Nations Humour**

The connection that DGA Productions establishes between the queerness of Two Spirit people and humour is very important. Humour is central to the *Bobbi* story and to many of the other stories from the *Children of the Rainbow* event. In these contexts, humour can be understood as a powerful tool for meaning making. Analyzing humour in the *Bobbi* story requires us to develop an understanding of the relationship between First Nations people and humour as a resource system for meaning making (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

To begin, Hirch (2005) describes humour as a phenomena that activates a number of native traditions including, “skilled storytelling,” preservation of “ritual practices” and practices of shamanism in which “ritual clowns” engaged in “privileged…ridicule, defile[ment]…[and] sexual humour” (2005, pg. 102), elements clearly present in the *Bobbi* story.

First Nations humour is described as extending beyond words, as embedded in culture and in language itself (Hirch, 2005). This point is illustrated through discussions of Native
language that relies on humour as part of linguistic function (Hirch, 2005, pg. 105). Therefore bringing particular kinds of humour into storytelling means infusing the story with ties to culture and language even if these are not spoken about or even spoken within the humour narrative. Froman (2005) describes native humour as a “coping mechanism…to deal with five hundred years of colonization and to help non-native people [to] understand” the experiences of First Nations people (pg. 135). Thus we can understand this use of humour as a practice of remembering (Pon, 2009).

Lousie ProFeit- LeBlanc (2005) describes aboriginal humour as a resource system for “teaching life lessons” (pg. 147). It is a humour that speaks of the lives of those who are the “poorest of our populations”; this humour “stems from those whose lives are a constant struggle, full of the strife and extreme hardship associated with poverty” (pg. 147). ProFeit-LeBlanc (2005) sees Native humour as that which shows “resilience” because it shows the ability to “look at life’s tests and laugh at them…” (pg. 147). It is a humour that “lifts spirits” (pg. 147).

There is much agreement in the literature that humour is a practice of survival and a marker of this survival (Hirch, 2005; Hayden Taylor, 2005; Ferguson, 2005; Froman, 2005; Highway 2008; King 2005). It may also be understood as a device used to “deal with the pain that inevitably accompanies poverty and marginalization” (Hirch, 2005, pg. 106). First Nations humour is a humour that speaks of “violence and trauma.” (Hirch, 2005, pg. 105). It is a way of remembering that First Nations people have been forced to “endure the array of oppressions” (Ibid. pg. 170).
In exploring the processes of aboriginal humour King (2005) uses the work of Penn (n.d.) to explore the notion of “satire.” He describes satire as that which:

“…pokes fun at something in such a way that we recognize our connection to it, see it as an instance of self awareness, that ‘somethingness’ in our selves in a way that we can evoke, change or induce understanding of the satirized behaviour” (as cited pg. 171).

In further considering how First Nations humour happens, Ferguson (2005) presents us with three different categories of “Native humour: 1) not jokes (pg. 124), 2) in jokes (pg. 125), and 3) our jokes (pg. 128). The concept of “not jokes” encompasses jokes about native people told by non-natives, usually “at the expense of native people” (Ferguson, 2005, pg. 124). These are ‘white people’s jokes’ and generally fall into what is largely described as “bigot humour” i.e. humour that relies on stereotypes and offensiveness as the key to “not being funny” (Ibid. pg. 124).

In contrast, “in jokes” are defined as jokes told by native people when “white people are in the room” (Ferguson, 2005 pg. 125). These jokes are both “self deprecating” and have a “political edge” (Ibid. pg. 125). This humour sometimes draws on “iconography” as a tool for making white people feel they know something about native culture; one might say that the allusion to this insider knowledge as something held by white people is the joke, a gentle joke that both strokes and smacks the ego of the white audience (Ibid. pg. 125) and it is one layer of humour present in the Bobbi story. Ferguson stresses that this humour is not meant to make anyone feel uncomfortable, or left out. It does however, clearly shift the power dynamic of
bigot humour and disarms white people by leading them to think about what they have assumed or enacted in their interactions with native humour.

Finally, “our jokes” are jokes that “tell the truth” (Ferguson, 2005, pg. 128). These jokes deal with content that “focuses on the specificity of the aboriginal way of life” (Ibid., pg. 128). They rely on cultural and experiential knowledge, reflexive knowledge and knowledge of linguistic practices (Ibid., pg. 131). This category of humour is part of First Nations oral storytelling traditions that carry on today in such practices as play writing (Ibid. pg. 131).

Hirch (2005) presents us with the idea of “trickster humour” as an important category of First Nations humour and one that benefits our analysis of Bobbi the Social Work Slayer. This type of humour is used to “teach cultural truths” (pg. 108). The “trickster” is described:

“as an unrealistic, expressionistic, and supernatural figure, half hero, half fool… [T]he Trickster…exhibits a range of contradictory characters and qualities: good and evil, male and female, human and animal, creative and destructive, sacred and profane. He/she is the creator and the destroyer, the humorous rogue, the clown as well as the cynical, malicious swindler, an imposter who, with no concept of moral or social values follows his/her passion and appetites…” (Hirch 2005, pg. 108).

In providing examples of Trickster stories, Hirch (2005) draws on the work of Thomson Highway (n.d.), whose work emphasizes the importance of Trickster learning and the artist’s role in telling Trickster stories (pg. 109). These stories bring to life humour that relies heavily on “context” and which allows the trickster to be a symbol of “comic liberation” (Hirch, 2005, pg. 109). Hirch further suggests that the Trickster is a multimodal storytelling
device, “comic” at the first level of reading, but which at closer examination reveals a story “involving distressing subject matter” (2005, pg. 110). Thus we might understand Bobbi as a “trickster tale.” (Ibid. pg. 110) as it brings us “laughter that might occur at what seems like the most inappropriate moment… [which]…disrupts our usual responses to this kind of difficult subject matter and therefore may allow meaning to penetrate us in a different way” (pg. 110).

Hirch (2005) suggests that the Trickster is an effective way of sharing stories that address “historical misconceptions” because of the Trickster’s cultural role in “the genre of resistance literature” (pg. 111). The Trickster can combine the un-combinable and mediate symbols in texts that bring to life important myths, legends and fables (Ibid. pg. 111). King (2005) suggests humour can facilitate moments of shared understanding. He asserts that the idea of “a community of selves laughing as a group at ourselves is a tempting idea…” (pg. 171) even when “humour is not necessarily about happiness any more than it is about laughter” (pg. 175). King (2005) suggests that humour is often a process of “self reflexive satire” (pg. 180). He suggests that native people laugh at “misfortunes…catastrophes…sexist and racist jokes” which can be understood as a way of identifying First Nation people’s “fears…and hatred” (King 2005 pg.181). However, King asserts that First Nations humour is at its best “when we laugh at ourselves.” (2005, pg. 181) which in the Bobbi story is clearly part of what is taking place.

King (2005) disputes the benefit of the kind of definition I am attempting to construct, suggesting definitions are a distraction that keeps us from “something we can see and hear, if we simply pay attention.” (pg. 183). He sees definitions as potentially distracting from our capacity to be present to the performance of the thing we are seeking to define. Thus defining humour might mean that we are missing the joke or “trying to insist that native humour
measure up to the definition, even though we know that humour will change while definitions, once struck, will not.” (Ibid.; pg. 183). To this point he states:

...in the end, it’s probably wiser and more judicious to put nothing in writing and pretend we know what were talking about, so that, when the need arises, we can change our minds and never have to worry about being wrong or right… (2005, pg. 183).

Convergence and Identity

These perspectives on First Nations humour tie closely to the literature on humour in LGBT communities. The identity of “other” that is relevant to native contexts is a shared experience that produces similar responses in some LGBT communities. Both “Firstness” and “queerness” are present in two spirit identity and bring specific ways of knowing and ways of doing humour that are visible in the Bobbi story. Thus, the humour present in this narrative might be understood as a convergence of multiple identities, processes and contexts (Hutchison, 1989; Shepard, 2005; Sorenson, 2008). These positions are mediated, working together to produce a “two spirit humour” – a dimension DGA describes as the “backbone” of its self-referential phenomenon, its resistance and claims making process that represent the importance of these liminal/convergent spaces.

In a setting where marginalization and oppression (on multiple levels and as an intersecting process) limit the capacity of voices to be heard by privileged and powerful ears (Foucault, 1988; Rosenberg 2004; Spivak, 2004), humour can become a powerful communication resource (Hutchison, 1989; Sorensen, 2008; Shepard 2005). The relationship

16 In the literature I reviewed the term two spirit was not capitalized. However in the spirit of hooks (1992), Two Spirit might also be a correct presentation of this term.
between post-modernist understandings, queer theory and humour is well represented in the cultural studies and queer theory literatures (Shepard 2005; Sorensen, 2008).

The power of humour to allow access to painful understandings also connects us to the idea of intersectionality (Carniol, 2005; Heron, 2005; Rossiter 2001), which suggests that the two spirit peoples’ use of humour may speak to the particular challenges they face in having their voices heard (Cooper, 2008). Some analysis suggests that marginalized sexual and gender identities can be seen as significant threats in communities where marginalization and oppression are present more generally (Berlandt & Freeman, 1993; Callaghan, 2007; Cooper, 2008; Gates Jr., 1993; Goldberg, 1993; Halpern, 2002; Poon & Ho, 2008; Scheman, 1997; Scofield, 2008). The internalization of mainstream hetero-normativity can become a tool for silencing ‘queer’ people in marginalized communities, even when broad spectrums of gender identities and sexualities have an ethno-cultural/social history (Callahan, 2007; Gates Jr., 1993; Goldberg, 1993; Halpern, 2002; Scheman, 1997).

Assuming that some of this analysis is useful in considering two spirit people’s lived experiences, the programmers of the 2005 imagineNative Festival might be seen as seeking change when they allocated resources to develop this first *Children of the Rainbow* event (DGA Production [OutLook]). Guston Aucoin commented in an interview that also appears on the DGA Productions YouTube channel, that he was asked by the festival producers to develop the event when no two spirit content was slated for the festival (DGA Productions [OutLook]). As the first two spirit focused event in the festival’s history, *Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* and a number of other digital media stories and performances at Children of the Rainbow, gave voice to these identities and experiences and continue to mark this moment through the YouTube environment (Burgess & Green, 2009).
This digital media story is a kind of remembering, a memorial text activating many other kinds of remembering. In this video, humour, parody, satire and wit become central tools for meaning making. They can be seen at work in Bobbi’s super-hero motifs, comic book style writing and feminist science fiction/fantasy discourses (Byers, 2000; White, 2008; Wolmark, 1994). These genres link into particular resource systems and communication devices bringing these into the Bobbi story and shaping the audience’s reading of it. (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; King, 2005, Kress, 2003; Cameron & Maslen, 2010).

**Intertextuality**

*Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* can also be seen as a satirical presentation of the genre *feminist science fiction fantasy* and as a spoof of one of the most popular contemporary characters of the genre: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Byers, 2000; DiGregario, 2006; White, 2008). A popular and long running television show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was one of the most successful productions of feminist sci-fi fantasy to enter mainstream media (Byers, 2000; DiGregario, 2006; White, 2008). Other powerful examples include *Xena the Warrior Princess*, and *Wonder Woman*.

Feminist sci-fi fantasy presents female characters as heroes in scenarios where they battle villains and foes. Here it is important to note that in the vast majority of these texts, and in all of the mainstream representations of the female superhero, the heroines are white women (Byers, 2000, pg. 57), a fact that we might want to hold onto as we consider this First Nations story of anti-child welfare heroics. The opponents these super-heroes fight usually take the form of mythological creatures or bio-engineered super-villains. Regardless of the power of history or science, these demons are no match for these liberated gals whose femininity is often presented as a hyper sexual caricature and who become sex goddesses in the pursuit of good
(Heath Justice, 2008; White, 2008). These heroes sport costumes that show off their bodies and reveal that physical power (Heath Justice, 2008) – they titillate and intimidate.

In the case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the central character (Buffy) is a teen cursed with exceptional powers to kill mythical archetypes of evil including vampires, zombies, demons and other super creatures of the underworld. Buffy, so the story goes, attracts these creatures (Byers, 2000, pg. 7). She attends school in close proximity to what are referred to in the show as “hell mouths”, gateways from the underworld to the living world through which evil travels.

Buffy’s life isn’t without stress. It is really a model of bifurcated consciousness in which she is forced to hide her ‘true’ identity as a super hero and super strong vampire slayer to all but a few trusted friends and allies (Byers, 2000, pg. 49). She spends much of her time trying to present and maintain the identity of an “ordinary girl” who does the things that high school students do and who lives with her sole parenting, career minded mother (Byers, 2000, pg. 32). Her mother’s distraction facilitates Buffy’s success as a slayer, thus her mother’s success is a double-edged sword. Buffy resists her skills, talents and gifts, but eventually gives in for altruistic reasons – she needs to save her town and frequently her friends and allies from the monsters, a giving in that reflects Heron’s (2007) understanding of the “helping imperative”.

There is much about Buffy that reads like a typical social work narrative and like a high-octane version of feminist empowerment. It’s a tale of altruism, resistance and need. It is a narrative of transcendence over gender normative stereotypes and yet an embracing of feminine traits (Byers 2000, pg. 55; White, 2008). It demonstrates both the tensions of being
limited by normalization and also the safety it brings. It’s a story that reflects Heron’s (2007) description of the helping imperative as something that allows women to go and do things that women aren’t supposed to do in places women aren’t supposed to go, with need and self denial as keenly important in the “truthiness” of their stories and in the coherence of their narrative (Boler 2008).

In our social work digital story, the character of Bobbi is undeniably a spoof of Buffy. We are invited to read Bobbi through the intertextual, mimetic presence of Buffy (Byers 2000, pg. 393). But this Buffy is also tinged with elements of the more mature and more abject Xena the Warrior Princess (White, 2008). Beyond being a superhero, Buffy has become an iconic cornerstone of cultural studies in women’s studies. The remaking of Buffy as Bobbi brings to life an abject and obtuse parody. Buffy and Bobbi are binary opposites and yet they share similar goals.

Bobbi can be read as a kind of lacking hero (Bernstein, 1992) - a lacking that becomes striking when we compare these two characters. Buffy is a fair skinned, blonde haired, svelte, young woman (Byers 2000, pg. 53) while Bobbi is a dark haired, darker skinned and plump adult women, dressed in a black bra, with a black imitation leather and stainless-steel dog collar; her weapon of choice is a plastic sword. Bobbi’s hero-wear is a la dollar store rather than reflecting custom made costumery and high cost items that are the marker of Buffy’s slaying gear (Ibid pg. 53).

Given the context of this digital story we might read Bobbi the Social Work slayer as the Aboriginal “inversion” of Buffy. Contextualizing Bobbi the Social Work Slayer in relation to the other digital texts presented from the Children of the Rainbow event suggests that abject
parodies are the trade mark of this event, with other mainstream television serials being remade as more “ordinary” versions of themselves and reflecting life experiences that capture the day to day lived lives of many First Nation people. These parodies include *Sex in the City*, remade as *Sex and the Rez* (DGA Productions), and *Queer as Folk* remade as *Queer as Chief*\(^{17}\) (DGA Productions).

We might understand these parodies as queered versions of the original texts, an understanding that opens us up once again to understandings of queer theory as the practice of rejecting hegemonic normativity while centering dissident and abject standpoints. (Hutchison, 1989; Shepard, 2005) In considering this perspective in the *Bobbi* story we might understand that while vampires are a worry for blonde cuties like Buffy who live in Sunnydale, California (Byers 2000, pg. 7), it is social workers who are an equal kind of trouble for First Nations people and native ways of life. Social workers are the monsters that First Nations people might need to be concerned about. We social workers, like Buffy’s vampires, have a tendency to pop up out of the blue, often close to the local school (Byers, 2000). Thus Bobbi is a hero just like Buffy because she can defend her friends from a historical menace that just won’t die (Byers, 2000, pg. 51).

Bobbi’s slaying techniques reference a broad range of kitsch superhero rhetoric including representations of the marshal art “style” of Batman & Robin, in the 1960’s Batman television series (Dozier, n.d., 20\(^{th}\) Century Fox Television). In this superhero media genre, pop-up captions that describe the sound of the physical harm perpetrated against foes serve as a

\(^{17}\) this digital story includes explicit sexual content that may be offensive to some people
‘special effect’ that obscures actual depictions of violence and injury accompanied by a musical score.

Bobbi’s other power is her capacity to turn the politics of the social workers against them, which is itself a very queer thing. Here Bobbi reminds the family she seeks to save that she is working with “unionized social workers” thus her casting of a “picket line” prevents the workers from crossing over to apprehend the children. This framing of the solution ridicules both union politics and the ‘commitment’ of social workers to the “protection of children”. The social workers that Bobbi fights aren’t typical workers; they are, in fact, zombie social workers – undead, determined and moving ever forward (Polger, 2000). That being said, it would appear that even zombie social workers aren’t dumb enough to do child protection work without the protection of collective bargaining!

**Queerness**

In the final scenes of this digital story, Bobbi becomes a larger than life parody of Buffy when she is made ‘out and queer’ through the use of queer cultural references. This queering of the feminine hero picks up on a number of dominant discourses that are ever present when feminine subjects transcend gender norms, themes present in the original Buffy stories (Byers, 2000). Homo-erotic subtext is an aspect of feminist fantasy that has produced a plethora of scholarship and analysis on representations like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (White, 2008; Byers, 2000; DiGregario, 2006). It is a theme that while amusing is a normalizing discourse that suggests the queering of gender also means the queering of sexuality which in turn serves as a process that orders the relationship between gender performance and desire (Poon and Ho, 2008), a theme that links us back to the experiences of Kelli Corbitt in the *Nervous CPS Worker*. 
The homo-erotic sub-text in the original *Buffy* stories present Buffy and Tara, a supporting character, perpetually suspended in what appears to be an unrealized adolescent lesbian crush – or what some might describe as a desire that cannot be spoken, particularly on American primetime television in the early 1990’s (Byers 2000, pg. 201; White, 2008). Unlike the ambiguous, unspoken desire present in the Buffy storylines (White, 2008), Bobbi’s sexuality is “out there” palpable and expressed in this digital media story. Her sexuality is mature, realized and more about fruition than desire, a marker of out queer sexuality (Watson, 2005) and suggests the Bobbi in this story draws on both Buffy and Xena the Warrior Princess (White, 2008).

Bobbi’s sexuality becomes the central theme in this story through the use of genre specific and culturally specific communication resource systems (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). For example, in the hero’s closing monologue, a common marker of a happy ending in super hero stories, is like the rest of the content of the Bobbi story: “queered” (Watson, 2005). The victory monologue, which usually focuses on declarations of success and the hero’s renewed commitment to fighting evil, gives way to a more gritty, abject version (Bernstein, 1992). Bobbi’s closing remarks begin centered in her pursuit of justice, but Bobbi “forgets herself” (Allen, 1997) as she begins to unwind what it that she has done here. The conversation moves off course into a discussion of her own sexual desire, her needs and wants. Here Bobbi’s lesbian empowerment makes her a dubious hero (Bernstein 1992), an act that reinforces yet another stereotype about the trustworthiness of queer people (Watson, 2005; Jagger, 2008) and the out of control nature of raced female sexuality (Peterkin, 2003).

Bobbi says that her commitment to fighting social workers is conditionally renewed – she promises she will continue to fight against the zombie social workers, but this guarantee
extends only so far. She is prepared to abandon her slaying style if someone “fills the crack,” a statement that is once more queered by Bobbi’s act of grabbing her own pelvis as she makes this statement (Peterkin, 2003). This double entendre may be read as both a reference to sexualized notions of the vagina and a reference to the common comparison of ‘gaps in the system’, which become the ‘cracks’ people fall through, a reference that returns us once more to the concept of the vagina as it relates to reproduction and birth.

Finally Bobbie’s speech wraps up as she declares that she might also be turned away from her heroic work in the event that someone “picks her up” for sex, an idea implied through a reference to queer culture and the signs and symbols that speak to particular categories of sexual desire and preferred sexual performance (Peterkin, 2003). Without revealing too much of the ‘secret code’ and thus violating my own cultural norms and traditions, it is fairly safe to say that this juicy bit of embedded dialogue appears to be at least confusing and most likely invisible to a large segment of the audience and to most of the classes I have shown the story to.

This digital story relies on a significant amount of contemporary popular culture and queer resource systems as well as mainstream and critical discourse for meaning making to occur. Further, the kinds of First Nations ways of knowing presented in this discussion of humour make this story a First Nations critique of child protection work (Kundouqk [Jacqui Green] & Qwu’sih’maht [Robina Thomas], 2009). This mishmash reads as purely amusing to an audience that knows nothing about child protection or social work, or even the history of aboriginal families in the Canadian welfare system (Pon, 2009). But when read in the context of knowledge of the child protection system, we are able to deconstruct layer after layer of
meanings and discourses that activate all that is evil and contradictory in social work practice, the part of social work we prefer to forget (Pon, 2009).

More particularly, as a digital story clearly produced by an aboriginal film group, the politics of social work in the context of service to aboriginal families is also front and centre in this story. The realities of colonization, cultural genocide via the residential school system and the mass apprehension of aboriginal children commonly referred to as the “sixties scoop” are all present as metaphors that would probably make watching this story too painful to bear if it wasn’t for the humour (Pon, 2009; King, 2005; Kundouqk [Jacqui Green] & Qwu’sih’maht [Robina Thomas], 2009; Sinclair, 2009).

The introduction of union politics as something that can stop the apprehension of aboriginal children sets up another very complex layer that pits the rights of workers against the rights of families and more specifically the right of aboriginal families within a welfare system that has objectified, humiliated and harmed them. But the issue of unionization in this context also demands greater unpacking as Bobbi’s flippant framing of unions has as much potential to harm aboriginal workers who now play a significant role in this sector across Canada as it does to interrupt the unearned privilege white workers may have.

The Metaphor of Zombie Social Workers

One of the most interesting representations in the story is the presentation of the child welfare social workers as zombies. The use of zombies as a resource system for metaphorically assigning meaning to child protection workers is a particular kind of discourse activation drawing on very specific cultural metaphors. Like Buffy the Vampire Slayer, zombies are a well-studied science fiction fantasy symbol. They are often used to depict “consumed
consumers,” (Harper, 2002) and have been used as metaphors for the “lack of consciousness” (Harper, 2000) associated with Western culture. Thus the zombie image encapsulates many of the understandings of Eurocentrism that give power to First Nations scholarship in social work (Hart, 2002; Pon, 2009).

Beyond the Bobbi story, zombie metaphors have been used throughout the literature to bring to life understandings of emptiness and consumption perpetrated by social workers and human services professionals or to consider harms that are perpetrated against these workers. This literature includes considerations of: contagion (Webb & Brynand, 2008) dementia (Tanner 2012), hemodialysis (Abram, 1970), psychiatric care (Wilson, 1992), anti-depressant use (Sonnenstuhl, 1982), parenting and television use (2006), the effect [of] intimate partner violence on professional caregivers (Mills, 1985), the results of service restructuring and neoliberalism (Hacker, 2009), overwork and work design (Rogowski, 2008), discipline and professionalism (Butler & Pugh, 2004), and the states’ role in social services (Beck, 2000).

Much of the literature relies on a framing of zombies that emphasizes their functioning as “human” while they lack the consciousness that is said to be a part of humanity. Thus, zombies may be read as representations of the distinction between consciousness and action and the importance of consciousness in action in both mainstream (Mandell, 2007; Moffatt, 2009; Rossiter, 2001; Heron, 2005) and Aboriginal focused social work (Freeman, 2011; Hart, 2008; Sinclair, 2004,). Polger (2000) argues that “one need not be conscious to move” but rather movement can be derived from a “complex control system” that can easily substitute for consciousness (pg. 286). One might describe this as bringing to life standardization in child welfare, in which policies and procedures overtake and eventually substitute for the skill and knowledge of workers (Baines, 2004; La Rose 2009; Smith, 2010).
In manifesting this movement without consciousness, zombies move ever forward, sometimes walking through or over what is in front of them, or destroying obstacles that get in their way regardless of the importance or value of the those obstacles (Harper, 2002; Polger, 2000). Their forward motion is unstoppable and oblivious, not unlike colonialism and imperialism presented in both Aboriginal and critical social work discourses. Zombies are the “un-dead” and they seek to make other living humans like them through exposure, contamination and consumption of their “living” brains; thus, zombies can be understood as facilitators of colonization and assimilation, the remote actors who do the on-the-ground-work of empire (Prasch, 2005; Spivak, 1985, 1988, 2004; Webb & Byrnand, 2008).

The perspectives echo many of the criticisms lobbied against social work and social workers (Baines et al., year; Lundby, 2008, 2009; Baines 2011a). Given the constant threat of assimilation faced by First Nations peoples and the emphasis on consumption in mainstream culture, zombies are a fitting metaphor for consideration of the relationships between native people and mainstream social workers.

Harper\(^{18}\) (2002) suggests zombie metaphors offer a critique of consumerism and represent “the masses.” Zombies represent the “disposable and despicable social underclass” categories that can be related to both social workers and aboriginal people (Harper 2002). In Bobbi we can read this metaphor applied in multiple ways. Social workers have long been understood to have low social standing among the professions (Baines et al., 1993; Lundby, 2008, 2009; Holosko, 2003; Spano, 1982). The people we work with, the processes we use, social work practices of education and knowledge production have long been criticized as

\(^{18}\) This HTML document has no page numbers.
marginally meeting the requirements for professional status (Holosko, 2003; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011; Lundy, 2003). Attempting to remedy this marginal status, social work has spent a considerable amount of time and energy engaged in a zombie like pursuit of social standing and professional status regardless of the harms it might have caused (Brookfield, 2009; Pon, 2009; Gibelman, 2004; Heron, 2007; Mullaly, 2009).

Within social work itself, different contexts of practice hold differing levels of status in the profession. Child protection social workers have long been understood as a kind of social work underclass (NSGEU, 2002). In many instances practice in this area of the field are seen to always fail to meet the measure of ‘good practice,’ as well intentioned workers become rapidly deskilled (Baines 2004, 2007, 2008, 2011b, 2012; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2010) and lose critical consciousness in a system that is fundamentally flawed and that works against both workers and clients (La Rose, 2009, 2012; NSGEU, 2002; Smith, 2010).

Harper (2002) uses analysis of a famous zombie focused film Night of the Living Dead (1968) as a reference for establishing important zombie metaphors. This film text supports understandings of zombies as representations of “race as a category” that can, in the instance of people of colour, makes people “disposable” (Harper, 2002). These metaphors are seen to “invit[e] the audience to consider zombiedom as a condition associated with both racial oppression and social abjection and therefore sanctions socio-political interpretations” (Harper, 2002). It is hard to deny the relevance of this analysis when we consider the experiences of First Nations people in the context of the child welfare system and the framing of aboriginal people in Canadian society more generally. It is curious as well to consider the visual of the child protection workers whose faces are whitened below their dirt and lesions. Is this designed
to suggest these workers are white, or if these zombies are aboriginal social workers does this suggested that professionalization white washes these workers?

The Bobbi story mediates important understandings about the experiences of First Nations peoples’ with social work practice and child protection services. The critiques embedded in the narrative present a number of challenges for social workers. The perspectives presented, while centred in Frist Nations experience, invite mainstream social workers to consider what roles we play in perpetuating these oppressive practices and how these are structured into child welfare services (Carrier & Strega, 2009; Pon, 2009; Sinclair, 2009). Any consideration of the change that needs to occur must include both unique issues of racism and assimilationists policies specific to First Nations people.

*Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* also presents for us a number of challenges that represent more generalized notions of normativity and oppression that are applied in mainstream contexts as well. Neoliberalism and the marketization of child welfare services affect both mainstream and First Nations child welfare interventions. Social Workers can learn a lot from Bobbi’s critique and there are probably a number of white families who would be quite happy to have Bobbi stop by to help them fend off the zombie social workers that visit them on a regular basis as well.

The metaphor of the zombie social worker is a powerful way of telling social workers that we have a lot to think about. We need to consider what it is that we do when we move ever forward, adhering without thinking to the rules and regulations, implementing standardized practices that control and move us (Polger, 2000). Bobbi the Social Work Slayer while protecting First Nations families from us may also be protecting us from practices that we have
come to take for granted. As a Trickster story, *Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* invites us to think about what we need to change by allowing us to laugh at ourselves, knowing that below the laughter there are truths that are difficult for us to acknowledge.
Chapter 10: Social Worker Overload

The digital media story *Social Worker Overload* ([http://youtu.be/d5YG9TVNSDw](http://youtu.be/d5YG9TVNSDw)) shares elements with the other digital stories considered in this thesis. As a tale of workers engaging in collective workplace action to protest their working conditions, this story presents an opposing perspective to *World Social Work Day 2010*. In that story, David Jones presents social workers with a very positive picture of the benefits of professionalization and of social development work. This work is made as a matter of social workers taking action to create new places and spaces to do social work.

In contrast, the social workers in *Social Worker Overload* present us with another set of examples highlighting the negative effects of workplace structures on practice and the workers’ lack of control over the work processes and infrastructures in which they operate. Like the other stories analyzed in this thesis, *Social Worker Overload* presents us with examples of the disconnections existing between the ideals of social work and the realities of work in the field. Wrightkan, TeamBettendorf and Erahoneybee explore similar contradictions in their digital media stories. Each showing us that work design matters in context, and remembering, forgetting and resisting play a significant role in social workers understanding of these practice environments.

The digital media story *Social Worker Overload*, created by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) presents a discussion of
social work through the lens of work and labour. In this story, four social workers speak from their position as union members about their involvement in a process of challenging their employer (Washington State) to acknowledge issues of over work experienced by social workers in the Department of Children and Family Services. This union made digital media story tells the tale of workplace advocacy eventually leading to a workload study designed to identify the specifics of their over-work. The workers tell us this workload study produced ‘evidence’ of the workers’ overload and identified the need for additional staffing.

However, the workers also advise us that this evidence has failed to produce actual material change for the workers, as the employer is not forthcoming with the additional resources needed for restitution. This failure to deliver change, has led the workers into a new phase in their advocacy project, this one focusing on pressuring the employer to follow through with the changes their evidence suggests are necessary. We might therefore understand this digital media story as a part of this advocacy activity, an element in common with the digital media story of the Nervous CPS Worker.

Analysis of the digital media story Social Worker Overload begins with consideration of the visual and auditory materials present in the story. The content of the verbal statements provided by the storytellers is enhanced by the multi-modal nature of the text. The inclusion of captions provides supplemental information to viewers, therefore we can understand post-production editing to be another important element of communication present in this story. The story is divided through editing into four phases, each presenting the narrative of an individual worker. Each individual narrative presents one workers’ subjective experience of Social Worker Overload as mediated by their
unique subjective positioning and by the unique work locations and job type/position they occupy within the larger organization.

As the audience to the digital media story *Social Worker Overload* we are presented with a digital story that assembles four narratives from four different workers together into a single story text. These workers who each tell us unique stories about workload, also create a complex and multilayered story that together, tells us working at the DCFS in the State of Washington isn’t easy work.

**Visual Analysis**

The overall style of the story and the visuals presented are one of the elements that create a unifying effect in this story. For example, all of the social workers presented in this story are shown in ‘top shots’ with the camera showing their bodies from about waist level to the top of their heads. For the most part, the workers are shown in the centre of the screen and face the camera square on. The camera is still, suggesting a tripod is being used. Most of the movement in the visual mode takes place through post-production editing which assembles the individual stories of the four social workers together into a series of linear phases. In sequence, each worker tells a story; when the first social worker’s narrative is complete we move on to the next story. Transitions between narratives are aided by visual cues.

From a visual standpoint, the ‘video’ in this digital media story doesn’t have much going for it. We watch four people, dressed in office wear standing before a camera, talking about work. All four workers stand in front of the same beige wall, all are shown from about the waist up. The visual and auditory elements produce a technically well-
made story, suggesting the technologies used to create these materials are top-rate and the people using these tools are well trained. While the story provides us with a “professional product” it also presents as an amateur production, a “home spun” style that reflects assumptions and stereotypes about the connection between imperfection and grassroots credibility (Lange 2008; Shepard 2005). It looks more like a community cable show than ‘network news’, but it is broadcast quality film production. However, the story lacks artistic flair; the style of presentation is “dry” or “bland”, the messages conveyed are direct messages without any fun or folly.

The blandness of the story is made more evident by the inclusion of captions and stylized visual effects displayed at the bottom of the screen during the four phases of this story. The captions are presented using a wide array of stylized formats as though the post-production editor was experimenting with the many possible styles allowed by their editing technologies. The visual effects applied to the captions produce unexpected movement during the phase, which appears in stark contrast to the static visual quality of the rest of the story. Sometimes captions scroll across the screen, sometimes they slide in and out, sometimes they draw attention through the use of colour: red and greed, blue and red, black and white.

These captions enhance the messages conveyed in the workers’ narratives. Sometimes captions provide context, telling us the workers’ name, their work location and position. Sometimes they give us additional facts or information that contextualizes and moves beyond the materials provided in the social workers’ narratives. The simplicity and uncreative presentation of social workers at the top of the screen, coupled with the presence of the technically complex use of captions at the bottom can be analyzed as a metaphor. In
contemporary neoliberal social work, technical process and technologies have overtaken a number of areas where workers’ autonomy and creativity once maintained a greater emphasis in practice (Fitch, 1995; Hennesey & Sawchuk, 2003; Smith, 2009). The over-use of technical elements occurs at the expense of the artistic (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines, 2004, Carniol, 2010; Gibelman, 2004; Goldstein, 1990; Mullaly, 2007; Smith, 2010; Specht & Courtney, 1995), and while the technical offers its own unique and important dimensions, the technical neither replaces, nor compensates for the absence of the “art and heart” of social work (Goldstein, 1990; Holosko, 2003; Trevillion, 2010).

Even in the limited scope of their head and shoulders shots, the workers convey meaning through their body language. They are still, almost unmoving, appearing perhaps more tense than nervous. When they speak about emotionally and politically charged issues, they seem almost too restrained, working hard at restraining their feelings (Baines, 2011b). Like Kelli Corbitt in “The Nervous CPS Worker”, the labour of emotional regulation and self-control is clearly present in the story. Their “affect” maybe flat because of a kind of exhaustion, a brokenness, or perhaps a kind of rage; these workers clearly show signs of compassion fatigue (Adams, Boscarino, Figley, 2006; Baines, 2011c; DePanfilis, 2006; Karabanow, 1999; Maslach et al., 2001;).

In some moments the workers are almost zombie like in their presentation, reminding us of the zombies that are shown to us in Bobbi the Social Work Slayer. A connection we might understand as manifest through the presence of technical rationality, standardization and over-work in these workers’ discussions, all of which make social workers into zombies by controlling what they do remotely. Too much work and too many demands, the topics the workers discuss in their narratives, limit the potential for workers to engage in creative
activities, particularly when these are not structured into the work-design (Antle, et. al., 2006; Baines, 2004; 2007; Caragata, 1997; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; Smith 2010, 2011). Standardization remotely controls what happens in the workers’ interactions with clients (La Rose, 2009; Richardson, 2005; Smith, 2009), and this idea of the ‘remote control’ of responses and interactions is yet another element that is also discussed in contemporary zombie scholarship creating yet another parallel between these two discourses and texts (Harper, 2002; Polger 2000).

The four accounts provided by the social workers in this digital media story also speak to the outcomes of a recently released employer sponsored workload study. In discussing the study, the workers present the research as both an outcome of the workers’ union advocacy but also as a kind of resistance or stalling tactic by the employer, who insisted that empirical research evidence of workload issues be generated. Here “evidence” is understood as something that is separate and apart from practitioner reflection and experiential knowledge (Fook, 1996; Smith, 2009; Trevillion, 2010). Research was eventually undertaken and the evidence produced, however, the employer still failed to provide resources to resolve the workload issues.

The first voice presentations provided in this story allow us to hear from four unionized social workers employed in front line child protection and family services. Centering front line workers’ perspectives as the voices that interpret and analyze the meaning of this workload research enriches the understandings that emerge from this text. These are stories that each represent a different union local, each presenting perspectives on workload from different bargaining unit positions and at the same time these voices are all social work voices. Each social worker presents a unique analysis and experience that is
unified by their status as social workers, their practice in child protection, their membership in the same union and their employment by the same state government.

Across the four phases, workers speak about their employer’s resistance to discuss workload issues. Here the contradictory tension of the government bureaucracies designed to detect, predict and remediate issues of risk in families failure yet failing to acknowledge risk in the working conditions of its own employees is a striking contrast (La Rose, 2009). Here we might understand the employer as “forgetting” the skills and expertise of these workers, all of whom are employed (in part) because of their capacity to identify and assess risk. The workers in this story tell us about their employer’s demand for workload research; this suggests these workers are unable to identify and assess risk in their own work design and work-life, while they remain competent and capable in the public sphere.

As the workers describe the struggles they face while they work, and the struggles they faced gaining acknowledgement from their employer, their frustration and disappointment is clearly visible. The contradictions and wanton disregard on the part of the employer makes the workers’ resistance all the more significant. True to the traditions of critical social work, the workers’ stories present audiences with a history of the workload issue, examples of the struggles these workers face on the job, and the struggles they face as they seek out acknowledgement by their employer. An acknowledgement that they believe will lead to change in these issues and experiences. Their narratives remind audiences of the many elements required in critical social work practice. It also reminds us that the process of advocacy can be a long slow process, even when supported by a national union like AFSCME.
This digital media story provides audience members with a history that demonstrates the use of many tactics to engage the employer in an active, outcome oriented dialogue (Alinsky, 1978; Benjamin, 2011; Baines, 2011b; Hardcastle & Powers 2004; La Rose, 2009; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). The strategy developed by the workers and their union textually, leads to the acknowledgement of the workers concerns. However, it requires them, to regroup and engage in yet more tactical work in order to seek out practical change in their working conditions (Baines, 2001; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004).

The workers tell us the outcome of this advocacy practice (to date) is bitter-sweet. While the employer did eventually acknowledge the issue of workload, the employers’ acknowledgement came with the demand for a workload study. This demand reminds us that neoliberal social work emphasizes empirical ways of knowing. While the workers speak proudly and optimistically about the success of getting the workload study completed, they also express frustration and a sense of irony that the issues of over-work have had not been addressed even though evidence of this issue has been produced (and presumably leading to more overwork). This suggests that evidence of a problem does not always resolve the issue, or even guarantee that resources will be allocated towards resolution. In this way, the Social Worker Overload becomes a story about the employers’ failure to respond to their own “evidence”, to resolve the challenges faced by these workers and the negative effects this overload has on department clients. The employer appears to ‘forget’ the reason this workload study was completed was to bring about practical change for the workers affected by these realities.
Intertextual Analysis

The experiences of these AFSCME workers are shared by many social workers in the field. The description of the employers’ denial or deflection of workload is a theme shared across the four workers’ narratives presented in the *Social Worker Overload* story. It is a theme that can also be understood as a shared global social work phenomena. By extending this story to the broader social work community and into the academic literature we can see how workload and work structures are a significant issue facing social workers in the field (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines 2012, 2011a, 2011b, 2009, 2004; Baines, MacKenzie Davis, Saini, 2009; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002; Smith, 2010, 2011).

In this story the workers frame the workload study as the process by which their employer creates an explicit understanding of workload “issues” and “needs” and (or) creates the “facts” about workload. The research study makes workload a readable subject for the employer (Fook, 2002; NSGEU, 2002; Rosenberg, 2004; Spivak, 1988). These workers clearly see the research process as fruitful, suggesting it produced a more concrete and more shared understanding of the workload issue. This study quantified the number of additional workers needed to resolve the issue. However, even with this quantification, no resolution has taken place.

*Social Worker Overload* provides the audience with a portrait of more than just the facts about workload; it presents a story about the labour of social work. This includes that extends beyond the actual ‘social work’ and into the workers' need to work for recognition of their skills and capacities as workers (Adams, Boscarino, Figley, 2006; Antle, et al., 2005; Baines 2004, 2011, 2012; Baines et.al., 2009; Brotheridge & Gradney, 2002). It also
includes their right to assess and require work environments that provide the means to do
the job as they understand it should be done, something that professionalization suggests
they have as both a responsibility to uphold and a right to define.

As the workers tell their stories, we hear them talk about their emotional labour. The
multimodal capacity of digital media also allows us to see the workers “do” emotional labour
as they control and regulate their feelings when they tell their stories (Baldry & Thibault, 2006;
Kress, 2003; Lundby 2008, 2009). Here seeing extends the meaning of this process in a way
that goes beyond what words can say. Without the visual elements of this story this beyond
words presentation of labour might not be known or acknowledged (Baldry & Thibault , 2006;
La Rose, 2012; Thurmim, 2008). As we watch, we can see the workers keep a lid on their
feelings, presenting their pleasantly stressed social work faces and soft modulated voices as a
cover for a wide range of feelings not necessarily understood to be acceptable for professionals
to feel or to share (Allen,1997; Karabanow, 1999; Wolfe Morrison, 2000 ; Carter-Scott, 2008).

Discourse Analysis

As we watch, we see workers “hold it together” and we see workers “crack” their
veneer. Michael Jaurigue a CPS Supervisor from Local 53 in Olympia Washington
presents as calm but angry as he tells his workload story. His quiet disposition is
somewhat undone by the presence of tense raised shoulders; Michael’s quietness presents
as a kind of “calm before the storm”. During his presentation there are moments when he
looks like he could easily come undone (Allen, 1997), as he describes his experience of
workload as a “piling on”. Yet, in his narrative he describes the workload study as both a
kind of “hope” and an “indictment”, statements that bridge the gap between what he says
and what he shows. He states:
The workload study is a kind of … Its an indictment of the management structure here in Olympia. And we've been saying, we the people who actually do the work - supervisors, social workers and investigators - we've been telling our people in Olympia, our managers in Olympia, that we can't go on at this pace. You guys need to really stop and do this study…It took them 3 years to finally do the workload study and now we have it and we ought to figure out what it really says and use it to go forward.

The statements made by Michael are contextualized by scrolling captions that annotate his narrative (Baldry & Thibault 2006). Here the scrolling captions provide additional details about the findings of the workload study, further contextualizing the emotions he displays (or conceals). This addition information deepens the meaning we can make from Michael’s story. These captions inform us of a call for additional hiring made by a former DCFS manager, in which there was a request for “the hiring of 770- new staff over the next four years.”

While this maybe an important increase in staffing levels, this request did not account for the full scope of the needs identified in the employer’s workload study. In order to meet these needs the State of Washington must hire an additional “1,500 workers”. However, hiring does not appear (from information in the video), to be forthcoming, which may explain why the union has elected to create and share this digital story (Lange 2009; Lundby, 2008, 2009).

Belinda MacDonald, Social Worker, Tacoma Washington Local 508, appears hyper-controlled as she speaks. She looks at the camera while she speaks, turning more
deliberately towards the camera as she emphasizes her points. Occasionally she looks away, which appears to be a “looking beyond us” as though she is peering around a corner and watching for some kind of threat, an action that maybe reflective of her internalized experience of the risk that speaking out can pose to workers (Mullaly, 2009). Belinda describes her frustration stating:

  We have been telling management for years that we cannot do the job. Yet they keep adding more and more things on our plate and we are not able to keep children safe… and the bottom line for me is I have a job to do. I love the kids that I work for and families that I work for and I can't do my job. And I want a job that is doable so that I can keep the kids, at least in the area that I work, which is children protection services, safe.

Belinda’s statement identifies the relationship between social workers, workload and risk to clients. Social workers are charged with the task of preventing harm to vulnerable populations in situations where elevated risk and need are identified (Dumbrill 2011). However, when too few resources are allocated to this kind of work the purpose and possibility of the service may get lost (Baines, 2004, 2011; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002; Smith, 2010).

Another example is presented when Banks Evans, a social worker from Local 843 shares his story. When Banks first appears on screen we are presented with a young man in a crisp white shirt. He is well groomed with short, cropped hair and exceptionally precise facial hair detailing. He stands at attention as he begins to tell his story of workload, his tidiness made all the more stiff by his formal way of speaking. As he tells
his story in a clear and authoritative voice he suddenly becomes ‘tongue tied’, stumbling through what he is trying to convey. This crack in his composure undoes his formality (Allen, 1997), he looks off camera then suddenly changes his tone, simply stating "something needs to be done".

At this point, Banks’ ‘military posture’ gives way to lots of body language. He moves his arms, shifts his weight from one foot to the other, looks off camera and then moves in closer to the camera. He pauses for a moment, breaks into a grin and adjusts his pockets. He declares that he doesn't know if he “can put this into a sound bite". He attempts to regain himself (Allen, 1997) looking off into the distance as though he is looking at his minds eye. Finally he states:

…there's a lot of different aspects to this…. I think we need to hire more people. I think we need to treat the people we have better so we can retain the staff that we have and I think that they should also be paid more. The pay is an issue for people - one of the many variables to retaining staff.

Terri Jones from Local 1221 in Spokane Washington appears on camera as a white social worker with a slightly rumpled look. Her nervousness shows as she speaks, she alternatively looks at, beyond and before the camera and at moments she looks vacant and then hyper-controlled as she speaks. Her voice shakes as she presents her narrative.

Several times during her story Terri Jones closes her eyes, as if there is too much going on for her to focus. She appears more angry and more animated than many of the other people in this digital media story, yet I wouldn’t describe Terri as expressive. Her body racks as she tells her tale, her body juts forward as though emphasizing her words.
There is a sense of conflict in the words she speaks as though the tensions and contradictions she experiences cannot be rolled into a singular linear narrative. Her speech reflects a kind of bifurcation of her consciousness, a dividedness that seems necessary for her to make sense of these experiences. She states:

Those of us doing the job… the system is not broken… we're still doing our job.

We're still protecting children, we're still helping families, we're still doing the best that we can.

She then contradicts this positivity by stating:

We are having to run more and more in place before we can get to the job and every time you run a social worker down by running them in place too long they're less able to do their job; they're less able to get much accomplished. But we're still doing the job. That's still happening and that part of the system is not broken.

Terri’s words suggest that while the social workers haven’t been broken, the system is pretty messed up. She makes a separation between ‘the workers’ who manage to do what needs to be done, and ‘the system’ that does not appear to work in the favour of the social workers or the clients. In this way we can see as well a separation from the work place and the practice of social work. It is clear from Terry’s responses and those of the other workers that the system is not resourcing the practice of social work as she understands it.

These statements can be read as bringing our attention back to the idea that professional social workers go above and beyond the limits of the social service sector. This ‘going beyond’ is described in much of the social work literature as a form of
resistance to systems that restrict social work (Benjamin, 2011; Fook, 2002; Smith, 2010; Baines, 2004; 2008, 2012). Yet we do this while wrapped up in these very systems and these systems lay claims to this kind of ‘above and beyond’ while not providing the resources necessary to undertake this level of practice (Brookfield, 2009; La Rose, 2009). At the same time, workers are held morally and legal responsible by both employers and associations when they can’t make the desired outcome happen (Brookfield, 2009; La Rose, 2009; Mullaly, 2009; Reamer, 1998). This occurs even when the decision making process is standardized, controlled and regulated at levels far beyond the social workers influence (Smith, 2009; Baines, 2004, 2011, 2012; Mullaly, 2007; Reamer 1998).

Terri Jones goes on to state:

> What isn't working is that our administration does not understand the job. They don't seem to understand that they don't understand the job, and so the obstructions placed in front of the social workers have grown greater and greater and that isn't working well. But I would really hesitate to say that the system is broken. We're still providing safety for children and helping families.

Terri’s words suggest the managers who attend to the system and its bureaucracy have little awareness of what is encompassed in the practice of social work. This statement supports the idea of “managerialism” as something that frames the role of management as separate and apart from the practice of social work (Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2007, 2009; Murdach, 2007). Furthermore, she presents us with an understanding of professionalized social workers as holding a particular kind of
knowledge and yet, the practice of this knowledge is not supported with necessary resources and helpful structures (Baines, 2002, 2004, 2011; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2010). The knowledge of social workers is not enough to motivate the employer and its managerial regime to respond to the workers’ demands or to structure the work in ways that are seen to actualize social work expertise.

In exploring the issue of emotional labour, *Social Worker Overload* also presents us with the workers’ personal understandings of the importance of alignment between the workers’ values, professional social work values and the work undertaken with clients. The alignment of values and the intrinsic social benefits of working in social care and social change activities are framed as important aspects of social work practice, an understanding that has been studied by a number of social work scholars (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Antley et. al, 2006; Baines, 2011bb; Baines et al., 2009; Bisman, 2004, 2011; Brookfield, 2009; Karabanow, 1999; La Rose, 2009, 2012; NSGEU, 2002).

The stories told by these union members are stories of dissatisfaction with their lived experiences of work. This story invites us to remember that social work is work (Brookfield, 2009; La Rose, 2009). It is a story that challenges us to remember that workplaces should sustain workers, rather than simply depleting them of their energy and enthusiasm and that this is also a responsibility of management (Baines, 2004, 2012; Brookfield, 2009; Schon, 1983).

Career narratives in occupations like social work have long presented this type of work as providing workers with a positive sense of self and a sense of accomplishment even in the context of social control (Antle et. al., 2006; Dumbrill, 2011; Baines, 2004,
2007, 2011; Mullaly, 2009, 2007). While these kinds of narratives offer an ideal version of the work, in today’s social climate the stories workers share tell us very different stories.

*Social Worker Overload* also reminds us that as social workers our livelihood is made off the avails of ‘other’ people’s problems and pain, and this work takes place in systems that increasingly allow for profit to be made from this pain (Aronson & Smith, 2010; Baines, 2011c). In other words, for many social workers their work in less than ideal conditions means that shareholders and the market profit from the misery of both workers and clients (Baines 2012; Smith 2010, 2011). This factor invites us to remember as Pon (2009) requests social work’s history of racism and complacency in genocide and to consider the effects of capitalism on people's lives and work.

In this case, remembering shows us that both social workers and clients are caught in a contradiction. At the socio-economic level we are invited to celebrate processes of change in social work practice management as benefitting the social service sector by creating greater levels of efficiency. Yet in the name of efficiency, doing more with less becomes the measure of “good service” rather than considering in more diverse terms what it is that constitutes good service (Aronson & Smith, 2010, Baines 2004, 2007, 2012; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; La Rose, 2012; Smith 2010, 2011). Social workers’ lament the need for more resources and supports, while at the same time largely forgetting the introduction of market based activities in these systems.

The *Social Worker Overload* digital media story activates professionalization discourses which can be understood as another practice of social work remembering and
forgetting. The dominance of professionalization discourses in social work has, to a large part, led to the subjugation of other understandings of social work, for example discourses that present social work as work or as a social movement (Baines, 2011b; Hartman, 1994; La Rose 2009, Reisch & Andrews, 2002; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2005; Flynn Saulnier, 1996; Spano, 1982). The dominance of professionalization as a framing of social work is often described as luring social workers into seeing themselves as separate and apart from other kinds of workers (Brookfield, 2009; Davies & Leonard, 2004; Dominelli & MacLeod, 1989; Dominelli, 2004; Ferguson & Lavalette, 2004). This is an idea the union is supporting these workers to resist.

Professionalization as productivity links the idea of professionalization and the enclosure of certain kinds of knowledge. These particular specialized knowledge bases are understood to allow for the production of evidence that proves particular relationships between the undertaking of certain activities and the production of particular predictable outcomes (Payne, 2001). In the case of social work, we are understood to be able to create evidence of practice outcomes that produce particular social goods (Trevillion, 2010). Of late these social goods are linked to notions of productivity as individualized phenomena reducing need and dependency, which are seen to create risks to the economy and to global markets (Spivak, 1988, 2004, 2005). Yet, the social workers featured in the digital media story Social Worker Overload shows us their experience of research as failing to create tangible change, because the findings have largely been ignored or "forgotten" by the employer. This experience is shared by workers beyond this local context (La Rose 2009; Baines, 2004; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002; Smith, 2009).
While professionalization may be centred as the ideal and required social work identity positioning (IFSW, 2012; Hick, 2001; Reamer, 1998), professionalization has not moved social workers out of the workforce (Baines, 2004; Schilling et al., 2008). The vast majority of social workers, like those depicted in *Social Work Overload* still sell their 'caring and changing' labour for wages; we are, for the most part, still employees in institutional settings (Antle et. al., 2006; Schilling, et al., 2008). As workers in a neoliberal context, social work practice is closely monitored and we as workers are less autonomous than ever before (Fook, 2002; Issit, 1999; Parada et al., 2007; Smith, 2007). A number of contemporary social work authors spend a considerable amount of time trying to make arguments for invisible and “under-ground” autonomy that workers can work towards actualizing (Smith, 2009; Parada et al., 2007). The need to squeeze moments of autonomy out of practice, as these authors describe ‘autonomous’ workers doing, is in my view, further evidence of the lack of autonomy in practice.

Evidence based practice as a form of knowledge production and as a goal of professionalization further entrenches standardization in social work practice which workers describe as further reducing autonomy (Baines 2004, 2007, 2011a, 2001b; La Rose, 2009; Richardson, 2005; Smith, 2010). As Terri Jones, Social Worker from Local 1221 describes, workers are required to do more administrative work before they get to the practice of social work. They are required to engage in standardized activities in an effort to create evidence that what they are doing is necessary and what they are doing is the correct thing to be doing (Mullaly, 2005; Baines, 2011b)

The effect of having to do work in order to justify doing the work that is the point of the practice, has detrimental effects on workers (Antle et al. 2006; Baines, 2004, 2007,
Terri Jones reflects this understanding in the following statement:

…we're still doing our job. We're still protecting children, we're still helping families, we're still doing the best that we can. We are having to run more and more in place before we can get to the job and every time you run a social worker down by running them in place too long they're less able to do their job, they're less able to get much accomplished. But we're still doing the job…

Given the complexity of meaning shared through Terri Jones' narrative we can understand *Social Worker Overload* to suggest the power of social media to deliver a message to the general community that might not be delivered by conventional mainstream media (Boler, 2008; Burgess & Green, 2009; Elsaesser, 2009; Lange, 2009; La Rose, 2012; Kidd, 2010; Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010; Couldry, 2010; Shifman, 2011). The text appears to have been commissioned, created and produced by a regional division of AFSCME. As a national union with a substantial membership base in the US (AFSCME.org/about), this union has a powerful social location (Carniol, 2010; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; Scanlon, 1999) and a pool of substantial resources to support this kind of work (Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006). The status of this union suggests they have both the knowledge base and financial means to effectively harness digital media production and social media platforms for their local, regional and national campaign work (Baines, 2011b; Hick, 2001; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; Scanlon, 1999).
The allocation of resources in this way affords the social work membership an important resource for knowledge production and data dissemination, practices that are clearly at work in the union’s decision to post this video to YouTube. Furthermore, all social workers benefit from this kind of production, especially for example, when researchers like me opt to make use of these texts to consider the plight of contemporary social workers (Boler, 2008; Lambert, 2008; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009; Thurmim, 2009).

**Genre Analysis**

The genre of this digital story is less evident than in many of the other stories considered. It could be considered an address, or a digital story of affinity (Lange, 2009). It projects the image of a kind of “community cable TV show”. The technical quality suggests this story is a “professional production” (Lange, 2009). The production contributes to a reading of the information contained in the digital media story as important and credible yet accessible (Lange 2009), but it also reads bland and homespun suggesting that it comes from a grassroots movement (Shepard, 2005).

The genre uses resource systems that allow the audience to make sense of the digital story by presenting familiar clusters of information that make reading the text easier for the audience (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). A significant amount of the meaning making in this story occurs on the basis of these clusters, like for example the captions, which tell us about the people who are speaking. The captions tell us who these workers are, what they do at DFCS and which location they practice from. They are “real people” made more real because we know these simple details about their lives (Lange, 2009).
Postproduction editing and captioning suggest this is an important text, the people who are sharing their stories are important; otherwise why would someone go to all this trouble and expense to make this digital story? This information can be extended and read as “shared” by their union brothers and sisters, who work in the same department locally and who work in “the same” or similar departments all across the country (Baines, 2011bd; Lange, 2009; La Rose, 2009). We could extend this kind of parallel understanding further by considering similar workplaces locally and applying these ideas to similar workers and workplaces internationally (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Thumim, 2008; La Rose, 2009).

The kind of disclosure made by the workers presented in this digital media story is important on a number of levels. First of all, the identification of these workers suggests that they are willing to speak about these issues and to be accountable for what they have said. In this way we can understand what the workers are saying as potentially true which also suggests to other workers that these workers are not afraid (Boler, 2008); they are not afraid of reprisal by their employer generally, or by coworkers or managers more specifically. Implied in this disclosure, is the idea that this union and/or membership in a union (any union) is something that protects workers (Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenberg 2006, Scanlon 1999; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). The story implies that these workers can speak because they have a union behind them (Baines 2004, 2011; La Rose 2009; Scanlon 1999, Scanlon & Harding, 2005).

These workers hold an intersectional social work identity (Carniol, 2005; Heron, 2005; Razak, 2005; Rossiter, 2001): they are employees, they are professionals and they are union members. This intersectional state is displayed as a valid social work identity, as
the social workers interchange words like ‘social worker’, ‘union member’ and ‘professional’ in their narratives. Presenting these identity positions as a complementary positionality challenges discourses of professionalization that preclude and marginalize the idea that professionals cannot also hold the identity of worker (La Rose, 2009; Reisch & Andrews, 2002; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). This foreclosure of professionals as workers serves in part to downplay the need for labour organizing in social work (Payne, 2001; Baines, 2011b; La Rose, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; Scanlon, 1999; Spano, 1982).

This public display of workers speaking truth to power activates many of the core social work value discourses (Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2009;) and the more radical social change oriented social work practice discourses (Baines 2011; Carniol, 2010; Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2009; Reisch & Andrews, 2002) in tandem. In this story, union membership may be read as an element that affords workers the ability to speak by providing both a platform and the resources needed to make this a reality (Snickars & Vondreau, 2009; Thurmim, 2008; Brushwood Rose, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; Scanlon, 1999).

We might also understand these resources as creating a climate in which workers can speak without fear because the union “has your back” in a practical sense (Baines, 2011b; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; La Rose, 2009; Scanlon, 1999; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). This “having the workers’ back” means that in the event something negative happens, because of this truth telling, then the union will provide advocacy and support to these workers (La Rose, 2009; Baines, 2011b; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; Scanlon, 1999; Scanlon & Harding, 2005). That being said, not all unions live up to the strength of
their ideals or their reputation as protectors (NSGEU, 2002); we can only hope that this reputation holds true for these workers.

The social workers in *Social Worker Overload* tell us that the government has not responded to its own research findings. Economic phenomena has a significant effect on the social service sector, with governments using the economy as a deciding factor in the reduction, expansion or adjustment of social programs (Baines, 2004; Baines, 2011b; Carniol, 2010; Carragata, 1997; Finkle, 2006; Hick, 2001; Mullaly, 2005). The political orientation of governments in part shapes the type of social service programs available (Finkle, 2006; Hick, 2001; Mullaly, 2005).

Most recently, government responses to economic realities including the failure of the banking systems at the international level stemming from the US based “mortgage crisis”, and failure of the North American auto industry as well as a number of global natural disasters that have required international responses, and political instability in the Middle East and the US lead war in Afghanistan and Iraq. These global realities have produced responses that are familiar to many people around the globe but unfamiliar to many of us working in ‘developed’ nations. As both the European Union and the US government embrace notions of “economic austerity”, the International Monetary Fund has introduced structural adjustment activities in several European countries. These loan policies have with them a number of strings attached that include regulation of social welfare funding and service provision. Therefore it is safe to suggest that social workers can expect more of the same in the coming years – that is: more less, and less more.
These politics and policies most certainly have an effect on service recipients and clients (Antle et al., 2002; Baines, 2004, 2011; Adams et al, 2009, 2005; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU, 2002). These effects are also experienced by workers in the field as the remaking of social programs which to a large degree means the remaking of *social work* regardless of what the professional associations tells us about what it means to be a social worker. The idea of doing more with less, is a theme embedded in the narratives shared by the social workers in *Social Worker Overload*. This doing more with less, or the “piling on” the workers describe, translates itself into increased expectations, increased caseloads compounded by fewer resources (Baines, 2004, 2007, 2011, 2012; Baines et al., 2009; Caragatta, 1997).

Further, the idea of efficiency embraces actuarial practices where the measurement of efficiency becomes a central focus of the work (Baines, 2011b; La Rose, 2009; Munro, 2004; Smith, 2010, 2011). Efficiency is measured using standardized tools, which in turn rely on standardized activities in social workers’ interactions with people and in the case of these social workers in Washington State required another kind of measurement in the form of research (Baines, 2011b; La Rose 2009; Mullaly, 2009). Issues of social workers’ workload, as it relates to mandated services like income supports and child welfare work are ongoing issues extending as far back, it would seem, as the history of the social service sector (Spano, 1982; Finckle, 2006; Reisch & Andrews, 2002; Scanlon 2005).

From a professional perspective workload is a concern because it prevents social workers from bringing to life the optimum potential of professional social work. Clients do not get the best possible service from social workers and social work organizations not funded to meet the demands for service (Aronson & Sammon 2000; Aronson & Smith
2009; Baines, 2004, 2011, 2012; Carniol, 2005; La Rose, 2009). The lack of resources leaves gaps in the system which, in spite of the best practice of the social worker may leave people with unmet needs or may lead to emotional and physical costs that are born by the workers as they try to prop up a failing social world (Baines 2004, 2012; Brookfield, 2006; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2007, 2010).

For social workers in the field, as those who share their narratives in the Social Worker Overload digital media story suggest, workload has cost both social workers and their clients. Terri Jones tells us workers continue to do the work even though the system “runs the workers in place” which “runs the workers down”, a metaphor that suggests the workers energies are like batteries that can be exhausted. Thus the doing more with less means workers are expected to sacrifice their own rights and needs in the employment context (Brookfield, 2006; Gibelman, 2005; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2009; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 2006; Scanlon, 1999). A sacrifice often described as necessary and desirable in the social work literature (Fook, 2002; Benjamin, 2011; Bisman, 2004; Gibelman, 2005; Mullaly, 2007, 2009; Rossiter, 2001) or tied to the workers morality (Heron 2005, 2007; Rossiter 2001).

The idea of needs is a complex one, because in a neoliberal context, clients do not have ‘their’ needs met. Needs are something that are determined by a higher authority than an individual person, actuarial information systems are deemed the most reliable vehicle for determining the needs that count in standardized practice (Baines, 2004, Baines 2007, 2011; La Rose, 2009; Parton, 2008; Smith, 2010, 2011). The requirements for this kind of process is something that is determined by authorities like the United Nations who
receive consultation from social workers in positions like those held by Dr. David Jones (Hick, 2001).

In this context, mandated services like child protection, are fundamental basic needs, as are services like food, clothing, shelter, employment services, support for serious mental health issues and social crisis as well as violence related crisis services. The needs that count are standardized in neoliberal social work, relegated into discrete categories that are assessed using actuarial approaches (Baines, 2011b; La Rose, 2009; Monro, 2004; Smith, 2010, 2012). The populations served by mandated services are vulnerable populations and the end result of these ‘stretched services’ can be the death of clients and or workers (Baines 2004, 2007, 2012; Baines et al., 2009; Fisher, 2004; La Rose, 2009). In these cases, the individual social worker may, have to bear the brunt of the liability for case outcomes because of the accountability framed within professionalization (For examples see: ASWB.org [Protection of Public], OCSWSSW.ca). This liability may be held by the workers even when they do not control the allocation of resources, nor hold the ultimate decisions making power over the level of service provided to a particular client (Baines, 2004; Baines, 2011c; Gibelman, 2005; La Rose, 2009; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010).

In conclusion, the kind of digital media sharing undertaken by AFSCME using the Social Worker Overload digital media story provides access to information that might not otherwise be made available to the general social work community through mainstream media or through more traditional research dissemination processes (Lange, 2009; Fitch, 2005; Ellingson, 2009; Kidd, 2010; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010, Couldry, 2010). Without access to this digital media story through social media and sharing platforms like YouTube this kind of tacit knowledge presented in the Social Worker Overload story would be lost.
(Lange, 2009; Hick, 2001; Couldry, 2010). Increased access to grey research like the workload knowledge produced by AFSME makes research more accessible to workers in the field in both format and content, an accessibility that is creating a new potential for solidarity and connection (Kidd, 2010; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009). This kind of sharing has the potential to allow workers to use tubing and surfing as technologies for community organizing and activist practice. Mediation of these practices of community organizing long desired, may allow for greater solidarity to be built among workers, an outcome that is rarely achieved among social workers.
Chapter 11: Conclusion

I introduced my thesis as a kind of consideration of the importance of resistance and remembering in the making of social work. I described social work as a “contested space” (Baines, 2007, pg. 20) where a history of struggle played a significant role in social workers capacity to define themselves in ways that reflected social change and critical traditions. I argued the digital media stories examined in this thesis may be understood as symbols of a new era in this struggle. This new era will rely (in part) on digital media and technology and will see social workers engage in a “global” process of resisting and remember in the YouTube environment. YouTube and other digital media sharing sites have the capacity to allow social workers with access to the online environment to create and contribute to popular understandings of social work’s social change history, thus making the potential for a radical future.

As I approached this process of analysis, I sought to examine social workers’ use of digital storytelling to engage in resistance and remembering. This inquiry was guided in part by understandings of critical social work that centre interdisciplinarity and social movement traditions. This work was guided by scholars like Donna Baines, whose work closely relates social work to the identity and orientation of its workers and to the work processes and environments shaping workers’ day-to-day work-life and their experiences of practice. It was also guided by Akua Benjamin’s (2007/2011) consideration of remembering as resistance, a process that flows out of a commitment to critical social work, informed by situated understanding of context. I have also learned a great deal from Gordon Pon’s (2009) work on the “ontology of forgetting” through
which he argues for the inclusion of social work’s history of participation in racism and oppression in contemporary understandings of what it means to be a social worker. Barbara Heron’s (2007) work on race and international helping has also played a significant role in shaping my thinking by helping me to establish links between helping, personal identity and morality. The history and traditions that Pon (2009) and Heron (2007) consider show us how we as social workers have sought to make ourselves “good” and “reliable helpers,” repeating the same old colonial and oppressive mistakes in new contexts. This thesis has also drawn on a great deal of other critical social work literature and critical scholarship from many different disciplines ranging from digital media and communication studies to women and gender studies.

I have approached this research seeking to answer the following three questions in detail:

• How are social workers using digital storytelling as a tool for resisting and remembering?
• How are traditional social work practices like reflective, empowerment and advocacy practices mediated and mediatized through social workers’ practices of digital media storytelling?
• How are contemporary social work discourses expressed in digital media storytelling?

Crystallization

In order to answer these questions, I have centered my analytical work in my examination of 6 digital media stories related to social work and shared publicly on
YouTube. These texts have been deconstructed and analyzed through crystallization. The multiple points of view and angles of the analysis have been created through the use of multi-modal analysis (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). Notions of critical reflection, reflective practice and reflexivity as process of knowledge generation in social work are considered as forms of self study that show themselves in digital media storytelling activities. This analysis is further informed by discourse, narrative, genre and metaphor analysis applied to the texts as relevant, based upon their content and contexts.

**Deconstruction and Analysis of the Texts**

Deconstruction and analysis of the digital stories included in this thesis presents for us conflicts and paradoxes relevant to contemporary practice In part, work-design affects social workers’ capacity to reflect values in their practice. Work-design also shapes workers’ job dissatisfaction, which may be understood to potentially affect their practice (Antle et al., 2006; Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Aronson & Smith, 2009; Baines 2004; 2012; Brookfield, 2009; La Rose, 2009; Maslach, et. al., 2001; Smith, 2010). These work-life issues and value conflicts add additional complexity to social workers’ emotional labour.

In attempting to cope with these demands for emotional labour, workers must respond emotionally in ways that are consistent with professional standards. Thus, regulating their responses to emotional experiences in an environment where little support and few resources are allocated to deal with these issues is a very big part of the work they do. It is an experience that is consistently shown in the social work representations they have posted on YouTube. It is further compounded by social work discourses that promote understandings of social work as benefitting workers by
enhancing their moral standing and social mobility as a substitute for fair wages and reasonable working conditions. However, in a neoliberal context, the “good helper” becomes a risky subject, one who potentially negatively affects the potential for exploitation necessary to make capitalism “cook”.

Professionalization deems the range of acceptable emotional responses and behaviours. *Our* codes of ethics standardize these, while licensure and regulation support enforcement of these textually mediated processes through techniques of self-policing and through complaints and adjudication procedures implemented at agency and community levels. In this context, consideration of these publicly accessible stories of social work allows social work researchers, like me, access to texts that at times show us these technologies in action and at times show us how resistance to these kinds of realities are possible; a resistance that can be enacted by workers, clients and people who fall into liminal spaces that make them neither workers nor clients.

The digital stories selected for this thesis are also texts that have been created spontaneously by the storytellers. These narratives have not been shaped to fit a particular research agenda, or to fit in a particular, required research project or storytelling project and the “discursive domain[s]” associated with this kind of standardized processes (McWilliam, 2008). Because these stories are created through more inductive and spontaneous or serendipitous processes, the perspectives on social work they offer us may be unique as they are not templated by programs or techniques that other more formal storytelling contexts may produce (Couldry, 2008, McWilliam, 2008; Sakamotto & Pinter, 2006).
The work of Markham and Baym (2009), Dicks et al. (2005), and Hine (2008) also invite considerations of digital media research techniques and traditions as affording social workers like me, the capacity to reconsider these digital media stories as important acts of knowledge production. Since these texts reflect the experience of social workers and their clients, and their analysis of these experiences, we may understand these texts as forms of practitioner research and knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Fook, 1996; Richardson, 2000). This may present a significant challenge, as we must re-orient our understanding of research when inquiry is undertaken in this “not as usual” way so that we may recognize these stories as a form of social work knowledge when all that we know from our disciplinary traditions tells us this is not what they are (Rosenberg, 2004; Spivak, 1988).

In particular, these digital media stories demonstrate the mediation and mediatization of reflective practice, empowerment processes and advocacy traditions. Mediatization is in part explained by the possibility of technology and the ‘evolution’ of social work to include these technologies (Couldry, 2008; Drotner, 2008; Hick & McNutt, 2002; McNutt, 2000; Thurmim, 2008). However, mediatization is also a political issue reflecting the goals of funders and regulatory systems and therefore requires deeper analysis (Drotner, 2008; Fitch, 2005; Hennesy & Sawchuck, 2003; McNutt, 2000). Pressure from neoliberal governments push more traditional reflective practices to the margins of social work practice spaces (Fook, 2002; Issit, 1999; La Rose, 2009). This suggests digital media use is at times an act of compliance, while at other times it may be an act of resistance, but many times the line between these two categories becomes a “bleeding edge” (Woods & Dempster, 2011).
In this way, resisting and remembering become concepts that are difficult to separate. Just as Foucault (1988) has suggested that knowledge/power operate as parallel process, it is in this context almost as difficult to separate resisting and remembering. Keeping something alive, active and known, means exercising the power to make this so; but this remembering is always, already a kind of forgetting. Neoliberalism brings with it an agenda that requires the forgetting of particular social processes and phenomena, which I have shown to affect social workers and social work practice. In particular, the conclusion drawn by many scholars that neoliberalism seeks to eliminate, erase or remake the radical, political, change-oriented aspects of our practice, echoes throughout the analysis of the stories I have considered (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Baines, 2011; Carniol, 2010; Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2009; Smith, 2010). By changing practice, neoliberalism also remakes social work outcomes and identities.

For social workers, one form of resistance to these kinds of remaking is engaging in cultural production (Hutcheson, 1989; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2011; Mullaly, 2009; Prasad, 2003; Shepard, 2005) or engaging in the creation and preservation of representations about social work. The convergence of digital media and neoliberalism means that YouTube has become one of the places where social workers undertake production of social work artifacts, and share these representations. We can understand these practices and this use of YouTube to constitute a kind of digital social work archive (Snickars & Vondreau, 2009; Burgess & Green, 2009; Schroter, 2009; Shifman, 2011; Kessler & Schafer, 2009). How long this will remain something that is accessible and possible will undoubtedly be influenced by the continued marketization and
commercialization of YouTube (Andrejevic, 2009; Farchy, 2009; Wasko & Erickson, 2009; McDonald, 2009; mwesch, 2010).

**Mediating and Mediatizing Social Work**

The body of digital stories presented and analyzed in this thesis may be understood as examples of the mediation and mediatization of social work practice. Digital media stories allow social workers to mediatize their work, to use technology to perform traditional kinds of practices and in doing so, these practices are also mediated, changed and adjusted by the technology, and by digital media culture (Baym, 2009, 2010; Markham 2009; Lundby, 2008). These stories reinforce our understanding of the workers’ orientation as significant to the processes and outcomes of practice. Similarly the politics of the storytaker are shown in the stories told. These political orientations are mediated through digital storytelling. The stories told are mediatizations of the workers world-views, way of knowing and doing, all of which are political.

Social work digital media stories mediate and mediatize reflective, empowerment and advocacy practices when present in social workers’ digital media stories. Digital media technology allows for a remaking of these social work traditions, a remaking that brings with it challenges, opportunities and threats both old and new. These stories show us once more the significance of political orientation in shaping these perspectives in texts. These are also mediated by the digital culture that becomes a part of individuals' perspectives through their participation in digital media.

Reflective practice as a social work tradition is particularly evident in the digital stories created by Erahoneybee and Wrightkan. These two social workers use digital
media storytelling to externalize their internal experiences of practice. Both of these storytellers show us, through their use of the medium, a progressive process of self-examination serving as a kind of self-study (Bride, 2009; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This self-examination occurs on multiple levels at the same time and the storymakers make use of the multi-modal capacity of digital media technology to show us this multiplicity of processes as they progress.

The use of digital media storytelling in this way also shows us how these explicit considerations of self allow new understandings to emerge for both the subject of the reflection and for the audiences who witness these reflections. What cannot be controlled in this process is who watches and what gets reinterpreted. These new understandings develop as a result of story sharing on the Internet, which is in part a result of viewing by intended and unintended audiences who may ‘fail’ to read the stories on the basis of the author’s intent (Lundby 2008, 2009; Kress, 2003; Rosenberg, 2004).

In Erahoneybee’s digital media story Song About a Child Welfare Agency, we see Erahoneybee struggle to make a connection between her health and her experiences of social work practice in context. We see her resist social work subjectivity and professional interpolation (Berg-Weger & Birkenmaier, 2000), which may be read as a kind of critical social work positionality, a position that remembers the kind of resistance that challenges neoliberal social work practices (Benjamin, 2011; Pon, 2009). Erahoneybee tries to “make light” of her experience and the work she is doing. Yet her story suggests that managing the conflicts between the values of social work and the actualities of practice is a significant part of her labour (Aronson & Sammon, 2009;

These acts can be understood as embracing critical social work practice by using parody, irony, wit and humour as techniques for reflection (Hutcheson, 1989; Shepard, 2005). By doing so, Erahoneybee also claims and uses the power available to her within her subordinate position as an intern (Ganascia, 2010; Fook, 2002; Mann, 2004, 2005; Mann, Nolan & Wellman, 2002; Razak, 2005; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2006). This resistance is demonstrated in part, by the mere act of telling tales from work (Bishop, 1992; Baines, 2007; La Rose 2009; NSGEU 2002) via the Internet, something that relies on the possibilities of digital media technologies and social media (Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010, Lange, 2009; Lundby 2009, 2008; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009).

We also witness Erahoneybee’s deeper reflection on her experiences of work and on the processes she uses to engage in this reflection as a step that shows us how quickly we can forget our own reasons for resistance. In this case, we see how Erahoneybee reflects her way out of her postmodernist social work subjective position (Hutcheson, 1989) and into a modernist social work subjectivity as she “becomes” a child protection intern (Smith, 2010). This becoming moves her from seeing humour as a possibly way of understanding to understanding her use of humour as something that makes her “a bad person”.
Similarly, Wrightkan also provides us with a glimpse into the process of reflection in which notions of professionalization as a kind of bourgeois identity remakes both social workers and social work. He suggests becoming a professional means abandoning many of the kinds of practice that motivate workers to enter the field in the first place, practices understood to help and support clients directly (Antle et al., 2006; La Rose, 2009; Smith 2010).

The reflective, empowerment and advocacy practices considered in this thesis also reinforce understandings of politics as playing a central role in social work (Baines, 2011; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2007). These stories show us how the political orientations of workers are manifest in practice, whether or not they are remembered consciously or consciously forgotten (Adams et al. 2009; Baines, 2011; Fraser, 2004; Pon, 2009). These social workers show us how their orientation to social work and their “politics” are a part of how they understand themselves as social workers and how they perform social work. They perform these politics in their stories, embedding them in the topics they present, and expressing them in the things they tell us. These politics are mediated in what is remembered and what is forgotten in the stories told and in the way these stories are told.

To bring this idea to life, we see David Jones present an individual address, a monologue delivered to social workers because a major social institution, the United Nations, has declared a particular day as World Social Work Day. He presents to us a text that delivers an institutional message about the expansion of the social work market. He presents this as the President of the most powerful social work institution in the
world. He forgets issues of oppression and exploitation that are buried in these practices.

In contrast, both *The Discreet Charm of the (Bourgeoisie) Social Worker* and the workers who share the *Social Worker Overload* digital media story also deliver individual narratives, but these can be understood as multiple voices in a collective narrative about overwork. They speak as union members, bringing to life understandings of social workers as workers. They ask that additional resources be provided to support or deepen a program that already exists rather than expanding a program into a new space, gobbling up what already exists and exploiting the systems that are already in place.

None of these social work stories are presented from a shared geographic location. They use different genres and different approaches to sharing their narratives. These workers focus on different examples and experiences. Yet, there are themes and similarities that can be traced across the stories, which present us with what Baldry and Thibault (2008) understand as “concordance”. In this way, normalizing discourses (Brock, 2003; Jagger, 2008) may be read across these texts, suggesting that social work still has a role in social control even when we may understand ourselves as engaging in critical practice (Smith, 2011). To illustrate this point, the Bettendorfs’ engage in advocacy that builds an argument on the basis of rights and rightness (Alinsky, 1978; Ife, 2009; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004; Mullaly, 2009), but in doing so also engage in normalization through acts of racism, sexism, gender normativity, hetero-normativity and homophobia. Sometimes they are active participants in this oppressive behaviour
and sometimes they are culpable because of their failure to challenge these behaviours in others.

Notions of empowerment practice and advocacy practice often lean heavily on understandings of “breaking silences” and “speaking out” as processes of change making (Baines 2007; Bishop, 2002; Carniol, 2010; Mullaly, 2009; Hardcastle & Power 2004; La Rose, 2009, 2012). Digital media storytelling has been described extensively in the literature as processes that allow for truths to be spoken that might change people’s understandings (La Rose, 2009). While these actions may be important steps in the advocacy process, telling tales isn’t the conclusion of the change process (Alinsky, 1978; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004; Holosko, 2003; Hick & McNutt, 2002). Speaking and sharing are merely steps on the road to change and the road to change that creates a more egalitarian reality for people is very, very long, or very, very rough…or both long and rough (Baines, 2011; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; Mullaly, 2009).

Social Change Through Production and Representation

The globalization of social work and the expansion of social work into nations and places where social work has not previously existed as a profession has been linked to international development activities by the IFSW (Hick, 2001; IFSW.org; The Global Agenda, 2012). This new framing of social work as a profession and as a practice requires us to consider what it is that development work offers for social work, inviting us to consider parallels that exist between community development practice and international development work (Bonnycastle, 2006; George, 2006). We need to ask ourselves as well, what it is that social workers have to offer to the process of “development”.
Greater power to control representation and to draw on these processes of meaning making have the potential to create social change by changing understandings or challenging stereotypes and assumptions used to oppress, control and exploit people in the margins (Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010). Much of the literature considered in this area could be applied to the context of this thesis, and might be important for creating the kind of social work that the IFSW is suggesting is possible. It would be a kind of social work that honours local communities, “protects” and “promotes” indigenous knowledge, and resists the potential of creating a kind of neo-colonial approach to internationalization (Hick, 2001; IFW.org; The Global Agenda, 2012).

In considering these goals for global social work, the digital media story *Bobbi the Social Work Slayer* invites us to consider what it means to acknowledge the failures of social work and our culpability in processes of colonization, cultural genocide and the overall oppression of indigenous and marginalized groups. If social work is to avoid repeating these histories in our globalized future, then we must consider the past as key to unlocking different ways of doing our work (Benjamin, 2011, hooks, 1990).

The Bobbi story invites us into these kinds of reflections gently, by using humour, irony, wit and parody (Hutcheson, 1989; Prasad, 2005; Shepard, 2005; Sorensen, 2008) to illustrate the effects of social work practices and child welfare services on First Nations people’s family lives. The story also presents us with the effects that standardized neoliberal practices have on social workers, like, for example amplifying the harms that are done to families. The story also suggests that we must twist, or “queer” our solutions to these problems because the solutions we have currently have failed quite miserably.
Connections Through Digital Texts

The social work stories considered in this thesis, are all different kinds of social work stories, yet together they tell us an overarching story about social work, a story that crosses many continents, many identities, and many experiences. Each story may be read as a chapter in a larger social work narrative, that tells us something about social work, and that may shift and change depending on what stories are added and removed from YouTube. Some of these stories may be “true”, while some of these stories are “truthy” (Boler, 2008), presenting to us possible stories that tell us something real through fiction.

As Chenderlan (1982) and Baldry & Thibault (2006) suggest, we take up some stories, seeing in them what it is that we are meant to remember, or what speaks to us in some way; while at the same time we leave other stories behind because they do not call us in the same way. In considering the content of stories and assembling meaning across stories, as good story audiences do, we leave some understandings out, ignore missing pieces or fill in details with fiction in order to create for ourselves a linear narrative, a story that is familiar, a story we want to be told (Portelli, 1991).

The texts presented bring to life the concept of the “hyper-local” and the “hyper-global” (Lange, 2009), enveloping some aspects of the uniqueness of Internet based communication technologies (Couldry, 2010; Lundby, 2008). Before this technology was developed, it is unlikely these texts would have been understood as interconnected because of their temporal and proximal distance. Now these stories can be rapidly and effective connected through digital media technologies, circulated and re-circulated through the capacity of digital media and the infrastructure of the Internet (Burgess &
Hyper-local texts or texts that are very specific in nature, like Erahoneybee’s bedroom sousveillance practices, allow us to see how the very-personal can be understood as a text that is relevant at the global level. Similarly, the work of the IFSW and former President David Jones can easily be read as a text of global significance, a global text that also holds relevance to individuals as a result of Jones' use of address as a practice of affinity (Lange, 2009).

Each text in its own way presents a specific individual local story about the effects of neoliberalism on social workers and social work. These texts move from being understood as singular stories, or singular readings as “truth” and become chapters in a much larger story of social work, in which each of these stories becomes a parallel example in a particular reading of context. These texts show us the poly-contextual nature of social work (La Rose, 2012; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009), illustrating what Baldry and Thibault (2006) describe as the “context of situation” and the “context of culture” (pg. 7), which are understood to be present in multi-modal and multi-vocal texts like the digital stories considered in this thesis.

**Genre and Meaning Making**

The analysis of these stories raises some questions about the concept of these texts when they are understood as “grassroots” or popular texts with spontaneous reflections of social work issues and concerns. As McWilliam (2008) points out, storytelling practices can become discursive domains, in which particular kinds of
stories can be made to reflect particular kinds of methods. It can be difficult to separate the “medium” from the “message” in that there are particular “mediums” that are more suitable to grow particular messages (Federman, 2004). We can understand digital storytelling to stimulate and fertilize particular methods, but we can also understand critical social work to be a particular medium in which particular kinds of stories are more likely to grow.

We can understand the project of storytelling to allow us to experience “critical social work stories” as bringing into view what Spivak’s (1985, 2004) work suggests might be understood as the voices of “subaltern” social workers. In this context, these texts become important elements in the “search for subjugated knowledge” (Hartman, 1994). We may understand the presence of these stories on the Internet as a “success” in that we now have a medium that will allow for the subaltern social workers to speak and to potentially be heard. In this case, part of the significance of this thesis is its contribution to “alternative” knowledge (Couldry, 2010; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009; Kidd, 2010; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010; Rosenberg, 2004). This means being willing to expand our understanding of how we relay and receive texts. If the medium is the message, then different mediums provide us with different messages and social workers need to create a parallel between the process goals and the desired outcomes of their digital media practice.

However, once again as Rosenberg (2004) and Spivak (2004) suggest, it is unlikely that the discursive domains of mainstream disciplinary spaces will be able to “hear” or “read” the knowledge in texts or mediums that are not already known and accepted, as the point of disciplinary spaces is to gate-keep (Payne, 2001). This
perspective is taken up by Spivak (1988, 2004) when she considers the idea of colonization, and the role that members of indigenous groups have in facilitating colonization. She reflects on the fact that individual members of indigenous groups were often honoured/used by the colonizers as cultural mediators who made the work of the colonizers culturally relevant for the colonized communities (Ibid., 2004). As mainstream social work organizations seek to regulate and enclose digital spaces by applying the rules and norms of social work professionalism to these spaces and practices, the potential of these spaces as places where subjugated knowledge can be found is likely to decrease and this shift maybe difficult to detect as regulations gets made “relative” by digital cultural interpreters. My work in part facilitates this process of making these texts visible and readable by this dominant and dominating part of social work.

If we understand practices of resistance and practices of reflexivity as a part of social work, then the whole project of protecting or restoring subjugated knowledge gets a bit more complicated as a result of these processes. It could even be argued that the discursive process of critical social work means that the stories that social workers tell are stories that can be told, stories that are structured into the ways that we learn to be social workers (Fook, 2002; Berg-Weger & Birkenmaier, 2000; Knight, 2006; Pease, 2010; Portelli, 1991; Sakamoto & Pinter, 2006); they become the official method of resistance.

**Discourse**

Critical social work is still a form of social work that exists within an institutional space, fitting within what we understand to be the disciplinary domain of
social work (albeit at the margin) (Payne, 2001). Therefore, the stories that we tell and can be read by someone like me, are constructed outside of me and the matter symbolized becomes what it is that I am allowed to remember while I maintain my subjective social work position (Davies, 2006). That being said, there is a downward pressure on what it means to be a social worker and these kinds of texts and these kinds of readings are a part of what helps to challenge neoliberalism in the field. In this way, we can remember what has been forgotten when we turn to digital media storytelling as a way of telling our stories and to digital spaces like YouTube as a way of sharing and archiving these stories.

The desire to regulate social workers' use of digital media as social media practices points to what will potentially occur as social work globalizes human service and development work (see: Open Mic Session, 2013 [Lena Dominelli speaks]; Hick, 2001; The Global Agenda, 2012). Spivak's cautions about colonization as a process that inevitably erodes culturally specific understandings replacing them with potentially hybrid outcomes, is something that social workers need to consider for themselves as well as for their clients. The role that social workers played in the process of cultural genocide is clearly present in the Canadian social work history and in the history of social work in Hong Kong, the U.K. Ireland, Australia, the U.S.A., and now potentially in Kenya.

Sharing the stories of social workers, and ensuring that this sharing is not simply a kind of forgetting designed to create a kind of innocence (Pon, 2009; Rossiter, 2001), is an important act. If social workers really believe that what we do is a fundamental good, and a global necessity, if liberation, social change and greater equity are to
become realities, then our stories of epic failure, like stories of the residential schools (Pon, 2009), the Industrial schools (Ferguson, 2007) and contemporary child protection services as well as other stories/histories of social work’s complacency and participation in oppression are important stories (Benjamin, 2011). These stories might help prevent similar events from taking place once more, perhaps in a global context this time. But sharing stories requires a place and space for stories; if social work regulators have the capacity to prevent social workers from telling stories that would in anyway ‘harm’ the profession or the employer, then we must ask “how” professional social work may be used as a tool for creating social justice and social change?

Digital media practices and the phenomenon of social media allows us to consider mechanisms of power present in our professional and practice activities (Foucault, 1988). We may understand the social workers’ choices to take up digital media practice as reflecting individual power (Brock, 2003; Fook, 2002; Foucault, 1988). If social media and digital media environments are seen as places where social networks act to produce and enact power (Elsaesser, 2009; Kress, 2003; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009), then technological possibilities of Web 2.0 and the framework of YouTube may be understood to open up some possibilities of “short circuiting” less desirable power processes currently at play. While networks like these have always existed, digital media facilitates these processes in ways that are faster, cheaper and potentially more far reaching than ever before (Burgess & Green, 2009; Snickars & Vondreau, 2009). The idea that I can connect with the experiences of the social work digital media storytellers that I have explored in this research while sitting in my basement in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, is case and point.
The process of digital storytelling brings to life Foucault’s (1988) understanding that power “circulate[s]” through social “institutions and institutionalized practices that govern everyday lives” (pg. 252). A perspective that invites us to consider power as “ascending” further suggests the need for social workers to engage in “practices that affect power at the micro-level” by engaging our individual “capacity… to appropriate and extend different technologies of power” (pg. 252). The digital media stories considered in this thesis show us how social workers take up digital media to engage in the kinds of acts Foucault suggests. For example, we may understand their stories to show us how they are responding to pressure on the possibilities for reflection in one location, but seeking to continue this practice in the space of YouTube. The social workers are mediating and mediatizing reflection and appropriating digital media storytelling and YouTube for their own purposes. However, if pressure by regulators creates challenges to social workers digital media storytelling practices it will be interesting to see where and how these processes are once more remade. The challenge for us is presently (and may continue to be) undoing the individuation that is reinforced in these kinds of practices.

From Individual Stories to Collaborative Understandings

While Foucault’s work, as used in this analysis, emphasizes the individual, there is good reason to think about how we might move these practices into collective processes. Critical reflection is not “naturally” or necessarily a collective process. I would argue that in the context of social work, it rarely takes place in this way, in particular for front line workers who cannot necessarily control the work environment or
their access to resources to facilitate these kinds of “professional” development activities (Issit, 1999).

There is good reason to consider how it is that social workers engage in the collectivization of critical reflection in the making of critical consciousness as a process aimed at creating oppositional culture (Alinsky, 1978; Flemming & Sewell, 2002; Hardcastle & Power, 2004) for the purpose of social change (Baines, 2011; Taylor & White, 2001; Shragge, 2007). In this context, the power potential of digital media storytelling and story sharing can either be the potential of a thousand sparks, each which flares and fades, or the potential of a coordinated process of sparking that has the potential for a fusion of power.

The notion of “speaking truth to power” as a means of engaging in social change through critique, while an apparently reasonable goal to pursue, proves to be a far more complicated matter when it is moved from the realm of analysis and into the action of practice (Baines 2011; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004; Kumsa Kuwee, 2011). Speaking and hearing are classed matters (Rosenberg, 2004; Spivak 1986, 2004). The process of “speaking truth”, is more than a matter of “giving voice” to people who are assumed to be voiceless, it is a matter of creating a concurrence between the manner of speaking, the speaker and the audience for the critique (Alinsky, 1978; Carniol, 2005; Hamilton, 2009; Portelli, 1991; Spivak, 1986, 2004).

Wrightkan presents us with an important understanding when he invites us to consider how social work is classed, with certain kinds of social work, social workers, and representations of social work having greater status in the profession than other
categories (Antle et al., 2006; Baines, 2011; Payne, 2010; Gibelman, 2004; La Rose, 2009; Smith, 2010). Professionalization can, in this way be understood as a kind of “supremacy” in that certain kinds of social work get remade as ideal forms, while others are made into more abject practices (Baines, 2007; Caragata, 1997; Ife, 1997; Rossiter, 2001). The same may be said for the practitioners (Heron, 2007; Razak, 2005), clients served (Baines, 2004; Fay, 2011) and the contexts of practice (Baines, 2011; Carniol, 2010; La Rose, 2009; NSGEU 2002). As social work becomes classed in this way, it is made bourgeois, and so the bodies and credentials of those who perform social work are also classed (Campbell, 2012; Heron, 2007; Rossiter & Heron, 2011; Razak 2005; Pollack & Rossiter, 2010). Race, gender, language, academic training and “kind” of practice produce intersectional understandings of the social work and the social worker (Baines, 2011; Carniol, 2005; Razack, 2005; Rossiter, 2001).

Professionalization discourses create norms about what can be said, the manner in which it may be said, who may say it, and it also creates norms around the medium through which these discourses are shared (Hutchison, 1989; Prasad, 2005; Rosenberg, 2004, Shepard, 2005; Spivak, 1985, 2004). Rules around social media, and the slowly developing regulation of social media practices in social work make social work critique in the digital domain a risky kind of engagement for any social worker who is not the ideal social worker and who does not possess and maintain the ideal social work body as well.

However, social work also presents as a kind of social change profession, a profession designed to care and to change. This process of making change is in part built on understandings of oppositional culture and critique as necessary aspects of these
processes (Baines, 2011b; Benjamin, 2007/2011; Carroll & Ratner, 2001; Flemming & Sewell; 2002; Fook, 2002; Foucault, 1988; Mansbridge & Morris, 2001). It appears that social work regulators have managed to forget this aspect of social work, honouring instead epistemological understandings of social work knowledge as stemming out of scientific ways of knowing and knowledge production, rather than practices of knowledge generation that are built on reflection and critique. Arguments for evidence-based practice mean we only do what authorities believe already works. Evidence based practice and the standardization that comes with it complicates innovation and emerging trends. Metric analysis and “big data” research also focuses on the statistically significant, and in a global context “big data” is made even bigger. This means that for those who are not served well by what is understood as best practice, challenging this reality becomes increasingly more difficult in the face of globalization.

Digital media environments allow for links that go beyond the traditional proximal and temporal connections allowing us to share experiences with people who are geographically far away from us and removed from us by time. Many examples of links and linking are visible within the range of social work digital stories posted on YouTube. These links have the capacity to facilitate a variety of different social work practices including community building, mobilization and activism among social workers (Boler 2008; Hick & McNutt, 2002).

The capacity of hypermedia to create links between materials on the Internet and people who use those materials is vast and accessible. Even ‘individual citizen users’ can utilize the Internet to create their own links between materials and organize connections as they choose (Wesch, 2008). The organization of links extends our
capacity to access these resources, be they human or material resources. Collaboration can occur relatively easily and cheaply. Collaboration is a desirable way of practicing in social work generally and in the context of anti-oppressive practice, where notions of experience as an important source of knowledge are key, it is made all the more important (Fook, 2002; Flynn Saulnier, 1995; Van Den Berg, 1995). In these contexts collaboration enriches understanding, analysis and outcome. Further involvement of communities in the practice of goal setting and change making is understood as important because it enhances the potential of empowerment and ownership spurred by intervention (George, 2006; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004).

Digital media is capable of reshaping who generates, manages and disseminates knowledge (Dicks et al., 2005; Wesch, 2008). Here technology has the potential to allow frontline workers and their clients to participate in these knowledge processes (Kidd, 2010; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010). The potential of the Internet may allow for a redistribution of power from institutional locations to grassroots community spaces (Couldry, 2010; Hick & McNutt, 2002; Kidd, 2010a, 2010b; Kidd & Rodríguez, 2010), a process that could have a significant effect on academic knowledge generation leading to greater collaboration between these two worlds. For example, The Nervous CPS worker is more popular, and has more views than World Social Work Day 2010 (as of June 18, 2013). Erahoneybee has more subscribers, more views and more connections than the IFSW channel (as of February, 2012). However, as the Internet and social media platforms like YouTube become increasingly commercialized, users and researchers will have to make wise decisions about the influence that these economic
and political process have on the potential for community organizing, social change engagement and generating and disseminating knowledge.

Technology provides the capacity for collaboration to occur between and among people who are temporally and spatially distant (Couldry, 2010; Lundby, 2008). These kinds of collaborations can occur relatively easily and cheaply (Baym, 2010; Kidd, 2010; Markham, 1998, 2004). Collaboration is a desirable way of practicing in social work generally; in the context of critical anti-oppressive practice it is seen as a necessarily element in practice. Collaboration in this way allows for new knowledge to be generated and disseminated, knowledge that reflects an understanding of knowing, being and doing as complex and intersectional processes. Digital media practices and the texts they generate are capable of reflecting these complexities and thus have the potential to contribute to the process and outcomes goals of critical social work.

**Implications for Future Research**

For now, I have reached the end of this consideration of social workers’ use of digital media as a tool for remembering, forgetting and resisting. But the flexibility and possibility of the medium of storytelling and the potential of crystallization as a method for analysis of texts means that many more chapters are yet to be written in social worker’s digital media adventure. Social workers may continue to engage in these story-making practices, and researchers like me may continue to deconstruct and analyze these texts until the next wave of mediatization occurs, opening new horizons for exploration.

There are many other studies that could flow out of this project and the research perspectives it presents. This research could give rise to another layer of inquiry in
which studying the connections and networks that flow out of these YouTube channels and the stories they contain become the focus of consideration. This kind of project has the potential to create still more connections between and among participants in the YouTube community and other Internet sharing spaces. Researching how these connections exist and what they lead to, yet more connections could tell us much about the potential for building the kinds of solidarities I have suggested may be possible earlier in this chapter. This is yet another kind of research that would benefit our understanding of social workers use of digital media and the potential of this tool for community organizing.

Undertaking a project interviewing the storytellers who created the digital stories we have considered in this thesis, provides us with another perspective to add to the crystallization of understanding being developed from these texts. Using the stories analyzed in this thesis to undertake an “audience study” and to investigate the range of meanings and understandings developed from these texts is yet another potential research activity that could flow naturally from this starting point.

The framing of social work as an important step in the process of professionalizing international development work is yet another kind of research activity. Some of the literature considered in the thesis focuses on development communications, social justice communication, or communications for change. The IFSW’s efforts to establish a framing of social work as a profession that is capable of undertaking international social development suggests the importance of creating links between development practices like social change communications. While some of these connections may already exist there is a need for social workers to become more aware
of the traditions of development work and to become more fluent in these practices that already exists in this area, for example, development communication activities. On this basis, my study points to the benefits of developing projects that allow social workers to engage in their own communication activities in order to learn on an experiential basis the challenges and opportunities that this will produce in our work with clients.

Social media and digital media are also becoming more commonplace practices in social work. Much of this work comes about as a result of mediatization and mediation, once again little research has been undertaken in this area with John McNutt and a few of his students presenting us with the bulk of available material in this area. Tensions exist between digital technologies and social work and fear and ignorance often producing a regulatory response (or the threat of this response) to these practices (White, 2011). Greater research into these activities and greater knowledge of the potential of this media through community based research and more formal interdisciplinary knowledge generation is another potentially important area for further investigation. The material in this thesis may point to some of the potential processes that could facilitate this kind of work.

Finally digital media storytelling techniques are being used by social workers in the field and by social work educators in the classroom. There are threats and opportunities inherent in this kind of work. Therefore, additional research into these approaches and critique of existing projects will benefit the field. These practices may also have the potential to support social workers to develop their own techniques and approaches for doing this work in a way that more closely reflects our goals and desires.
Digital media storytelling and platforms like YouTube have the potential to support greater connections and to foster greater solidarity among social workers locally and globally. As globalization continues to influence social work and social work regulators continue to stake claims about what it means to be a social worker, these kinds of connections may become increasingly important. These connections may play an important role in social work for social change.

Digital media processes allow social workers to create representations about our work and thus to influence what it means to be a social worker. These representations may become important materials that allow us to preserve some of the more marginal and in my opinion more grassroots understandings of social work. These perspectives may be important to the making of social change activities and to the centering of anti-oppressive goals designed to create fundamental social change.

Beyond social workers’ practices of digital storytelling, I have a continuing interest in other kinds of questions about how digital media will be taken up and incorporated into the field of social work: as a way to structure practice and thus shape working conditions; as a creative tool for community engagement; or as a tool of measurement, monitoring and regulation. Continued inquiry into social workers’ use of digital media may allow social workers to participate more actively in the design and implementation of technology as it shapes our practice and influences our collective futures.
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