

**A Different Understanding of 'Professional':
Social Work Students Who Have or Continue to Utilize Self-harm.**

**A Workshop for University of Victoria School of Social Work
Practicum Supervisors**

By Elizabeth L. Daye
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1. Acknowledgments:

I wish to thank my supervisory committee for their wisdom, constant patience, feedback and support. Had it not been for their belief in me and the relevancy of my topic I would not have been able to complete it. Susan Strega, my academic supervisor, constantly refocused me on what my goal was for the research and pushed me to trust the legitimacy of my own voice and experiences. Kristin Smith, my committee member, offered insight and feedback on alternative ways to approach the research. Cheryl Moir-Van Iersel played an active role in the formation of the workshop and provided guidance and direction based on her own experience creating workshops which was truly invaluable. Because of my committee's involvement I was pushed to dig deeper in order to determine what I wanted to accomplish and what truly would be possible at a Masters level.

I would also like to thank both of my parents, Gerard and Ursula for their constant belief in me. Had it not been for their love and support I never would have applied for Grad school, nor would I have been able to overcome the challenges it presented along the way. I also want to express my utmost appreciation for my partner, Cam who has stood by me through the entire Masters process and patiently listened to me very passionately discuss all that I was learning and struggling to understand.

I thank the individuals mentioned above, as well as all of the many other people who have aided in this journey. I appreciate you all for taking time out of your lives to sit, listen and talk with me. I never could have done this without each one of you.

I'm starting my practicum today. People keep telling me, "It's normal to be nervous", when I express my anxiety. But what I can't or don't mention is that I'm scared of being 'found out'. I'm scared that somehow my future colleagues will look at me and know all about me; know that for years I cut little lines in my skin. And if they know, then surely they won't take me seriously, surely they will see me as incompetent, surely they will treat me like the imposter I feel I am. An imposter working with the same population I belonged to not so long ago. Yet this fear inside me begins to turn to anger, as I shouldn't be fearful, I shouldn't feel like an imposter or that there is something wrong with me. I am not incompetent. Each of my cuts has taught me something; taught me that there is more than ever meets the eye, taught me a very different way of working with this population, taught me things that those without their own cuts may never understand no matter how many books they read. But this very personal and real knowledge isn't fully recognized in all areas of social work, so I start my practicum scared of being 'found out'. Yet all the while knowing that if others could listen without judging ears and I could overcome my fear, so many stereotypes around self-harm could be challenged and so much learned.

Elizabeth Daye Journal entry from January 2009

2. Research Focus and Summary

The goal of my research was to develop an educational workshop focused on challenging discourses surrounding who can be seen as suitable to be a professional social worker. Such discourses are perpetuated by a history of dividing practices, which position those in 'client' positions as innately different and less than those in 'worker' positions (Chambon, 1999). My personal experience of belonging to both positions illuminated for me the need for social workers' beliefs surrounding suitability to be broadened and potentially challenged.

Individuals who have or historically have had a stigmatized identity are often viewed as permanently 'different' from those who do not have a stigmatized identity. In order to challenge this perception, I decided to focus on self-harm and those who utilize such behaviour and are social work practicum students. Originally, I had desired to determine what messages practicum supervisors were being given, within the literature,

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in regards to working with social work students who were or had self-harmed. However, such literature did not appear to be available, thus I focused instead on the general messages that practicum supervisors were given regarding working with students. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data sources in order to determine what messages were currently being given to practicum supervisors. Through this analysis implicit as well as explicit messages were apparent, some of which position students with 'emotional' problems or those who struggle as potentially dangerous to their clients. The repercussions of such beliefs are examined within the project, as well as how such beliefs can and do affect students with stigmatized identities in general, or those who self-harm specifically.

Through my research it became apparent that there was a lack of information that acknowledged or discussed students who have stigmatized identities or histories entering social work. There was also no mention of those who have or do engage in self-harm becoming social workers. Due to the lack of information and general positioning of students who 'struggle' as potentially needing to be weaned out of the profession, it became apparent to me that a resource was needed that positions being a social worker with a stigmatized identity, such as self harming, in a different light. Thus, in response to the research conducted as a part of this Masters Degree a workshop (see Appendix A) was created for the University of Victoria School of Social Work. The workshop was created for social work practicum supervisors with the aim of increasing their understanding of self-harm while improving possibilities for supervisors to create more supportive environments for the students with whom they work. Supervisors in attendance will also have their understanding of 'professional' and who should be seen as

suitable to be given such a title questioned, challenged and potentially broadened. In order to assist in the analysis of the data, as well as theorize how supervisors could potentially support practicum students, I utilized my own experiences of being a social work practicum student with a history of self-harm. Overall, my intention for the research was to develop an educational workshop that challenges the stigma and stereotypes often associated with self-harm, while offering ways in which supervisors can support students who are engaging or have engaged in self-harm.

3. Personal Disclaimer

I struggled internally throughout the research process as well as during the creation of the workshop. My struggle involved whether I should discuss students who have a history of self-harm, those who are currently self-harming or both. It was through this struggle that my own internalized ideas regarding who is a 'professional' began to surface. I have been raised with dominant Western ideas, and consequently have internalized many of the discourses regarding who engages in self-harm and the reasons they do so. I have also unconsciously internalized ideas and images regarding who is or should be considered a professional. The dominant idea of what constitutes a professional and the fact that someone who has self-harmed is often excluded from this image was one of my main motivators for engaging in this research.

Initially I wanted to solely focus on students who had historically engaged in self-harm, but no longer were doing so. This is a population that I belong to and thus understand first hand how it feels to be a practicum student, who has self-harmed in the past, and is now a student in the very setting where I was once a client. However, when challenged by others to include individuals who were still self-harming, I felt uncertain of

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whether I could authentically discuss self-harm as always being simply a coping mechanism. It became apparent to me that even though I have spent much of my personal and professional life trying to combat many of the stereotypic beliefs surrounding self-harm, such as it being attention seeking, or that only those who are mentally ill engage in such behaviour, suddenly I was wondering if I actually agreed that a student who was still self-harming should be seen as suitable to participate in a practicum and indeed become a professional social worker. This is due to the fact that not only have I internalized many of the stereotypes regarding self-harm, but I have internalized discourses regarding who is suitable to be seen as a professional as well as who isn't. Although I know that the way our society classifies a professional as someone who is and always has been emotionally stable, well dressed, educated, and articulate, is often incorrect I have still internalized this supposed ideal figure. Thoughts such as, "surely one must have to 'deal' with their issues and have gotten help before being ready to be a social worker, which obviously hasn't happened if they are still self-harming" ran through my head. These thoughts shocked me as they are the very words I have heard others say so many times; the very words that I desire to challenge.

As I battled internally with my beliefs about self-harm as well as who truly is a 'professional', I was also forced to examine my beliefs regarding why people utilize self-harm. I reflected and remembered what purpose self-harm had held for me, and why I had utilized it for so long. Through this reflection, I began to think about other areas of my life and how my engagement in self-harm seemingly had no impact on them. I was attending college, working towards becoming a social worker, getting good grades, volunteering, and very involved with my family and friends. I appeared to be a well-

rounded student who would have been described as suitable to one day become a professional. And indeed I was. Yet I engaged in self-harm. Self-harm was how I coped and in many ways I believe it is what allowed me to remain grounded enough to balance all of my different obligations. Through remembering my own journey and that my engagement with self-harm was simply a way to cope and in no way fully defined me as a person, it became clear to me that unless I included students who were currently self-harming that I would indeed be subscribing to the very discourses and stereotypes regarding who can be seen as suitable to be a professional that I was hoping to challenge. For that reason, when I discuss practicum students throughout this project I am speaking about students who either self-harmed historically and no longer are doing so, or who are currently utilizing such behaviour. No distinction when discussing the practicum student is made, as I do not believe one is necessary. I set out to challenge other peoples' perceptions of self-harm and who is suitable to be a professional, however through this process I was forced to examine and challenge my own beliefs, many of which I did not even realize I possessed. This has been a humbling experience for me, as I hope it is for those partaking in the workshop as well.

4. Committee Membership

This research project is designed to fulfill the requirements of *Social Work 598:*

Individual Research Project, which is a part of the Masters of Social Work degree at the

University of Victoria. The project committee is made up of the following members:

Susan Strega, PhD
Academic Supervisor, Chair of the Committee
Associate Professor, School of Social Work (UVIC)
Email: sstrega@uvic.ca

Kristin Smith, PhD

Committee Member
Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Ryerson University (RU)
Email: kristin.smith@ryerson.ca

Cheryl Moir Van Iersel, PhD
Community Committee Member
Senior Instructor, School of Social Work (UVic)
Email: ciersel@uvic.ca

5. Background of Research Project

The University of Victoria School of Social Work is committed to “social justice, anti-racist, anti-oppressive social work practices”, while “promoting critical enquiry that respects diversity of knowing and being” (University of Victoria (UVic) School of Social Work *Mission Statement*, n.d.). The stated goal of the School is to help prepare social work students to become practitioners who are skilled in “critical self-reflection and in working with individuals, families, groups and communities” (UVic School of Social Work *Mission Statement*, n.d.). The School recognizes that people bring with them a diversity of life experiences. This diversity is seen as an asset, which has resulted in the School consciously admitting students who encompass a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as those who differ in age, gender, sexuality, ability, work and life experiences (UVic School of Social Work *Admissions Policy and Procedures*, n.d.). The School strives to create a supportive environment where individuals are treated equitably, fairly and respectfully while working across differences.

Yet not all differences are accepted or seen as valuable within the field of social work. Although often unspoken there are ‘ideals’ regarding who is suitable to be a social worker, as well as who does not fit the criteria of ‘professional’. These ideals have been challenged in certain areas; however dividing practices, which “distinguish, separate, and categorize populations” (Chambon, 1999, p. 273) result in the belief that there are innate

differences between those who occupy social work positions and those who occupy/occupied client positions. In my experience this belief continues even within spaces believed to respect 'epistemic privilege' (Potts & Brown, 2005). The Code of Ethics (2005), that all social workers are required to follow, states "as individuals, social workers [must] take care in their actions to not bring the reputation of the profession into disrepute" (p. 6). Due to the prevalent belief that those who engage in self-harm are unsuitable to be social workers, one's engagement in such behaviour while a student or practicing social worker has the potential to be seen as bringing the profession into disrepute. This belief follows the medical model, where those who have been diagnosed with a mental illness are believed to never get well again (Poole, 2011, p. 16). Thus, individuals who have mental health concerns or have traumatic histories are often positioned as permanently within a 'client' position, and their suitability is often questioned when they desire to become social workers. Essentially, their presence in the field challenges the known and accepted understanding of 'professional'. Since self-harm is often associated with mental health, having engaged in such behaviour either historically, or currently, also positions one as 'forever' a client. This lack of acceptance of diverse life experiences and the risk of students with such experiences being seen as unsuitable for the profession often results in students fearing being 'found out' and thus remaining quiet.

All BSW students at the University of Victoria must complete two field education practicums in order to successfully complete their program (UVic School of Social Work *Practicum Policy and Guidelines*, 2008). At the time of writing, the third year practicum consists of 300 hours, while the fourth year practicum consists of 400 hours. Both

practicums can be completed in various community as well as government agencies within the student's home community. Individual agency mandates can, and often do, include service to individuals, families and communities from a variety of backgrounds (UVic School of Social Work *Practicum Policy and Guidelines*, 2008, A1.1). Practicums are completed under the supervision of an experienced social worker within the agency where the student is located (UVic School of Social Work *Practicum Policy and Guidelines*, 2008). The BSW Field Education Manual states that the experience within the practicum is meant to "build upon practice and previous experience, and to provide opportunities to strengthen skills, knowledge, and understanding of current values and attitudes" (School of Social Work UVic, 2009, p. 8). The School aspires that students will not simply acquire further work experience, rather practicums will provide opportunities for students to engage in critical self-reflection while applying the theory they learned in their classes to social work practice situations (School of Social Work UVic *BSW Field Education Manual*, 2009).

The BSW Field Education Manual cautions students to be aware of the emotional as well as physical toll the practicum may have on them (School of Social Work UVic, 2009). It goes on to state that certain aspects of the student's life, that they may not have previously dealt with, may be triggered within the practicum, which can result in an increase in anxiety for the student (School of Social Work UVic *BSW Field Education Manual*, 2009, p. 38). It is suggested that students utilize available support networks. The supervisor at the agency where they are placed may be able to provide support to the student as part of the agency supervisor's role encompasses providing day-to-day supervision and guidance to the student as they complete their practicum. It has been

found that practicum students benefit from a supportive supervisory relationship where they can openly discuss their anxieties and concerns (Chui, 2009). When discussing students who encounter difficult situations in their practicum Chui (2009) stated, “by having an outlet to share these difficult experiences, the student would not have to bear the full weight of any negative emotional baggage or professional issues alone” (p. 22). It is suggested that the supervisor and student determine the pattern and frequency of supervision prior to the commencement of the practicum (School of Social Work UVic *BSW Field Education Manual*, 2009). This allows both parties the opportunity to prepare for supervision and attend with relevant questions as well as concerns. Chui (2009) found that the quality of learning was affected by the presence of a learning contract, where the expectations of the student as well as details regarding the frequency and duration of supervision were outlined. It was found that students often worried that they would not get enough supervision and were concerned about what their supervisor would expect of them if they did not discuss these matters and come to an agreement prior to the practicum starting (Chui, 2009).

As was previously mentioned, students are unable to complete their bachelor of social work degree without completing and passing their practicums. In order to pass, practicum students must complete the required hours as well as accomplish the learning objectives as set out by the School (School of Social Work UVic *Practicum Policy and Guidelines*, 2012). Each student is assigned a faculty liaison worker through UVic. It is the liaison worker who ultimately determines whether the student passes or fails the practicum (School of Social Work UVic *Practicum Policy and Guidelines*). The practicum supervisor determines whether the student completed the learning objectives in

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a manner deemed satisfactory and then reports how the student did to the faculty liaison worker. This places an immense amount of power in the supervisor's hands, as they have the ability to determine, along with the liaison worker, whether the student passes their practicum and thus is able to become a social worker. If a student does fail their practicum they are able to re-do their practicum at another agency, however if they fail their second practicum they will be asked to leave the social work program at UVic (School of Social Work UVic *Practicum Policy and Guidelines*). Due to the importance of the practicum, including the necessity to pass it, it is vital that supervisors and liaison workers hold an inclusive understanding of 'professionalism', which does not exclude individuals who have engaged or engage in self-harm. If supervisors believe that such behaviour deems a student unsuitable to become a social worker then the student is at risk of failing their practicum and not becoming a social worker if their supervisor finds out. It has been found that students often feel incompetent and inferior within their practicum, regardless of their identity or experience, resulting in them trying not to expose areas they feel may confirm these feelings (Chui, 2009, p. 24). Students who have or are self-harming likely try to hide their use of self-harm and potentially fear 'being discovered'. The workshop created as part of this project will act to increase supervisors' understanding of self-harm, as well as assist in the broadening of their understanding of who can and indeed should be considered suitable to be seen as a professional.

UVic's Policy on Human Rights, Equity and Fairness (2005) clearly states that "all members of the university community are responsible for promoting a supportive and inclusive learning and working environment and for dealing respectfully and fairly with each other" (policy 5. 1). The workshop I created promotes and offers a supportive

learning environment for supervisors to grow in their understanding of self-harm, as well as how they can support students who currently are or have utilized such behaviour. This is important as students have a right to practicum placements that they feel are safe, free of discrimination and harassment (School of Social Work UVic *BSW Field Education Manual*, 2009, p. 56).

In a study by Nisivoccia (1990) it was shown that students often fear being judged or seen as incompetent (as cited in Chui, 2009, p. 14). She also reported that the supervisor's reaction to a student's anxieties has the potential to "inhibit further learning" and greatly affects the overall effectiveness of the learning process within practicums (Nisivoccia, 1990 as cited in Chui, 2009). In my experience, the level to which I felt supported by my supervisor greatly affected the overall practicum experience, as well as how effectively I was able to learn. If a student is concerned about the reaction of their supervisor or resulting repercussions of disclosing having self-harmed either currently or historically, as I have, this is likely to interfere with their ability to effectively learn and grow in their practicum. However, if the supervisor is supportive and understands self-harm as a self-regulating coping mechanism, which is simply an aspect of the student's identity, rather than a totalizing identity, or a rationale for discrimination or judgment, then the potential for the practicum to be a supportive and positive one is greatly increased.

It has been found that students are more motivated to learn and take risks within their practicums if they feel safe and supported by their supervisors (Knowles, 1971; Fernandez, 1998, as cited in Chui, 2009, p. 28). Thus, in order to maximize the learning of practicum students it is vital that supervisors support them, and in order for that to

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occur supervisors need to avoid subscribing to pathologizing stereotypes about self-harm as well as who should be seen as suitable to be a social worker. However, due to the stigma still attached to self-harm, as well as the perpetuation of largely inaccurate stereotypes that has led to such stigma, I believe that it is important to educate practicum supervisors and faculty liaisons, who will be working directly with students who may have or continue to engage in self-harm. It is hoped that by challenging the pathologizing stereotypes attached to self-harm that students will indeed feel supported within their practicum. It is also hoped that by broadening and perhaps challenging supervisors' understanding of professional suitability that students who have stigmatized identities, such as self-harm, will no longer be viewed as potentially 'unstable' and thus unsuitable to be social workers.

UVic strives to provide its students with the best possible educational experience (UVic *Policy on Human Rights, Equity and Fairness*, 2005, policy 4). From my experience of being a Bachelor of Social Work student at UVic, I learned that getting an education is not simply about the classroom learning environment. Rather, in social work at UVic a large part of the educational experience occurs during the two mandatory practicums. In order for the student's experience to be valuable and indeed provide the "best possible educational experience" (UVic *Policy on Human Rights, Equity and Fairness*, 2005, policy 4) for all social work students, both the classroom as well as the practicums must provide a supportive experience for students. A workshop that assists practicum supervisors and faculty liaisons to understand self-harm and how to support students they are supervising, who may be utilizing or have utilized self-harm, will prove

to be a useful addition to the School of Social Work's orientation for practicum supervisors.

Currently UVic Social Work practicum supervisors are offered the opportunity to take part in a six week optional online course developed and run by the School of Social Work. This course costs \$199 and covers current literature on being a practicum supervisor, provides tools for working with students, examines the links between theory and practice in relation to supervision, as well as examines how supervisory skills can be transferred to the workplace (*Practicum Supervision in the Human Services*, 2010). The voices of previous students and supervisors are incorporated throughout the course in order to provide further insight. This course is the only one currently available to prospective supervisors through UVic. Although many of the topics covered are of great importance, it does not examine how supervisors can support students with stigmatized identities in general, or those who have engaged in self-harm specifically. The workshop I created has the potential to be incorporated into this already existing course as a one week component or it could be offered separately to practicum supervisors.

As professionals in the helping field, I believe that we have an ethical responsibility to provide support to those who are entering the field with stigmatizing life experiences. Practicums need to be a supportive place for everyone, regardless of one's social location or personal history. Due to the lack of current training for practicum supervisors on how to support students with stigmatizing identities, such as self-harm, the workshop developed as a part of this research project aims to educate practicum supervisors on the most up-to-date knowledge and understandings of self-harm as a

coping mechanism, as well as broaden supervisors understanding of professionalism, while exploring how they can support students with stigmatized identities.

6. Research Question

The educational workshop produced for practicum supervisors at the University of Victoria, centers around the following question:

How can social work students be supported within their practicums as they weigh the risks and benefits of disclosing stigmatizing personal information about their utilization of self-harm?

7. Literature Review

Self-harm has been increasingly researched in recent years, as practitioners require and consequently seek information on how to seemingly 'manage' this behavior. Self-harm is most often defined as any intentional non-suicidal behavior, which results in damage to one's body tissue (Emerson, 2010; FirstSigns, 2002; Interdisciplinary National Self-Injury in Youth Network Canada (INSYNC), n.d.; Timofeyev, Sharff, Burns & Outterson, 2002). Self-harm constitutes a spectrum of behaviors including cutting/mutilating, scratching, hitting oneself, hair pulling, as well as burning one's skin (Canadian Press, 2008; Emerson, 2010; First Signs, n.d.; INSYNC, n.d.; Long & Jenkins, 2010; Timofeyev et al., 2002). A study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal found that 17% of British Columbia youth, between the ages of 14 and 21, have engaged in self-harming behaviour (Harris, 2010, para. 12). However, there is discrepancy within the literature regarding the exact current prevalence of self-harm and whether it is indeed increasing. Cloutier et al. (2010) suggested self-harming rates ranged from 14% to 40% in community populations of adolescents and 38% to 67% for

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psychiatric inpatient populations (p. 259). Self-harm has also been found to be utilized by 11% to 38% of college students and in about four percent of older adults (Harris, 2010).

It is important to consider that contrary to the seemingly accepted belief that self-harm is an attention seeking behavior; it is in reality, often a secretive behavior, which others may not discover for many years (Brody, 2008; Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior (CRPSIB), 2012; Emerson, 2010; FirstSigns, 2002; Long & Jenkins, 2010).

This is largely due to the fact that those who self-harm often do so in places where the marks can be covered by clothing, such as the abdomen, back of upper legs, and forearms (Emerson, 2010, p. 840). For this reason, it is nearly impossible to truly know how many individuals are currently engaging in self-harm and if this number has increased or decreased in recent years. However, a decade long study completed in Great Britain determined that there has been a 28% increase in the number of teenagers who presented to the hospital because of engagement with self-harm (Boyce, Oakley-Browne, & Hatcher, 2001 as cited in CRPSIB, 2012). It is likely that the actual number of individuals engaging in self-harm is even higher than the statistics from hospital admissions show (Emerson, 2010), due to the fact that a study completed at two colleges found that only 6.5% of individuals ever receive treatment for their wounds (Whitlock, 2006 as cited in CPRSIB, 2012). Regardless of the exact number of individuals who self-harm, current estimates of prevalence suggest it is a significant issue affecting large numbers of people, doubtless including many students.

Some writers stressed the correlation between engaging in self-harm and trauma caused by interpersonal family conflicts, as well as emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse (Brody, 2008; Cloutier et al., 2010; Timofeyev et al., 2002). However, there is no

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agreement within the literature as to the 'cause' of self-harm. Selekman (2002) cautions that one cannot automatically assume that someone who engages in self-harm has experienced abuse (p. 3). Selekman also stresses that even those who have experienced abuse, and are self-harming, may not wish to discuss the abuse and that it is the individual who must decide what information is important to focus on. Trying to 'heal' past trauma, which may or may not exist for the individual, prior to their being ready, can indeed further push them to utilize self-harm in order to manage the emotions they are experiencing (Selekman, 2002, p. 3).

More recently, self-harm is beginning to be primarily understood as a coping mechanism, which assists the person to cope and survive by relieving emotional distress (CRPSIB, 2012; FirstSigns, 2002). People who utilize self-harm as a coping mechanism often report that it is easier to deal with physical pain compared to the hidden emotional pain they are experiencing (FirstSigns, 2002). It has also been found that when someone experiences feelings of numbness or dissociation they may feel a sense of calm or be awakened by engaging in self-harm (CRPSIB, 2012; FirstSigns, 2002; Harris, 2010). Whitlock, Director of the Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults, reported that self-harm functions to "self-regulate feelings and help people cope with overwhelming negative emotions they have no other way to dispel" (as cited in Brody, 2008, para. 11). The reduction in tension and unpleasant feelings people often describe when they self-harm is likely due to the fact that when an individual self-harms endorphins are released within their brain, resulting in a sense of relief from emotional anguish (INSYNC, n.d.; Timofeyev et al., 2002). Due to its biologically reinforcing nature, self-harm has been found to have the potential to

become addictive (Brody, 2008; Canadian Press, 2008; INSYNC, n.d.).

In my experience, many helping professionals view the engagement in self-harming practices as an indication of suicidal ideation or intention. Recent literature largely challenges this longstanding belief, and discusses how the utilization of self-harm may in actuality be a “battle to stay alive” or a “life ‘saver’ rather than a life taker” (Emerson, 2010, p. 841). Self-harm is becoming increasingly understood as an emotional self-regulating response, which research has shown to be distinct from suicidal ideation (Brody, 2008; Canadian Press, 2008; Cloutier et al., 2010; CRPSIB, 2012). The intent behind the act of hurting oneself, the lethality of the method used as well as the overall attitude towards life were found to be different in populations of youth, as well as adults, who had attempted suicide and those who had engaged in self-harm (Cloutier et al., 2010, p. 260). In fact, Nixon stated that self-harm may indeed be utilized in order to manage suicidal ideation and prevent the person from acting on such thoughts (Canadian Press, 2008, para. 22). Research has also found that around 60% of individuals who engage in self-harm have not considered suicide (CRPSIB, 2012), thus the longstanding belief that self-harm is always or usually directly linked to suicidal ideation or intention is likely incorrect. According to Selekman (2002) a distinct difference is that individuals who are suicidal often wish to end all feeling, whereas those who self-harm do so in order to mitigate negative feelings, and indeed to feel better. My own experience of self-harm is in line with this understanding, as it was the only thing for many years that could take my mind off everything else that was going on in my life; the only thing that grounded me and brought me back to reality. Ironically, it allowed me a short break from the constant sadness and anxiety I experienced during my youth.

Transue and Whitlock (2010) found that the media reinforces inaccurate stereotypes regarding self-harm. In my experience, it is teenage girls who are most often depicted or discussed within the media as self-harmers, as if self-harm is limited simply to a specific sex. Selekman (2002) noted that while some research has contributed to the media's portrayal of it mainly being girls and women who engage in self-harm, however this is likely inaccurate. The number of boys and men who engage in self-harm is not known, since many individuals who engage in such behaviour do so in secret (Brody, 2008; CRPSIB, 2012; Selekman, 2002). The literature states that self-harm occurs within all age groups and is not limited exclusively to a specific gender, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or related to one's personal strength (see, for example, Brody, 2008; Caicedo & Whitlock, n.d.; Canadian Press, 2008; FirstSigns, 2002; Harris, 2010; Long & Jenkins, 2010). In fact, if we see self-harm as a coping mechanism, utilized to mitigate distressing emotions, there is the possibility for anyone who experiences distress to engage in self-harm (FirstSigns, 2002; Harris, 2010). In summary, it is impossible to identify someone who may currently utilize or has historically utilized self-harm (Caicedo & Whitlock, n.d.).

Although there is a growing body of knowledge viewing self-harm as a coping mechanism, there is still a stigma attached to having engaged in such behavior. I believe that this is largely due to the pathologizing images and portrayals of self-harm within the mainstream media, as well as in some of the literature currently available. Thus, those who utilized self-harm often experience the stigmatizing effects long after the behavior has stopped. An enormous amount of shame is often experienced by those who self-harm, both while engaging in such behavior, as well as after they have stopped (Burstow,

1992). The shame experienced, along with the stigma attached to self-harm due to misconceptions regarding why people may engage in such behavior, makes it difficult for individuals to openly discuss their experiences of self-harm (Burstow). Unfortunately, this forced silence, in order to avoid being faced with unsympathetic responses or stigmatization, means that the misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding self-harm continue to be perpetuated.

I believe that the current misconceptions surrounding self-harm and the ensuing stigma often results in people, who either currently or historically utilize self-harm, being viewed as 'messed up', 'unable to cope' or mentally ill, and thus unlikely to succeed. We are not thought of as suitable to be 'professionals', at least not if people were to be aware of our engagement in self-harm. Through my own experiences of having self-harmed during my youth, then learning other coping mechanisms and stopping the self-harming, all while working towards my goal of becoming a social worker, I now know that this belief is far from true. Having self-harmed or currently self-harming need not limit one's ability to be a competent social worker. Unfortunately, this view, in my experience, is not widely shared. And it is this lack of understanding that, I believe, often results in there being risks associated with disclosing that one has self-harmed either presently or historically.

Due to the large percentage of people who are believed to have engaged in self-harm, it is possible to predict that some of them will enter schools of social work and eventually be completing practicums. Similarly, there are already practicing social workers who self-harm, some of whom may indeed be practicum supervisors or faculty liaisons. In my experience, being a student in an environment where one's supervisors

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may potentially subscribe to available stigmatizing stereotypes regarding who self-harms and for what reasons, does not create an environment conducive to feeling supported. Thus, in order for students, as well as already practicing social workers who utilize or utilized self-harm, to feel supported it is important that individuals already in the field, particularly those in powerful supervisory positions grow in their understanding of self-harm as a coping mechanism. Arnold and Magill (2000, as cited in Emerson, 2010) similarly recommend that self-harm needs to be better acknowledged and understood by helping professionals and that more support is needed for those who have engaged in self-harming behaviors. I believe that the educational workshop I created will begin to fill this apparent gap by challenging the stigmatizing stereotypes regarding who self-harms and the seemingly accepted belief that there is something innately wrong with someone who does utilize such behavior. This belief needs to be challenged as it contributes to dividing practices where individuals, who may possess characteristics or act in ways often associated with a 'client' status, are viewed as unable to ever be suitable to be social workers. It is also hoped that practicum supervisors, who take part in the workshop, will have their understanding broadened beyond the medical pathologizing understanding, of the reasons why someone may have engaged or may be engaging in self-harm. By challenging the stigma attached to self-harm as well as broadening supervisors understanding of who should be considered suitable to be seen as a professional, students with stigmatized identities will not only be more supported within their practicum, but the risk of being seen as unsuitable and therefore disqualified from the School of Social Work simply because one utilizes or has utilized self-harm will likely decrease.

8. Methodology

I believe that engaging in research is a political act, as lives may be changed and accepted 'truths' challenged. Ball and Janyst (2008) state that, "researchers have the power to collect information and produce meanings which can support or undermine values, practices, and people; and to construct legitimating arguments for or against ideas, theories, policies, or practices" (p. 48). Throughout this research process and particularly as I created the workshop, I continually reminded myself and was made aware of the power I held. However, I was also readily reminded of how little power I had felt I had when I was a practicum student, due to having a history of self-harm. Due to my stigmatized identity, I was acutely aware of the possibility of being seen as unsuitable to be a social worker. While I knew this wasn't true, I feared others seeing me as unsuitable and consequently not allowing me to complete my degree. Although I recognize how powerful the dominant discourse that positions those with stigmatized identities, such as self-harm, as unsuitable for professions like social work is, I still feel that it was important to remain mindful of the power I now hold as the research and workshop are likely to influence the way practicum supervisors interact with their students. For this reason, I am accountable not only to the University of Victoria School of Social Work to create a useful workshop, but more importantly, I am accountable to practicum supervisors, faculty liaisons and future social work students, particularly those who have engaged or are engaging in self-harm.

I chose thematic analysis as the methodology for completing this research project, as it "provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 78). Essentially,

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thematic analysis is a method which allows for the identification, analysis and reporting of repeated patterns or themes within the data being studied. Boyatzis (1998 as cited in Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79) states that it goes further than simply organizing and describing the data or themes, rather researchers utilizing thematic analysis also interpret and make meaning of various aspects of the research. I was interested in growing in my understanding of the messages practicum supervisors were receiving within the literature about how to work with their students. I desired to identify if there were themes within the literature and if so, what they were. By gaining an understanding of the themes present I believed that I would be able to understand the messages that supervisors were receiving and thus what would be important to include in my workshop. Essentially, I would be able to identify what I would be 'talking back to'. Due to this research being done as part of my Masters Degree requirements, thematic analysis appealed to me because it is considered "a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 81).

The methodology one utilizes acts as the theoretical framework, which guides how one's research is conducted. Stanley and Wise (1983) reminded me that "the kind of person we are, and how we experience the research, all have a critical impact on what we see, what we do, and how we interpret and construct what is going on" (p. 50). Research often discusses themes, which seem to 'emerge' from the data, as if they reside in the data and it is simply our job, as researchers, to go about finding them (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 80). However, this "denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers" (Taylor & Ussher, 2001, as cited in Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 80). I realize that

my location, history, motives, agenda and the methodology I utilized, all influenced how I chose to conduct the research, the conclusions I drew, as well as what I viewed as valid to include in the workshop (Rutman, Hubberstey, Barlow & Brown, 2005, p. 156).

Braun and Clark (2006) explain that when one is utilizing thematic analysis, which I did, it is imperative that the researcher recognizes and acknowledges that what they determine is important to analyze is based on their own biases. For this reason, they urge the researcher to be transparent about the theoretical frameworks and assumptions that guide the research. Through the process of conducting research, as well as the creation of the workshop, a form of knowledge was created. This knowledge has the potential to be constructed as truth (Chambon, 1999). However, I do not propose to determine the 'truth' as I believe "there is no 'the truth', 'a truth' – truth is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity" (Rich, 1979, as cited in Kimpson, 2005, p. 77). Thus, it was not my desire or goal to produce the 'truth', nor do I think that this would be possible. Rather, as Potts and Brown (2005) state "in anti-oppressive research, we are not looking for "truth"; we are looking for meaning, for understanding, for the power to change" (p. 261). I desire to change the way that students with stigmatized identities are treated, as well as who is eligible to be considered suitable to be a professional. It was with these desires in mind that I completed the research.

Data Collection Methods

I collected data by searching for and analyzing secondary literature. In order to determine what literature I should analyze I spoke informally with UVic's practicum liaison, as well as with instructors at UVic, regarding the resources that supervisors most often turn to for instruction on how to work with BSW practicum students. Razack's

(2002) 'Transforming the Field: Critical Antiracist and Anti-oppressive Perspectives for the Human Services Practicum' as well as Bogo and Vayda's (1998) 'The Practice of Field Instruction in Social Work Theory and Process', 2nd edition were purchased, while I was granted on-line access to UVic's HSHS 001 Practicum Supervision in the Human Services' (2011) course. Although two of the data sources are older, through discussions with instructors at UVic and the liaison worker, it became apparent that these sources are still readily referenced and utilized by practicum supervisors. When I was working on the proposal for my research and trying to determine what it was indeed that I wished to research I had also seen Razack, as well as Bogo and Vayda's books referenced in articles written about practicum supervision. For these reasons, I decided that, while they may appear to be outdated they are still relevant and new literature does not appear to have been written to take their place. I decided that the three data sources I had collected were sufficient for the research given that as I began to read and analyze them there was sufficient data to form codes and themes.

Throughout this project my goal was to challenge the stigmatizing understanding of self-harm by assisting practicum supervisors to grow in their understanding of self-harm as a coping mechanism. It is my belief that if supervisors have such an understanding, practicums will become more supportive and indeed safer for students who utilize such behaviour. In order to achieve my primary goal, I realized that I would need to grow in my understanding of the suggestions currently being given to practicum supervisors.

Initially, I had assumed that resources written for social work practicum supervisors would address, at least briefly, supervising a student who had engaged or

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currently was engaging in self-harm. I had assumed this because I know from my personal experience that there are social workers who self-harm and that at one time they were students. Knowing this, I made the incorrect assumption that this would be known or assumed by others, and that the literature would reflect this. Thus, I desired to collect data from literature that provided instruction to social work practicum supervisors in regards to working with a student who either was self-harming or had done so historically. I hoped that by collecting such data, I would grow in my understanding of the messages supervisors were being given regarding working with students who self-harm as well as what would be important to cover in the workshop I would be creating. However, upon my first reading of the data it became apparent that I had been incorrect in this assumption. No mention of self-harm or self-injury, as it is often referred to, was made in any of the data sources that I analyzed. The lack of available information led me to return to the data, however this time I was looking for what supervisors *were* being advised to do and what direction they were being given. By growing in my understanding of what supervisors are instructed, or at least recommended to do, I believe I have a better understanding of the discourses and messages currently influencing practicum supervisors. Essentially, I have gained a greater understanding of the potential climate practicum students face. Through my failed attempt to collect data directed at practicum supervisors who are working with students who self-harm it became apparent to me that the workshop that I created would be vital to fill this gap.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis occurred alongside the data collection process. This aligns with thematic analysis where analysis is said to begin once the researcher notices

“patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data”, which often occurs during the data collection process (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 86). After fully reading through a particular piece of literature in order to gauge its relevance to the research, as well as gain an overall understanding of the content, I reread it a second time. During this second reading, I typed into a Word document each sentence, with its corresponding page number, that I felt was of interest or pertained to self-harm. I created separate documents for each of the data sources in order to ensure that the quotes and page numbers were not confused among the data sources.

Braun and Clark (2006) state that “writing is an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end...writing should begin in phase one, with the jotting down of ideas and potential coding schemes” (p. 86). Thus, during this second reading, along with subsequent readings, I made notes, both within a journal as well as on a Word document on the computer, of any codes or themes that appeared to be developing. Braun and Clark (2006) state “codes identify a feature of the data...that appears interesting to the analyst” (p. 88). In order to determine if a data extract was of importance, or potentially could be, I ‘listened’ to my own internal response. If I was intrigued, bothered or excited about something written then I recorded it without being concerned at that time whether it would fit in the final analysis.

After reading through each piece of literature and journaling my reactions to it, I returned to the data excerpts and began identifying initial codes. Codes are used to identify features within the data that appear to be relevant to the researcher and refer to “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, as cited in Braun and

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Clark, 2006, p. 88). I read each sentence that I had typed into the Word documents and recorded underneath as many codes as I felt applied. I began by coding the extracts of data from Razack (2002), then Bogo and Vayda (1998) and finally UVic Practicum Course (2011). The codes I identified initially were: student struggles; need for safety in the practicum; practicum function; suggestions for supervisors; disclosure; power; students' fears; stigmatized identity; problems in the practicum; risks; discrimination/oppression; and silence. None of the codes directly related to self-harm as there was no mention in any of the data items of self-harm. However, the codes identified do indirectly relate to students who self-harm, as well as students with stigmatized identities in general. Much of what was written in the data sources and thus informed what I chose to identify as codes and later on themes impacts those with stigmatized identities. For instance, where the data discussed the 'practicum function' social work practicums were often described as gatekeepers to the profession. Similarly, the code 'student struggles' included data excerpts about students who were struggling in their practicum and how the supervisor could potentially work with them. Suggestions ranged from supporting them if their struggle was seen as 'legitimate' or situational, to once again cautioning supervisors if the struggle was seen to be 'within' the student. I recognize that I could have used different codes for each section and that others likely would have, however I chose the codes based on what I felt best described all of the data that it encompassed.

Within my journal and Word documents, I recorded my personal reflections, emotional responses and any insights that arose while reading the literature. I also recorded any questions or observations pertaining to the research that I wanted to alert

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myself to during future readings. These recordings enabled me to informally express my thoughts and feelings without worry of being judged. While certain codes and themes began to be identified through the reading, based on what I deemed to be of importance or relevant even if only indirectly to self-harm, it wasn't until I returned and read my initial thoughts that had been recorded that I began to be able to identify what themes were of real importance. My recorded reactions also allowed me to see the contradictions that were present within the literature, as at times I strongly agreed with what I had read in the data and at other times I was shocked and troubled. The documents that prompted my reactions have proven instrumental in allowing me to understand at a deeper level the discourses influencing supervisors and the resulting risks practicum students who self-harm likely face. These reactions have illuminated for me what is important to cover within the workshop and what discourses need to be challenged in order for students with stigmatizing histories to feel supported within their practicums.

Through repeated readings of the data as well as sitting with the data, I began to group the codes into potential themes as well as collate the coded data extracts with their corresponding identified themes. Braun and Clark (2006) state that “essentially, [at this stage] you are starting to analyze your codes, and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme” (p. 89). Not all of the codes formed overarching themes; some combined to form sub-themes, while others proved to not hold relevance to my analysis and were discarded. I identified themes based on the overarching messages present in the data extracts and codes, which related to students with stigmatized identities either directly or indirectly. Braun and Clark (2006) describe sub-themes as “themes-within-a-theme” (p. 92). They go on to state that sub-themes are useful to

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provide structure to large or complex themes (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 92). Each sub-theme directly relates to its corresponding theme, however is slightly different than the other sub-themes, which is why I separated them. This simplified my analysis as well as provided structure when writing about the themes and sub-themes. Once I identified the themes and sub-themes based on the codes, which were identified in the data, I recorded this in a mind-map so as to have a visual representation to return to throughout the analysis.

The overall themes that I identified and felt were relevant to my research, were 'explicitly suggested', as well as 'implicitly suggested'. The subthemes that were identified within 'explicitly suggested' are: 'need to do' as well as 'need to understand'. The theme 'implicitly suggested' subthemes are: 'weaning out', as well as 'power and pathology'.

Braun and Clark (2006) state, "for each individual theme, you need to conduct and write a detailed analysis" (p. 92). The Word document and journal, in which I recorded my reactions to the data, assisted in the writing of the analysis of the different themes and sub-themes. Through the analysis, I drew on my own personal experiences of having engaged in self-harm throughout my youth, as well as managing this information as a BSW practicum student. Due to having completed two undergraduate practicums with the School of Social Work at UVic, I am personally aware of the fear of being discriminated against, of being seen as unsuitable if someone were to find out my history of self-harm, and potentially being disqualified from the program. Similarly, I have also been fortunate to have the experience of a fully supportive supervisor, who viewed my history of self-harm as a life experience, which can now be drawn on when working with

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others. My two experiences with different practicum supervisors, one in which I was fearful that my history of self-harm would be discovered and potentially result in me not passing my practicum, and the other where I felt comfortable not only discussing my history but also how I now view it as a life experience I can draw on, were staggeringly different, as was my ability to grow and learn in the practicum. It is these experiences that continue to assure me of the importance of practicum supervisors being educated on self-harm and how to support their students who may be weighing the risks and benefits of disclosing such information.

I recognize that the themes I identified were influenced by my personal experiences, and that themes must be thought of as “emergent and changeable in their meaning and desirability to individuals over their lifetime” (Luborsky, 1994, p. 194). Thus, it is likely that if I were to complete this research at another time in my life the themes I would identify would be somewhat different, as would the way I analyze them. Similarly, other researchers analyzing the same data would likely come to somewhat different conclusions. I do not propose that I have completed this research in an objective manner; rather I valued and honored my own experiences and reactions to the literature. My experiences grant me ‘epistemic privilege’ (Potts & Brown, 2005), which provides me with some authority to speak on self-harm and what may or may not be useful to someone who is struggling with whether to disclose this information about themselves.

As C.W. Mills (1959 as cited in Church, 1995, p. 2) stated,

the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community...do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other... What this means is that you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work.

The research I completed is subjective, however I believe drawing on my own experiences throughout the analysis allowed for valuable insights to be made. Insights that may not have been possible had it not been for my history of self-harm.

9. Ethics

As an anti-oppressive social worker, I aimed to conduct my research in an ethical manner. For me this means that all stages, including the formation of my research question, had to be ethical (Potts & Brown, 2005). According to Absolon and Willett (2005) in order to do ethical research it is vital that I have a stake in the research, am invested in the process and results, as well as that it has relevance and meaning to me on a personal level (p. 104). I cannot think of a research area that I would have more of a vested interest in, or that would have more meaning to me, due to my own personal history of self-harm, as well as my history of being a practicum student who weighed the risks of disclosing this information. It is my desire that other students with stigmatized identities do not have to partake in practicums where they fear the possibility of being disqualified if their supervisor learns about an aspect of their lives, history or identity. I have been motivated from the start of this project to do research and create something that could potentially result in more supportive practicums for practicum students. Due to the personal importance of this research, as well as the resulting workshop, I considered it my responsibility to ensure that the research I did was 'good' research, which was done with integrity. By this, I mean that it was of vital importance to me that the research process as well as the workshop offer a different and non-pathologizing view of those who self-harm, or have histories of self-harm. I recognize that all research is

interpretable, and that the way I wish my research and workshop to be interpreted may be different than how it is actually understood, given that I do not have control over others' understanding of it. However, I believe that it is my responsibility to anticipate the various ways my research could be interpreted and mitigate the likelihood of misunderstandings. In order to do this, I have attempted to be clear within the workshop and leave very little to interpretation.

I did not seek ethics approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board as my research does not involve human participants. The literature I utilized, as data, was anonymized open source material, thus it is accessible to the general public to utilize.

Potential Benefits

I propose that there are many benefits to this research. At this time the University of Victoria School of Social Work does not have any training for practicum supervisors regarding how to support the students they may be supervising who have stigmatizing histories of self-harm. To the best of my knowledge other schools of social work within Canada similarly do not offer workshops or guidance for practicum supervisors working with students who have self-harmed. The workshop I have created will fill this apparent gap and thus act as an ongoing resource for the School of Social Work.

I believe that disclosing one's engagement with self-harm will continue to be unwise when trying to be seen as suitable to be a social worker as long as those who self-harm, or have histories of such, are viewed as deranged, damaged, unable to cope or simply as attention-seeking. When UVic delivers the workshop to practicum supervisors, those in attendance will have the potential to have any pathologizing beliefs about self-

harm challenged and learn ways in which they can support their students. Supervisors will also be provided the opportunity to begin to question their understandings of 'professional' suitability and who is excluded as well as included in such images and ideas currently.

I maintain that all practicum students require support, thus regardless of whether the supervisor has a student who has self-harmed or not, attending the workshop will be beneficial due to its emphasis on supporting one's student. Ultimately, this research and the workshop that has been created have the potential to increase the support students, who either currently or historically engage in self-harm, receive while in their practicum. Similarly, due to the focus on broadening the attending supervisor's understanding of suitability as to who should become a professional social worker, those who are currently practicing and have utilized self-harm could potentially experience an increase in acceptance within the workforce. Many social workers who have self-harmed, either presently or historically, likely do not disclose such information out of fear of being seen as incompetent by their colleagues and superiors. If self-harm is increasingly understood as a self-regulating coping mechanism, and having a stigmatized identity is no longer grounds to be disqualified from being viewed as suitable to be a social worker, then individuals regardless of whether they are students, supervisors or other social workers would potentially feel more supported or at least accepted within the field.

Potential Risks

The risks of this research were minimal, since no human subjects were directly involved. As mentioned above, the secondary literature that I utilized is accessible to the public, thus permission to access such information was not required.

At the onset of the research I spent some time reflecting on what I felt that I would possibly need to support myself through the research process. Due to the fact that this topic holds personal relevance for me, I recognized that there was the potential for me to become activated. In this context when I use the term 'activated,' I am referring to feelings of sadness, possible resurgence of the desire to self-harm, frustration that self-harm is still misunderstood, as well as anger that many people with stigmatized identities are not seen as suitable to be professionals. I identified key individuals with whom I could speak honestly about my research as well as how it was affecting me. I also regularly engaged in activities that I enjoy in order to ensure that my research did not become all encompassing. My research journal served as an important tool where I could engage in reflexivity and thus be transparent, even if only with myself, regarding how the research process was affecting me (Strega, 2005). Engaging in reflexivity did not only serve to provide a manner in which to process the reactions I was experiencing, but it also illuminated what data was relevant to the research based on my reactions.

10. Discussion of Themes

Explicit Suggestions – Need to Understand

Within the data set there were some explicit suggestions as well as statements regarding what is important for supervisors to understand when working with practicum students. Of particular importance, was the consistency between all of the data items that supervisors need to understand the emotions that the student may be experiencing. If such an understanding is not present the likelihood that students will feel supported and safe within their practicum decreases (Bogo & Vayda, 1998). Razack (2002) discusses the need for supervisors to understand the challenges that students from diverse backgrounds

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often have to face in the practicum (p. 15). Supervisors were urged to “hear the rich experiences students bring to the work and attempt to understand the meanings they attach to their encounters with others” (HSHS 001, 2011, unit 1 part 17). Through repeated reading of the data, I came to view the need to understand as being tightly connected with the need for supervisors to take action. Reflecting on one’s own practicum was noted to have the potential to allow supervisors increased understanding of their practicum students experiences (Bogo & Vayda), however, I believe that it is vital that supervisors recognize that people often react or experience events differently from each other. Thus simply reflecting on one’s own practicum may not be enough to understand what the student they are working with is experiencing. Bogo and Vayda touch on this when they discuss how important it is that supervisors understand that students differ from each other and that each of their students’ experiences and reactions are likely to be different (p. 86). Narayan (1988 as cited in HSHS 001, 2011, unit 5) similarly discussed that it is impossible to fully understand another’s oppression, when one is not an ‘insider’. She went on to state that while individuals may not be able to understand another’s experience or oppression, by analogizing their own experience of oppression supervisors may be able to avoid insensitive responses (Narayan as cited in HSHS 001, 2011, unit 5).

While none of the data discussed self-harm, it was present in my mind as I read and analyzed the data. I agreed with Narayan’s (1988 as cited in HSHS 001, 2011, unit 5) suggestion to think of times when we have felt oppressed and I would take this farther to suggest that supervisors should remember what they needed or wanted at that time. While it may be possible to empathize with someone who has a different life experience from

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your own, such as self-harm, it is not possible to fully understand that experience in its totality. However, supervisors have the ability to grow in their understanding by engaging the student in conversations regarding what the student may need to feel supported as well as reflecting on what they themselves find supportive. I believe it is important to mention at this time that not everyone who has engaged in self-harm will have had the same experiences, will have utilized such behaviour for the same reasons, or will find similar responses supportive. Thus, regardless of whether a supervisor has self-harmed or has had students previously who have done so does not mean that they will necessarily understand another's experiences, and neither can they neglect to grow in their understanding of what the particular student they are currently working with feels and requires of them in terms of support. Anderson and Swim (1995 as cited in HSHS 001, 2011, unit 1) call this the "not-knowing" stance, in which the supervisor recognizes that they will never fully be able to understand another person and thus must continually learn more about what their student has said or done and the reasons behind it. Rather than assuming that one understands where another is coming from or why they behaved in a certain way it becomes important, when engaging in 'not-knowing', to explore along with the other person their own understanding so that both can grow together (Anderson & Swim as cited in HSHS 001). I agree that it is vital that supervisors remember that no one can ever fully understand another person. This is particularly true, as was previously mentioned, when the supervisor is of a different social identity from their student (HSHS 001, 2011, unit 1 part 16).

Razack (2002) discussed throughout her book the importance of supervisors understanding issues relating to power, the production of knowledge, racism as well as

oppression. It appeared to be assumed that supervisors already had such an understanding or that they would take the initiative to seek such an understanding elsewhere as these topics were not discussed in enough depth to allow such an understanding to develop. She also stressed that supervisors should relay their understanding to the students with whom they work. It was cautioned that if supervisors do not have such discussions with their students then the “resulting silence and omission help to sustain power and subjugate knowledge” (Razack, 2002, p. 83). While it is vital to have understandings of these concepts connected to anti-oppressive practice, I also agree with Razack (2002) that it is imperative to acknowledge that these understandings affect how one practices. To simply understand something is not enough, and neither is it adequate to merely discuss the issues with others. Rather supervisors need to be acting as role models for their students, by exhibiting behaviours that honour diverse ways of knowing and actively challenge oppression. In the next section, I will discuss what the data revealed that supervisors are being told to do when working with practicum students in general, as well as how this differs when the student is seen to be struggling either emotionally or within the practicum.

Explicitly Suggested: Need To Do

Need to Reflect

Prior to the practicum beginning, the data sources suggested, as previously mentioned, that the supervisor think back on her/his own practicum and remember how s/he felt and what was helpful. Razack (2002) briefly identifies that supervisors can share some of the fears that they had while in practicum in order to attempt to help alleviate or at least normalize the student's own fears (p. 117). Bogo and Vayda (1998) take this one

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step further by suggesting that the supervisor reflect on what was useful to their own learning as a student while also reflecting on their own relationship with their practicum supervisor (p. 80-81). Through this active reflection on one's own practicum it is suggested that supervisors will likely be able to "make a conscious decision about how [they] will behave towards [their] students" (Bogo & Vayda, 1998, p. 78). It is believed that reflection on one's own practicum has the ability to allow supervisors insight into their students' feelings. Having such understanding is believed to potentially allow supervisors to act with intention and lead to an increased awareness of the possible repercussions of their actions. While I agree that this is an important exercise for supervisors, I believe it is equally important for supervisors to realize that their students may learn and react to situations differently than they do or did. Bogo and Vayda (1998) mention this briefly when they suggest supervisors need to "recognize multiple variations in students' reactions to new learning situations, and to understand the unique experience and reactions of a particular student" (p. 86). The importance of recognizing that each student is different from oneself as well as from each other is compounded by the fact that there is a large possibility that students may have different life experiences or come from different social locations. Thus, simply reflecting on one's own experiences may not be enough to foster true understanding or acceptance. Indeed there is a danger that a supervisor may expect the students to respond in particular ways, which could lead to misunderstandings when the student does not act as anticipated. This is particularly true in the case of self-harm where it is unlikely that all students who have engaged in such behaviour will happen to be placed with supervisors who have utilized self-harm. Supervisors who have not had such an experience and who may or may not view self-

harm as a coping mechanism could potentially ascribe to pathologizing discourses regardless of whether they have undergone the suggested exercise of reflecting on their own practicum experiences. And as previously mentioned, even if the supervisor has self-harmed and engages in reflection does not automatically mean that they will understand the experiences of the student they are working with.

Important Qualities in Supervisors

Numerous qualities were identified within the different data sources as being necessary for supervisors to have in order to support students within their practicum. Smart and Gray (2000 as cited in Razack, 2002, p. 86) outlined that supervisors need to be open, flexible, sensitive, recognize limited knowledge of oppression as well as respect students' values and attitudes. It was also stressed that supervisors should exhibit to their students an acceptance of spirituality, while also demonstrating their "understanding of racism, oppression, socio-political forces, history and colonization" (Razack, 2002, p. 86). UVic's Practicum Supervision in the Human Services (2011) course noted that effective supervisors should have the ability to participate in numerous and contradictory viewpoints, thus allowing all sides to be explored (Anderson & Swim, 1995, p. 4). Bogo and Vayda (1998) stressed the importance that supervisors respond to students' feelings in a supportive manner. Support was said to be exhibited by the presence of warmth and understanding; being open and respectful of the student; acknowledging the student as a future professional; as well as remaining sensitive to the student's needs (Bogo & Vayda, 1998, p. 91). The ability to suspend judgment and respect the students' opinion or thoughts was noted as a necessary quality of supervisors, as this allows one to explore

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ideas with their students rather than simply instructing them (Vassar, 2010, as cited in HSHS 001, 2011, unit 1).

I agree that all of the listed qualities are necessary in a supervisory relationship in order for a student to feel supported and safe. For instance, the manner in which the supervisor chooses to discuss their understanding of racism or oppression is likely to have a tremendous impact on whether the student feels safe to discuss their own understanding of such issues. Consequently the manner in which the supervisor treats the student and whether the student's own knowledge is seen as valid is likely to influence whether they choose to disclose their use of self-harm. If the supervisor is opinionated and refuses to acknowledge different beliefs or points of view the student assigned to them is likely to feel intimidated and be wary of confronting or disagreeing with the supervisor. The student may feel, and indeed may be correct, that if they disagree with a supervisor who does not appear open to difference, that the supervisor may not provide them with positive feedback in their evaluation. This has the possibility of affecting their ability to obtain a Social Work Degree. It is for this reason that it is not only important that supervisors remain open to difference, but that they articulate this openness to their students. I agree with Bogo and Vayda's (1998) statement "while trust is developed through the relational qualities of warmth, acceptance, genuineness, and interest, it is only tested as participants grapple with difference and recognize that they can risk disagreement and achieve resolution of some sort" (p. 97). If supervisors demonstrate that they are comfortable with students having different opinions and these differences can be explored in a respectful manner, students are likely to be more willing to engage in discussions without fear of the possible repercussions.

Importance of Supervision

The importance of regular and predictable supervision meetings between the student and supervisor was mentioned across the data set as a way of establishing and maintaining a working relationship once the practicum began. Along with needing to be physically available at agreed upon times it was also noted that supervisors need to also be emotionally available to their students (HSHS 001, 2011, unit 2 part 6). Falender and Shafranske (as cited in HSHS 001, 2011, unit 2 part 6) found that supervisors are required to commit enthusiasm and energy to supervision in order for students to find it effective. It is the supervisor's responsibility to engage the student in discussions regarding what is being encountered in the practicum, their reaction or thoughts about it, while also encouraging students to think critically about the situations they are dealing with. Bogo and Vayda (1998) mirror this thinking when they state, "it is the field instructor's responsibility to take the lead in developing and maintaining a positive working relationship" (p. 93).

Although self-harm is never explicitly discussed within the data set, many of the suggestions made to practicum supervisors, in regards to how to interact with minority students, could, in my opinion, be transferable to those with stigmatized identities and experiences. I believe this because the feelings I experienced during my practicum were very similar to the feelings minority students were discussed to have when in practicum. While minority students and their experiences in the world as well as practicum are different in many ways from those who have stigmatized identities, the feeling of being 'different' or 'other' is similar. Although the reasons for that feeling may differ the feeling of being 'other', regardless of the reason, often results in fear that one will not be

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seen as suitable. This fear of being further marginalized and rejected due to their difference was acknowledged by Razack (2002) when she discussed minority students and the importance of supervisors engaging students in conversations about societal inequalities, values and ideology (p. 85). Having a stigmatized experience, due to my prior utilization of self-harm, left me fearful of being 'found out', judged, and seen as unsuitable to be a social worker. This common feeling of fear of being seen as different and potentially not suitable allowed me to draw links between the suggestions made to supervisors working with minority students and how they might work with those with stigmatized identities.

Razack (2002) discusses how important it is that supervisors discuss with students the agency's stance on working with diverse populations within the initial interview (p. 84 & 85). Through engaging in such discussions, regardless of whether it is about the supervisor's or agency's stance on diverse populations generally, or self-harm specifically, I believe that students starting their practicum, particularly those who may be of minority status or have stigmatized identities, could potentially feel more aware of what to expect in the practicum. This would also likely help to alleviate some of the student's fears by relaying to them where the agency, and more importantly where the supervisor, stands on various issues. Indeed engaging in these conversations, particularly at the beginning of one's practicum, should not be the responsibility of the student as this is already a potentially vulnerable and disconcerting time for them. By conveying their understanding of stigmatized identities and experiences the supervisor is likely to foster a supportive relationship with students who have or are utilizing self-harm. This results from the fact that the student will not have to worry about the supervisor's possible

reaction, judgment or being seen as unsuitable and thus not passing the practicum, if the supervisor was to find out.

Need to be Supportive

Each of the data items at various times noted or discussed the importance of supporting the student that one is supervising. This support was seen to be one of the main roles of a supervisor as is reflected in the sentence, "the three most common verbs used to describe what supervisors actually do include: administer, educate, support" (HSHS 001, 2011, unit 1 part 2). The student's ability to grow and learn within practicum was recognized in the data as being fostered by a supportive relationship where a student felt safe to ask questions and grapple with differences in opinion. The importance of supervisors making time to discuss with students their experiences and attend to any emotional issues that may have arisen, in a manner that is responsive to the student's feelings, was highlighted by Bogo and Vayda (1998, p. 90-91). Working as a social worker is not always an easy task and the learning curve can be quite steep and emotionally draining. It is for this reason that it is so important that supervisors engage in supportive supervision with their student and create an environment where the student can feel safe to bring forward their struggles. Razack (2002) instructed supervisors to be sensitive to their students "emotional and psychological issues", by listening in a non-judgmental empathic manner (p. 117). Razack advises supervisors to discuss with their students self-disclosure procedures in case they should choose to discuss any personal information with their supervisor (p. 117). She also states "students ought not to be judged and analyzed because of a history of psychiatric and/or emotional issues" (Razack, 2002, p. 117). While I strongly agree with her assertion, it does not specify or

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cover students who have self-harmed. Razack (2002) was not consistent in her advice to support students who may be seen to have emotional issues. Indeed at times she made direct statements to contradict her assertion that supervisors should support and not judge students regardless of their history. Overall, through repeated reading of the data it became increasingly clear that the literature I was analyzing strongly positioned supporting one's student as a necessary aspect of being a supervisor. However, as previously mentioned this support was not always positioned as being necessary in all situations or with all students, thus I will be returning to it below. I, however, would state that regardless of a student's identity, history or experience they should be supported by their supervisor in a manner that the student identifies as indeed being supportive.

Managing 'Problem' Students

As previously discussed, all of the data sources highlighted the importance of supporting the students one supervises and that this support creates an environment conducive to learning due to students feeling safe to take risks. Interestingly there appeared to be exceptions to when or how this support should be exhibited. Students who have stigmatizing histories, such as emotional or psychiatric issues, were positioned as potentially dangerous to the clients they may work with. The need for supervisors to maintain 'control' of their students, who are portrayed as a risk to clients, is made explicit when Razack (2002) states, "supervisors need to be trained to manage psychological and emotional difficulties as they emerge with practicum students" (p. 116). Similarly, Bogo and Vayda (1998) state, "the student who displays behaviours which are destructive to others, and which are clearly unprofessional, must be removed from the practicum setting" (p. 179). However unlike Razack, Bogo and Vayda provide examples of what

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would be considered to be 'destructive to others' or 'unprofessional'. These include "physically injuring someone, appearing at the agency intoxicated or under the influence of drugs, having frequent temper outbursts, sexually seducing clients, stealing, or threatening to harm clients, staff, other students, or the field instructor" (Bogo & Vayda, 1998, p. 179). I agree that in these situations the appropriateness of the practicum would likely need to be reevaluated, however Bogo and Vayda (1998) continue by stating that such behaviour could be an indication of a mental illness or personality disorder (p. 179). A link has seemingly been made between mental and/or psychological difficulties and consequently being unsuitable and unprofessional. This correlation that they are drawing between mental illness and unprofessional and destructive behaviour is problematic to me. While these behaviours may indicate that something is going on for the student, and that this 'something' may indeed be a mental illness, it also might not be. Drawing such a correlation has the potential to imply that students who have mental health concerns are more likely to act in the ways mentioned and thus behave unprofessionally. Such beliefs only further serve to reinforce the stigma around mental health and potentially create hesitancy on supervisors' part to take students who have disclosed having mental health concerns. This is mainly due to the notion that if students who either have or are believed to have mental health concerns are believed to act destructively then they also could be a danger to their clients and essentially are a liability concern for the agency. As self-harm is often incorrectly linked to mental health concerns such beliefs also impact students who have engaged in self-harm. Even supervisors who are aware that self-harm and mental health does not always coincide may subscribe to the stigma attached to self-harm

which positions such individuals as inherently emotionally unstable and thus unsuitable to be professional social workers.

As I previously stated, I do not condone the above behaviors, however their cause should not be speculated on or a hypothesis drawn without actual understanding of the individual situation. Because the authors neglect to mention that such behaviours could be seen as an indication of matters other than one's mental health, their statement simply serves to further entrench the stigma and fears that are present within Western society regarding individuals with mental health concerns. Bogo and Vayda (1998) also do not make note of the numerous individuals who are both students and practicing social workers who have mental health or psychological concerns or are in addiction recovery and yet do not act in the destructive manners described.

I feel it is important to note that not all of the data items examined positioned students who appear to be 'struggling' as a risk to their clients. UVic's Practicum Supervisors course highlighted the importance of supervisors checking out their assumptions about a student's negative behaviour with the student prior to laying judgment (HSHS 001, 2011, unit 4 part 4). It is vital that supervisors not only receive this message, but that they also practice it regardless of how sure they are that they understand why a student may be acting in what they position as an 'unprofessional' manner.

Implicitly Suggested: Weaning Out

The practicum is a chance for practicing social workers to work with students as they learn what is required to perform the job, and practice various skills that may be required in different agencies. From my perspective, the supervisor's role is to support

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the student, model expected behaviour and assist the student to learn what is expected of a social worker at that particular agency, while allowing for the student to find their own practice style. Of course the supervisor is also expected to report back to the school regarding the student's performance and determine whether the student should pass or fail the practicum. This decision should be based on whether the student was able to perform the job at the level of a student.

It became apparent to me while analyzing the data that the practicum is also positioned as a way of gatekeeping entry into the profession of social work. And indeed it is the supervisor's responsibility to act as the gatekeeper. It is within the practicum that students are evaluated to see whether they are suitable to be professional social workers. Supervisors are instructed, although often implicitly, to watch for struggling students and that it is their job to ensure that such students do not enter the profession. For instance, Razack (2002) discusses how acting like a 'gatekeeper' is important, because it "alerts field educators to students who have difficulties because of interpersonal problems and psychological or emotional issues" (p. 105). She goes on to discuss how supervisors must manage students who have psychological or emotional issues, which as previously discussed positions such students as a danger to clients and not suitable to be social workers. Rather than the focus being on the practicum as a place of learning, it is positioned as a 'gatekeeper' whose role it is to wean out students who are seen as potentially 'unstable' or who may be deemed unsuitable to be social workers. Bogo and Vayda (1998) perpetuate the importance of supervisors and practicums ensuring certain students do not enter the profession when they state, "though most jurisdictions have enacted legislation regulating social work practice, for the most part, the schools of social

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work are the gatekeepers controlling entry into the profession” (p. 177). The mere mention of the importance of weaning out ‘unprofessional’ students directly relies on, and is influenced by, discourses regarding who can be considered ‘professional’ as well as a history of dividing practices.

Through the analysis of the data a contradiction became apparent. Razack (2002) states that students should not be judged based on their psychological problems (p. 117). Supervisors are encouraged to support students and foster an environment of safety, however at the same time Razack advises them to remain alert to warning signs that the student is struggling and therefore may not be prepared to be a social worker. Razack never acknowledges or examines this contradiction.

While the practicum was discussed as an ‘opportunity’ to ensure those who were not ready to be social workers were not able to be, the interview was discussed as a place where supervisors could potentially elicit information about students to assist in their assessment of whether the student was even ready to do a practicum. The idea that students with emotional or psychological issues are potentially dangerous to clients, and thus a liability concern to the agencies they are working at, was further supported when it was suggested that students should disclose at the interview any personal information that may impact the practicum. Rosenblum and Raphael (1991 as cited in Bogo & Vayda, 1998, p. 159) state “one must keep in mind that agencies, too, should be able to make an informed choice in selecting their practicum students”. The data suggested that students should ‘warn’ their prospective supervisors of any struggles they may have and essentially open themselves up for rejection. Due to the current discourse and the stigma attached to various ways of being or life experiences, disclosing one’s engagement in

something like self-harm in the interview has the potential to limit the student's ability to get a practicum. Thus students might be assessed on one aspect of their life experience before the supervisor even gets a chance to see how they practice. Suggestions regarding students disclosing personal information allows a weaning out at the interview stage, which further limits a student's ability to enter social work. While I do believe that agencies should have a right to choose who their students are, I do not agree that they have any right to personal information about the student. The only time that I would agree that it would be in the student's best interest to disclose their history to a potential supervisor or preferably the School's liaison worker would be if they had been a client at a particular agency and desired to be placed with social workers who had not worked with them in a professional manner.

I feel it is important to mention here that one of the data sources did not discuss the practicum as a 'gatekeeper' or contribute to the theme of weaning out. UVic's Practicum Supervision in the Human Services (2011) course discussed checking in with students that appeared to be struggling, reflecting what the supervisor observed and asking for the students' understanding of the behaviour. The need for a supportive space was highlighted as essential when providing this feedback so that the student could feel safe to discuss what might be causing them difficulty (HSHS 001, 2011, unit 4 part 6). The onus was repeatedly put back on the supervisor to check their own expectations and communication style, rather than assuming that the student was struggling because of their own incompetence or issues. Supervisors who take this course would potentially have the ability to respond to students who self-harm or have historically, in a more understanding manner. These supervisors may explore with students what self-harm

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means to them and how the student sees their engagement in self-harm as potentially relevant or irrelevant to their practicum. The stance that supervisors must support all students regardless of their struggles or reasons for them is vastly different and progressive compared to a gatekeeping stance, which requires supervisors to ensure certain individuals do not enter the profession.

Implicitly Suggested: Power and Pathology

Having been a practicum student, I am very aware of the power imbalance currently in place. As previously mentioned the supervisor is required to report how the student interacts with clients and whether they accomplish all of their learning objectives in a satisfactory manner to the liaison worker. The supervisor also has the power to determine whether the student is suitable in their opinion to be a social worker. After reporting their thoughts and observations to the liaison worker it is then determined whether the student is able to pass their practicum and successfully complete their degree, which is required to become a social worker. Thus, the supervisor essentially holds the power to determine whether the student is able to become a social worker. As the student does not hold similar power over their supervisor there is an imbalance. This imbalance is not always acknowledged or discussed, however it is always present as all supervisors hold power over the students they work with. Bogo and Vayda (1998) discuss how the power imbalance is innate to the practicum when they state “even though field instructors may not subjectively experience themselves as having power, the respective roles of student and teacher confer power on them” (p. 87).

Indeed all of the data sources acknowledged that power is present in the practicum and discussed the importance of acknowledging it and being wary of its abuse.

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The manner in which power is utilized and exerted has the potential to be harmful to the student-supervisor relationship was also discussed in all of the data sources. For instance, Bogo and Vayda (1998) state, “instructors can unwittingly collude with [the power that is innate to the supervisory position] and reinforce a one-down relationship with the student. This position mitigates against an atmosphere that is open, free, and facilitative of learning” (p. 87). While the power which is granted to supervisors to determine whether students are able to become social workers was acknowledged and suggestions were offered regarding how to mitigate the overuse of this power differential, only one data source discussed that perhaps supervisors should stop being viewed and expected by others as well as themselves to be an ‘expert’. The UVic practicum supervisors course discussed at various points the importance of the supervisor taking a learner’s stance, in which they open themselves up to be taught by their students. It was stated that “characterizing the supervisor as expert reinforces a hierarchical relationship and emphasizes a “unidirectional flow of knowledge and learning” (Carrington, 2002, p. 34, as cited in HSHS 001, 2011, unit 1 part 18). By recognizing that they have much to learn from their students and conveying the desire to grow and learn together, while being open to other opinions and ways of knowing, I believe that students would feel safer to take risks. Such risks could involve offering a different way of looking at a situation in the practicum or it could involve students and supervisors discussing how they have come to see matters differently. I believe that different life experiences offer us all different ways of being and viewing the world. Engaging in self-harm is no different. It is utilized for a reason and those reasons, as well as having the experience of engaging in such behaviour, allows individuals a different way of viewing situations. It allows us epistemic privilege.

Epistemic privilege refers to the claim that “members of an oppressed group have a more immediate, subtle and critical knowledge about the nature of their oppression than people who are non-members of the oppressed group” (Narayan, 1988, p. 35). Yet this privilege as it pertains to having engaged in self-harm, is not yet recognized due to the stigma still attached to self-harm. As Razack (2002) states, “students do not freely share their past experiences as clients since they fear being labeled and stigmatized” (p. 116).

The data sources also discussed that due to power imbalance, students are vulnerable and, as Bogo and Vayda (1998) report, at times students feel “concerned about the instructor’s potential to harm them. They expend considerable energy ‘figuring out’ what will please the instructor and trying to behave in accordance with those perceptions” (p. 87). This feeling of vulnerability and thinking that the supervisor has the potential to or might actually harm them would likely leave students fearful and not able to concentrate on much else. I relate to the idea of trying to ‘figure out’ what someone wants from me. Especially when that someone is in an authority position and thus has the power to determine whether I can achieve my goal of becoming a social worker. Unfortunately in my experience this has resulted in me not doing as good a job as I potentially could have because I was focused on the other person instead of the task at hand. Research has mirrored my experience as anxiety in students has been found to “affect adversely a person’s capacity and motivation to learn” (Chui, 2009, p. 27). If students were able to feel safe to make ‘mistakes’ or be honest with their supervisor, then energy would not be needlessly spent worrying that the supervisor might find out about their history, identity, or not approve of their practice.

As was revealed within the data, it is paramount that supervisors support their students and engage in conversations about the power imbalance that is inherently present when one individual is given the right to determine if another can enter a profession or not. As it is not possible for either students or supervisors to refuse to engage in the evaluation process, supervisors should discuss with students, upon the commencement of the practicum, what they will be expected to do and how they will be evaluated. Included in this should be what students will not be evaluated for and what the supervisor is open to discussing. For example, I would suggest that the supervisor discuss with the student whether or not they accept opinions different from her/his own and whether divergent ways of knowing are seen as assets or not. Similarly, supervisors need to not only discuss their understanding of racism, disability, and sexuality as was suggested in the data, but it is also important that they discuss their understanding of the many ways in which we all learn and that different life experiences can influence our practice. Through this discussion it is important that the supervisor illustrate to the student that they accept that not all learning has been in the classroom and indeed some of the most valuable learning occurs due to our life experiences, and that that knowledge will equally be valued.

Originally, I had classified the code 'student fears' as separate from the code 'power', however through the re-reading of the data sources as well as examining the codes in order to determine whether any were of particular significance and could be combined to form a theme it became apparent to me that the presence of a power imbalance was illustrated by the fear and anxiety that students experience within their practicum. All of the data sources agreed that in order for learning to be facilitated, students needed to feel safe within their practicum and that they need to be able to trust

their supervisor in order for this to be a reality. Yet while it seems to be known that supervisors need to work to create safe supportive spaces for their students, and that a key aspect of this is establishing a trusting relationship, students still are reported within the data to be fearful of being seen as unsuitable to be social workers. None of the data sources discussed dividing practices or how discourses around who is to be seen and considered a professional can contribute to the student's fears and feelings of inadequacy. UVic's course came the closest through its discussion of reciprocal learning where the supervisor is no longer positioned as expert.

There needs to be a direct challenge to the idea of not only who is to be considered an expert, but also to dominant discourses surrounding who should be seen as suitable to become a professional. Currently individuals who engage in self-harm are not viewed as suitable to be professional social workers. This is due to the stigma and stereotypes attached to self-harm, such as it being representative of emotional instability. The belief that individuals who engage in such behavior are unable to cope, leads to beliefs that they would not be suitable for a profession where they are required to work under stress and with others who are often going through difficult situations. However, as has been previously discussed, self-harm is indeed a way of coping. Thus it is essential that the stigma and beliefs regarding self-harm illustrating a person's inability to cope and thus be a social worker need to be disrupted. I do not believe that the power present in the practicum will begin to be disturbed until this occurs and consequently the pathologization of self-harm will simply continue until it is challenged.

12. Summary

Self-harm is still a largely misunderstood behavior. Similarly, discourses around who can be considered suitable to be seen as a legitimate 'professional' continue to be perpetuated; resulting in individuals either hiding aspects of themselves or potentially being treated and viewed differently. The research I completed for this project, as well as the resulting workshop, will increase the University of Victoria School of Social Work practicum supervisor's understanding of self-harm, while challenging the pathologization of such behaviour. It also will assist practicum supervisors to examine some of their own internalized ideals regarding who constitutes a professional, while discussing ways that they can support their students regardless of their social location or history. Ultimately, through supervisors' increased awareness and potential shift in beliefs and actions, practicum students who are either currently self-harming, or have done so historically, will feel more supported within their practicums.

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Appendix A:

Workshop for University of Victoria School of Social Work

Practicum Supervisors

Note for Facilitator: One of the goals of the workshop is to assist in a potential paradigm shift regarding how supervisors view self-harm and those who have engaged in such behavior. Essentially it will challenge or broaden a supervisor's understanding of self-harm. In order to achieve this, self-harm will be located in the context of self-regulation. This will be done by drawing links between the supervisor's personal self-regulating behaviors and self-harm, along with discussing recent literature on self-harm. By the end of the workshop it is hoped that the attending supervisors will have had their potentially pathologizing views on self-harm challenged and begin to see how they and others can view the life experience of having engaged in self-harm as an asset that will assist the students they work with as they enter the field of social work.

Another goal of the workshop is that supervisors will learn new supportive ways to interact with the students they supervise. This in turn has the potential to result in safer and supportive practicums for social work students who self-harm or have done so historically. It should be noted that the intent of the workshop is not to encourage supervisors to gain disclosures from their students, rather simply to provide an environment where their students may feel comfortable to disclose if they so chose.

This workshop has been designed to be flexible by allowing the facilitator room to mold the format regarding what is covered and how. This was done due to the fact that different people will likely be acting as facilitator and may feel more comfortable with

particular exercises. It also allows the facilitator to mold the workshop to the particular group of supervisors attending. Below are various exercises that could be incorporated into the workshop. Potential speaking notes are provided in “quotations” - feel free to use your own words, however please ensure the same message is conveyed.

Topics To Be Covered in Workshop

Introduction (40 minutes)

- Setting the Context:
 - Facilitator introduce self and how they came to present the workshop
 - Request that the supervisors in attendance introduce themselves and where they work
 - Discuss the break schedule, location of washrooms
 - Safe to take risks:
 - “Although we all work as social workers the experiences we have had in our personal lives that led us to this profession as well as the experiences we have had since entering the field are all different. Thus, what seems logical to one may not to another. Similarly our ways of responding to situations and information also differ. It is important that for the next few hours we suspend judgment of different opinions and life experiences. At the end of the workshop you can feel free to take your judgments with you, however in order for this to be a safe place for all of us it is important that no thoughts, feelings, reactions or experiences are diminished or

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judged. The goal of this workshop is not to ridicule anyone for their opinions, rather it is to grow in our understanding of self-harm and potentially challenge some of the stigma attached to it; while assisting you to learn how to support the students you are working with who may, whether you know it or not, be engaging or have engaged in self-harm. Your responses may be questioned, however this is due to my intrigue and desire to understand how you came to understand or know what you know. It is not because your opinion is necessarily wrong or that I am trying to challenge you. In order for everyone to feel safe it is important that you know that I do not expect you to be able to answer all of the questions. Similarly, if you do not feel comfortable responding to something I have said or asked of you please know that you can simply say 'pass'."

- "Many of the exercises you will partake in during this workshop will be writing exercises. This is for two reasons. The first is so that you can take your responses and notes with you. These notes can act to help trigger memories of what you learned or thought during the workshop. As we experience new things our thoughts often change. The notes you write down will help illustrate any changes in your thoughts from right now to the end of the workshop, as well as further down the road when you look back on them. The second reason is so that you can be fully authentic and

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answer as truthfully as you can at this time, without worry of others knowing how you responded. Although I hope to create a supportive environment where you can all feel safe to explore ideas with me and each other, I know from personal experience that even in spaces where I felt supported I often have censored what I would say to others. Your responses to the exercises, your thoughts and reactions are for your eyes only. There will be times I will ask you to discuss in small or the large group your reactions, however what you choose to share or whether you choose to share is up to you.”

- Introduction Exercise – Handout:
 - “Please take about 5 minutes to write down why you are at this workshop and what you are hoping to gain from this experience. This will be for your own viewing only, however if some of you wish to share what you have written with the group there will be time. If you wish turn to your handout package to answer the questions in there.”
 - After 5 minutes or when most people appear to no longer be writing:
 - “Would anyone care to share what you have written?”
 - Write down on a large piece of paper or chalkboard what 3-5 people hope to learn in the workshop.

- Overview of Workshop
 - *Note to Facilitator:* This will depend on what you as the facilitator choose to cover in the workshop. Prior to the workshop look through the material and determine what activities you wish to include and when break(s) will be.
- What Won't be Covered
 - “Due to the focus of this workshop being on working with a practicum student who either is currently or has historically self-harmed we will not be discussing how to work with clients who are self-harming.”
 - “We also will not be discussing how to encourage students to stop engaging in self-harm or how to assess whether further intervention is needed. It is recognized that self-harm does indeed damage one's body and can at times require physicians to look at the wounds. If you are concerned about your students safety due to their engagement in self-harm, it is advised that you speak to them and support them in either seeking medical treatment for their wounds or if THEY so desire assist them to locate a professional to discuss alternatives to self-harm. It should be noted that the mere engagement in self-harm is not viewed as detrimental unless the individual utilizing it see's it as such.”

Safety Contract (10-15 minutes)

Purpose: To establish guidelines that everyone will respect and follow, while discussing what people need in order for this to be a safe enough space to do the work that needs to be done.

Large Group Activity:

- “Similar to the reasons for attending this workshop being different, we all likely have different requirements in order to feel safe enough. The work you will each be doing today is important and yet it will be more beneficial to you if you feel safe enough to take risks and be authentic. For this reason it is important that at the onset we discuss what each of us requires and create what I call a ‘Safety Contract’. This contract will be at the front of the room for the entire workshop so that we can each remember what was agreed upon and reference it if needed.”
- “What do you need today to be able to do this work?”
- “How do you identify if it is safe enough to take risks?”
- “What are you willing to hold yourself accountable to and wish others to hold themselves accountable to so that everyone can feel safe enough?”

Facilitator Actions: Write their answers on a piece of paper that will be visible throughout the workshop to remind everyone what was agreed upon. Discuss their responses and seek clarification if needed. As a group determine what will be included in the ‘safety contract’. The guidelines should be concrete rather than open for interpretation. For example, rather than saying “people wont be mean”, one could elaborate and say “racist, homophobic, ect. comments will be questioned in order to determine the speaker’s intent, however openly hostile comments will not be accepted”.

Who 'Is' a Professional? (15-20 minutes)

Purpose: To illuminate how we as a society as well as the supervisors as individuals define professional and what indicates to them that someone can be considered as such.

Large Group Activity:

Part One: "As was previously mentioned we all come to this workshop from different places, yet we are all subjected to the same discourses. What do you think of when I say the word professional? What images come to your mind? How do you know that someone is a professional?"

- Write down peoples answers on large piece of paper or chalk board

Part Two: "How do you know someone isn't suitable to be considered a professional? What makes the person who you would view as a professional different from the one you don't think is?"

- Record their answers on the chalkboard/paper. Reiterate there are no wrong answers and no one will be judged for their responses.

Part Three: "Where do you think you got these ideas and images from? What do you think are the effects of these ideas?"

- Record their answers on the chalkboard/paper.

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Part Four: “Who gets included in these images and ideas of professional? Who gets excluded? What do you think the profession gains and losses due to the continuation of these images?”

- Record their answers on the chalkboard/paper.

Part Five: Discuss the answers that were provided. Discuss how there is not much room for those who self-harm or who did so historically to be seen as suitable to be professionals. The way this is taken up will depend on the responses provided by the particular group.

- “As many of you may be aware social work has struggled to be seen as a legitimate profession. Now that in many area’s we are seen as professionals, we seem to be struggling with opening our understanding of who a ‘professional’ is. A worker-client binary exists, where someone who either belonged to a client population or exhibits traits/behaviours that are often associated with clients is seen as different from individuals who are seen as the workers. The fact that people can often belong to both groups at the same time or move back and forth is often not discussed or acknowledged. Social workers are often good at responding to clients with empathy and in non-judgmental ways, however when the ‘client’ crosses the line to become a worker these same empathetic social workers often struggle to see their colleague as equal. In recent years there has been some major progress in certain areas. For instance, in addictions it is often viewed as an asset to have experienced your own struggles. Similarly, being queer is often viewed in a positive light when working with that population specifically and is no longer

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seen as grounds to discriminate when working with other populations. However, having self-harmed or having mental health concerns is still positioned as a potential danger to clients and thus one's ability to be an effective social worker is called into question. There is an irony at play, since we spend time encouraging our clients to disclose to us and supporting them, yet there is a real danger for us to disclose information about ourselves to each other. It is hoped that through your attendance at this workshop that this will begin to change even if only with the people you come into contact with."

Increasing Awareness (15 minute) - Handout

Purpose: To assist supervisors to have a reference point of their initial thoughts of self-harm and how students who engage or have engaged in such behaviour should be responded to.

Facilitator Actions: If utilizing this activity include handout in package that is given to participants at the beginning of the workshop.

Scenarios: "The following scenario can be found in your handouts. Record your responses to the scenarios either in your journals or directly in your handout. You will not be asked to share responses with anyone, rather this exercise is simply for you."

- *First Scenario:* You have just started working with a new practicum student. One of your colleagues approaches you and informs you that the student self-harms.
 - Question: What do you think is important to do after being informed your student was self-harming?

- “There might only be one thing or there might be many. That depends on you and there is no right answer. If you are unsure of what is important simply record what you *think* might be important for you to do, how you would respond or what your reaction likely would be.” (5 minutes)
- *Second Scenario*: What would you think is important or what would be your reaction if your colleague had told you that your student had self-harmed in the past but no longer was doing so?
 - Is this different or the same as the first scenario?
 - If you said you would react the same way, why is that? And if you would likely react differently, why is that? (5-7 minutes)

Historically or Currently? Does it make a Difference?

Facilitator to read: “This workshop was created by Elizabeth Daye as part of her Masters of Social Work Project. She struggled with whether to focus on practicum students who had self-harmed historically, but no longer were doing so, those who were still utilizing such behaviour or both. Originally, Elizabeth planned to simply discuss students who had engaged in self-harm previously but no longer were doing so. Over time she came to the conclusion that unless she included students who were currently self-harming that she would indeed be perpetuating discourses surrounding professionalization, which often exclude those who self-harm. Since it was her desire to challenge the limits of who can be seen as a professional, Elizabeth decided that she would speak about students who had self-harmed regardless of when the behaviour took

place. For this reason when practicum students are mentioned throughout this workshop I am speaking about students who either self-harmed historically, or who currently are still utilizing such behaviour. No distinction when discussing the practicum student is made, as one is not necessary. If self-harm truly is understood as a self-regulating coping mechanism then their engagement in such behaviour should not influence whether they are viewed as suitable to be a professional.”

Self-Regulating Exercise (20 minutes)

Purpose: To position self-harm in the context of a self-regulating coping mechanism and illustrate that all of us have different ways to self-soothe or cope with life. It is hoped that by enabling practicum supervisors to see the similarities between their own coping behaviors and self-harm that the supervisors will begin to view self-harm as a coping mechanism rather than a pathology or indication of underlying instability. Thus the likelihood of supervisors utilizing stigmatizing stereotypes regarding self-harm may decrease which in turn has the potential to create a safer and more supportive practicum experience for students.

Small Group Activity: “I want you to think back to when you were children. What did you do to comfort yourself when upset, stressed or anxious?” (5 minutes)

- Examples could be sucking ones thumb, twirling hair, rubbing a worry stone, having a routine or structure.
- “Please break into groups of 3 and discuss any of your childhood self-regulating behaviours that you feel comfortable discussing.”

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- While everyone is still in their groups, after about 5 minutes ask: “What comforting actions stayed from your childhood and what did you give up?”
 - Let group discuss for another 5 minutes
- *Large Group Activity:* Ask them to return to their own seats. “Could I have a volunteer who feels comfortable sharing something that they did as a child to comfort themselves and whether they still utilize it or have given it up?”
 - Briefly explore why they may have given up certain coping mechanisms. Was it because it was no longer viewed as socially acceptable? For example sucking ones thumb in public at 25 may be questioned.
 - In a large group ask: “What new self-regulating actions have you acquired in your adulthood?”
 - Examples: Smoking, exercising, having a drink, ect.
 - Explain that: “The goal of this exercise was to normalize that we all have ways to self-regulate and comfort ourselves. The difference is that some are more socially acceptable at particular ages and some are stigmatized resulting in those who utilize them being pathologized. Self-harm is becoming increasingly understood as a coping-mechanism, which is utilized for reasons similar to those that you listed.

Data and Findings of Research – Handout

Purpose: To illustrate why the workshop was created and why it is important.

Facilitator: “Elizabeth set out originally to grow in her understanding of how social work practicum supervisors were being instructed to work with students who were or had self-harmed. She was unable to find any literature that discussed or even acknowledged that social workers or students may engage in self-harm. This led her to be interested in what messages in general supervisors were being given in the literature. Through her analysis of Razack’s (2002) ‘Transforming the Field: Critical Antiracist and Anti-oppressive Perspectives for the Human Services Practicum’, Bogo and Vayda’s (1998) ‘The Practice of Field Instruction in Social Work Theory and Process’ second addition as well as UVic’s HSHS 001 Practicum Supervision in the Human Services’ (2011) course, Elizabeth concluded that it was unlikely that students would be supported in their practicums if they disclosed self-harming. This conclusion was largely based on the fact that two out of the three data items positioned students with emotional issues as a potential ‘danger’ in the practicum and the advice offered to supervisors led Elizabeth to conclude that students who self-harm would not be supported if supervisors were to follow such advice. While she noted that it was possible that supervisors who partook in the Practicum Supervision in the Human Services Course and followed the guidance offered would indeed support their students, the lack of acknowledgement that students may engage in self-harm led Elizabeth to create this workshop. Do to the stigma attached to self-harm, Elizabeth felt that self-harm needed to be discussed directly rather than leaving material that discussed students with emotional issues or who were struggling

open for interpretation. She also decided that practicum supervisors should have an up-to-date understanding of self-harm as well as how to create safe supportive atmospheres for students.”

Self-Harm As Self-Regulation – Handout (40 minutes)

Purpose: To position self-harm as a self-regulating coping mechanism through a brief examination of the current understanding of self-harm from the literature.

Facilitator: “This part of the workshop will be a bit more of a presentation rather than interaction or activities, however please feel free to raise your hand if you have any questions or want to discuss something further.”

“The definition of self-harm or self-injury as it is often referred to is a deliberate, self-effected, low-lethality bodily harm of a socially unacceptable nature, without suicidal intent, which is carried out to reduce psychological distress.” (Walsh, 2006 as cited Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute Inc. (CTRI), 2008).

“Borrowing from The Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute’s Self-Injury Behaviour in Youth: Issues and Strategies’ workshop please turn to your handout to answer the following questions on your own.”

- Describe your personal beliefs/assumptions as well as understanding about those who self-harm.

- What experience do you have with self-harm?
- If you become triggered by anything discussed in this workshop how will you engage in self-care?

What Is Self-Harm? – Large group activity

Facilitator: “From your personal or professional experience what is self-harm?”

Actions of facilitator: Write the answers on large piece of paper or the chalkboard.

Answers include:

- Scratching
- Cutting
- Burning
- Self-hitting
- Hair-pulling

Recent Understandings of Self-harm

“Although self-harm has often been thought of as a female teenage phenomena in actuality it is not only self identifying females who engage in such behavior. The methods used to self-injure have been found to be different, however no one method is specific to a particular gender. Self-harm has also been found to not simply be utilized by youth, however onset has been found to often occur between twelve and fifteen years of age (Nixon, 2012). Within the literature there has yet to be a conclusive agreement as to the ‘cause’ of self-harm, thus it is important that if you suspect that your student is

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engaging in self-harm or you have been made aware of such behaviour that you do not begin to speculate as to the reason for their utilization of self-harm.

Recently self-harm has begun to be viewed as a self-regulating coping mechanism, which assists the person to cope and survive by relieving emotional distress (Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior (CRPSIB), 2012). Do to the fact that the person often experiences relief after engaging in self-injury they are often not able to discontinue the behavior until they have either learned other personally effective coping mechanisms or the factors causing them distress have been alleviated.

This recent understanding of self-harm as an emotional self-regulating response has largely challenged the longstanding belief that those who self-harm are also suicidal or that the act itself is a suicide attempt. Indeed the literature discusses how the utilization of self-harm may in actuality be a “battle to stay alive” or a “life ‘saver’ rather than a life taker” (Emerson, 2010, p. 841). In fact, Nixon stated that self-harm may indeed be utilized in order to manage suicidal ideation and prevent the person from acting on such thoughts (Canadian Press, 2008, para. 22). Research has also found that around 60% of individuals who engage in self-harm have not considered suicide (CRPSIB, 2012), thus the longstanding belief that self-harm is always or usually directly linked to suicidal ideation or intention is likely incorrect. According to Selekman (2002) a distinct difference is that individuals who are suicidal often wish to end all feeling, whereas those who self-harm do so in order to mitigate negative feelings, and indeed to feel better.

While it may not be ideal to think of your student, or anyone else for that matter, as physically hurting themselves in order to self-regulate, it is vital that everyone realize that the mere engagement in such behaviour does not in any way reflect the stability or

mental state of the person. Indeed having engaged in self-harm either historically or presently need not limit one's ability to be suitable to be a social worker."

Reflection Activity – Handout (30 minutes)

Purpose: For supervisors to gain empathy for students, who have or are self-harming, rather than seeing them as 'other'. This activity creates commonality between the supervisors own experiences and that of their student, while discussing what is needed in order to foster environments conducive to feeling supported.

Reflection Activity: "The fear of 'coming out' or possibly being judged is a common human experience. It is what we are 'coming out' about that differs. Please take a few minutes to think about a time in your life preferably professionally, but personal is fine as well, when you wanted to share something about yourself, an experience you had or your opinion, but didn't know if it was safe to do so. You may have decided to tell someone or have stayed silent. The important part is remembering a situation where you had to weigh the potential risks of disclosing something."

- *Facilitator:* After about two minutes ask the participants to answer in their journal or on the handout the following questions:
 - What did you hope might happen if you told someone?
 - What did you fear might happen?
- *Facilitator:* Once it appears that everyone has answered the two questions present the scenario.

- *Scenario*: Imagine you are working with a student who either is currently or has historically self-harmed, but has not disclosed this to you yet.
 - What do you think the student might hope and fear will happen if they tell you?
 - “It is important that we all remember that empathy is not about assuming the other persons experience is the same as your own, rather empathy allows us to more fully understand how others may react or the potential reasons behind their actions or reactions. Ultimately, it is hoped that when we have empathy for someone we can respond to them with less judgment.”
- “I want to briefly return to the answers you all wrote down about what your own fears and hopes were when faced with the decision of whether to disclose or not.”
 - If you decided to disclose what skills did you have or how did you know it was safe to do so?
 - What did you or do you want from others in order to feel safe?
 - How would you like this to be illustrated or demonstrated to you?
 - How, if you have thought about it, do you try to illustrate the practicum or your relationship within the practicum is a safe place to your students?

Small Group Activity: “Please break back into small groups of 3. You do not need to discuss what you struggled with choosing to disclose, rather I want you to discuss how you assess if it is safe to do so and what makes you feel safe and supported. Please also

discuss ways in which you try to support your student, or if you haven't actively thought about it before, how you think you might now try to show them that you support them.”

Facilitator: After about 10 minutes or when conversation seems to be getting off track ask participants to come back to the big group.

Large Group Activity: Request that someone from each of the groups report on some of the ways that the group discussed would possibly assist in the student feeling supported. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide this activity and conversation. Depending on the participant's responses introjections or suggestions from the facilitator may not be necessary. Below are some suggestions that the supervisor could suggest if they are not already covered by the participants.

Suggestions for Creating a Supportive Environment

- It is important that supervisors explicitly state that having a different opinion from the supervisor is fine, and that the supervisor may question the student in order to better understand their opinions. Similarly, the supervisor should explain that they are open to the student questioning them about their opinions and/or statements they have made.
- Discuss with student, one's own understanding of and acceptance of difference, such as race/racism, gender equality/sexism, homophobia, ableism, ect. By having these conversations at the beginning of the practicum the student will know where the supervisor stands and if their belief systems are similar.

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- Discuss with student their understanding of self-harm. After this workshop supervisors should understand self-harm as a coping mechanism and could discuss what they have learned today with their student. This is important for different reasons. As has been mentioned self-harm is often misunderstood, thus discussing it with students has the potential to educate students who have not had such an experience. Students who have or are self-harming will likely feel more comfortable and supported knowing that their supervisor understand self-harm and does not ascribe to pathologizing discourses.
- Articulate to students that life experiences, such as self-harm, can be seen as an asset in practice and not something one should be ashamed of.

Conclusion

Facilitator: “I want to thank each of you for taking time out of your busy lives to come to this workshop. But more importantly I want to thank you for engaging with the material and pushing yourself to take risks today, for being willing to look at your practice and wonder what else could be done. You all have provided yourselves with a unique opportunity by attending this workshop. Each one of you has the opportunity to create an environment for your student that you have wished to have with a supervisor. Everyone has this opportunity regardless of whether they attend a workshop like this or not, however you are now becoming aware of the opportunity and that provides it power to be effective.”

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Social Work Students Who Have or Continue to Utilize Self-harm.

Handouts Package

Introduction Exercise

- 1) What are your reasons for attending this workshop?
- 2) What are you hoping to gain from this experience?

Increasing Awareness Handout

Record your responses to the scenarios either in your journals or directly in your handout.

You will not be asked to share responses with anyone, rather this exercise is simply for you.

First Scenario: You have just started working with a new practicum student. One of your colleagues approaches you and informs you that the student self-harms.

- Question: What do you think is important to do after being informed your student was self-harming? (Remember there are no wrong answers)

Second Scenario: What would you think is important or what would be your reaction if your colleague had told you that your student had self-harmed in the past but no longer was doing so?

- Is this different or the same as the first scenario?
 - If you said you would react the same way, why is that? And if you would likely react differently, why is that?

Data and Findings of Research Handout

Elizabeth Daye set out originally to grow in her understanding of how social work practicum supervisors were being instructed to work with students who were or had self-harmed. She was unable to find any literature that discussed or even acknowledged that social workers or students may engage in self-harm. This led her to be interested in what messages in general supervisors were being given in the literature. Through her analysis of Razack's (2002) 'Transforming the Field: Critical Antiracist and Anti-oppressive Perspectives for the Human Services Practicum', Bogo and Vayda's (1998) 'The Practice of Field Instruction in Social Work Theory and Process' second addition as well as UVic's HSHS 001 Practicum Supervision in the Human Services' (2011) course, Elizabeth concluded that it was unlikely that students would be supported in their practicums if they disclosed self-harming. This conclusion was largely based on the fact that two out of the three data items positioned students with emotional issues as a potential 'danger' in the practicum and the advice offered to supervisors led Elizabeth to conclude that students who self-harm would not be supported if supervisors were to follow such advice. While she noted that it was possible that supervisors who partook in the Practicum Supervision in the Human Services Course and followed the guidance offered would indeed support their students, the lack of acknowledgement that students may engage in self-harm led Elizabeth to create this workshop. Do to the stigma attached to self-harm, Elizabeth felt that self-harm needed to be discussed directly rather than leaving material that discussed students with emotional issues or who were struggling open for interpretation. She also decided that practicum supervisors should have an up-to-

date understanding of self-harm as well as how to create safe supportive atmospheres for students.

Self-Harm As Self-Regulation – Handout

- Describe your personal beliefs/assumptions as well as understanding about those who self-harm.

- What experience do you have with self-harm?

- If you become triggered by anything discussed in this workshop how will you engage in self-care?

From: The Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute's Self-Injury Behaviour in Youth: Issues and Strategies' (2008) workshop

Reflection Activity Handout

Think about a time in your life, preferably professionally, but personal is fine as well, when you wanted to share something about yourself, an experience you had or your opinion, but didn't know if it was safe to do so. You may have decided to tell someone or have stayed silent. The important part is remembering a situation where you had to weigh the potential risks of disclosing something.

- In your journal or on the handout please answer the following questions:
 - What did you hope might happen if you told someone?
 - What did you fear might happen?

Scenario: Imagine you are working with a student who either is currently or has historically self-harmed, but has not disclosed this to you yet.

- What do you think the student might hope and fear will happen if they tell you?

Thinking about your responses to when you were trying to decide whether to disclose or not answer the following questions:

- If you decided to disclose what skills did you have or how did you know it was safe to do so?
- What did you or do you want from others in order to feel safe?
- How would you like this to be illustrated or demonstrated to you?
- How, if you have thought about it, do you try to illustrate the practicum or your relationship within the practicum is a safe place to your students?

Small Group Activity: Discuss how you assess if it is safe to disclose and what makes you feel safe and supported. Please also discuss ways in which you try to support your student, or if you haven't actively thought about it before, how you think you might now try to show them that you support them.

Resources for Further Inquiry

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