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Social Workers, Regulation, and Social Justice: Tensions in Canadian Social Work

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Abstract

Social workers expect their professional regulatory body to work to further social justice mandates. Data collected from document and website reviews and participants illustrate that social justice exists within the current regulatory framework. This study explores social workers' expectations of their regulatory organization's participation in social justice. Interviews were conducted with 22 Canadian social workers; participants all indicated that they felt social justice was an important aspect of social work. Participants from the practitioner group expressed concern with the level of social justice being embraced by the regulatory body. Participants from the regulatory group claim they were advocating for social justice. Reviews of legislation illustrated a varied position of social justice within the framework. Regulatory websites and association membership showed involvement in social justice efforts. Individual regulatory organizations have embraced this important aspect of social work. Results showed that regulatory bodies participate in social justice efforts; however,

some members feel that this is not enough. Improved communication between the regulatory body and the membership is recommended.

Challenging the status quo and seeking better alternatives for society is a cornerstone of social work in Canada. It is so engrained in practice that it appears in the Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (CASW, 2005). In fact, the pursuit of social justice is rooted in the beginning of social work in the charity movements of the 19th century (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). Social workers challenge oppressive practices and attempt to demystify structural barriers that prevent clients from achieving their goals; they advocate for change and struggle against conventional power structures that uphold privilege and power for few while ignoring the reality of many (Mullaly, 2007).

Cepulionyte and Dunajevas (2016) define a value contradiction as an occurrence within social work practice that causes a tension for the individual because the requirements of their practice and their social work values do not match. Often social workers find themselves intertwined in value contradictions within their professional practice on issues such as abortion (Cepulionyte & Dunajevas, 2016), upholding organizationally defined roles (Gallina, 2010), professional roles (Mullaly, 2007), organizational requirements (Gough & Spencer, 2014), and the place of political activism in social work practice (Fargion, 2008; Hugman, 2009; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 2007). Using the concept of value contradiction, and framed within a structural dialogue, this research explores the place of social justice within a Canadian regulatory framework, with the intention of allowing front-line practicing social workers as well as regulators to present, in their own words, their views on this topic.

For some in the social work field, the quest for professionalism has come at a cost: a move away from challenging systems and advocating for social justice (Barter, 2012; Fargion, 2012; Greenwood, 1957; Mullaly, 2007). The impetus for this research is the value contradiction that exists between regulatory control for social work and the place of social justice within this system. Regulation focuses on the protection of the public (Mullaly, 2007) while the front line, the individual social worker, seeks justice (Donaldson et al. 2014). The significance of value contradictions can be seen in the differing views presented by the

participants in this research and their frustration over the location of social justice within the regulatory controls of social work in Canada. The question then becomes: Does social justice have a place within the regulation of social work in Canada? Similar questions have been raised in social work studies over time (Greenwood, 1957; Kallen, Miller & Daniels, 1968; Mullaly, 2007), but the views of social workers and regulatory bodies have not been investigated.

Structural context of value contradictions

Mullaly (2007) presents two distinct views of social work, conventional and progressive, highlighting a key value contradiction and offering an interesting frame to discuss social justice within the Canadian regulatory system. A conventional view of social work practice is influenced by government organizations, capitalist ideologies, professional regulation, case work, and organizational structures (Barter, 2012; Burt, 2008; Carniol, 2000; George, Coleman & Barnoff, 2010; Hugman, 2009; Matthews, 1927; Mullaly, 2007; Stadum, 1990; Swain, 2001). Conventional social work limits social workers to operating within a full acceptance of regulations, rules, obligations, and laws, along with a perceived shift away from social justice efforts (Kallen et al., 1968; Mullaly, 2007). This approach to practice focuses on individual problems and reduces interventions to mask larger social issues (Mullaly, 2007). It is within this conventional system that social work regulatory bodies in Canada exist. However, from this conventional position they have access to areas of government systems that individual social workers may not have, providing an opportunity to leverage existing relationships to advocate for social justice.

A progressive view of social work practice considers the structural elements that contribute to the struggles faced by individuals, families, and communities (Chan, 2018; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 2007). Progressive practice identifies macro-level issues within society that perpetuate problems and advocates for change though social justice activities (Brown & Hannis, 2012; Dudley, 1978; Lee, 1999; Mullaly, 2007; Shragge, 2013). Social workers who support social justice interpret their work through this progressive lens.

Barter (2012), in a challenge to the profession, argues that the social justice roots of social work are being threatened by conventional regulatory

frameworks. Social workers "are working at arm's length and are primarily concerned with social control rather than social change" (p. 234). Barter contends that a focus on regulation and the professional label for social work has pushed social workers away from advocating for social change in exchange for a mainstream professional identity. Indeed, 66 years ago Greenwood (1957) cautioned that "social workers might have to scuttle their social action heritage as a price of achieving the public acceptance accorded a profession" (p. 55). Just over a decade later, Kallen, Miller and Daniels (1968) presented a situation in North America where the focus of social work "ignores the systematic interrelationships of institutions within the social structure" (p. 236) and focuses instead on forcing the individual to change to address their own problems, thus moving away from social justice to mainstream roles of social control. Yet many social workers practicing in large government organizations strive to maintain their responsibility as agents of social change when describing their views of social work (Lipsky, 1980; Theriault et al. 2014).

Social workers do not need to align themselves with only one viewpoint, conventional or progressive (Chan, 2018; George & Marlowe, 2005). Progressive ideologies can infiltrate traditionally conventional practice areas and intensify their support of social justice. Likewise, expectations of regulatory bodies can evolve to allow higher expectations for their participation in social justice activities. It is not surprising, then, that social workers expect their regulatory body to act as an agent of social change.

Canadian social work regulation

Social work in Canada is regulated provincially, and each province has a designated regulatory body. In some Canadian jurisdictions the regulatory body functions as a dual role entity, which means that they are both a regulatory body and a professional association (Rice, 2018; Kourgiantakis et al. 2022). Currently these jurisdictions are Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. The jurisdictions of British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories have a sole regulatory body with no association obligations. As this research is being written, Alberta is in a state of flux with the passing of Bill 46, which requires a separation of the

regulatory and association functions of the professional association in the province (ACSW). These differences between jurisdictions are important to acknowledge in this research, as they speak to the legislated mandates of each regulatory body. The scope of this research is limited to an exploration of the regulatory bodies' position in social justice efforts. While the role of the independent provincial associations in social justice is important, it is not a part of this research.

Method

This research was undertaken from a qualitative perspective, which was used to ensure that the question of rigor was taken seriously (Padgett, 1998). Data was collected from three separate sources: interviews, legislative documents, and websites. Richardson (1998) describes the triangulation of data as using "different methods such as interviews, (...) and document checking to validate findings" (p. 358); however, this description does not seem to truly speak to the multitude of sources examined. Given its number of sources of information, the use of triangulation, although accurate, seems to limit this research by suggesting that there is one fixed point where one can "triangulate" focus (p. 358). Richardson (1998) proposes a more appropriate description, "crystallization", which suggests "a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of this topic" (p. 358) that takes into consideration the data collected from each of the distinct groups as well as the other sources that have been consulted and analysed.

The use of qualitative inquiry in this research allows for the experiences of participants to become the data explored (Berg 2007; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Laws & McLeod, 2004; Warner, 2008; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). Perspectives from registered social workers were collected from semi-structured open-ended interviews focused on exploring the place of social justice in regulation, allowing for the participants to provide uninterrupted narratives of their views and expectations (Berg, 2007; Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019). Participants were purposefully selected as being members of one of two groups in social work: some were regulatory participants (who worked with a regulatory body) and others were practice participants (who did client interventions or taught).

Faulkner and Faulkner (2019) present purposeful sampling as valuable in research when it is important to have participants with some predetermined characteristic in mind. This research required individuals that were registered social workers who were either working in a practice field or in a regulatory capacity. In the case of regulatory participants, purposeful sampling was used as there are only 11 regulatory bodies in Canada, the number of potential participants from this group was limited. Practice participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in research on professional regulation and on their understanding of the regulatory process.

In total, 22 individual interviews were conducted for this research. Of these participants, 14 self-identified with the practice category. Two were from a community-based organization, four from child welfare, three from health/hospital practice, and five from an academic setting. The other eight participants self-identified as being closely involved with a regulatory body, either as an employee, volunteer, or board member. Two of the participants were retired from front-line practice but had more than 30 years each of social work and regulatory experience; one had been an employee of a provincial regulatory body; one had been a long-serving board member; five participants were directly involved in regulatory employment; and one participant was a member of a board of directors.

The researcher then transcribed each interview and subsequently analyzed each transcript and any accompanying notes to identify themes specific to social justice. The data collected from the interviews was then categorized, allowing themes to emerge. This data was then reviewed further to ensure that the examples provided in the research were representative of the participants and reflected their voices. To further enhance the rigor of the study, a variation of member checking was utilized. Participants' responses in qualitative research are essential, and to ensure that their views are presented accurately, it is valuable to follow up with some participants if possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Accordingly, four participants, one regulatory and three practice, were asked to read a draft of the paper prior to submission for publication to provide any feedback that they felt was necessary.

Additionally, a comprehensive review of the 11 Canadian regulatory jurisdictional legislations and the websites of the regulatory bodies in these

jurisdictions was undertaken to identify evidence of social justice efforts. The reviews of the legislation specifically looked for the clear inclusion of social justice within the documents. The reviews of websites were conducted to identify evidence of involvement in social justice efforts reflecting the definition of social justice that appears in the following section of this paper. Ethics approval was granted by the University of New Brunswick, Canada. Participants were advised at the start of the interviews that they could end the process at any time and/or request that their information be withdrawn from the research without explanation, and that their identity would be protected by the researcher.

Defining social justice

While conducting this research, the methodological question soon became clear: What constitutes social justice and how should it be defined? To overcome this hurdle, a grounded theory approach to defining social justice was undertaken by using the data collected from participants though interviews (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using an iterative approach to coding data (Chun Tie et al., 2019), comments on social justice presented in the interviews were identified, and through constant comparative analysis, a definition of the term as presented by the interview participants was developed. It was evident while completing the interviews that the terms "social justice" and "social action" were being used by participants interchangeably.

This paper is written using the term "social justice"; however, the terminology used by the participants is presented in this research as they stated it. Participants from the practitioner group identified macro-level efforts, public statements, protests, and political commentary as being important components of social justice. Participants from the regulatory group identified political influence, participation in decision-making, public statements, media releases, and an active public voice as being definitive of social justice. Through a constant review of the data, theme saturation was reached (Birks & Mills, 2015), allowing for a definition of social justice that was appropriate for this research. Here, then, social justice is defined as actions that focus on social issues in a meaningful manner, with the intention of eliciting change and raising awareness within a public forum. By developing this definition of social justice

through a grounded theory approach, this research can support an exploration of the topic in a manner reflective of the participants in this study.

Results

Results of interviews and reviews of legislation and websites of regulatory bodies are presented in the following section. First, the data from the interviews will be presented.

Defining social work practice

The practice of social work was discussed as a main research theme by all the participants in their interviews, illustrating a critical approach to practice (Barter, 2012; Mullaly, 2007). A participant who worked in a child welfare setting provided this description of how social justice defines practice:

> It's also taking social action on bigger things. Not just bread and butter issues for myself as a job but also what's going on in society. It's speaking out and naming things. It's helping (clients) to question and understand the unjust system that they're living in.

This view of social work suggests that the role of the social worker requires them to expand their focus beyond only helping the individual, by speaking out, naming social problems, and being willing to be responsible for taking a stance on bigger social issues (Barter, 2012; Mullaly, 2007). A second participant from a hospital setting described social work practice as helping clients to navigate a broken system while advocating for change:

> It is a pretty broad field, but it's based on working with people who are struggling in one way or another and offering them support in whatever ways you can. Basically, helping people navigate a broken system while advocating for change.

A third participant, from an academic setting, explained their view of social work practice as expanding beyond the individual and looking at larger structural issues (Mullaly, 2007) that affect individuals' lives:

> The one-on-one interactions we have with individuals, it's empowering individuals to move forward and deal with whatever issues are

confronting them. But we often say in terms of that one-on-one it's not always necessarily the "problem" of that individual, it often gets defined that way, when generally it is larger structures that are impacting the individual.

These examples show that social workers define social work practice as not only working with individuals, but also navigating broken systems and working to correct the harmful nature of larger structures that impact the lives of the people that social workers help (Chan, 2018; Mullaly, 2007). A participant from a child welfare practice environment summed up this argument very well: "I don't want to help people adjust to an unjust system, I want to help them to question and understand the unjust system that they're living in." This participant then goes on to say that the regulatory body "can speak out and they can disagree, and they can do something different."

Regulatory participants provided definitions of social work practice that also reflected the importance of social justice:

I define social work pretty broadly as enhancing or promoting the social function of individuals, families, groups and communities, promoting social justice, and social programs, and working towards a better society in general.

Another regulatory participant stated that social work "promotes social change"; that it is "based on principles of social justice"; and that it "engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance societal well-being." Supporting the position of Mullaly (2007), and George and Marlo (2005), all 22 participants in this study provided definitions of social work practice that included social justice as a key aspect of the profession, regardless of whether they were a practice or regulatory participant.

The social justice role of the professional organization produced two separate themes for discussion. One was highlighted by the comments of practicing participants who felt the regulatory body does not participate in social justice efforts. A second theme, presented by regulatory participants, suggests that the regulatory body does participate in social justice, although not through protests or outward political activism. These themes are presented below.

Social justice (practice participants)

Twelve participants from the practice group identified the lack of support of social activism as a worry, because activism is one of the building blocks of the profession of social work (Mullaly, 2007). The proponents of progressive and structural approaches to social work spoke of the centrality of social and political activism to social work (Fargion, 2008; Hugman, 2009; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 2007). This sentiment is illustrated in the following commentary by a participant who worked in a community-based setting:

> Social justice isn't the reason I went into social work but it's the reason I fell in love with it. In my opinion it's what sets social work apart from other human services, like psychology, the focus on the structural issues causing the problems. That's what I feel passionately about, working to build a society where everyone has the same chance at things.

A practitioner participant, from a child welfare background, was particularly concerned with the lack of support that their local body provided to their membership in social justice efforts because of the nature of the current board of directors:

> It's not going anywhere. I think they're a very conservative board and association really. You wouldn't see them out picketing, you know, or nailing politicians on certain things. It just wouldn't happen. I mean, I don't see any social action at all.

This participant pointed out different elements that are important in the discussion of social justice and professional regulation, indicating a perceived unwillingness of the regulatory body to challenge the government administration. They are not convinced that the regulatory body is able to effectively work within government to move forward social justice agendas. One practitioner participant spoke of a time when their regulatory body distanced themselves from the actions of the local chapter by not becoming involved in questioning political leaders during an election. This participant felt this inappropriate and stated, "our job is, and part of our responsibility according to our code of ethics is, social change, social action." Another registered participant offered these

thoughts about why they believed their regulatory body was unsuccessful in effecting change at the social level on behalf of the social work profession:

> I don't see them as particularly proactive. At this point it is perhaps a tad on the conservative side. (…) I don't see them showing up at the legislature perhaps as much as they might need to. Issues coming from poverty, to changes to homelessness initiatives are important to social work. We could have a stronger social work voice in those kinds of issues.

Twelve practice participants reported that their regulatory body could increase their role in advocating for social justice. This attitude suggests a perceived lack of will on the part of the regulatory body to participate in social justice. This is indicative of the value of social justice within social work (Mullaly, 2007; George & Marlo, 2005) and shows that for these practice participants there remains a contradiction (Cepulionyte & Dunajevas, 2016) over the roles and expectations of the provincial regulatory bodies.

Social justice (regulatory participants)

All eight of the regulatory participants indicated that their jurisdiction participated in social justice in a manner that was able to influence change. A regulatory participant, working directly for a provincial regulatory body, began their comments by discussing the different definitions of social justice considered to be relevant, then moved to discussing examples of how the regulatory body is addressing important social issues:

> Well from my perspective the role of social action is what we do. How do we define it? (…) Is social action organizing a protest? Sit-ins and protests and that stuff, that's one perspective. For me another perspective of social action is really to promote social justice, to be at the table and promote some change for the best interest of the client. So, we try to do alternative ways of social action. (…) So being where the decision is being made (…) is the way of influencing social policies, building commitment, collaboration, and change (…) we develop partnerships and collaborations with diverse groups of partners, and we try to develop program research and so forth to be able to do something proactively to help the situations.

Moving away from the more structural model of social justice, community organizing, and protest (Mullaly, 2007; Shragge, 2013), in the view of this participant, is a means of fulfilling the role of social work. This participant says that being at the table with government and holding true to a social justice agenda is a practical and effective way for the regulatory body to advocate for issues of social justice (Chan, 2018), stating "It's different from some social change efforts and grassroots protests and activism that slap everyone in the face. It's a different way of doing social action." Another regulatory participant said that their provincial regulatory body was participating in social justice work though "grassroots efforts and partnership building" to address social issues in a real and impactful way.

The data collected in this qualitative research illustrates that within the sample of participants there was an overwhelming agreement that the pursuit of social justice is important to them when considering the role of the regulatory body. However, there was a clear discrepancy between the practicing and regulatory participants regarding how much effort the regulatory bodies put into social justice advocacy.

Legislative review

A review of the current legislative documents that regulate social work in Canada was conducted. Of the 11 jurisdictions represented by these documents, eight of the pieces of legislation spoke to whether social justice belonged in the scope of the professional body or of the profession. The legislation in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island all refer to the place of social justice within the objects of the regulatory body, making social justice advocacy an actual role of the association and a part of their corporate functioning. In Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, and the Northwest Territories, the place of social justice is found within the legislated definition of social work practice and not within the objects of the association or college. This shifts the responsibility for advocacy, at least at a formal legislative level, to the individual member. The province of Nova Scotia has interesting legislation because it refers to social justice, community change, and improving social conditions in both the objects of the college and the definition of the practice of social work. The location of this information within the legislation is different between the jurisdictions.

Legislation in the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, and Newfoundland had no mention of the place of social justice within their legislation.

Individual websites

To determine if the provincial regulatory bodies were involved in social justice efforts, a review of their respective websites was undertaken. All eleven of the jurisdictions demonstrated at least some connection to social justice efforts as related to social work practice. Data showed that one of the main forms of social justice participation was though the release of media statements on topics ranging from conversion therapy, support for minority groups, reconciliation, provincial budget critiques, anti-racism messages, diversity, equity and inclusion of marginalized communities, commentary on provincial child welfare programs, health reform, minimum wage, and mental health advocacy, to name a few.

The jurisdiction presenting the weakest connection to social justice content was that of the Northwest Territories. In this jurisdiction, regulation is not conducted by an individual licencing body, but by the department of health and social services, which is a territorial government-based department that internally regulates professionals practicing in the Northwest Territories. The review of the departmental website found links to varied topics, such as *Building stronger families and Climate change and health*. Although a government website, these examples of social commentaries can be perceived as places for issues of social justice to be presented.

The remaining ten jurisdictions fall into two distinct categories. The first category is provinces that have standalone regulatory bodies: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec. The second category is provinces that share a regulatory and association role: New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan. For the provinces in the first category, with a single focus social work regulatory body, the primary function of the regulatory body is the protection of the public. In these jurisdictions, it is evident that the social justice roots of social work have not been lost, but rather are being incorporated into the day-to-day work of the organizations. The registrar of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers wrote that as a regulatory body they have a "responsibility to engage in

difficult discussions and to examine how issues of diversity, equality, and inclusion fit within the regulatory context," showing a commitment on the part of the college to continue to seek change in these areas (Betteridge, 2021). Jurisdictional bodies have produced reports that speak to societal issues. One example of this is from the regulatory body in the Province of Quebec, l'Order des travailleurs sociaux et des therapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec. It released a report, *Un rendez-vous incontournable* (May 2020), that recognized the collective responsibility towards children and youth in the province and called for a substantial reinvestment in front-line social services and the prevention of child maltreatment. In British Columbia, examples on the website further support the place of social justice within the regulatory framework. These include a video on Indigenous registered social workers, statements on residential schools and Indigenous-specific racism, and a toolkit for further improving the relationship between registered social workers and First Nations communities. The Manitoba website includes public statements regarding truth and reconciliation, conversion therapy, and systemic racism, to highlight a few. These examples illustrate a commitment to social justice and speaking out on important issues.

Jurisdictions that maintain a dual role regulatory and association body have examples of social justice projects as well. All these jurisdictions present as being comfortable with social justice advocacy while also fulfilling their mandate of regulatory control. These jurisdictions provide frameworks that support the development of social justice and advocacy committees. In Saskatchewan (SASW), the professional association describes itself as "a member-based organization that governs the profession of social work and serves and protects the public interest through regulation of the social work profession; support to competent and ethical social work practice; promotion of the profession; and advocacy for social justice and well-being for all." New Brunswick and Nova Scotia both boast a social justice component; New Brunswick has a social action committee supported by the board of directors, and Nova Scotia has both a social justice committee and a policy and advocacy committee. New Brunswick has publicly supported a zero-tolerance policy on conversion therapy and is a strong voice in the long journey towards truth and reconciliation. Nova Scotia has produced a social policy framework document for its province,

and as recently as October 2022, published a statement of support for a local union that was on strike. The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers made this statement on their approach to social policy and social work: "Our profession is founded on humanitarian and egalitarian ideals. We envision and work towards a society that promotes social, economic, and political equity. As social workers, we labour in solidarity with our clients, organizations, and communities, and with Nova Scotians who are vulnerable, oppressed and dealing with the hurtful outcomes of society." Newfoundland's website highlights regulatory involvement in the provincial health accord supporting health care reform, a commitment to truth and reconciliation, and the publication of an online forum titled Connecting Voices, which allows members to write articles of interest and supports a social justice lens. All the provincial regulatory bodies support Canadian First Nations communities, acknowledge the unimaginable damage that has been caused by residential schools, and emphasize the importance of reconciliation for the mending of the national fabric. A last element gleaned from the website reviews was membership in the Canadian Association of Social Workers.

Canadian Association of Social Workers membership (CASW)

The CASW is viewed as the political voice of the profession of social work in Canada. There is a distinction, however, between the CASW and regulatory membership across the country. In the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, being a member of the professional regulatory body automatically grants the individual social worker membership in the CASW. However, being a registered social worker in the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island does not provide CASW membership to the individual social worker. In each of these jurisdictions, the individual social worker must register in the provincial association (separate from the regulatory body) to obtain CASW membership. The provision of CASW membership to individual members by some regulatory jurisdictions is an example of a form of social justice participation. By providing membership, which also provides financial support to the CASW, these jurisdictions are actively supporting a national organization that is not hesitant about speaking out on social justice issues.

Discussion

Social justice is clearly an important component of social work identity, though views differ among the participants about what it means to participate in social justice efforts. For practicing social workers, social justice brings value to their professional identity, and this research shows that the regulatory bodies, in the commission of their legislated roles, can include social justice efforts within their structures. Regulatory bodies have adopted a clear stance of supporting social justice initiatives. Mullaly (2007) claimed that social work regulation is missing the presence of any sanctioning of political activism or social action. Despite some disagreement from practice participants in this study, the professional regulatory bodies show an approach to social justice that broadly aligns with a progressive approach to practice.

Supporters of the progressive and structural approaches to social work saw the presence of social justice as a key component of social work practice (Fargion, 2008; Hugmann, 2009; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 2007). As has been illustrated, in all but three of the regulatory jurisdictions, social justice appears within the legislation as an expectation of either the professional body or social work practice itself. The review of the websites illustrates that all the jurisdictions, in some manner, speak out on social issues of importance in Canada today. The regulatory bodies' engagement with social justice topics illustrates that their legislative role for public protection and participation in social justice efforts can coexist within their structure through the development of position papers, media statements, collaborative change work with government, and the support of social justice committees within the organization.

All of the participants in this research send a clear message that social justice should be a part of the role of the regulatory body. In fact, all the participants agreed with the idea of social justice as foundational to the social work profession in Canada. Eight of the pieces of social work legislation reviewed in this paper refer to the place of social justice within the practice of social work or the role of the regulatory body. All the professional regulatory bodies examined in the research identify social issues that they have spoken out on, taken a position on, or highlighted as important in their public representations on their websites.

Conclusion

Limitations for this study include the small sample size of participants and the purposeful selection method. Although theme saturation was reached within the interview process (Birks & Mills, 2015), it would have added value to the research to have a larger sample size (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019). Social work in Canada encompasses more than 52000 professionals (CASW), and a larger scale sample size, coupled with a mixed methods approach, may have garnered additional data. Using a purposeful sample selection process limited the researcher's ability to consider the position of individuals from outside of the regulatory scope (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019). Individuals who are educated in social work and not registered, or individuals that have retired and are no longer members of their profession regulatory body, may have provided additional and interesting views of this topic.

Data shows that the provincial regulatory bodies support the pursuit of social justice in Canada. This is illustrated by public statements, political influence, media releases, and partnership building. The value contradiction that was presented at the beginning of this paper and in commentary from practice participants is important to consider, highlighting the importance of increasing the social justice voice of the profession of social work in Canada. For some participants who actively seek professional satisfaction from social justice, the current efforts of the regulatory bodies do not reach far enough. The regulatory bodies are engaging in social justice movements through the brokering of ideas, support of change, political interventions, speaking out in support of reconciliation, and program development. To support an improved relationship between the regulatory body and their members, this research indicates the regulatory body should increase its public voice. Participants from this study want to see an outspoken representation of the profession from regulators, and they want to see them confront controversial issues. As increased public presence and improved communication with members is important, the regulatory bodies should also catalogue and publicize their social justice efforts to ensure that their membership is aware of their values and actions. The burden of improving the relationship between practicing social workers and regulators, and garnering support of the membership, falls on the regulatory body. They will have to engage in constant dialogue and information sharing, to ensure that

the current pattern of supporting social justice continues and the value contradictions felt by registered social workers is alleviated.

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