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The Praxis of Privilege: How Social Workers Experience their Privilege

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The Praxis of Privilege: How Social Workers Experience their Privilege

The purpose of this study was to explore how social workers in direct practice experience their privilege. To achieve this, the study utilized the framework of social constructionism and the phenomenological method to describe, interpret, and understand the experiences of 20 social workers who have face-to-face interactions with their clients.

Data analysis of the semi-structured interviews resulted in six themes of privilege, which are: (a) moving target, (b) the embeddedness of power, (c) variegated experiences, (d) assorted emotions, (e) reflection is not a priority, and (f) the pyramid will always exist. Findings indicate that privilege is not a uniform sociological phenomenon but one that is variable and contextual.

By proposing privilege as a moving target, the study recognizes the different but fluid categories of social identities, professional status, sense of personal agency, and the contexts of social work practice, as well as the multiplicity of experiences of social workers. The study concludes that as the demographics of social workers become increasingly diverse, there is the need to recognize the privilege and vulnerabilities which simultaneously play out in therapeutic encounters. Social work agencies and organizations should provide space for open dialogue regarding privilege and power, and mitigate against the possibility of oppression of social workers.