

Radical Thinking in Consensual Contexts in Social Work Policy and Practice (Stream 5)

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It has been observed that the language of anti-discriminatory practice and anti-oppressive practice dominates the discipline of social work. There is an assumption that these concepts are good things, “hurrah words” as White and Pettit might say. Although the application of these concepts is believed to promote empowering practice, this paper argues that these terms are both highly contested and internally diverse. Although both these concepts have their origins in radicalism and challenge, we question whether these ideas have currency in a transforming policy milieu. Specifically we consider the role and future of anti-oppressive discourse in an age of public policy consensuality. We question how the radical roots of anti-discrimination and anti-oppression fit within a consensual context of current social work. By exploring the provenance of anti-discrimination and anti-oppression and the relationship to empowering practice, we argue that much of the language of radical social work has been colonised by consensual ends and therefore ultimately question whether anti-discrimination and anti-oppression are truly empowering or whether we are deluded and seduced by an empowerment rhetoric which supports the consensual context.

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