

Professional Discretion Part 2

Jessica Toft ([00:06](#)):

Hello and welcome. This is a continuation of our previous discussion on the ability of social workers to practice professional discretion. In this podcast, we will discuss how social workers are resisting conditions of managerialism. My name is Jessica Toff, associate professor at the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, and I'm the principal investigator of the Impacts of Neoliberalism on social work practice in Minnesota. And I'm excited to have with me two bright PhD students, Channel Lowery and Elin Amundson. And especially pleased to have Amelia LeGarde, who is a child protection case manager for the last 10 years. Six of those being in tribal welfare. And she spent the majority of her professional career working with Indigenous families and communities. So here's the format, uh, as in the last podcast in the first half, these two research assistants will ask me questions about the background of the research, and then we'll turn the tables and I will ask them and Amelia, about their professional work. So let's get started.

Channel Lowery ([01:11](#)):

Okay. So thank you for the introduction, Jessica. I am Channel, um, like Jessica said, I'm a PhD student here at the University of Minnesota and a research assistant on this project, and I'm really excited to talk about this subject. Um, so my first question is, um, Jessica, you talk about resistance to managerialism. Can you just tell us first, like what is managerialism?

Jessica Toft ([01:33](#)):

Okay, great question. And we've had several podcasts on managerialism that are in this series that, that folks might wanna check out, but I wanna give the real brief thumbnail sketch, first of all, and maybe social workers, this will resonate. Um, so managerialism is really the application of business principles into the social work field. And it looks something like this. Social workers, you might have experienced pressures to increase your productivity and to be really efficient in your work. Um, you might also have experienced pressures to be really routinized or standardized in your practice. And in fact, you might already be told ahead of time what your outcomes are supposed to be even before you meet a client. And you might have been told ahead of time what your methods or your interventions are gonna be even before you meet a client.

([02:25](#)):

We see a lot of quantified measures, uh, in this sort of standardization of practice too. There's a sense of accountability. Um, there's been a lot of responsibilization down to the first line of practice, so you might feel like you're responsible for a lot of things that maybe in the past you weren't always responsible for. Um, also just a general control over practice. Uh, um, how you want to engage your practice has seems to be limited. Um, there might be monitoring so maybe paperwork, monitoring rules, checks. You might even have experienced surveillance, so you might be worried about your computers or whether or not those emails are being watched. Um, also there's this real market model about incentivizing speed in your work. So you might get better pay if you work faster and you get more cases, quote unquote completed. Um, and on the other hand, you might have been sanctioned if you didn't work fast enough. Um, and these things might look different in different sectors, but maybe some of these have resonated with you. So we're gonna talk about resistance to these sorts of managerialist pressures and how social workers engage resistance.

Channel Lowery ([03:34](#)):

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Thank you so much cuz that definitely resonates.

[\(03:37\)](#):

Great

Elin Amundson [\(03:39\)](#):

Yeah. So this is Elin, also student PhD student and research assistant on this project. And just to give a little more context, in the previous podcast we talked about professional discretion. So can you say a little bit more about how all of these concepts, professional discretion, managerialism, and resistance, all relate to each other?

Jessica Toft [\(04:01\)](#):

Yes. Um, so when we think about professional discretion, discretion, uh, we think about the ability of social workers to actually be social workers. So think about being able to engage the knowledge that you learned in the classroom. All of those classes you went to think about the, the values that you were taught in the code of ethics and how you really should try to abide by those, consult your peers, really adhere to those. And, and I think in social work, we really hold up our code of ethics as making us distinct from other professions. And then also the skills and practice that you learned. You know, the practicum is our signature pedagogy, as we say in social work. And are you able to learn what you, what you learned in your practicum and all the supervision you had and what, you know, the skills. So managerialism may be limiting professional discretion is one of, is our big hypothesis. And there's been research that indicates this, um, you know, compromising ethics, um, having to choose between agency rules and clients' interests, um, et cetera, et cetera. So resistance comes into play. Resistance is the thing that, uh, social workers can maybe engage to try to become more fully social workers against the pressures of managerialism.

Elin Amundson [\(05:19\)](#):

Thank you so much. I mean, what is some of that research that you've been drawing from as you've been building this project out?

Jessica Toft [\(05:24\)](#):

Yeah, so that's, it's important. I mean, it is, this might not be as exciting as some things, but I think it's exciting because we're not the only ones. You know, sometimes it feels like social workers are the only ones who have to deal with all of these issues and you're, you're sort of, you know, um, siloed in this. But actually other countries seem to have been, have done a better job at thinking about resistance. In fact, we have scholars such as Donna Baines in Canada, not too far away from us, who's really trying to look at how social workers resist managerialism. We have in Ireland and the UK the work of Ferguson and, uh, Lavalette. In Israel we have the work of Roni Strier and Berschling. And Strier has a lot of excellent, uh, articles on neoliberalism and resistance, and even in Australia with the work of Wallace and Pease.

[\(06:15\)](#):

And in fact, the US in general is behind on this topic of how neoliberalism and managerialism affects social work. And what we know in the field of social work and many other professions is that over time there's been a change in relation between management and labor. And this has altered the way that workers are able to resist. Um, and in fact, you think social workers think about how much work you do that is not paid because you need to get your work done. So the lines between work and non-work have blurred. We might feel like we're out, we're not in the workplace, but we're still doing work on our

phones and our on our email, et cetera, even when we're not there. So this in a way, uh, employers have been able to spread out into our quote unquote free time and capture extra workers' time and value.

[\(07:04\)](#):

Um, and so, um, in response resistance has morphed to this and it's changed. There are a variety of ways that social workers are, um, in opposition and we use the word disrupting, but disrupting these dominating ideas or even sort of workplace discourses or workplace communications that we hear. Um, and and I in the US I wanna give credit to, uh, Jennifer Zelnik and Mimi Abramovitz have really done the pioneering work on resistance. And they have identified several ways that social workers might be resisting today. For example, loosely interpreting guidelines, practicing outside of agency approved methods, uh, perhaps altering performance reports slowing down work, lowering benchmarks, just voluntarily lowering benchmarks maybe refusing to comply with paperwork or all aspects of paperwork expressing. And then here's the more a you know, active methods expressing disagreement, with management, maybe even engaging in some kind of collective action.

[\(08:14\)](#):

Um, some, you know, we have these professional, associations and we have the licensing board. In theory, these are places where we should be able to go to try to engage resistance. It's an interesting scholar in communications. His name is Mumby. And he, um, identifies four ways that we can think about the ways that we might be resisting. One of them is this hidden individual way. So for example, when you report, well, when you're altering reports you use, you're doing that kind of in a hidden way and individually, um, then there's a hidden collective way where maybe workers quietly disagree you, and they don't necessarily talk about it amongst themselves, but you sort of notice everybody's sort of slowing down or everybody's doing something kind of together, but not really talking too much about it. There's a public individual way where the person stands up maybe in a staff meeting for example, and says, I don't agree with these particular rules.

[\(09:12\)](#):

Um, and then there's a public collective way where workers can organize maybe to challenge management, maybe in staff meetings, maybe in other ways. We have unions as an example here that would fit in here. Um, so, you know, in practice with I think is interesting, fco, some of you have heard about Foucault, but all the way back in 1980, he's a French philosopher, but he, we get some of our ideas from him. He makes the great big point that wherever there is power over there is automatically a resistance to it. And that, so maybe we can see this in social work, you know, rather than saying we just follow the rules, we are resisting. This is just part of the nature of human nature. And it's interesting for us to figure out how social workers are doing this. And in fact, our survey research that we did of the all you know, social workers and all them who engaged, really showed that social workers are resisting more than we thought they were.

[\(10:06\)](#):

I think this is exciting. Um, so now's the time where we turn the tables and I get to ask you practicing social workers, um, about your background and your experience with resistance in the workplace. Um, and so thanks again to Amelia and Channel and Elin for engaging in this part of the program. And this is what social, what folks really wanna hear. So let me just remind you again, resistance to managerialism refers to the ways that workers resist or challenge management pressures to limit high quality work with clients or worsen working conditions of social workers. So again, this could be done by an individual or a group. It could be overt out in the open or it could be hidden. I'm gonna do sort of two parts to this. The first part, I'm gonna give you a couple of ways which we can think about resistance.

[\(11:01\)](#):

And I'm wondering which of these resonate with you. So I'm gonna just list a few out, let you take think about it for a second. I'm gonna ask you, which really resonate. So the first part, loosely interpreting guidelines, practicing outside of agency approved interventions, altering performance reports, slowing down work or deliberately sidestepping, agency instituted time pressures. Here's our first set of them, which of these resonate with you? I'm just gonna do a vote. Let's just do a vote, kind of, which, you know, maybe your top two. How about that. Amelia? Which of these really resonate with you?

Amelia LeGarde ([11:39](#)):

I think my top two that really resonates with me is that loosely interpreting guidelines. Um, and then probably the deliberately side-stepping agency institution time pressures.

Jessica Toft ([11:51](#)):

Fantastic. Thank you. Uh, Channel, how about you?

Channel Lowery ([11:56](#)):

Yeah, I would say the slowing down work and then like Amelia said, deliberately sidestepping agency instituted time pressures for sure.

Jessica Toft ([12:03](#)):

All right. Elin, what resonates with you?

Elin Amundson ([12:08](#)):

From my experiences, I'd say loosely interpreting guidelines and maybe practicing outside of agency or evidence-based model approved interventions.

Jessica Toft ([12:17](#)):

Yes. Okay. Thanks for the vote. Now I'm going to get some real specific examples. Amelia, tell us about your two that you highlighted.

Amelia LeGarde ([12:25](#)):

Yeah, you had mentioned how like as you were sharing that this may resonate with some social workers, right? And like, this is what drew me in. I think in previous podcasts you had mentioned how like there's a word now for social workers and so I sit here because I like this did, I was like, oh, there really is something. And I've taken this like to my peers. And so I like smile when I hear the word resistance cuz I've literally said like, we are the resistance, right? I've talked about feeling like I'm in Star Wars And um, like we are the, like infiltrating the system because it's not just me. And something that I think is kind of interesting is, um, some of the examples that you shared about resistance is like that individual resistance or that group resistance where they're maybe not talking but y'all are deciding to do something together.

([13:17](#)):

But in my experience, what has happened is like we have come together to do the resistance, but not like in a public way. Um, to do it in a public way oftentimes results in like a target on your back and you end up being under the microscope. And so when I hear like that managerialism piece, that really also resonates, right? Cuz then your phones are getting looked at more, your emails are getting looked at

more your like standard pieces are getting looked at more. And so like, it's this like quiet group resistance that's happening where we don't agree with something and how it's being done. Um, and oftentimes there's sediments shared of it's way better to ask for forgiveness than it is to ask for permission because if we were to ask for permission, we would be stonewalled. But, um, we try and find those like loopholes or those, those ways to get around things.

[\(14:08\)](#):

Um, and it's like tough because it, we come from a place of wanting to be altruistic, right? And so like at least we all agree that our end goal is a good goal, but that's like some like gray territory to get into. Um, cuz you don't know that to be the case. And then the other piece that I just wanted to highlight too, and I had mentioned it I think in my email, um, was that we do have some supervisors that also are supportive. And so one, one supervisor in particular has told us as staff that she's not as concerned with us meeting the threshold for like our time recording for instance, right? So like here at my agency we have to account for every single minute of our day, 7.5 hours a day, even our 30 minute breaks, right? And, but that's time consuming and that takes a lot of time. And so you're here typing about like what you did with clients, and that takes up the time for you to actually go out and be with the clients and be serving the community. And so, in that instance that has been supported by a supervisor who's like, the work that you do with my community and the families that you're serving is more important than meeting this 100%, um, time recording expectation.

Jessica Toft [\(15:18\)](#):

Wow. That's fantastic. Thanks so much, Amelia. It's so interesting. I really heard, and I just remind you that you're with child protection, so you're in the public sector. So this is one thing that might be interesting for us as we listen to this. Um, and that piece about time. So let's hear from our other, other folks here and see if they have some similar perspectives or what their stories are, Channel.

Channel Lowery [\(15:40\)](#):

Yeah, so I, like I said in the other podcast, I worked in community integration. I was a community integration specialist, which means that I worked with individuals who had a mental health condition and worked with them on finding, sustaining, maintaining their housing. Um, and a lot of times that included other goals. And like I said, the ones that stuck out, stuck out for me in terms of resistance to managerialism was really this idea of slowing down work and deliberately sidestepping agency instituted time pressures. Um, so in terms of like slowing down work, I think of, you know, having to do these assessments in the beginning that I talked about in the previous podcast, and a lot of of times we were told this needs to get done in the first session with a client, which to me felt very one invasive and really impeded on my ability to build rapport with the client.

[\(16:34\)](#):

So a lot of times what I would do is I would break them up into two to three sessions, even though that wasn't so supposed to be happening. But I would just say like, they were emotional and I was not going to push them. And so I took my time. That's usually what I would say because they weren't sitting with me in those meetings, you know, my supervisors, they weren't sitting with me in those meetings and I felt justified, because a lot of times that would happen or I just felt that, you know, innate sense of like, you need to slow down Channel because they're really, you know, these are really invasive questions and you're trying to build rapport, so slow down, let's talk about something else. Um, and it took me a little longer so I, but I felt like that was a way for me to, one, build rapport with the client and two, not

feel so pressured to do the work so fast and get this information so fast when it was really kind of like I said, invasive and then deliberately size stepping the time pressures.

(17:32):

Um, I think about, you know, a lot of times our job included moving clients and we had a truck that we would use that was donated to move clients. And, you know, they felt like, okay, you should be able to move people in less than a day and then you can still see clients. Well, a lot of times me and my coworkers would just take the day, and again, our supervisors were not with us. Um, you know, we're working with people who have a mental health diagnosis and it takes a little longer sometimes, it is a little bit more organizing to go into it. Um, so we would just, you know, take the day and not have any more appointments after. A lot of times we would, you know, take that time, take our time in moving people. Um, sometimes we would, you know, take longer breaks to like, go out to lunch and come back and help clients and, and then we were done. Um, we kind of would just be like, okay, we're gonna take the truck back, but we're not returning to the agency <laugh>. We would just be like, okay, we got done at this time. So we just went home. Um, even if it was a little bit earlier than, you know, we said it was. So those are the two ways that I would think of in terms of getting at the resistance to managerialism.

Jessica Toft (18:49):

That's, that's fantastic. Uh, in interesting that time has come up both time for being human with your client and also time for being a human with yourself as as workers. Yeah. Thanks so much. And Channel, is this a nonprofit sector?

Channel Lowery (19:03):

This, this is a nonprofit, but it was a private, it was yeah, yeah, it was private, p

Jessica Toft (19:09):

Private Nonprofit. Okay. Thanks so much Channel. Elin, how about for you? Let's hear from you about yours.

Elin Amundson (19:14):

Yeah, so most of my experience before joint or you know, starting this program was in adolescent and family mental health working at a nonprofit. And we were contracted with the county, so it was kind of an interesting intersection of nonprofit and public. Um, but our program was based on this family oriented, really outcomes oriented evidence-based model. Um, and the model was kind of, it had a lot of business management deep principles built into it, but there was some flexibility with that too. So there was both positive and negative aspects to the model itself. Um, but it did give us some room to make to use our professional discretion. So how that showed up in the form of resistance, we were often, our supervisors were also really encouraging and supporting when we wanted to speak up, when the model itself conflicted with our professional understanding of what was ethical and or important for the families.

(20:17):

Um, so we found ways to work around limitations when the model wanted us to go one direction, but we thought it was really important to go a different one. Um, for example, I guess we similar, you know, similar to what Channel said, we would take our time with this intake paperwork even though we were pressured to move really quickly on interventions and get started right away. Um, so there was just, yeah, there were constant tensions between what the model wanted us to do and what the families or

the youth needed. And so sometimes resistance looked like giving the families permission to forego the model driven goals and expectations to meet a different goal that would've like facilitated the goals in the long, longer run, even if not in the short immediate term.

Jessica Toft ([21:10](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So, um, and so you're, that was the practicing outside of agency approved interventions example, and then did you see also say deliberately side stepping agency institute time pressures?

Elin Amundson ([21:23](#)):

That was, yeah, that was, maybe that was a little more along the lines of deliberately sidestepping the okay pressures, but I guess practicing outside of the approved interventions. Here's an example. There wasn't a ton of like opportunity for macro level resistance in this job as a formal part of the job, but to fit within the model, we were able to do some kind of meso level resistance. So for example, our team organized some parent support groups and activities, since that was a need that was frequently expressed by the parents and families that we served. So this, it wasn't really like built in into the model and it wasn't a part of the, what the model suggested that we do, or an intervention that was suggested by normal practice, but we were supported by our supervisors to organize these, like outside of the model interventions that families really valued and wanted. Um, so yeah, there was like this constant tension and resistance between what seemed like it would be helpful for the families we served and what the model was kind of directing us or funneling us to do.

Jessica Toft ([22:26](#)):

Yeah, so I heard in there both that you, your sort of creative use of the model really, really take advantage of any, and then also supervisor support Yeah. Is another part of that. All right. Thanks so much for that. Our first set of questions about resistance. Let's move on to our, our last set of parts of resistance and let's do the same process. I'd like for you to, as I say these, which of these resonate with you, again, your top two, and then we're gonna see if we can share some examples. So first one, expressing disagreement to coworkers or management, organizing with other workers and collective action in various ways, contacting professional associations or the social work licensing board, belonging to a union, and then any other, there are other, other ways of resisting. So I'm gonna leave that open too. So let's do our vote once again. And, um, Amelia, I'm gonna have you head us off. What, what are your top two here?

Amelia LeGarde ([23:26](#)):

Yeah, my top two are gonna be that expressing disagreement to coworkers or management and then that organizing with other workers in a collective action in various ways.

Jessica Toft ([23:36](#)):

Great. Fantastic. Channel, how about you?

Channel Lowery ([23:40](#)):

Yeah, actually the same two. Expressing disagreement to coworkers and management and then organizing with other workers in a collective action in various ways.

Jessica Toft ([23:50](#)):

Great. Elin, how about you?

Elin Amundson ([23:52](#)):

Same two <laugh>. Um, there's not a <very interesting> there weren't many opportunities to belong to a union, at least not at the time that I was working, but, so definitely those top two.

Jessica Toft ([24:01](#)):

Okay. That makes sense. And, and in fact, of the three of you, do any of you belong to a union?

Amelia LeGarde ([24:09](#)):

I do. Amelia does.

Jessica Toft ([24:10](#)):

Okay. Amelia, thank you. So you, you just

Elin Amundson ([24:13](#)):

Outta curiosity, what is the union you belong to, because I'm so curious of what op union opportunities exist for social workers at all?

Amelia LeGarde ([24:20](#)):

That's such a great question you guys, and I wish that I had a better answer. They've asked me to like represent the union and like I pay my dues and I know that there's protections, but my union knowledge ends there. <laugh>.

Jessica Toft ([24:34](#)):

Yeah. It, it, I think for counties am I maybe often is typically asked me or you the count the county Public workers. But that's, that's interesting though that Amelia, you're, you know, you know you belong to one, but I, I wonder if there's a lot of social workers who don't know the name of their, the their precise union. Yeah. Yeah. Um, okay. So back to our questions though about your examples. Um, so Amelia, can you tell us about the expressing disagreement to workers or co or management and organizing with other workers in collective ways?

Amelia LeGarde ([25:07](#)):

Yeah, I have like a really particular example. Um, and it goes back to my tribal days and, um, myself and a coworker, we were at a conference and we learned that the way that we were practicing within our agency wasn't best for families. And so we decided at that conference that we were gonna go back and do something different. And it was very challenging. We came back like super enthusiastic. We were over here like the, like the founder of this conference is the one that we listened to, and he's the one that like drastically influenced our practice and I'll give Terry Cross a shout out here. And so we returned like all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed thinking about how like, this is what's gonna be best for families. And like, again, it was drastically different than how we had been practicing and how those before us had been practicing and, um, very different than how the agency was practicing.

[\(26:02\)](#):

And it then led us back to that first question where we were having to be the resistance, right? We like, were like, okay, they're not gonna do it, but we will continue to do it. We like so strongly believe that this is what's best for our families and so this is what we're gonna do. Um, and we like had talked to management and we went up ladders of management. Like it was a pretty wild couple years and, you know, unfortunately we ended up having to leave, because like our value system so like strongly didn't align with what the agency wanted us to do. Um, but yeah, that's, that's like again over here in my Star Wars world being like we were the resistance.

Jessica Toft ([26:43](#)):

Absolutely. It sounds like you really took a lot of agency there to, you know, and confidence and, and willing to put, put willingness to kind of put yourself out there. So, and would you say it was fairly successful?

Amelia LeGarde ([27:00](#)):

I mean, like, I'm talking to a researcher, so I'm over here and I'm like on a very small scale. I'd like to think that like the work that we did was super impactful to the families that we served, but you know, was it like large scale successful? Was it macro or meso? No, right, because it was just a couple of us that were doing this work and like ultimately we had to leave because the system, the agency wasn't supportive, didn't wanna change. And, you know, I left and shortly before I left I was asked one day to like account for like every place I had been and why I was here and why I was there. And it only takes 20 minutes to get from here to here, so where were you? Um, mm-hmm. And it really resulted in like being under that micro microscope, right? And so I'm here being like, I'm doing really good work for the families and like, this is the way that we should be practicing, but like that system, that agency didn't recognize that. So your question was, was it successful? I'm like, I don't think so.

Jessica Toft ([28:00](#)):

Yeah. And, and, and I wanna, I wanna lift up that, you know, you are here, you are talking to many, many people about this experience. And so I think that this is really helpful for social workers to hear your story, um, and how managerialism is, uh, impacting, professional work and ideas and creativity. And I wanna say thank you for your, thank you for that effort and work, and I know that you're, you're bringing it forward,

Elin Amundson ([28:24](#)):

So yeah, and maybe like in the long arc of time six, like def it sounds definitely powerful, right? And if it didn't feel successful in that short term view, maybe successful in the longer term by making that powerful statement, you know?

Jessica Toft ([28:38](#)):

Absolutely. Absolutely. Elin. So Elin, while I have you here chatting, I'm gonna ask you to go next, so Sure. With your two. So yeah, what were your two,

Elin Amundson ([28:49](#)):

Um, expressing disagreement to coworkers or management? We were always encouraged and welcomed to speak up when we had something to say. And again, our two main supervisors were really good at kind of navigating that middle ground between meeting the expectations of the stakeholders

and hearing what the direct line workers had to say about what the job and the work actually looked like. So that, that was a really common form of resistance actually in the day-to-day parts of the job. But because there was also that middle, middle management position that really was crucial for the, like, to make this whole position work, there wasn't a ton of opportunity for us to directly interact at higher levels, but a few of my coworkers did kind of start to level up their resistance by developing these, well, that parent support group. They also developed some like a training for county level stakeholders and then pitched it to our middle manager, like the managers of, of our program who were the middle men between the larger systems and the program itself. And they advocated higher up to get this training that would maybe help people at, at different systems levels understand the work that we did in our program. So again, these extra work pieces of work, like these extra forms of resistance that my coworkers had started to develop were kind of separate from the work as a clinician, but they did kind of try to go beyond the micro level focus and start to resist up to make our work more effective at a broader level.

Jessica Toft ([30:32](#)):

Yeah, really interesting. Again, I'm hearing the, the supervisor middle, you talked about a middleman there, how they can be really supportive, but maybe that can also be a, a barrier between the direct line and the higher levels or the so, but this kind of almost like a proposal format of, hey, here's, here's the, here's the proposal, here's what we're pitching, kind of made its way up, which is might be an interesting piece for us to think about. Like how do you talk to the higher ups, what do you think?

Elin Amundson ([30:59](#)):

Yeah, we probably made them groan a couple times with all these ideas, but, but they definitely were there for it too and, and did what they could to make it happen because, you know, one of our supervisors was a social worker, she knew.

Jessica Toft ([31:11](#)):

Right. And was this a kind of, would you say this is a smaller nonprofit or,

Elin Amundson ([31:16](#)):

Um, it's a pretty big nonprofit. <Okay.> But small team and kind of a siloed team within the nonprofit.

Jessica Toft ([31:22](#)):

Okay. Okay. Interesting. Thanks so much, Elin. Um, Channel, how about for you?

Channel Lowery ([31:28](#)):

Yeah, so I picked the, you know, the same two expressing disagreement with coworkers. And that one stands out to me, um, just because one of the things we, we had a contract with the county and we had billable units that we had to meet every week individually and as a team. And a lot of times at first that was doable. It seemed like, you know, very doable, but then they increased the amount of units that we needed to get per person per week which just meant more time face to face with clients. And, we really were in disagreement about that. So we expressed that disagreement amongst ourselves at first. But then, you know, in our meetings with our manager, we talked about how we disagree with this as well and really came to the conclusion that we need to express why this is, this is not doable.

([32:20](#)):

Because we're the ones that are out in the community, not our supervisors. And so it's really important that they understand what's going on when we're out in the community. Because, similar to what Amelia said, you know, sometimes I would get calls from my supervisor like, Hey, I noticed you had this appointment here, and then your next appointment is here. So just wondering like, why you haven't come back to the office, until your next appointment. And I'm like I just felt like, why do I need to explain like I'm a professional? I ultimately did explain, but I felt like I needed to express like, okay, why don't I agree with this policy? So I did, you know, I talked about building that rapport with clients and not always having to go from one place to the other.

(33:08):

We can't always meet the time crunches in terms of meeting face to face. And then we have cancellations sometimes, sometimes clients are not in a good space to wanna meet and they cancel, and it's like, okay, well you need to call every single client on your list to see if they wanna meet. And it's like, that is outside of the scope of like their goals. Sometimes I'm not just gonna call clients like it's a money grab to be like, Hey, do you have time to meet? And it's like, we already met. So, and then the organization piece with coworkers, I felt like that was more of an informal training thing that we would do with the other staff to be like, Hey, the not saying this, but like, these are the ways that we resist. So I mentioned the example of about the truck moving people.

(33:51):

So a lot of times what we would do unbeknownst to our supervisor was like, ask our coworkers, like, Hey, do you have this day that you can kind of help me move this client and then make it like a full day, like, for all of us to be able to spend the time together and help our client move? And it was faster, and then we had just more free time to either catch up on paperwork or kind of have the rest of the day. Because, you know, we felt like it was a good team building exercise as well, as well as like, okay, now we can catch up on some other things that we all have to do. So I think in terms of the organization piece, we really centered because we were kind of siloed with our clients. We just kind of wanted to organize in ways that were beneficial and then have that time away from our supervisors to be able to talk about how do we do things to make our jobs more efficient and easier to do.

Jessica Toft (34:42):

Wow. So Channel, I really picked up with sort of the, that's like the, the lived experience of social workers is not necessarily known by management. And there's a lot of assumptions about what goes into a, you know, how the work, the daily work, and that you all figured out ways to make work more humane by creating more space and time for yourselves. But sometimes even trying to make explicit what's happening during the day without just doing the paperwork to <laugh>, you know, document your day. It, it's sort of different ways of doing it. Once the voice of social worker, here's what I'm doing in my day overall, stop asking me <laugh>. And the other way is management. Tell me every minute.

Channel Lowery (35:24):

Yeah, yeah, for sure. And I, I think that comes up a lot with myself, like making it more humane. I'm all about self care and all about, you know, taking care of ourselves so that we can have the longevity to continue to do the job. I felt like the work that I was doing really important and really impactful, keeping people in housing and getting them housing. Um, so yeah, I definitely center that.

Jessica Toft (35:45):

Fantastic. Um, so I just wanna give each of you, you know, if you have like a, if there's like a minute or less, if there's something that you really want to make sure that the listeners here, you know, I wanna just open the mic for you for, to to say any final words.

Channel Lowery ([36:02](#)):

I just wanna say that Amelia pointed out something. I was thinking of the importance of professional development and how when we do things or do trainings outside of our agency, we can then bring that back to our agency and that can be a form of resistance. And it gets you connected to the broader sphere of what's going on in social work. What are the new evidence-based practices? What are the new theories out there that we can then formulate to change the things that our agencies have been doing that may be harmful to communities?

Jessica Toft ([36:33](#)):

Yeah. Fantastic, listening to each other, learning from our experiences, bringing back ideas. How about the other two of you,

Elin Amundson ([36:41](#)):

Amelia? I love the idea of being, your Star Wars inspiration is gonna stick in, stick around in my brain and remind me to resist when possible.

Amelia LeGarde ([36:51](#)):

Well, I am glad that you, like that resonates with you. I'm always like, y'all know Star Wars <laugh>, and I guess, I guess that's probably my message. You know, I sit here and I listen to you, two talk and I'm like, huh. They like trust their middle management and like, what a interesting dynamic that is. Um, so, but I, you know, I also come from a place where I try to maintain hope and optimism. And so I guess if I had one piece to share, I'd be over here and be like, y'all are not alone. Um, we got this survey here that says that, you know, this isn't a unique experience. And you know, again, as I continue to tell anyone who will listen to me about this podcast series, that's my message is like, we're not alone. And, I will be hopeful and optimistic that once we can identify what the problem is, we can figure out a solution.

Jessica Toft ([37:41](#)):

Thanks so much, Amelia. And I wanna just remind listeners, so on the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare website, we have five fact sheets which discuss different aspects of managerialism, professional discretion, and resistance, and, child welfare, school social workers, social work at large, rural social workers. So if you're interested in those and learning a little bit more about the survey, that's a great way to get a start. There are those previous podcasts and now we have this wonderful podcast. And I just wanna thank the three of you for your stories. I'm sure a lot of social workers are heartened to hear that there's other people who've had similar experiences. There's still questions out there that we really want to learn more about. So what I think this shows us is that there, uh, there is a world of experience that social workers having right now, direct practice social workers that are, that we're not hearing the voices nearly enough.

([38:39](#)):

And so this is helps justify our interview project. We are going to be going around the state and we will have a number of interviews with social workers in this upcoming year about their work life and about how they experience managerialism, professional discretion and resistance. And it'll be so interesting to

hear how, how social workers are engaging this and hopefully hearing this podcast we'll also get them thinking about other ways that they can resist. We'll be really excited to next year have another podcast, what we learned about in these interviews. And again, thank you so much to the guests, Amelia LeGarde, Elin Amundson, Channel Lowery, your stories are inspirational and important. And I wanna thank once again the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare and I wanna thank and send out hope and resistance to our listeners. Glad that you could tune in to this podcast and I just wanna tell everyone to keep up the good work. Our clients and citizens and residents of Minnesota depend on you and wish you all the best.

Speaker 5 ([39:52](#)):

Thank you.

([39:52](#)):

Thank you so much for having us.

([39:54](#)):

Yeah, thank you.

([39:55](#)):

Miigwech

([39:59](#)):

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