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WOMEN AND SOCIAL WORK:  
A STUDY OF FEMINIST  
SOCIAL WORK STUDENT  
PLACEMENTS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in Social Work at Massey University.

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## ABSTRACT

Women social workers and their clients are taking strength from the women's movement. They are redefining women's problems and looking for alternative solutions. This study of feminist social work student placements arises from the author's joint interests in feminism and social work education. It establishes the salient characteristics of such placements. The focus is on issues relating to placement administration and the articulation of fieldwork curriculum with academic curriculum.

The research was carried out late in 1986. All students (10) on the Massey University Bachelor of Social Work degree who regarded their final placements as feminist were interviewed and placement documents such as contracts, visitors' reports, supervisors assessments and written projects were also used as data. Interviews took place after placements were completed.

Four chapters relate to the data. There is a short description of each placement followed by a chapter on the administrative processes of these placements. The third chapter looks at respondents theoretical positions and what influenced their integration of theory into practice. The presentation of data concludes with a section on the nature of feminist social work and outlines five placement principles.

It is argued that the social work education curriculum should include feminist theory in relation to social work practice. Emphasis is placed on developing a common understanding of feminist placements so that their organisation may be compatible, as far as possible, with feminist principles. In addition there should be more mainstream feminist theory taught on social work courses to supplement a core paper on women's issues in social work.

The study makes it clear that it is essential that academic input is articulated with fieldwork practice.

The investigation of the truth is in one way hard, in another easy. An indication of this is found in the fact that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, no one fails entirely, but everyone says something true about the nature of things, and while individually they contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed.

Aristotle. Metaphysics, Book IIa. (Barnes, 1984: 1569.)

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