

# The Outsider Looking In

*Ethical dilemmas in understanding oppression of women within international cross-cultural contexts*



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PARTNERING for CHANGE

# National Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics

- According to the NASW Code of Ethics, social workers are ethically obligated to promote social justice.
- Social workers are required to “pursue social change, particularly with and on the behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people,” while seeking to “promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008, ethical principles).

# Social Workers in the international arena

- Social workers face increased exposure to diverse cultures and value systems.
- The framework used to conceptualize oppression will dictate: the problem definition, the research, and intervention applied.
- What may constitute as oppression to a social worker using a “western” framework, may not to someone of a different background (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999; Hanchard, 2003).
- Social workers ability to practice in accordance with their ethical code is thus complicated.

# Addressing the sexual exploitation of domestic workers in Brazil

- This presentation will illustrate my struggle and reconciliation with this ethical dilemma.
  - i. Personal standpoint
  - ii. Understanding the societal position of Brazilian domestic workers through intersectionality theory
  - iii. Exploitation and its applicability to this project
  - iv. Personal struggles with professional ethics
  - v. Conclusion and implications for social work practice

# I. Personal Standpoint

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- Who am I?
- How did I get involved in this project?
- What is my role in this project?
- Why is it important to pose these questions?

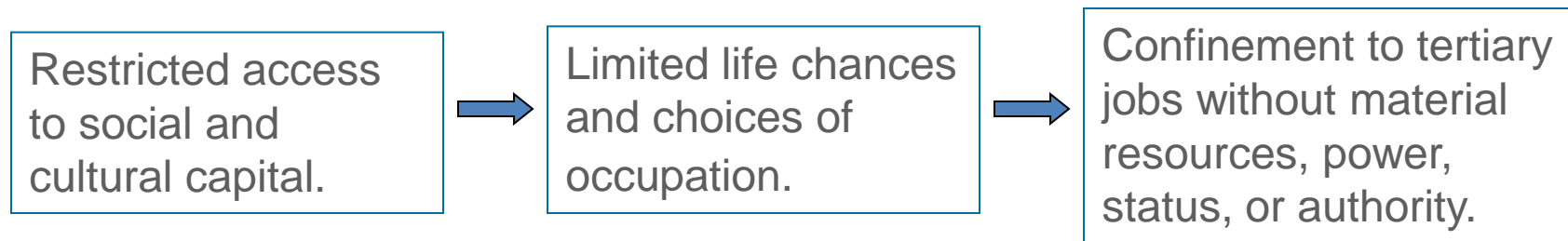
## II. Intersectionality and the societal position of Brazilian domestic workers

- Utilizing intersectionality theory to understand the experiences of domestic workers involves issues of *power*, *privilege* and *equity* (Anderson & Collins, 2001; Bailey, 2004; Goldstein, 2003; Sheriff, 2001).
- “Recognizing and analyzing the hierarchies and systems of domination that permeates society and systematically exploit and control” domestic workers (Anderson & Collins 2001, p. 5).
- Black female domestic workers in Brazil are systematically disadvantaged by the intersection of their race, class, and gender.

## II. Intersectionality and the societal position of Brazilian domestic workers

- Black women are economically and socially disadvantaged in Brazilian society.

Noticeable absence of black women in schools, the workforce, the public healthcare system, and in politics (Andrews, 2004; Davilla, 2003; McDonnell & Loureno, 2009; Reichmann, 1995).



Lovell, 2000

- Thus there is an overwhelming absence of black women from the upper and middle class (Telles, 2004).

## II. Intersectionality and the societal position of Brazilian domestic workers

- Black women are also sexually disadvantaged.
    - Patriarchal Values
      - Regardless of race or class, a man's sexual prowess is associated with his reputation.
    - Double standards based on race and class
      - Colonial practices
      - “Virgin/Whore” dichotomy
      - Construction of “whiteness” as the ideal for femininity and womanhood.
- (Caldwell, 2001; Fernandes, 1969; Freyre, 1933)





# Overview of the societal position of Brazilian domestic workers

- Black women are overrepresented in the profession of domestic work due to lack of social and cultural capital.
- Subject to discriminatory discourse regarding sexuality.
- Black women represent the most marginalized population in Brazilian society.



### III. Exploitation and its applicability to this project

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- What is sexual exploitation?
- What isn't sexual exploitation?
- Whose definition must I consider?
- What extent must I remain sensitive to cultural differences?

# III. Exploitation and its applicability to this project

## MARIANA'S CASE STUDY



# III. Exploitation and its applicability to this project

## What is sexual exploitation?

According to DeSouza & Cerqueira (2008) sexual exploitation of Brazilian domestic workers is defined as sexual harassment as a behavioral construct comprising three related, but distinct dimensions:

1. Gender harassment: Insulting, hostile, or degrading attitudes towards women.
2. Unwanted sexual attention: Verbal and non-verbal behaviors that are offensive, unwanted, or unreciprocated attention.
3. Sexual coercion: When better treatment or rewards are offered contingent on sexual cooperation

### III. Exploitation and its applicability to this project

According to Cardoso (1997, p. 136): “To understand the woman’s reason to stay with one who attacks her, it becomes necessary to reveal the hidden realities that oppresses women daily and maintains her in the extreme point of subordination.”



**Domestic workers in Brazil are susceptible to sexual exploitation due to their lack of power, status, and access.**

## IV. Personal Struggle with Professional Ethics

- My framework for analysis shaped by my own culture, values, and experiences.

American

South Asian

F  
O  
S  
W  
R

Insider

Traditional

Liberal

Woman

Social Worker

Outsider

Researcher



## IV. Personal Struggle with Professional Ethics

- Women as “an already constituted, coherent group with identical interest and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial locations or contradictions” (Mohanty 1998, p. 336-337).
- Brazilian domestic workers as leading “an essentially truncated life based on [their] feminine gender (read: sexual constrained) and being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc)” (Mohanty 1998, p. 353).
- Western (American) women as “educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions” (Mohanty 1998, p. 353).

## V. Conclusions and Implications for Social Work Practice

- There is no hard and fast reconciliation to the ethical dilemmas social workers will face in international, cross-cultural contexts.
- Power and oppression cannot be ascertained using rigid constructs.
- Social workers must employ culturally competent frameworks to conceptualize oppression.
- Research and practice must be informed by the clients as stakeholders in their own lives.



# Thank You

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