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Critical Social Work

1. While a critical tradition has been present since the birth of professional social work, it was not until the 1960s that a distinct body of critical practical theories emerged. (2)
2. There is a broad range of models that can be identified as critical: (3)
Anti-racist and multicultural social work, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory social work, feminist social work, various strands of community work, Marxist social work, radical social work, structural social work, participatory and action forms of research
3. Critical social work or activist social work to refer to practice models that incorporate an emancipatory social change orientation: (3)
 - ◆ A commitment to standing alongside oppressed and impoverished populations (Leonard, 1994);
 - ◆ The importance of dialogic relations between workers and service users
 - ◆ The role of social, economic and political systems in shaping individual experiences and social relationships, including interactions within the practice context (Leonard, 1995)
 - ◆ A commitment to the study of change, the move towards change and the provocation of change. Critical practice is orientated towards the transformation of processes and structures that perpetuate domination and exploitation (Leonard, 1994)
4. Comments:
 - ◆ They often leave little space in which to voice the contradictions, uncertainties, contextual variability within activist practice contexts and the specific demands associated with social work practice, particularly in conventional settings. (4)
 - ◆ They seem to avoid the urgent questions of how to bring an activist orientation to bear in settings where the overt use of worker power and authority is not only unavoidable but, in fact, central to the work that social workers do. Even the use of power mandated through critical practice theories, such as the exercise of power required to initiate consciousness raising, collective processes, the sharing of skills and the dispersion of

power itself, is underplayed, if acknowledged at all, in critical social work authors' reflections on practice. (4)

- ◆ The fixed definitions of social change devalues the change activity in which social workers are typically engaged. Critical traditions foreground social super-structures in analysis and action. The dualistic construction of the structural and local spheres leads logically to the conclusion that the local practices of social work are limited if not counterproductive for radical social change. Quite simply, radical analyses can overlook the emancipatory potential in everyday social work practices by establishing standard that devalue much of the change activity in which social workers are involved. (5)

5. A poststructural turn in critical social work

- ◆ The reason for this orientation is that the work of these poststructural authors provides useful tools for destabilizing and reworking the social work theories, whilst retaining an orientation towards progressive political practices. (5)
- ◆ Postmodernists are disillusioned with modernity. Postmodern theories are founded on the claim that the contemporary conditions of transformation are so fundamental that the new conditions must be named and new cultural forms developed in order to understand and engage with these uncertain times. Poststructural theory challenges the failure of contemporary social and political discourses to come to terms with the constitutive power of language. They are particularly critical of the humanist aspects of Enlightenment thought, which are based on assumptions about the coherence of individual identity and which place humans center stage in determining the course of history. (6)
- ◆ In contrast to the grand and utopian visions approaches to social change that are anti-dogmatic, pragmatic, flexible and contextually sensitive and that require activists to adopt a critically self-reflexive attitude towards the effects of their emancipatory ideals. If there can be said to be an aim of poststructural emancipatory politics it is towards the creation of conditions for ongoing dialogue and contestation. (6)
- ◆ The task of drawing implications for critical forms of social work is complicated by this lack of commonality, the complexity of the various bodies of work and the disparate interpretations of the work of poststructural thinkers. For this reasons, it is generally more useful to talk about individual thinkers rather than the field of poststructuralism. (7)
- ◆ In this work, I have elected to focus on the work of Foucault and radical

poststructural feminist thinkers, Hélène Cixous, Elizabeth Grosz and Moira Gatens because of their interest in activist politics and the processes of power, identity and change. (7)

- ◆ The use of poststructural theory to rethink critical practices is controversial. Amongst many critical social workers there is a concern that poststructural ideas can obscure the material realities of disadvantage and moreover, that these theories can leave activists bereft of political strategy. (7)
- ◆ Many activists are concerned about the nihilistic and conservative implications of poststructural philosophies. These thinkers question the utility of poststructuralism philosophies. These thinkers questions the utility of poststructuralism on the grounds that it offers few truths or directions for practice and threatens to undermine the emancipatory ideals that have provided the foundations for critical social work. It fails to provide a framework for progressive practice because it is unable to ‘specify possible mechanisms of change and .. to state why change is better than no change.’ (Parton, 1994) (7-8)
- ◆ Foucault cites social workers alongside a range of other modern professionals such as law and medicine whose gender composition, knowledge base and professional power are quite distinct from social work. While I acknowledge the importance of Foucault’s critique of professional helping as a tool for the surveillance and discipline of oppressed population it has been necessary to use Foucault against himself, on the grounds that he too has adopted a universalist critique of the helping professions which fails to grasp the dynamism and diversity of social work practices. (8)

Critical Theory and Social Work

1. Radical elements have long existed within the field. Some of these earlier activists are well known to the profession such as Jane Adams. (12)
2. The intellectual antecedents band of critical social theories including: feminist theories, Marxism, community development, radical educational theory, anti-psychiatry, radical sociology, critical theories about race and ethnicity, and liberation theology. (12)
3. They emphasize the values of equity and justice for oppressed populations.
4. Critical theories are concerned with possibilities for liberatory social transformation. In realizing this vision, critical theory emphasize the relationship between theory and practice. A key point of critical theory is not just to understand the world but to change it. (13)
5. An important aspect of the critical theories is their emphasis on the abilities of

humans, through their self-conscious and collective action, to achieve the emancipatory vision of a society free from domination. (14)

6. Marx's influence on twentieth century critical social theory has been profound. The contemporary development of Marx's work, in Western political theory, has taken two key paths. The first is the classical Marxian view which continues to emphasize the economic deterministic aspects of Marx's theory. However, some theorists reject this classical view as 'too narrowly reductionist' to be useful for understanding and transforming capitalist society. In this second school of thought the work of the Frankfurt school, including Horkeimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas, can be located. The critical theoretical work of the Frankfurt school has focused on tracing the linkages between the economic, political, social, cultural and psychic realms. (17)
7. In concert with Marx's epistemological stance, critical social science is primarily concerned with linking thought and action. For critical social scientists, rational reflection provides a vital base for radical action. Action is directed towards mobilizing the oppressed to engage in processes of fundamental personal and social transformation. (18)
8. Critical social theories seek to explain the social order: the overarching social structure is considered to fundamentally order social relations at institutional and personal levels. (19)
9. A conflict perspective is central to the understanding of power relations: critical social theorists dispute the manner in which the power of the elite is exercised. The position and power of the oppressor and oppressed are structurally determined. (19)
10. This position, that humans both produce and are produced by the society, is based on an activist conception of human beings. Human are shaped by the social structure, but they are also recognized as capable of altering it. (20)
11. An emphasis on rational self-consciousness as a precursor to change: for critical social theorists the subordination of the powerless occurs primarily through the false ideological propositions to which they adhere. Consciousness raising is thus considered as a fundamental precursor to radical social action. (20)
12. The participation of the oppressed in the process of change: critical social theorists aim to empower their audience to transform the social order (Fay, 1987). This means that the critical social science theory must have an action orientation and that this process of change must be intelligible to the oppressed.
13. The development of a critical approach to social work: (21)
 - ◆ Activists approaches are, in part, built on a critique of orthodox social work. Activists expose the inherently political nature of social work and,

participatory, the role of social work in processes of social control. (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Leonard, 1975.) (21)

- ◆ The critique of the individualistic focus of orthodox social work; (22)
 - ◆ Emphasizing the inequities that underlie the worker-client relationship;
 - ◆ The critique of professionalism; (23)
14. The transformative agenda of activist social work: activist social work is oriented towards radical transformation in both the processes and goals of social work practice. While activist seek to develop more equitable relations between themselves and their clients, their concerns about equity are certainly not confined to this. Indeed activists are motivated by a vision of a just society. (24)
 15. However, the degree of change required and the role the social worker can be expected play in the transformation process vary considerably. Amongst activist social workers there is debate between the reformist and revolutionary approaches to practice. (24)
 16. The prioritization of the social structure in the analysis of problems, (25)
 17. A shift from a focus on individual pathology to a concentration on oppression, (26)
 18. The development of egalitarian practice processes; (27)
 19. Adoption of practice strategies that recognize and challenge the structures of oppression;
 20. The role of the social worker in activist practice.
 21. Three strategies commonly advocated by activist social workers for the achievement of more egalitarian practice relations: (28)
 - ◆ The diminution of differences between workers and clients;
 - ◆ The revaluing of the participant's knowledge;
 - ◆ Ensuring the accountability of the worker to the client.
 22. Strategies for change in critical social work: (30)
 - ◆ Consciousness raising: a process of critical reflection whereby the oppressed move from a position of self-blame to an understanding of the structural origins of their suffering; (31)
 - ◆ Reflect the critical social science view that humans are essentially rational and thus, changes in thought will be reflected in transformed action. They are based on a view that through a process of critical self-reflection people can develop a critique of their self-understanding and social practices, such that they can change the way they live. (31)
 - ◆ The importance of their own self-reflection as a basis for action. Activists insist the consciousness raising process must involve a dialogic process between workers and clients. (31)

- ◆ The development of collective identifications and the emergence of collective activities: to promote the development of collective and oppositional identifications amongst oppressed people. (32)

23 The role of the worker:

- ◆ It is recognized that whatever actions the practitioners may take to redistribute power in the practice context, the basic structural inequities remain and are reflected in their relationship to their client. (33)
- ◆ The activist approach to the analysis of power suggests that the power differences between workers are both immutable and oppressive. This conceptualization of power in the worker-client relationship has led some practitioners to conclude that the most empowering action a worker can take is to minimize their involvement with oppressed people; that is, to transfer skills and knowledge as efficiently as possible and exit themselves from the lives of service users. (34)
- ◆ Activist social workers frequently argue that the contradictory character of social work practice must be recognized if social workers are to contribute to progressive social transformation. The ambivalent position of the worker does imply that the social worker will need to make a concerted commitment to change activity, if his practice is not merely to further middle class interests. (35)

Foucault and the politics of emancipation:

1. It may well be that aspects of social work 'culture', especially the long-standing ambivalence about practice theory contribute to an indifference towards poststructuralism. (37)
2. Critical social work authors are amongst the most hostile critics of these contemporary developments. Some embrace poststructural and postmodern ideas as 'unambiguously progressive forces', many are alarmed at the retreat from universal notions of justice, equity and radical change these ideas imply. (37)
3. Poststructuralism challenges the humanist claim that through rational thought and action human societies can transform themselves. It also call into question the authoritarianism that lies, often unrecognized, in emancipatory practice theories. (38)
4. There is little that unifies poststructuralists it is generally more useful to discuss the work of individual thinkers. Language becomes for poststructuralists a major site of struggle. (38)
5. They prioritize the role of language in constituting social reality. The assumption is that there is no way of directly experience the social world; rather, one can

only know 'reality' through language. According to Foucault, there is no reality outside discourse (Foucault, 1981:67). (39)

6. Foucault and the rules of discourse:

- ◆ Discourses are produced by specific rules and procedures which make it possible for 'certain statements but not others to occur at particular times, places and institutional locations.' (Fairclough, 1992:40; Foucault, 1981:52). (40)
- ◆ Discourses and power are interconnected. Foucault is concerned to understand the processes through which truth claims become possible and particular individuals come to be seen as capable of speaking that truth. (40)
- ◆ In common with the critique made by many critical social workers, Foucault has pointed out that the truth status of modern social sciences has enabled human service professionals to exercise disciplinary power in relation to marginalized populations. (40)
- ◆ As truth and power are linked, from a Foucauldian perspective it becomes necessary to consider not only the effects of professional discourse but also how subjugated knowledge can also be suppressed via the forms of knowledge such as critical knowledge and lived experience that activists advocate. (41)
- ◆ Discourses are discontinuous and contradictory. This means that in every context there are a number of discourses operating, which may be overlapping, distinct or discontinuous, and understanding and action in context will be shaped by a combination of discourses. (41)
- ◆ Exteriority: one must consider the concrete operations of discourse, that is, to ask what are the effects of discourse, that the form and limits of the discourse are exposed. (41)

7. Power: a Foucauldian approach

- ◆ Power is productive in that it constitutes things, such as discourses, knowledges and 'identity'. Power is exercised through the individual as it categorizes the individual, attaches itself to his/her identity, imposing a law of truth on him/her. (44)
- ◆ Foucault has argued that the social sciences and the helping professions have played a vital role in providing a bridge between the individual and 'the effective management of "men and things"'. These sciences contribute to contemporary modes of governmentality by providing methods for observation of, and intervention into, the most minute and intimate details of individual lives. (44)
- ◆ Social control is an important dimension of contemporary social service

work, this notion cannot explain the operation of power that fall outside a unilateral relationship of control. Critical social workers fail to observe the ambivalent and, sometimes, positive dimensions of human services activity within local contexts. (45)

- ◆ Foucault's work encourages social workers to recognize the multiple possibilities for power in local practice contexts. (45)
- ◆ Foucault does not deny the existence of oppressive social structures, such as capitalism or patriarchy. What does refuse, however, is to accord them priority in explaining local phenomena. The superstructure does not produce local power relations; rather, it is the local relations that enable global phenomena of power. Foucault's work encourages social workers to look to the rich data of everyday practice to understand how social practices are sustained and can be challenged. (45)

8. From identity to subjectivity: the role of discourse

- ◆ In preference to the term 'identity', poststructuralists refer instead to subjectivity to denote 'the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world.' (Weedon, 1987:32) Poststructuralists reject the view that individuals have pre-social identity or essence such as that of woman or proletariat, rather, one's subjectivity is produced through discourses. (45)
- ◆ The practice of collective identification, common to many contemporary social movements, is called into question as poststructural theory highlights that shared identifications such as that of woman or proletariat may provide no basis for shared political interest whatsoever. (46)
- ◆ Discourse and the subject positions that they make available to us or from which one is excluded very much affect the way we live. One direction for political practice is that of destabilizing discourses that continue oppression by excluding individuals from non-oppressive subject positions or those that confine individuals to a narrow range of possibilities. (46)

9. Towards a politics of detail

- ◆ One direction in which the poststructural theories discussed in this chapter lead is towards a 'politics of detail' in which the understanding of power, identity and processes of change begins in the analysis of the everyday social practices. (51)
- ◆ A further issue is that the emphasis on rationality can neglect other ways of knowing, such as bodily and emotional knowledge. The processes of consciousness raising, commonly promoted in activist practice models,

provides an illustration of the potential for activist practices to silence non-rational forms of knowing. Consciousness raising processes ignore the plethora of ways in which bodily and irrational or emotional knowledge impede change or make it possible. (52)

- ◆ The importance for social workers of the rejection of singular notions of progress is that it can lead away from attempts to fix an essence of social work and instead to make invisible a heterogeneity of progressive practice possibilities relevant to the diverse contexts in which social work occurs. (52-3)

10. A focus on social practices rather than social identities:

- ◆ Foucault suggests that the formation of identities is vital to the modern operations of discipline and surveillance. Modern power operates by binding individuals to identifications which, in turn, requires that individuals submit to power (such as school, prison, social services, gym, the consciousness raising group) in order to maintain a coherent sense of self. From this perspectives, the practices of identity politics exemplified by the forming of collective identities such as ‘woman’, ‘gay’ or ‘differently able’ can reinforce the modern operations of power. (53)
- ◆ Foucault promotes the ongoing reinvention of the self as a strategy for transgressing the kinds of individualizing practices imposed on populations in the modern epoch. (54)
- ◆ Whilst poststructuralists refuse the notion of an essential self as the foundation for shared struggle, collective action remains possible. However, the ‘we’ of shared political activity is always a provisional category and maintains only in so far as common concerns can be identified. (Foucault, 1991:385). (54)

Critical Social Work Responses to ‘Post’ Theories:

1. Response one: reservations about poststructuralism as a counter-revolutionary force: poststructural theory leads to the promotion of uncertainty, diversity and complexity. It is this focus on ambiguity, so appealing in many areas of social science and humanities and even within some domains of social work, that has proven problematic for progressive authors both within some domains of social work, that has proven problematic for progressive authors both within social work and outside it. Until recently, the dominant response of critical social workers was to cite the various forms of post theories as counter-revolutionary forces. Also critical authors are hesitant to embrace the poststructural notion of fragmented and multiple identities while the categories of class, gender and race

continue to represent virulent social divisions. Critical authors contest whether progressive political practices can be founded on a notion of diversity. There is concern that the celebration of difference will lead not to justice but to the uncritical endorsement of differences produced by fundamental social and economic inequities. Activists contend that poststructural theories lack strategies relevant to contemporary political struggles. Finally, poststructural theory offers little towards the reconstruction of emancipatory political processes. For instance, the emphasis on locality is promoted, it seems, in the absence of strategies to contest the domination of local elites and local truth claims. (55-8)

2. Response two: embrace of poststructural critique of the human services: Yet Foucault's work also extends well established radical perspectives on the controlling dimensions of care work by demonstrating how the human services contribute to the subordination of marginalized populations. For Foucault there is no escape from power. Practice cannot be disconnected from modern system of power, which pervade everywhere. While critical practice is possible it is always shaped by the historical and local contexts in which social work practices are embedded.
3. To adopt Foucault's analysis as the complete explanation of the operations of contemporary social work is to miss his call to the investigation of local practices sites. Foucault's historical critique was intended to incorporate the entire scope of the human services field, including the work of judges, teachers, psychiatrists and medical practitioners. Critical social workers, then, must interrogate the usefulness of his insights for engaging with both the specifics and the diversity of social work practices. (59)
4. The variability of social work knowledge is evidence of the influence of a range of paradigms, other than positivism, on knowledge development. The positivist paradigm has been subject of heated debate amongst social workers. During this time, interpretivism and critical perspectives have had considerable influence on the field. In this way, social work knowledge is markedly different from many other human service occupations, such as psychology and medicine, whose knowledge foundations remain strongly positivist. (60)
5. I am suggesting that Foucault's critique of positivism is limited for apprehending the operations of power/knowledge in social work practices that are avowedly anti-positivist, anti-expert and anti-technical. The failure to engage critically with other approaches to knowledge gained through lived experience, is never innocent of the operations of power. (60)
6. Activists may miss the opportunities this body of work provides for rethinking social work. (60)

7. Response Three: Poststructural theory and social work processes: poststructuralism is used to deconstruct claims to a 'core' or 'essence' of social work and to move instead towards practice theories that engage with the complexity and contextual diversity of social work practices. (61)
8. This is because the insights of poststructural theory invite us to recognize that 'social work', like all other entities, is constituted through discourses. (61)
9. Critical practice is possible, but recognition of the historical and local contexts of social work practice demands greater modesty in claims about what can be achieved. Attention to historical context is important also for drawing critical social workers' attention to the shifts, over time, in the uses and effects of critical practice strategies. (61)
10. This perspective emphasize the open and multi-faceted character of texts and narratives.
11. Representations of practice:
 - ◆ The representations of critical discourse must be examined not just for the claims they make, but also for the kinds of subjectivities, social objects and power relations they make possible. The insights can increase the self-reflexivity of activist practitioners by encouraging the ongoing interrogation of the processes through which some truth claims are produced while others are suppressed. Yet in unsettling the truth claims that have become an unspoken and unquestioned orthodoxy of critical social work practice theories, poststructural perspectives can contribute to more ended approaches to practice in action and theory-building. (63)
12. Power
 - ◆ Activists are encouraged to turn their attention to the forms of power, including the exclusionary effects, that their discourses produce. Practice processes such as raising consciousness, initiating collective involvement and struggle do not occur in the absence of power. Thus, rather than a surrender of power, what activist practice discourses demand is a different use of power from that usually associated with professional practices. Foucault's emphasis on the micro-physics of power suggests that local relations of power are not merely an effect of the structural. (64)
13. Identity
 - ◆ In the critical social science school, power is regarded as 'coercive/ oppressive and identity is structured in a hierarchy in which one subject position is seen as dominant over the others' (Gibson-Graham, 1995). In critical social work discourses, these oppositions include: (64)
 - Middle class/ working class

- The privileged/ the poor
 - Technical knowledge/ lived experience
 - Voice/ silence
 - Researcher/ researched
 - Worker/ client
 - Powerful/ powerless
- ◆ Critical social work representations have made important contributions to the rethinking of practice in so far as they have encouraged workers to adopt a stance of humility and self-reflexivity. (65)
 - ◆ The portrayal of social workers as ‘powerful’ and as ‘experts’ is questionable in so far as it obscures other ways in which these individuals are positioned through discourses, in relation to categories such as gender, race, sexuality and lived experience. (65)
14. Poststructuralism can be used to destabilize the rationalist claims of critical discourse which imply that if one gets the analysis right the correct practices will follow. (66)
 15. Within local practice contexts, critical discourses can lead to the suppression of different perspectives, even amongst those whose interests critical social workers claim to champion. (66)
 16. Foucault’s work further problematizes emancipatory strategies on the grounds that they are implicated in processes of surveillance and disciplining practices. Foucault suggests that contemporary practices associated with sexuality, such as the proliferation of discourses about this topic, do not liberate sexuality, such as the proliferation of discourses about this topic, do not liberate sexuality but rather make it the subject of public obsession. According to this insight, then, it is not sufficient to subscribe to a set of ‘emancipatory’ strategies; one must also interrogate the local effects of these practices. (66)
 17. A discourse analysis approach
 - ◆ Discourse analysis illuminates the processes through which discourses constitute and constrain social relationships, practices and institutions. Discourse analysis can enrich progressive social work practices theories, the use of these methods to investigate social work practices by demonstrating how the language practices through which organizations, theorists, practitioners and service users express their understanding of social work also shape the kinds of practices that occur. (67)
 - ◆ I use discourse analysis to investigate the language through which: (67)
 - Critical social workers delineate what social work, particularly activist practice, ‘is’,

- Workers and service users construct and express their understanding of social work within particular contexts of action.

◆ Researching as a practitioner (69)

Rethinking Professional Power and identity

1. Rethinking social control: in critical practice theory, power is represented as a possession of individuals and groups who hold privileged positions within overarching social structures. Critical social workers have represented workers and service users dualistically as the 'powerful' and the 'powerless'. The radical egalitarian stance promotes to reduce the power imbalance between them. (73)
 2. However, Foucault's analysis suggests that social control is present in all human services work, including ostensibly radical practice approaches. (73)
 3. In this chapter I have shown how the insights of critical poststructural theories bid social workers towards: (94)
- ◆ The development of practice modes that engage productively with the power and social control inherent to social work activity, particularly statutory work. The emphasis, then, is not the refusal of power, for such an ambition is an absurdity in many contexts of practice, but rather towards analysis of how worker power can be made more humane and accountable.
 - ◆ The recognition that achievement of activist practice does not involve an absence of power, but rather its highly specific use;
 - ◆ An acknowledgement that worker power is not always enacted overtly and, often, the most powerful actions occur without service users' or workers' recognition that power has been exercised.
 - ◆ A rupturing of the unitary depictions of the disembodied, powerful and authoritarian worker towards a recognition of the impact of the corporeal on the resources and vulnerabilities that workers may bring in the enactment of power in the practice context.

Reconstructing Critical Practices:

1. Critical poststructural theory contributes to the repositioning of theory in practice. In this new position, theory is a tool, something that can be used to critique practice but also something practitioners and service users can speak with and against. Critical poststructural theory shows the truths proclaimed in critical social work to be partial truths and the voices of the theorist/ researcher to be situated rather than universal voices. This recognition can contribute to different ways of theorising to greater openness to those aspects of social work practice that defy explanation in traditional scientific terms or through reference to the social 'whole'. (122-123)

2. The critical social work literature is riddled with dualism which no longer make sense, if in fact they ever did, for supporting activist practices in the contemporary and diverse contexts of social work activity: (124)
 - ◆ Structural/ local
 - ◆ Theory/ practice
 - ◆ Dominance/ egalitarianism
 - ◆ Community work/ casework
 - ◆ Public sector/ private or corporate sector
 - ◆ Rational/ irrational
 - ◆ Care/ control
3. Even when workers seek an equal relation with the service user, they are still bound by other professional, organizational and personal obligations, which shape the achievement of egalitarian ideals. In so far as the ideal of radical egalitarianism impedes workers from acknowledging these tensions in their practice, it contributes to exploitation and confusion for service users about the nature of their relationship. (126)
4. Power/knowledge and power in social work:
 - ◆ Technical knowledge and power in social work: I have argued that technical knowledge is not necessarily inconsistent with other ways of knowing; rather, what matters is whether this knowledge is used to extend the justice and humanity of social services or to confine it; (128) Second, the technical knowledge base is vulnerable to contest by other professionals and service users because of the perceived non-technical character of much social work activity. (129)
 - ◆ Critical perspectives and power/knowledge: self-reflexivity is enhanced through the realization that all discourses, including critical practice theories, must be subject to critical interrogation of the forms of power discourses they effect. (130) Poststructural theory suggest that the discourses of liberation do not exist outside power. Indeed, these discourses can have oppressive effects. Ironically, these discourses can be used to accord power to their speakers, such as the revolutionary, whilst having little benefit for those whom the discourses claim to represent. (130)
 - ◆ Lived experience and power/knowledge: by challenging the opposition between professional knowledge and lived experience in critical practice, poststructural theory can extend our understanding of the operations of power and knowledge in the local contexts of activist practice. Far from being innocent of the operations of professional power, lived experience can be used to extend professional power. (131)

5. Strategies for change:

- ◆ Rethinking consciousness raising: (137-8)
 - Dictates what counts as ‘conservative’ and ‘activist’ in accordance with critical social science understanding and in so doing devalues local understandings and practices of resistance;
 - Promotes intolerance of differences in so far as the alternative perspectives, even those advanced by oppressed people, are readily dismissed as evidence of false consciousness;
 - Privileges rational ways of knowing and acting thus downplaying the myriad of factors including irrationality and local contexts, that impinge on human activity.
- ◆ Rethinking collective identification and action: the problem lies in the belief that identities, which are the foundation stone of collective politics, refer to fixed and stable essences. (139)
- ◆ Maintaining a tension between the symbolic and the material: poststructuralists emphasize on language and on the symbolic can elide the material realities of disadvantage. An important lesson of poststructuralism is that the local is more than an effect of the structural, and hence the broad overarching frameworks of critical social science are viewed as blunt instruments for understanding and action upon local experiences of power, identity and the practices of change. Thus critical social science theorists in their emphasis on analysis categories of ‘class’, ‘gender’ and ‘race’ continue to provide important analytic and strategic resources for understanding and responding to disadvantage. (140)
- ◆ Acknowledge relations of domination: the reconceptualisation of power as flexible, multifarious and contextually variable obscures those forms of power that are fixed and dominatory. (140)
- ◆ An uncertain certainty: the embrace of difference can lead to uncertainty of direction and political strategy. (141)
- ◆ Ethical framework and the limits to an openness to difference: For Foucault and Cixous it is apparent that not all difference is acceptable to them. In recent years, a number of theorists have sought to address the problem of articulating the ethical frameworks that mediate the emphasis on locality and difference in poststructural/ postmodern political practices. (142)