

## Empowering Students in a Feminist Social Work Practice Course

By: Faye Y. Abram, [Cathryne L. Schmitz](#), Susan A. Taylor, Susan C. Tebb, and Maria C. Bartlett

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### **Abstract:**

Since 1993, a faculty collective has team-taught a feminist social work practice course. The course, designed to heighten student knowledge of feminist practice, was expected to empower students. An overview of the course is presented with an analysis of its impact on student perceptions of personal and professional power. Pre and post measures of empowerment were analyzed and used to derive outcome measures of change in student views of themselves as empowered persons and practitioners. Findings indicate that students had significantly higher perceptions of their personal and professional power upon completion of the feminist practice course than before. Implications for social work students and practitioners are discussed.

**Keywords:** Feminist education, feminist practice, empowerment, social work students

### **Article:**

Empowerment, a popular concept, is replete in the social work literature. It is defined as a process for increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power (Gutierrez, 1996), as an intervention (Parsons & Cox, 1989; Solomon, 1976), and as a skill (Mandell & Schram, 1985) that is useful for work with oppressed populations such as persons of color and women. Empowerment is also described more broadly as a goal that targets powerlessness experienced by all kinds of people (Parsons, 1991) with many different kinds of problems. The practice literature offers abundant examples of the use of empowerment strategies with a variety of client groups. These groups include women (Browne, 1995; Gutierrez, 1990; Rosenfeld, Schon, & Sykes, 1995; Towns & Gentzler, 1985; Wilson & Anderson, 1997), the elderly (Parsons & Cox, 1994), adolescents of color (Gibson, 1993), patients with mental illnesses (Rappaport, Reischl, & Zimmerman, 1992), the urban poor (Blecher & Hegar, 1991), nursing home residents (McDermott, 1989), persons with AIDS (Haney, 1988), and adolescents with leukemia (Price, 1988). This literature encompasses a wide spectrum of empowerment activities that range from individual resistance to mass political mobilization and that aim to challenge basic power relations in society (Bookman & Morgen, 1988; Browne, 1995).

Two key objectives of empowerment include: (a) achieving more equitable division of resources and non-exploitative relationships and (b) helping people (men as well as women) creatively obtain power through increased knowledge, skills, and self-pride (Mickelson, 1995). These objectives are as relevant for social work practitioners, faculty, and students as they are for client groups because social workers often have questions and doubts about their personal and professional power (Pinderhughes, 1983, 1990). Frans (1993b) makes the indictment that "social workers have historically reflected perceptions of powerlessness as professionals, yet have endeavored to empower others" (p. 19). Likewise, social work students cannot effectively empower their clients if they do not have a sense of themselves as empowered practitioners.

Education as an empowerment process is grounded in several theoretical models, including liberation-oriented (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985) and feminist approaches to education and practice (Belensky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; hooks, 1984, 1994; Maher, 1985; Thorne, 1989). Weick (1995) advocates a feminist approach to education and practice to bring about "emancipatory change ... change which reveals personal and collective power to know and to be who we are ... and to challenge and dispel myths of inadequacy in all its guises" (p.

223). Other feminist authors (Abramovitz, 1987; Bricker-Jenkins, Hooyman, & Gottlieb, 1991; Davis, 1993, 1994; Van Den Bergh, 1995) stress the importance of education as a vehicle for incorporating a feminist perspective into social work.

This paper describes the development and evaluation of a feminist practice course that was designed to empower social work students as it heightened their knowledge about feminist approaches to social work practice. First, a discussion of student empowerment in social work education is presented followed by a description of the feminist practice course. Second, the evaluation method used to determine the impact of the course on student perceptions of personal and professional power is described. The findings are presented along with an in-depth discussion of their implications for social work practice.

## **EMPOWERING SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS**

Scant literature focuses on the empowerment of social work students, particularly studies that are based on empirical research (Lazzari, Banman, & Jackson, 1996). There are, nonetheless, some noteworthy works that explore links between feminist education, empowerment, and student learning. These include Lazzari's (1991) study of feminism and the empowerment of students in field education; Michaud, Sontag, and Smiar's (1996) examination of student management teams as an empowerment tool; as well as Lazzari, Banman, and Jackson's (1996) qualitative study of the educational empowerment of students involved as co-teachers. These models offer increased understanding of the relationship between empowerment concepts and students learning.

Research on feminist education and empowerment provides other relevant insights and findings. Gutierrez (1996) used empowerment theories to guide her research on how beliefs about the self can contribute to individual, community, and social change. She found support for the theoretical proposition that "consciousness raising and ethnic/minority group consciousness can have a strong direct effect on activism and political empowerment" (p. 56). Similarly, Bartlett and her colleagues (1993) found that students in a feminist social work practice class reported that "the course not only raised the consciousness of students but was a moment of politicization" (p. 451). Likewise, Pennell and colleagues (1993) found students who took women's studies courses demonstrated increased identification with feminist issues, changes in practices approaches and enhanced self-esteem. Other re-search literature on the impact of women's studies courses on students (Anderson, 1991; Stake, Rose, Ellis, & West, 1994) have influenced and fueled an expectation that a feminist social work practice course would have a positive impact on students' sense of personal and professional power. Unfortunately, Munson and Hipp (1998) found that social work students lack knowledge of feminism and knowledge of feminist approaches to social work practice.

A feminist social work practice course was designed to address the gap in feminist education and the Council on Social Work Education's mandate for adequate content on women in the curriculum (CSWE, 1994). A social work faculty collective of five women and two men first offered the course in 1993. The collective held the view that gaining knowledge about women's minority group status was integral to raising consciousness about oppression, re-envisioning practice beyond gender-sensitive and nonsexist approaches, and moving toward transformative change across all levels of systems. Because the course was designed to educate students on the impact of gender-based oppression and power inequality on women's lives, an empowerment model was embraced as a way to structure the course, the learning process, and emancipatory change in students.

## **THE COURSE**

The Feminist Social Work Practice (FSWP) course was designed as a vehicle to empower students while raising consciousness about the unique issues that confront women as clients and practitioners. The conceptualization of the course focused on the exploration of the values, aims, and techniques of feminist social work practice as distinguished from other perspectives. The FSWP course, a graduate course for three credit hours, covers a range of issue topics. These include economics; gender, race and ethnic disparity and discrimination; aging; health and mental health; spirituality; women in politics and administration; men and social work practice; sexual diversity; violence against women; international and global relations. Issue topics are divided among

faculty according to interest and expertise. With a cap of 25 students, a designated member of the faculty team facilitates participation and the learning process for each class session.

The FSWP faculty collective embraces the principle that the educational process should enable students to experience empowerment in the class through input, collaboration, and shared responsibility for learning. Consequently, with the greatest intentionality, faculty members attend to key factors in the educational process that are thought to contribute to student empowerment. These include (a) a non-hierarchical teaching/learning model; (b) a team approach; and (c) valuation of the contributions of women, their ways of knowing, and female “voices.”

A non-hierarchical teaching/learning model is introduced early, reinforced throughout, and reflected in the grading of students’ performance in the FSWP course. In the first class session, the faculty participants present themselves as learners as well as teachers and urge students to participate as co-teachers and adult-learners. Students as well as faculty place on the table for discussion diverse ideas about feminism, feminist social work practice, and ways of viewing the world. In presenting multiple perspectives, there is a base for open honest dialogue, without apologizing for conflicting viewpoints. Students interpret this beginning as a leveler that avoids establishing a hierarchy of dominance in the class-room. The usual top-down, faculty-to-student, vertical communication pattern is replaced with one that is more horizontal, closely connecting the content and process of the course (Freire, 1973). The classroom is structured with participants sitting around a large circular table, which is consistent with a non-hierarchical model of teaching. A round-robin discussion format is frequently used to minimize cognitive “silence,” the tendency for some women to experience themselves as mindless and voiceless recipients of knowledge from an all-knowing superior or external authority (Belensky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

Similarly, instead of the more conventional rank-ordered assignment of final grades, students earn a grade of pass by successfully completing all course assignments. The faculty team believes this grading system helps deter competition and best reflects the principles of the course.

The FSWP course has been *team-taught* each year for the past six years. This approach seems to minimize some of the difficulties that surface when there is just one teacher in the classroom as a solitary source of knowledge and experience. Such questions as “How do I allow them their own reality while exposing them to mine...without imposing it on them... or believing that my way of looking at the world is the only correct way?” (Davis, 1993, p. 148), become less problematic when a course is team-taught. The team approach is reflected in the group project assignment as well. Student teams/groups develop from the topics that are presented in class and students are free to choose their groups. Students are encouraged to be creative, to explore and expand ideas generated by group members, and to engage in cooperative problem solving. The faculty team aims to mirror and nurture the dynamic and fluid collaborative interaction that is vital to the functioning of service-delivery teams and collegial networks in social work practice (Bartlett, Tebb, & Chadha, 1995).

In the FSWP course, there is explicit valuation of women’s contributions, their ways of knowing, and female voices. Typically, faculty participants highlight new research on and/or by women that challenges old assumptions of theory and practice. Gilligan’s work (1982), for example, pointed out the different perspectives of women and the need to hear and chronicle the female voices of intimacy and care, rather than the exclusively male voices of rights and rules. The added value of subjective knowledge (i.e., a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known) and constructed knowledge (i.e., the view that all knowledge is contextual, created, and based on both subjective and objective experiences) are discussed in class. This process enables students, women students in particular, to recognize expert knowledge that one has about one’s own body and life experiences and to perceive of themselves as creators of knowledge. Classroom teaching is informed by research on women’s ways of knowing (Norman, 1990; Merdinger, 1991) that suggest they emphasize direct experience, relations, and empathy over objectivity, independence, and criticism. The faculty members make a concerted effort to draw on the strengths and abilities of women students. Course assignments and requirements direct students to include their experiences and to integrate

literature, poetry, and other artistic forms of expression as they explore the application of feminist theories, principles, and strategies to particular problems and situations in social work practice. By valuing women's contributions, their ways of knowing, and different voices, the FSWP faculty team hopes students will be empowered through increased knowledge, skill, and self-pride.

FSWP course requirements and assignments include journals, seminar participation, discussion, group projects, and a final reflection/integration paper. Faculty participants evaluate these components to determine the student's pass/fail grade. Feminist practice approaches are the foci of seminar discussions and student group projects demonstrate the application of feminist theories, principles, and strategies to particular problems and situations in social work practice. See Bartlett et al. (1995) article for a full description of the course, its development and implementation. The FSWP course afforded the collective an opportunity to empirically test its expectation that feminist education will empower social work students.

### **THE RESEARCH APPROACH**

A clear and early-articulated goal of the collective of faculty teaching the FSWP course was to contribute to the knowledge base and research on feminist social work education. Toward that end, the FSWP collective has systematically collected data every year the course has been offered to address research questions of interest. A small university grant for faculty research afforded the collective an opportunity and the means to begin to investigate the impact of the course on students. One of the questions the FSWP faculty sought to answer was this: Will education in feminist social work practice effect students' self-perceptions of empowerment?

The FSWP faculty expected that the feminist practice course would heighten students', as well as their own, sense of personal and professional power. This expectation of empowerment through education was based upon findings from qualitative analysis of the first FSWP class and is grounded in the theoretical literature on empowerment and feminist practice research literature. Conversely, knowledge of others' negative expectations and criticism that "feminist courses often weaken higher education" and "handicap female students" (Lehrman, 1993) pressed FSWP faculty to examine the data and find empirical support for their expectation.

The primary aim of this research was to evaluate the impact of a feminist social work practice course on students' self-perceptions of empowerment. The specific research question investigated was: Will FSWP students' empowerment scores be higher upon completion of the course than their scores before taking the course? Inquiry focused specifically on whether the FSWP course produced a positive change in students' self-perceptions of personal and professional power. Ideally, this research would also have involved obtaining some evidence that students' knowledge of feminist practice and heightened sense of their personal and professional power enhances the quality of services or client outcomes. Such inquiry, however, is beyond the scope and resources of this project. Herein, empowerment is examined as a student outcome; and education for feminist practice is discussed as an empowering experience that would ultimately affect client groups served by social work students and practitioners.

### **METHODOLOGY**

A one-group pre-test/post-test design was used to analyze change in the empowerment scores of students in the FSWP course (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Although this pre-experimental design is common in studies of educational outcomes, it can be open to threats to internal validity. In this study, however, the number of weeks between the pre-test and post-test was long enough to preclude effects of re-testing bias or recall of the test material. Because data were collected from two different courses over time, the effects of history are likely to be minimal. Additional information was also obtained about the group of students who took the FSWP course and a group of students who did not take the course to examine selection bias.

#### ***Subjects***

The FSWP sample consisted of 35 graduate level social work(MSW) students who had completed the course in either the summer 1994 or fall 1995. These students voluntarily completed a self-administered empowerment questionnaire at the beginning of the course and completed the same questionnaire at the end of the course.

(Three students were dropped from the study due to incomplete data). The overwhelming majority of FSWP students were women (94%), in a total MSW student body consisting of 83% women. The majority of FSWP students and MSW student body were white/European American (83% and 85%, respectively).

### **Measures**

Students completed the Social Work Empowerment Scale developed by Douglas J. Frans (1993a). This scale is a 34 item self-administered questionnaire that is “designed to measure social workers’ perceptions of personal and professional power” (p. 312). It was derived from theory and developed using selected methods of both rational and empirical scale-construction approaches. This measure also has been statistically validated. Frans used different sample populations, which included a panel of 24 workers, a pilot sample of 62 MSW professionals and students, and a random sample of 520 social workers as respondent groups in the validation process. Results of correlational and factor analyses are reported. The scale achieved a Cronbach’s alpha of .88 and the dimensions of empowerment subscales had alpha scores ranging from a low of .70 to a high of .81 (Frans, 1993a, p. 322). These results provide evidence that the Social Work Empowerment Scale is a relatively sound measure for tapping dimensions of empowerment.

This Likert-type scale consists of subscales that tap five different dimensions of empowerment: (a) knowledge and skills, (b) critical awareness, (c) self-concept, (d) collective identity, and (e) propensity to act. Each subscale has six to nine items that are used to measure a particular dimension of empowerment. All items comprising the Social Work Empowerment Scale are positive statements; structured on a 5-point response continuum ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The scale and subscale scores are calculated by using item summation. The highest possible total score on the Social Work Empowerment Scale is 170. Although norms have not yet been established, a mean total empowerment score of 126 was reported for respondents participating in the pilot study (Frans, 1993a, p. 322). The entire Social Work Empowerment Scale, with items for each subscale, is provided in an appendix at the end of this article.

### **RESULTS**

In Table 1, the percent agreement (the sum percent of those who agreed or strongly agreed) with selected empowerment subscale items and change scores are presented for the FSWP students, before and after completion of the course. Two items were selected as representative of the other empowerment statements within each subscale of the Social Work Empowerment Scale. Also presented in Table 1 are the change scores by subscale items. Change scores were derived by subtracting the FSWP students’ pre-test scores from their post-test scores.

Positive change occurred across all subscales on self-perception of one’s knowledge and skills, self-concept, critical awareness, collective identity, and propensity to act. As shown in Table 1, marked changes (increases of 20% or more) occurred in the percent of students agreeing with several statements of empowerment. For example, 67% of the pre-FSWP students and even more (88%) of the post-FSWP students agreed that they have adequate information to solve problems. Approximately two-thirds of the FSWP students (67%) initially agreed that they “don’t doubt [their] self worth even when ... others do”; this rose to 79% for FSWP students who had completed the course. While 64% of the pre-FSWP students affirmed that they often are “the one to initiate responses to problems,” upon completion of the course, 85% of the FSWP students affirmed that they are the ones to initiate such action.

In Table 2, the mean, pre-test, post-tests and change scores on empowerment for the FSWP students are presented. The mean total score on empowerment (i.e., the sum of each students’ total empowerment score divided by the number of students) at baseline (pre-FSWP) was 132, which is close to the mean total empowerment score of 126 re-ported in Frans’ (1993a) pilot study. The post-FSWP students had a 5.94-point increase in their perception of their own power after taking the course. For the arithmetic mean of the scores on a single empowerment item, there was a 0.17 increase. Using the conventional  $p < .05$  level of significance, these changes were statistically significant [ $t(30) = 3.17, p = .003$ ] and suggest that the FSWP course had a positive influence on students’ perceptions of personal and professional power.



TABLE 1. Percent agreement with empowerment statement by selected subscale items, for the students before (pre-FSWP) and after (post-FSWP) the course, with change scores.

EMPOWERMENT SUBSCALES: SELECTED ITEMS	PERCENT preFSWP (%)	AGREEMENT postFSWP (%)	CHANGE SCORES (%)
<b>Knowledge and Skills</b>			
• I have adequate information resources to solve most professional problems	67	88	+21
• I rarely run into unfamiliar problems at work anymore.	25	46	+21
<b>Self-Concept</b>			
• I feel as competent as anyone else that I work with.	86	91	+ 5
• I don't doubt my self worth even when I think others do.	67	79	+12
<b>Critical Awareness</b>			
• I am usually able to think through all relevant issues.	86	88	+ 2
• I always know who has the power in different situations.	47	67	+20
<b>Collective Identity</b>			
• It is helpful to join with others to solve problems.	97	100	+ 3
• I identify strongly with my profession.	89	97	+ 8
<b>Propensity to Act</b>			
• I am often the one to initiate responses to problems.	64	85	+21
• I would rather take action than trust that things will work out.	75	91	+16
Change Score = postFSWP - preFSWP			

To address questions about the sample's comparability, the FSWP group of students was compared to a similar group of 53 students who did not take the course (the non-FSWP group). The two groups, matched on gender and race, were found to have similar average credit hours toward completion of their degree (40.6 for the FSWP group and 35.3 for the non-FSWP students). This small difference between the two groups suggests that outcomes for the FSWP group cannot be attributed to them being more academically mature or further along in the MSW program than other students. The FSWP students' and the non-FSWP students' empowerment scores at baseline were also compared using the student's t-test. The FSWP students had slightly higher baseline scores on empowerment than the non-FSWP students. The mean total score on empowerment was 132 on the pre-test for the FSWP students; it was 128 for the non-FSWP students. The 4-point difference between the two empowerment scores was not statistically significant [ $t(86) = 1.64, p > .05, p = .10$ ]. This lends credence to the inference that positive outcomes of the FSWP group may be related to the students having completed the course and not due to a preexisting difference on empowerment.

TABLE 2. Empowerment comparisons: pre-test, post-test and change scores

	Pre-FSWP (n = 35)	Post-FSWP (n = 31)	Change
Mean on Empowerment Items	3.89	4.06	0.17
Mean Total Empowerment Score	132.17	137.81	5.94
	t-value = 3.17	df = 30	p = .003

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Analysis of the data revealed a significant but modest shift in student perceptions of empowerment. The findings provided some support for the expectation the FSWP course had a positive impact on students' sense of personal and professional power. However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the small sample and the type of research design. Other reasons for interpreting findings with prudence are noted below with each component of empowerment.

*Knowledge and Skills.* The FSWP course focused on knowledge and skills for feminist practice (e.g., content on oppression, gender-based privileges, alternative world views, differential male/female development and life experiences, and liberatory practice), while the empowerment instrument focused on one's general knowledge and skill level for professional work. Nevertheless, the FSWP students evidenced a positive change in this area. The application of feminist ideological themes and principles (e.g., emphasis on empowerment, recognition that the personal is political, and validation of the nonrational as well as multiple truths and subjugated knowledge) to practice in the course may have attributed to the increase in students' assessment of their general knowledge and skills for practice. But the inability to detect more substantial change on this dimension of empowerment may be due to the instrument's omission of items that tap the specific power of feminist knowledge and skills.

*Self-Concept.* The self-concept items tap views of empowerment related to individual self-appraisal, positive self-evaluation, and confidence. The course encouraged student assessment of one's own social history and acceptance of women's stories. The FSWP students indicated that they have a perception of self that is positive and satisfying to the individual, that included a sense of self-validation and self-esteem, all key for a person to be, feel, and act empowered (Gutierrez, 1990; Pinderhughes, 1983). Reported increases in students' self-concept, however, reflect more about students' professional selves than about their personal selves as men and women. With an increasing number of male students electing the FSWP course (currently one-third of the enrolled students are men), the FSWP collective will soon be able to explore questions about the impact of education for feminist social work practice with male students. Will the self-concept of male FSWP students improve as well? Future research is needed to provide some answers to this and other related questions.

*Critical Awareness and Collective Identity.* The critical awareness component of empowerment is related to one's ability to form and express sophisticated judgments about one's world, of one's place within the larger systems or macrostructure (Freire, 1990; Pinderhughes, 1993). Similarly, the propensity to act subscale for empowerment is an indicator of reflective actions directed toward achieving better power relations. Course content drew attention to the under-representation of women in Congress and other political arenas, the economics of gender inequality, and the social structures that disadvantage women in the U. S. and the world. The course also emphasized the capacity to increase individuals' power by connecting with others who share goals, resources, and aspirations of the system of which one is a functional part, and the need to correct for injustices and inequalities. FSWP students demonstrated improvement on these subscale items through heightened awareness of their place in the work world and involvement in/attachment to a professional or reference group. But, did students gain a critical feminist perspective to come to identify more with feminist groups? Qualitative data suggest that FSWP students became more positive about feminism and the benefits of women working together (with men) for change (Bartlett et al., 1995).

*Propensity to Act.* The data provided evidence that the FSWP students were more likely to take action after having had the course than before. This finding suggests that students gained a sense of personal and collective efficacy, which has been related to the empowerment process (Bandura, 1987; Pecukonis & Wencour, 1994). Gutierrez (1996) asserted that "for individuals to engage in social action, they must first develop a sense of critical consciousness and self as well as collective efficacy" (p. 43-44). Future research is needed to clarify the link between and possible ordering of empowerment dimensions.

It is important to question the heretofore unstated assumption that social work students and practitioners with a heightened sense of their own personal and professional power will be able to serve clients more effectively than those who perceive themselves to have less or little power. What about professional abuse of power and power struggles and/or conflicts within groups and organizations? Importantly, feminist ideology and principles offer "a re-conceptualization of power as limit-less, collective, and transactive; as implying individual responsibility, not individual property; as egalitarianism with no "power over"; as enabling, nonviolent, problem-solving, and inclusive" (Bricker-Jenkins & Lockett, 1995, p. 253 1). With this perspective on power, it is important to remember, as Pinderhughes (1993, 1990) and Hartman (1993) point out, it takes empowered social workers to relinquish some power (i.e., control over agency resources, expert knowledge, interpersonal influence, and authority) inherent in their positions in order to empower clients.

The faculty collective embraced the idea that the FSWP research project and process should, like the course, empower students. The notion of research as an empowering experience is a natural extension of some basic social work and feminist values (Mason, 1997; Reinhartz, 1992; Swigonski, 1994; Yeich & Levine, 1992) as well as the strengths perspective in social work (Saleebey, 1992, 1997). The assumptions, goals and principles of empowerment research (Holmes, 1992; Massat & Lundy, 1997) guided this study and its investigators.

The FSWP research project employed two student research assistants, one graduate social work student and one undergraduate social work student who were involved in all aspects of the study. The students also participated as co-presenters on a panel at a professional symposium, sharing their contributions to the FSWP research project and describing how they were empowered in the process. The FSWP student research assistants reported that their involvement with the FSWP project helped them gain a greater sense of their own power and strength as individuals and social work practitioners. They added that they grew in their ability to voice their own ideas and distinct realities, that they gained the tools needed to pursue their own/feminist change and research agendas. Student participants in the FSWP class have also collaborated with faculty on other projects, co-authored a publication, and been involved in various ways as stakeholders in FSWP endeavors.

## CONCLUSION

The FSWP course not only increased knowledge relevant to women practitioners and clients in the field of social work but also led to meaningful personal changes in empowerment for students participating in the course. Education was provided on feminist issues illustrating how a feminist perspective in social work practice can facilitate personal and social change. Vital to the process was the development of a classroom environment conducive to group process and discussion, supporting the interaction necessary for growth and change. As the social work profession expands its focus on empowerment, the model used for this course has lessons for helping students experience the impact of feminist practice. Without changes in social work education, the profession cannot move to effective empowerment practice (Gutierrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998). Such change seems most likely to occur if students and faculty adopt a broad, multidisciplinary, and experience-based perspective on feminist practice, as articulated below.

Feminist practice is a multicultural, multimodal, liberatory practice that attempts in theory and methods to address simultaneously the content and conditions, consciousness, and context of people's lives. Feminist practitioners work with both women and men in all social work practice settings and roles. [They] assume that the transformation of the sociopolitical structures is necessary for the meeting of human needs and for healing the multiple injuries of sexism and other forms of domination and exploitation. (Bricker-Jenkins & Lockett, 1995, p. 25-30)

An important prerequisite for effective social work practice is the empowerment of students and practitioners. This FSWP course heightened the students' feminist knowledge and skills, collective identity, self-concept, critical awareness, and propensity to act, which contribute to both personal and professional empowerment.

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## **APPENDIX: THE SOCIAL WORK EMPOWERMENT SCALE**

### ***Knowledge and Skills Subscale***

- I usually know what response to take to situations that arise at work.
- I have adequate information resources to solve most professional problems.
- I am frequently told that I am a knowledgeable worker.
- If I don't have an answer to a question, I always know where to go to get it.
- My education prepared me for my job.
- I am aware of all the pertinent issues related to my field of practice.
- I rarely run into unfamiliar problems at work any more.
- I often read professional journals.
- I frequently attend conferences and training sessions to improve my skills.

### ***Self-Concept Subscale***

- I feel as competent as anyone else that I work with.
- I generally make a good impression with others.
- I don't doubt my self worth even when I think others do.
- I feel that I am important to the people I work with.
- I think I serve a valuable role in my professional capacity.
- I feel self-assured when I am around my superiors.

### ***Critical Awareness Subscale***

- I am usually able to think through all relevant issues.
- I always know who has the power in different situations.
- My intuition and hunches prove to be right most of the time.
- I usually know exactly where I stand.
- My place in the world is always very clear to me.

### ***Collective Identity Subscale***

- I enjoy spending time with other people in my profession.
- It is helpful to join with others to solve problems.
- I identify with my profession.
- The workers in my agency all have a common purpose.
- I enjoy using the team approach.
- I have frequent contact with other specialists in my field.

### ***Propensity to Act Subscale***

- When I become aware of activities to address a problem of interest, I try to find out how to get involved.
- I have organized coworkers or others to offer new programs or interventions.
- I am often the one to initiate responses to problems.
- I would rather take action than trust that things will work out.
- I volunteer to take on extra work in areas of interest to me.
- One of the things I like in a job is to have multiple involvement in different areas of interest.

Source: Frans, D. J. (1993). A scale for measuring social worker empowerment. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 3(3), 312-328.