Who Is the "Self" in Self-Aware: Professional Self-Awareness from a Critical Theory Perspective

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Professional self-awareness is widely considered a necessary condition for competent social work practice. Alternate prescriptions for self-awareness rely implicitly on varying definitions of what it means to be a "self" and what it means to be "aware." I will review three approaches to professional self-awareness conventionally adopted in the literature: (*a*) simple conscious awareness (awareness of whatever is being experienced), (*b*) reflective awareness (awareness of a self who is experiencing something), and (*c*) reflexive awareness (the self's awareness of how his or her awareness is constituted in direct experience). Strengths and limitations of these three epistemological approaches are discussed. An alternate framework, based on Anthony Giddens's "structuration theory," is developed and advanced as a more macro-level and less exclusively psychological understanding of practitioner self-awareness. The article concludes with illustrations from practice.

The notion that social workers should be aware of the "self" in practice situations has been advocated as a practice principle for almost as long as social work has been a profession.[1] Professional self-awareness is widely considered a necessary condition for competent social work practice.[2] Definitions of self-awareness rely implicitly on various meanings of the term "self."[3] Yet, the question, What does it mean to be a self? is not directly addressed in the practice literature. Neither does the literature explicitly raise the question, How is it even possible to have a valid awareness of the self when it is the self (itself) who is aware? This central concern is an epistemological one—the relationship of the knower to what

is known. Although epistemological issues have been a preoccupation in the social work research literature, these issues have received limited attention in the literature on social work practice.[4]

In this article, I will review three approaches to professional self-awareness conventionally adopted in the social work practice literature. For present purposes I will define these forms of awareness as (*a*) simple conscious awareness (awareness of whatever is being experienced), (*b*) reflective awareness (awareness of a self who is experiencing something), and (*c*) reflexive awareness (the self's awareness of how his/her awareness is constituted in direct experience). Each of these approaches corresponds to an implicit conceptualization of "self." When I use the term "self," I am referring to both a "sense of personal identity" as well as to assumptions about the sort of person one is.[5] I will argue that these conventional approaches, although valid and useful, offer only a partial account of what it means to be a self-aware professional. I will then outline an alternative, fourth form of awareness termed "critical reflectivity." The understanding of "critical reflectivity" developed here is derived primarily from critical theory, with special reference to Anthony Giddens's "structuration theory."[6] As developed in this article, critical reflectivity does not displace earlier notions found in the literature but rather incorporates them into a more inclusive (and less exclusively psychological) understanding.[7] The article will conclude with implications for social work practice.

Conventional Concepts of Practitioner Self-Awareness

Although the social work profession has been consistent in advocating the importance of self-awareness, the literature varies a great deal in the way the issue is understood. Each of the three conceptualizations of self-awareness that I have identified from the literature (simple conscious awareness, reflective self-awareness, and reflexive self-awareness) differs from the others in its notion of what it means to be a "self" and in its assumptions about how one can have self-knowledge. That is to say, each relies on distinct philosophies of knowledge and selfhood.

Simple Conscious Awareness

At a very basic level, self-awareness is defined in terms of becoming awake to present realities, noticing one's surroundings, and being able to name one's perceptions, feelings, and nuances of behavior. The self is aware of and can recognize what it is experiencing. This self is understood as the perceiving subject, the locus for sensations, perceptions, and impressions. Influenced by traditions of gestalt and existential theory, the emphasis is on here-and-now contact with the environment. This contact experience can be described as unselfconscious in the sense that atten-

tion and awareness are directed to what is experienced by the self rather than to the self who is experiencing.[8]

It is what Jean-Paul Sartre refers to as "unreflected consciousness."[9] For this reason, it is more nearly correct to talk about this kind of awareness as pre-self-awareness. However, in the practice literature, alert attention to details of the here-and-now experience is identified as one form of self-awareness—that is, the self being more fully aware.[10] Hence, it is included in the present discussion.

I use the term "simple" to describe this way of being aware in order to indicate its directness and unselfconscious nature, but there is nothing either easy or trivial about its accomplishment.[11] Simple conscious awareness is what makes both experience and memory possible. Without it, the practitioner would not be able to make accurate observations or correct assessments. It is a condition sine qua non for articulating one's perceptions. Simple conscious awareness is a prerequisite for the other forms of self-awareness described in this article.

How does one go about developing or sustaining simple conscious awareness? Gestalt and other existentialist-oriented social workers recommend activities or "experiments" to focus the individual on "now" experiences or to clear away obstacles assumed to disrupt attention to the here and now.[12] In social work, the literature on training for basic skills offers suggestions to the student on how to attend to the practice situation, with particular emphasis on developing accurate listening and observation behaviors. "Listening," suggests one source, "refers to the processes of attentively *hearing* another's words and speech, *observing* her nonverbal gestures and positions . . . and *remembering* what she communicates."[13] One frequently prescribed activity is the classical supervisory and training exercise known as the verbatim, process recording. To produce a verbatim account of a practice interaction, the student is instructed to attend as fully as possible to words, behaviors, affect, and impressions of the client and self during an interview. This full attention to the interaction requires that the student engage in what we have termed "simple conscious awareness." Later the student is asked to recall and reproduce in writing the exact details of the encounter.[14] Apart from basic training guides, however, the practice literature in social work usually goes no farther than offering simple admonishments that it is necessary for the practitioner to pay attention to the realities of the practice situation.[15]

Reflective Self-Awareness

Whereas simple conscious awareness focuses the self on direct experience, reflective self-awareness turns attention to a self who "has" the experience. The self's behaviors, affect, cognitive content, and accomplishments become objects of reflection. This seems to be a relatively

straightforward formula: the self steps back to observe and consider its own performance. However, for certain theorists, this formulation raises as many issues as it resolves. The issues can be illustrated through a story about a young seeker of wisdom who approached an adept of a particular religious tradition asking, "Who am I?" The adept replied simply, "And who is asking the question?" Modern philosophers from John Locke and Immanuel Kant to Sartre were well aware of the fundamental question at the heart of the quest for self-knowledge: "Who is the self who knows the self-who-is-known?"[16]

Answers to this question have varied within Western philosophical traditions. Until the advent of postmodernism, the most common approaches to the question have included the assumption of some form of dichotomy between the knowing self and the self-as-known.[17] Moreover, in order to deal with the quandary involved in trying to derive two "selves" out of one self, the knowing self is often posited as being created specifically in the act of reflecting on itself. Jürgen Habermas characterizes this position in the following manner: "The 'I' constitutes itself by knowing itself in terms of (bei) an 'other' identified as itself."[18] Metaphorically speaking, just as the human eye cannot directly see itself in the act of perceiving except when projected in a mirror as image-other, the reflecting-self can only know itself as projected or objectified in its conscious thoughts, behaviors, social productions, or social consequences.

Epistemological assumptions: reflective awareness.—There are at least three assumptions about the nature of the self that are embedded in this conceptualization of self-knowing. First, self-reflection is thought to be accomplished by distinguishing between a subject-self (the reflecting aspect of the self) and an object-self (the self as reflected upon). In other words, a distinction is made between the self as an "I" and the self as a "me." This is similar to George Herbert Mead's classic distinction between the "I" and the "me."[19] Second, there is an assumption that the reflecting self comes into being in the act of reflecting on the experience of the object-self.[20] This means that the self who is an "I" examines and reflects on experience; in doing so, it transcends or stands apart from the experience. This subject "I" is not available for empirical investigation; only the object "me" is.[21] To borrow Mead's colloquial explanation, the "I" who knows is not "in the limelight."[22] Third, it is assumed that the greater the separation between subject-self ("I") and object-self ("me"), the greater the objectivity and therefore the more reliable the self-knowledge. One becomes "objective" about the self, much as one does about other objects of observation—by distancing the subjective element as far as possible.[23]

The metaphor of distance is often used to describe this objectifying process. By standing apart from the self and creating "distance," one can look more objectively at oneself.[24] At this point in the history of epistemological thought, there is no serious debate on the question of whether

the quest for objectively valid knowledge about the self is ever fully realized. Most people would agree that our knowledge of ourselves, no matter how objective, is always to some extent partial and flawed.[25] The real debate centers around whether all "objective" knowledge of the self should be taken as problematic. Within the postmodern current of thought, the idea of a transcendent self capable of "looking down on the self" objectively is rejected as a myth. However, others do accept the notion that despite our fallibility, human beings have some capacity to stand apart from their own characteristics, productions, and behaviors in an attempt to objectively examine and evaluate them.[26] For many of the latter thinkers, objectivity is a matter of degree: any way of knowing becomes more objective the less it relies on the idiosyncratic perspective of a particular knower.[27] However imperfect the process and however flawed the outcome, proponents argue, this attempt to reflect on a self objectified for observation gives human beings enormous cognitive powers. On the capacity for objective self-reflection rests such crucial, conceptual functions as self-other-object differentiation, inferential learning, and causal attribution. It is the ability to objectify the self for consideration that makes personal learning possible. Indeed, the achievements of Western science rely on this kind of reflection, understood as the objectification of experience by distancing the knower from that which is known.[28]

Reflective self-awareness in the practice literature. —This presumption of a differentiation between a subject-self who reflects and an object-self who is the focus of reflection is the formula for self most often assumed in discussions of professional self-awareness in social work practice texts. "Practitioner know thyself" is a common injunction, as the social worker is urged to make "conscious use of Self."[29] The practitioner is expected to be as objective as possible in reflecting on practice behaviors, attitudes, interactions, and accomplishments. He or she is called upon to increase the distance between the reflecting-self and object-self and to reduce any negative impact of the subjective self on the practice setting. It is within this frame of reference that many introductory textbooks advise social work students to become aware of their values, needs, and biases in order to serve clients more consciously and objectively.[30]

Prescriptions for increasing objectivity in self-reflection include scrutinizing one's reactions for the presence of biases, using one's colleagues to provide objectivity, eliciting feedback from clients, using reflective tools such as audio and video tapes, engaging in good supervision, examining cognitive products of the self such as reasoning and judgment, and attending to the practice knowledge assumed to be implicit in the daily activities of practice.[31] The attempt to introduce evaluation of outcomes as a routine element of professional practice may also be seen as a way of creating an objectifying distance between the professional and his or her practice behaviors and achievements. The impact of profes-

sionally guided behaviors in the direct-practice setting is objectified for routine examination, in part so that the practitioner may become aware of what behaviors and assumptions he or she may need to modify in order to make practice more effective.[32] In all of these prescriptions, the practitioner as knowing-self is asked to reflect on the performing-self by positing his or her thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and accomplishments as other.

Reflexive Self-Awareness

Philosopher Thomas Nagel suggests that some of the most crucial problems in human knowledge revolve around the following question: "How to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included."[33] With a minimum of polemic, Nagel's comment summarizes one of the central problems in postmodern discourse. Contemporary postmodernism challenges the notion of a self-contained and transcendent self able to stand apart from experience and observe the "world" from some privileged and "uncontaminated" viewpoint.[34] Any knowledge we have of our world, most postmodernists maintain, is "insider knowledge." When self-knowledge is the issue, the problem is compounded. We are ineluctably insiders in developing self-awareness.

Those who support this view argue that the goal of stepping away from the self to find a perspective that transcends the self is essentially unattainable. We cannot observe and make judgments about the self the way we can about another. This is because our knowledge of the self is inherently reflexive—that is, self-referential.[35] Any judgment or critique of the self based on self-awareness is made by the same self being judged or critiqued. This implies that statements made on the basis of self-awareness are not simply descriptive statements about an objective self but expressions of that self. Consider Ludwig Wittgenstein's well-known example concerning differences between the two assertions "she is in pain" and "I am in pain."[36] The first is a statement one makes about the other, a statement that can be substantiated with empirical data. The second statement, however, is not an empirical description. This is because the statement is not simply describing the pain; it is itself an articulation of the pain.[37]

If this much of the argument is allowed, then how is it possible to even conceive of a valid awareness of the self? The answer to this question requires that we decathect the notion of validity from the concept "objectivity" and allow that there may be valid forms of subjective knowledge.[38] In knowing the self, suggests philosopher Paul Ricoeur, the relationship between self and other is one of identity or "mutual belonging."[39] Valid knowledge of the self becomes possible not by creating distance and otherness but by reducing the "distance" and relying on sameness between

knower and known. The answer to the question of how I can know the self is not "because I am able to step back and look at myself objectively" but rather "because I am on more or less familiar terms with the self; I am not a stranger to myself."[40]

Epistemological assumptions: reflexive awareness. —There are a number of assumptions about the self that are central to this conceptualization of self-awareness. First, whereas the reflective formulation described above emphasizes differentness and distance between an "I" and a "me" in the quest for valid self-knowledge, the reflexive version of self-awareness emphasizes that distinctions between an "I" and "me" are ontologically meaningless. The observing "I" and the observed "me" occupy the same "space," experience the same biography, have the same heredity, and belong to the same socializing communities. Any self-observation or self-critique is shaped by the identical social conditions that influence all learned characteristics of the self, including the very behaviors being observed. Second, the notion of a transcendent self that is able to stand apart to view the self from some privileged vantage point is rejected as being epistemologically impossible. As Nagel suggests, there is no "view from nowhere."[41] It would not be possible to conceive of a valid awareness of the self without simultaneously monitoring and critiquing how the "I" (the knowing subject) constructs that awareness. Metaphorically speaking, advocates of a reflexive approach would say, "Yes, view yourself and your behavior in a mirror, but as you look in the mirror, also consider ways in which the shape/substance of the mirror itself, the lighting, the eye or eyesight of the viewer, and the viewer's particular angle of observation contribute to the construction of the image." Third, allowance is made for the possibility of a valid subjective knowledge of the self, including self-understanding, personal insight, and intuition. By the term "subjective knowledge," I mean knowledge derived largely from the unique perspective of the knowing-I, not the term "subjective" in its more pejorative meaning of "contaminated" or "biased." Subjectivity is treated here not as a source of error to be contained but rather as a way of knowing in its own right. As Nagel maintains: "Sometimes . . . the truth is *not* to be found by traveling as far away from one's personal perspective as possible" (emphasis added).[42]

Those who object to the reflexive formulation argue that without anchoring our knowledge of self more rigorously in "objective" reality, the possibilities for self-misrepresentation are enormous. We ourselves become the major barrier to a valid, subjective or objective knowledge of the self.[43] In response to such critics, proponents of a reflexive approach to self-awareness are quick to point out that it is not their claim that all such knowledge is necessarily accurate or true.[44] They argue that they make the same limited knowledge claim that can be made for more objectivist approaches to self-awareness—that is, the claim that self-knowledge, while possible, is always approximate and imperfect and that

we are often opaque to ourselves. Finally, they suggest that whatever its limitations, reflexive self-awareness does form the basis for such crucial conceptual functions as personal meaning, interpersonal and interpretive understanding, and accurate empathy as a way of knowing self and other. Indeed, it can be said that reflexive self-awareness is sine qua non for interpersonal communication to occur since such communication rests, in part, on one's ability to use intuitive familiarity with his or her own experience (derived from one's socializing communities) as a way of understanding others.[45]

Reflexive self-awareness in the practice literature. —Both the early and the more contemporary clinical practice literatures contain examples of prescriptions for reflexive self-awareness in practice. Long before social-science research took its so-called reflexive turn in the 1970s, many social work practitioners and academics, particularly those interested in clinical practice, underscored the need for reflexive awareness of the self as integral to competent work with clients. Of course, this early clinical discourse was more post-Freudian and analytic than postmodern and constructivist, and the terminology was more likely to include concepts like "transference," "countertransference," and "defense mechanisms" instead of more contemporary terms like "narrative," "deconstruction," and "text."[46] Still, a kind of reflexivity was implied when the clinical practitioner was urged to consider how the self of the clinician, formed through early life experiences, contributed to clinical perception and judgments as well as, in part, to the behaviors and reactions of the other person. In this traditional approach to practice, clinical responses to the other were understood to be reactions to aspects of the self—if not entirely, then at least in part. For instance, a social worker might discover that his or her angry response to a client's behavior had as much, or more, to do with issues in the practitioner's own life experience as with the client's situation.[47] Practitioners were advised to use therapy and professional supervision to become increasingly aware of the ways in which the here-and-now practice situation was filtered through lenses shaped by their own early life experiences, particularly experiences with their family of origin. This kind of reflexive self-awareness was thought to reduce errors in the attribution of causality, intentionality, and affect as well as to increase the relevance of clinical insight and understanding.

Within the past 8 to 10 years, journals and texts in clinical social work have begun to pay increasing attention to the implications of a constructivist perspective for practice and teaching.[48] Introduced into the social work literature largely through the family therapy, feminist, and qualitative-research literatures, constructivism forms the basis for newer approaches to clinical practice with families and individuals, including "solution-oriented treatment," "narrative therapy," and "dialogic therapy."[49] Those who adopt this perspective emphasize that whatever is defined as reality in a person's experience is not simply an objective

given.[50] Rather, a person's reality is seen as co-constructed by individual consciousness in interaction with the social and physical environment and mediated through language and culture.[51] Within the social-constructivist framework, even the notion of an individual and separate self, a center of perception and action who is solely responsible for defining his or her own existence, is called into question. Instead, the self is viewed as a process, an ongoing, fluid construction whose identity is inextricably linked to social context and interpersonal interactions.[52] The self construct is defined, at least in part, in dialogue with other people's understandings of who the self is.[53]

In the practice setting, it is understood that the self-narratives of both client and worker together create the context in which the therapeutic work occurs. Clinical practice, therefore, is necessarily reflexive; there is nothing that goes on in the clinical interaction that does not contain some aspect of the clinician's self.[54] Although the term "self-awareness" is not generally used by proponents of these newer approaches (since it is generally assumed that there is no concrete "self" of which to be aware), practitioners are encouraged to consider reflexively their own current narratives, the stories they are telling themselves about themselves, within the immediate clinical situation.[55] In addition to the clinical merit attributed to reflexive techniques, greater practice accountability is said to be achieved when the clinical practitioner makes his or her narratives (or metaphors or stories) explicit and more available for self and other.[56] Through this process, the practitioner comes closer to understanding how his or her experience of self is constituted in interaction with others and how together with the client, worlds of meaning are created anew in each clinical instance.

A Synthesizing Perspective: Critical Reflectivity

In the frameworks described above, to be self-aware means (1) to experience "contents" of awareness (simple conscious awareness), (2) to stand back in order to observe and critique those contents (reflective awareness), (3) to understand how the history and person of the clinician impacts clinical performance (the Freudian and ego psychology version of reflexive awareness), or (4) to become aware of those processes by which the self interacts with others to create meaning and identities (the social constructivist version of reflexive awareness). In the first conceptualization, the self is understood as the simple perceiving subject, the unreflective locus for sensations, perceptions, cognition, and impressions. In the second, the self is seen as both transcendent "I" and as objectified "me"—with the "I" capable of standing apart and evaluating beliefs, behaviors, and accomplishments of the "me." In the third and (especially) fourth versions of practitioner self-awareness, the self is a construct that is continuously emerging within specific social contexts—

that is, the self as co-constructor of his or her immediate worlds of meaning. The self in each of these traditions is the self of individual or interpersonal psychology—the location for thoughts, feelings, perceptions, sensations, meanings, intentions, experiences, behaviors, biases, and so forth.[57]

Each of these notions about practitioner self-awareness has an important role in assisting the social worker to learn about aspects of his or her performance in immediate practice settings, and it is not my intention to suggest their displacement. However, there are limitations inherent in definitions of self-awareness that focus exclusively on the individual psychology of the practitioner or, at most, on his or her microtransactions. Remaining persistently psychological or sociopsychological, these conventional understandings of practitioner self-awareness have given little attention to human consciousness and awareness (including self-awareness) as a larger epistemological and sociological problem. "The identity of self," suggests critical theorist Brian Fay, "is so tied up with the nature of the society in which it resides that the former is unthinkable without the latter."[58] In this section, I first outline a macroconceptualization of the self derived from critical theory—in particular, Giddens's "structuration theory"—and then discuss implications for practice and for the principle of "professional self-awareness."

Giddens's Structuration Theory

When seventeenth-century mathematician Blaise Pascal made his famous political/religious observation that "what is truth on one side of the Pyrenees is error on the other," he was one of the first thinkers to suggest a relationship between social systems and personal awareness and thought.[59] Over the course of the past 2 centuries, a good deal of sociological thinking has considered the relationship between social structure and individual consciousness.[60] Attempts to link the two social phenomena in some systematic way have been a preoccupation in the philosophy and sociology of knowledge. Two of the most persistent questions in this literature have been (*a*) "How is social structure related to human consciousness and awareness?" and (*b*) "What is the role of human agency (action) in this relationship?"

Those theorists concerned with the impact of social structure on human consciousness have tended to concentrate on larger macro-theory issues and to adopt a perspective on the function of social science consistent with the one advanced by Émile Durkheim.[61] According to Durkheim, the proper objects of social science are social facts. Social facts are constituted by social regularities, patterns, and structures external to (and separate from) individual understandings and meanings and not reducible to those meanings.[62] Those who adopt this perspective as well as others who approach sociological phenomena with a macro-lens tend

to make human consciousness and thought a by-product of social systems and institutions external to human consciousness.[63] Thus, human agency is limited to either response or resistance to received structural arrangements. By contrast, theorists concerned with issues surrounding the role of human agency have tended to focus on micro-sociological issues and to adopt a perspective on social science that is more consonant with the one advocated by sociologist Max Weber. Weber defined sociology as "a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action. . . . In 'action' is included all human behavior when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it."[64] Though Weber himself explored large, macro-issues, many theorists who subsequently adopted his perspective on the sociological task have placed emphasis on the formation of "meaningful realities" in the more intimate arena of everyday human encounters.[65] When these theorists take note at all of larger systemic phenomena, it is generally to observe that social structures and institutions give context to and set limits on the meaning actors can create in a given interaction.[66]

Thus, macro-theorists have emphasized the inevitability of received societal structures and their determinative impact on human social life and awareness. In contrast, micro-theorists have tended to emphasize the fragility of the more immediate "worlds" of meaning that human agents co-construct in interaction with others. The former group of thinkers give a poor account of human agency and the latter, a poor account of the development and persistence of human structural arrangements.[67]

Giddens suggests that because the problem of social structure and the problem of human action have appeared in the literature as divergent issues, a consistent theory of how human agency is involved in the development, persistence, and transformation of human institutions and structures has not been well developed. Giddens's structuration theory is an effort to address this issue.[68] According to his theory, there is a recursive quality to the relation between human beings and their social structures and institutions. That is to say, society and its structures are both condition and outcome of the actions of human beings in time. It is just as true to assert that persons, as selves and as identities, are shaped, sustained, and modified by the structures and practices of their socializing communities/societies as it is to say that "institutions, or large scale societies, have structural properties in virtue of the continuity of the actions of their component members."[69]

Giddens's theory of the duality of social structure raises two immediate epistemological questions: (a) "Just how aware is the lay person of the manner in which societal structures and arrangements condition his or her awareness and action?" and (b) "How aware is the lay person of the manner in which his or her day-to-day activity over time constitutes and reconstitutes society?" In answer to these questions, Giddens posits three pivotal ways of knowing. The first he terms "mutual knowledge." By

"mutual knowledge" Giddens means the "knowledge of convention that actors must possess in common in order to make sense of what both they and other actors do in the course of their day-to-day social lives." Society and social structures, Giddens maintains, are maintained by the patterned application in practice of "what everyone knows."[70] In addition to mutual knowledge as a precondition for human social interaction, Giddens posits two subsidiary forms of knowledge: "discursive knowledge" and "practical knowledge." "Discursive knowledge" is knowledge to which people can give expression—knowledge available for discourse. Colloquially speaking, it is what we know and know we know. By contrast "practical knowledge" is knowledge embedded in social practices; it is articulated in acts rather than discourse. Giddens's "practical knowledge" is similar to Michael Polyani's "tacit knowledge"—knowledge implicit in the act of performing a skill or engaging in routine practices and judgments.[71] Fay calls this "embodied" knowledge—that is to say, precognitive or extracognitive knowledge.[72] For example, cultural rules that govern how men and women interact are revealed in the interactions themselves. If a cultural outsider should ask about such rules, an insider may have difficulty answering the question because such behaviors are simply accepted as something natural and given. Practical knowledge is primarily about the internalized rules and beliefs that guide social interactions without conscious attention to those rules and beliefs. For Giddens, practical knowledge is essential to the reflexive monitoring of our day-to-day activity as competent social actors. It is the way we implicitly "know" about the social conditions that inform our behavior and thought. It is the way we know what to do and what we can expect others to do without having to think about what we know.[73]

Of course, "what everyone knows" depends a great deal on the location of the knower within a given social structure. Actors may be situated in varying places relative to power, access, opportunity, and ideology, and all of these factors enter into the calculus of what one knows. For instance, what a member of a marginalized, ethnic minority knows about racism will be different than what a member of the majority group might know. What a Wall Street broker knows about how the class structure of society is preserved on a day-to-day basis will be different from what a member of the working class knows about the matter. Indeed, even though actors contribute to society's constitution and production, they do so "under conditions that are [not] wholly intended . . . by them."[74] Nevertheless, the critical issue here for Giddens is the contention that actors do know much more about what they are doing in the course of their daily activities than they can generally articulate. "Every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member" because social actors reproduce that society in their everyday activities.[75] That is to say, the domain of practical knowledge is larger than that of discursive knowledge.

To illustrate, Giddens uses the example of the reproduction of the structure of a given language. It is clear that when a native speaker uses a language, he or she is not consciously (discursively) aware of reproducing and perpetuating the grammar and syntax of the language. If asked to describe the activity, the speaker would no doubt say that he or she is merely trying to express an idea or feeling in a manner that will be understood by the other party. Nevertheless, in point of fact, those who speak, use, or write a language do contribute to the reproduction of a language, doing so in the very act of communicating through use of that language.[76] Now suppose one were to ask the speaker, "How is it that English or French or Urdu survives as a language, more or less intact, from generation to generation?" When asked to reflect on this larger structural question, the thoughtful actor might have some sense of this larger picture. For example, he or she might say, "Because it is a living language," or, to be more pragmatic, "Because I and others use it every day."[77]

Giddens's language example is an uncomplicated case. Consider a more complex issue—for example, the class structure of a society. Critical theorists might ask the following questions:

What do people socialized into the middle and upper classes of a society need to know (in the sense of Giddens's "practical knowledge") about how to act in relation to another member of that same class in order to be accepted as belonging?

What do they need to know about how to act in relation to someone from a lower class in order to maintain their own class position?

What do people in lower class strata need to know about how to act to be accepted by someone from the same class?

What have they learned about how to behave, what to believe, and how to think in relation to someone from the middle or upper classes?

More important, what do actors know about how the class structure of society is maintained or modified in their everyday interactions?

If asked to reflect on intentions, actors may be aware of acting or wanting to act in such a way that they find acceptance among others perceived to be most like them. Or they may say that it is easier to relate to particular categories of people or to those who live or work in close proximity. It is probably not their conscious intention to reproduce the class strata of their society with each of these interactions (according to Giddens, "intention" or "motivation" are not the same as practical knowledge; we may behave in ways that are not entirely consistent with our intentions or overt purposes). Can actors come to identify (at least) some of the extended social and structural consequences of their individually intended actions? Yes, according to Giddens. If encouraged to reflect on their own behavior and assumptions in light of the larger structural question, then individuals could conceivably arrive at an awareness that when

they and others in society act and interact in specific, class-determined ways (doing so consistently over time), a society's class structure is preserved and reproduced. Of course, it is true that some actors—those with more power and influence—may have a disproportionate effect in reinforcing the structures and practices that in turn enhance their power and influence. And it is true that some actors will not be able to recognize very much of the larger picture for a variety of reasons (e.g., ideology, socialization, or marginalization) or may not even wish to see it (the "not seeing it" perhaps being part of what permits the activity to continue).[78] But this only serves to support Giddens's contention that members of a society, each from his or her own position and set of interests, act in such a way that the structure of society is reproduced.

Reconceptualizing Practitioner Self-Awareness

In developing his theory of society that links a macro-conceptualization of structure with micro-considerations of human agency, Giddens articulates the concept of a self who is consummately a social actor.[79] To support his major themes, Giddens also sketches a theory of human consciousness.[80] In this section, I extend Giddens's concepts of self and consciousness to an understanding of self-awareness based on his notions. It is my major thesis that if the self is conceptualized as inextricably emersed in society's structures both as agent and as product, any exclusively psychological account of self-awareness will be incomplete.

There are several crucial assumptions about the nature of the self and consciousness that can be extracted from Giddens's perspective in order to develop a more macro-concept of self-awareness. First, "understandings which selves, as social actors, have of themselves and their society" are constitutive elements of social structure just as those very self-understandings are artifacts of the social world.[81] The self is ineluctably insider not only to his or her own immediate "worlds of meaning" but also to the larger social world accomplished together with others. This means that knowledge about self-in-society is always, to some extent, subjective and reflexive. Second, this self who is co-constructor of a social reality nevertheless comes into being in the context of social structures that exist prior to the self. Indeed, the structural achievements of society necessarily exceed the meanings and activities of any constituent self. Thus, there is an externality to the institutions and structures we co-constitute and cosustain as a society.[82] To the extent that this is true, the self and its social context are available to systematic and objective forms of reflection.[83] Third, the self, as conceptualized here, lives simultaneously in "*the* world" (externalized structures cocreated and covalidated with others) and in "*my* world" (the self and social world as internalized and given meaning by the self). These worlds interpenetrate with various degrees of correspondence or distortion. As Peter L. Berger and Thomas

Luckmann suggest: "Others have a perspective on this common world that is not identical with mine. My 'here' is their 'there.' My 'now' does not fully overlap theirs. All the same, I know that I live with them in a common world. . . . [and] that we share a common sense about its reality."[84] Finally, the self that emerges in this framework is a self who cannot escape his or her day-to-day involvement in the ongoing construction, maintenance, or renewal of the structures of society. This is an activist conception of self—a self whose actions have importance not only for his or her immediate relationships but for the maintenance and alteration of society itself. In one manner of speaking, then, self-reflection is always a reflection on society and vice versa.[85]

What are the implications of this way of understanding the self for the concept of practitioner self-awareness? More pragmatically speaking, on what "content" does the self reflect, and what questions does one pose? In a general sense, there are three types of questions posed in critical reflectivity: (*a*) questions about "the world," (*b*) about "my world," and (*c*) about correspondences and contradictions between those worlds.

Questions having to do with the category "the world," for example, might include any of the following:

What are the structures of my society, in particular, those structures related to power, inequality, and marginalization?
    On what basis are these structures rationalized by members of society?
    What social behaviors, values, or assumptions hold such structures in place?
    What is my location in relation to each of these structures? What do I know (Giddens's practical and discursive knowledge) about how people in my location are supposed to act with regard to others in the same location (location in relation to the social categories class, race, power, gender or other) or toward those in other social groups?
    Who benefits from such structural arrangements and who loses? How do I benefit or lose?
    In what ways do my assumptions and activities contribute to the maintenance or transformation of such social structures?
    What have I discovered (what can I discover) about the extended structural consequences of my social actions and that of others?

These and similar questions can be approached empirically and with some measure of objectivity, particularly when inquiry is conducted in concert with others whose perspectives may reflect different locations within the social structure.

About "my world," questions might include the following:

What do I believe about myself, my place in the world, and about the place of people like or different from me?
    What assumptions do I make and what values do I hold about my social world and its structures, including structures of systematic domination and inequality?
    What is my understanding about how to act in relation to someone who belongs to a different class, race, status, and so forth? And from what sources have I learned these social lessons?

Which of these structural arrangements have I internalized? How do I rationalize them? How do my actions reflect or repudiate these beliefs and values?

These and similar questions require a familiarity with the self and with the meanings and understandings the self has constructed. These questions do not yield to objective forms of inquiry. "My subjectivity," suggest Berger and Luckmann, "is accessible to me in a way . . . [the other's] can never be."[86]

Finally, there is a set of questions that relate to similarities and differences between what the self understands about society and self ("my world"), on the one hand, and the lived, objective conditions of social life ("the world"), on the other. For instance, I might ask any of the following:

In what ways are my values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, and self-understandings reflections of economic, social, educational, or other systems?[87]

To what extent do I accept (or accept uncritically) the values, beliefs, assumptions, and prescriptions I have received as a result of my socialization into particular communities?

To what extent do I accept the structures of my society as unproblematic, especially structures related to power and privilege? To what extent am I able or willing to raise questions about them?

Are there inconsistencies or distortions between my received beliefs/assumptions and the concrete conditions of individual and group life? How do I account for these contradictions?

In what ways are my perspectives, beliefs, values, and assumptions related to my self-interest and perceived needs?

Are there contradictions between my avowed intentions or values and the structural outcomes of my activities?

These kinds of questions require critical, reflective consideration by social actors of their subjective understandings of society and self in light of the objective structures that form and inform human consciousness and thought. It also requires a consideration of social structural arrangements in light of human consciousness and behavior, which constitute and perpetuate society on an ongoing basis. As critical theorists often maintain, "neither social conditions nor intersubjective meanings alone constitute the whole of reality."[88]

Engaging in Critical Reflectivity: A Case Example

An illustration may help us to better understand how critical reflectivity differs from the other approaches to self-awareness. Consider racism as one structural feature of society in the United States. Most general-practice textbooks urge students and professionals to become aware of their biases and prejudices, specifically with regard to racial and cultural minority groups. As outlined above, the conventional approaches to self-awareness in practice include the more objective-oriented reflec-

tive practice and the more subjective-based reflexive awareness. Those
who advocate reflective practice would counsel the student or practi-
tioner to take time to think objectively about patterns of behavior, affect,
perception, and behavior, identifying any such patterns that may reflect
bias or discrimination. Social workers are also encouraged to examine
systematically practice behaviors with respect to racial and ethnic popu-
lations. The goal of this sort of reflection would be for each worker to
identify and correct negative feelings, attitudes, or perceptions related
to people who belong to particular social categories (e.g., race). This
issue becomes an important topic in supervision as the supervisor assists
the social worker in examining his or her behavior and affect carefully.[89]
By contrast, those who adopt a reflexive approach to self-awareness
would encourage the social worker to examine how his or her conscious-
ness enters into and shapes awareness and experience in each encoun-
ter. They would invite practitioners to tell their own narratives about who
they are and how their own unique stories predispose them to particular
ways of perceiving and knowing. The goal is for social work practitioners
to understand how the selves they are and the background they bring to
each encounter intersects with the stories of other social actors to pro-
duce particular meanings, understandings, or distortions.[90] The larger
question would be how racism is woven into their self-narrative.

Utilizing either of these more conventional strategies for self-aware-
ness, some practitioners may come to recognize personal characteristics
or experiences that are related or contribute to racism. This, of course,
is the overarching objective of such self-examination. However, other so-
cial workers may conclude that they are relatively free of racist thoughts
or attitudes. Although these workers may be deeply troubled that there
are people who are known to harbor biased attitudes and intentions to-
ward one or another racial minority group, they feel confident that they
themselves are peripheral to the problem. And they may be correct as
far as such reflection takes them. As Giddens explains: "Agents can
sometimes express their reasons for what they do in verbal or discursive
form. Individuals can in some degree . . . give accounts of the circum-
stances of their actions. But this by no means exhausts what they know
about why they act as they do. Many most subtle and dazzlingly intricate
forms of knowledge are embedded in, and constitutive of, the actions
we carry out."[91] When reflective questions about bias and intolerance
are confined to micro-examinations of personal understandings, affects,
and motivations, these "more intricate forms of knowledge" remain un-
tapped. Having identified no personal racist feelings or intentions, some
individuals even find it possible to distance themselves from the problem
of racism: "Society may be racist or other people may be racist, but there
is little I can do about that."

How would proponents of critical reflectivity approach this issue? Con-
tinuing with the example of racism in social work practice, let us assume

the context of a social work case manager in an urban community mental health center. Let us further assume that this case manager is a Caucasian female.[92] She is consciously committed to reflective practice in the traditional meaning of the term; for example, she routinely uses supervision to identify and correct any biases that may be reflected in her behavior, assumptions, or intentions. So she is surprised and dismayed when her supervisor notes that, based on aggregate data for the prior 2 years, African-American clients for whom this social worker has assumed case-management duties have fared less well on certain outcome variables related to successful community tenure. For example, African-American clients on her case load are disproportionately hospitalized. Further, they are more likely to be admitted involuntarily and with the involvement of the legal system.[93] If this social worker were to rely solely on conventional prescriptions for reflective practice, she may conclude that she had worked hard to eliminate biases in her personal and professional life. She may also come to the conclusion, perhaps with some justification, that in her practice she consciously seeks to provide the very best service for all her clients regardless of social categories. If she were limited to this sort of reflection, the social worker could only assume that if client outcomes for community tenure seem to be structured along racial lines, the problem must be related to factors outside of her control, perhaps to something about the client group itself.[94]

However, this social worker's reflectiveness does not stop at this point. She understands that racism is much more than a matter of personal attitudes, affect, and intentions that devalue members of specific groups. Those who advocate critical reflectivity as an approach to self-awareness would start with the assumption that no one and no institution escapes complicity in society and its structures. This would suggest that many of the social activities of the self have structural implications with regard to racism even when one's conscious attitudes and intentions may not support racism. In critical reflectivity, questions would center on the relationship between seemingly unproblematic, everyday behavior and racially structured outcomes. The social worker in this case might reflect on some of the following questions:

What do I (we) do in the agency on a day-to-day basis that might contribute to the structuring of unequal outcomes?

What have I learned about how to perceive or how to relate to members of my own or other ethnic groups and what is the source of that learning? To be specific, what do I as a middle-class, white, professional female (her location in the social structures of gender, class, and race) know about how to relate to and interpret the behavior of others who occupy similar as well as different social locations?

What have I learned about how to interpret the behavior of someone whose self-identification is African American? What if I add class or gender to the equation?

What do I know about my conscious intentions when I interact with an African-American client, in particular, a client in crisis with a potential to be hospitalized?

Why is there a disjuncture between the motivations and intentions of which I am aware and the objective outcomes as reported?

This seeming contradiction between intention (part of "my world") and outcome (part of "the world") requires further reflection. To add to the complexity of the reflective task, in Giddens's theory, people are not just passive recipients on which the structures of society act; they are active agents.[95] That is to say, in various ways they may challenge the received prescriptions and proscriptions that keep them marginalized; they may resist submission to an authority that is perceived as imposed and culturally alien. Through further reflection, the social worker in this case might come to recognize that in the emergency room, she and other professionals are in a position of authority and power. She and her co-professionals can, with legal and medical justification, take actions that have consequences for an individual's freedom and sense of personal integrity. In addition, she and her Caucasian colleagues are part of a group that has historically dominated, marginalized, and treated with disrespect members of ethnic and cultural minority groups.[96] This group history plus individual expectations based on personal experience with racism are integrated as part of what a minority client knows (tacitly and overtly) about interactions with members of the majority culture.[97] Thus, the social worker might consider questions such as the following:

What part of the behavior of clients in the emergency room may be interpreted as resistance to further marginalization, disempowerment, and disrespect?

What clinical choices might I make differently if I were to view some of the "presenting" behavior in the emergency room as positive—as opposition or challenge to further disempowerment—instead of viewing it as antisocial acting out? Would I look at diagnosis differently?[98] Would I take more time in assessing safety and dangerousness? Would I take a more serious look at options other than hospitalization in such cases?

As a result of her reflections, this social worker might conclude that some of her decisions to recommend hospitalization or to involve security personnel in particular cases may have been based on her misconstrual of the relations of power and marginalization in her clinical setting.

At this point, it is clear that the social worker in our example has gone far afield from simple reflection on personal beliefs, intentions, affects, and attitudes. She has examined one instance of how socially structured relations of power and privilege are constructed (misconstructed) in the interactions between a white, middle-class social worker and minority clients, including how each actor, by operating out of his or her own "practical knowledge" (i.e., "tacit stocks of knowledge which actors draw upon in the constitution of social activity")[99] and by interacting in ways that each saw as necessary or compelling, contributed to outcomes none may

have consciously intended. Acting out of a consciousness shaped by society, parties in this case succeed in reproducing the very structure that has shaped that same consciousness as it relates to racism.[100] Going well beyond identification of personal bias, the aim of this social worker's reflection was to make both ordinary awareness and routine interactions problematic with regard to structural consequences. Of course, the example above assumes the case of a social worker who is motivated to understand the implications of her actions. The larger picture is much more complicated, including, as it does, the behavior of actors who do not view racism as a problem or who even justify its existence, along with laws, regulations, and procedures that may disadvantage particular groups. However, these factors do not change the essential argument. Central to Giddens's thesis is the recognition that laws, regulations, procedures, and inequities of access to power and privilege are all structural products of human agency over time. Social structures and institutionalized support for those structures do not exist without the social actions of human beings.

Concluding Comment: Implications for Social Work

In their controversial book *Unfaithful Angels,* Harry Specht and Mark Courtney deplore what they regard as the retreat of the social work profession away from macro-considerations to a micro-emphasis on individual (especially intrapsychic) solutions.[101] The profession's conventional ways of conceptualizing practitioner self-awareness reflect this retreat. I have suggested that Giddens's structuration theory offers an approach to self-awareness that includes macro-considerations as a necessary part of the definition of what it means to be a self-aware, reflective practitioner. This approach to self-awareness and the theory that underpins it hold a number of implications of for social work education and practice.

In social work, as in sociology, there has been an unfortunate bifurcation between micro- and macro-theory. Over the past several decades, efforts have been made to bridge this gap. Of note are efforts by scholars who have contributed to the development of a systems perspective and various ecological frameworks.[102] What these several perspectives have in common is an understanding that "individuals are engaged in constant transactions with other human beings and with other systems in the environment and that these various persons and systems reciprocally influence each other."[103] Ecosystem frameworks as a group succeed in showing that micro-systems do not exist in a vacuum and that the behavior of individuals and families must be understood in relation to larger social systems. However, these perspectives artificially place the individual over and against the social structure as two separate, interacting elements—the self-system in interaction with society. Missing from such accounts is a concept of self as co-constituting and comaintaining society, that is, self

as insider and creator. Giddens's theory suggests that human beings are consummately insider to social structure and cannot opt out of it. To paraphrase an old maxim: We have met society and it is us.

As a result of the macro/micro division in social work practice, the conception of a self as active subject has been confined largely to one's immediate social encounters, and social transformation generally has meant self-transformation. At the same time, larger macro-structures (e.g., the structures that support racism, classism, and sexism) have been viewed as part of the context of human activity, something that influences human behavior but is subject to change only as a result of grander, sociohistorical processes or (in the profession) through the efforts of those special practitioners who choose to become "activists." Giddens's theory is consummately a theory of the human actor. For Giddens, the idea that human beings interact with a society defined as some entity external to individuals amounts to a reification and an anthropomorphization of human institutions: "Social systems have no purpose, reasons, or needs, whatsoever; only human individuals do so." [104] Social systems do not act; only human actors do.

Social institutions are human constructions; they have no existence apart from the human actions that constitute and reconstitute their form and substance. Of course, social institutions are not human constructs in the same way daydreams or smoke are constructions. Nor do social institutions change readily or without effort. Giddens does not deny the existence of social regularities and social uniformities that are heavily buttressed by convention and ideology.[105] Indeed, there is a solidity to human social arrangements; time, history, tradition, culture, law, ideology, and the behavior of many, many actors all hold human social structures together. But these and others like them are also human constructs. Thus, within Giddens's structuration theory, we find the possibility for a more "actor-oriented" social work, one in which the individual is conceptualized not as simply the passive object of society's forces or the passive recipient of society's dictates but as intrinsically implicated in society—acting, conforming, resisting, challenging, and modifying. To be an agent, Giddens maintains, is to make a difference in social outcomes and, "since 'to make a difference' is to transform some aspect of a process or event, agency in structuration theory is equated with transformative capacity." [106] This is an actor capable not only of self transformation but of social transformation as well.

For social work, all of this implies that the historical argument over whether social workers should be prepared for social-change roles is largely a moot issue.[107] Like all other individuals, social workers are always involved in social change and social stability. As individuals and as professionals, social workers' daily interactions with clients and others have consequences for maintaining or altering society's structures. Because of the social work profession's unique role with clients who are

often marginalized within society's structures, this social-structural consequence of professional activity is not insignificant. The key choice, then, is not whether to be an agent of change but whether to be a more conscious agent of change. The goal of the kind of critical reflectivity defined here is nothing less than this: that social work professionals "as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociohistorical reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality." [108]

Notes

1. See Helen H. Perlman, *Social Casework: A Problem Solving Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Charlotte Towle, *The Learner in Education for the Professions as Seen in Education for Social Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); and Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House, with Autobiographical Notes by Jane Addams* (1910; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990). Addams reported that she always tried to check her observations on community conditions with people who lived those conditions to reduce error in her practice.

2. See Dean H. Hepworth, Ronald H. Rooney, and Jo Ann Larsen, *Direct, Social Work Practice*, 5th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1997); Marilyn Lammert, "Experience as Knowing: Utilizing Therapist Self-Awareness," *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work* 67 (1986): 369–76; Helen Northern, *Clinical Social Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); and Bradford W. Sheafor, Charles R. Horejsi, and Gloria A. Horejsi, *Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice*, 3d ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1994).

3. See John Shotter and Kenneth J. Gergen, "Social Construction: Knowledge, Self, Others, and Continuing the Conversation," *Communication Yearbook* 17 (1994): 3–33.

4. As Leon F. Williams points out: "Much of the debate over the theory of knowledge in the profession has generally focused on the nature of research. In fact, it is rare to witness a debate of the epistemological basis of any practice technique or theory" ("Epistemology," in *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, ed. Richard L. Edwards [Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers Press, 1995], p. 877).

5. See Rom Harré, "Is There Still a Problem about the Self?" *Communication Yearbook* 17 (1994): 55. As used here, the term "self" overlaps the concept of "person." "Person" is what others see of a self; the "self" refers to that person's sense of identity.

6. On critical theory, see Brian Fay, *Critical Social Science: Liberation and Its Limits* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987); Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1971), *Theory and Practice*, trans. J. Viertel (London: Heineman, 1974); Henry Giroux, *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (London: Routledge, 1992); Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1984), *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Anthony Giddens and Jonathan H. Turner, eds., *Social Theory Today* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987); Jack Mezirow, "Perspective Transformation," *Adult Education* 28, no. 2 (1978): 100–10, and "A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education," *Adult Education* 32, no. 1 (1981): 3–24.

7. Over the last 5 decades, a considerable amount of literature has been generated on the subject of the psychology of self that developed in response to ego psychology and object-relations theory. Since my arguments are primarily epistemological, it is beyond the aim and scope of the present article to discuss this or other psychological literature on the development of a self. For example, see Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971).

8. See Donald F. Krill, "Existential Social Work," in *Social Work Treatment: Interlocking*

Theoretical Approaches, ed. Francis J. Turner, 3d. ed. (London and New York: Free Press, 1986); and James Lantz, "Countertransference as a Corrective Emotional Experience in Existential Family Therapy," *Contemporary Family Therapy* 15, no. 3 (1993): 209–21.

9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness,* trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), pp. 46–47.

10. See Barry Cournoyer, *The Social Work Skills Workbook* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1991); and Marilyn Lammert, "Experience as Knowing: Utilizing Therapist Self-Awareness," *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work* 67 (1986): 369–76.

11. See Lantz.

12. See Michael Blugerman, "Contributions of Gestalt Theory to Social Work Treatment," in Turner, ed., pp. 69–90; Krill; and Lantz.

13. Cournoyer, p. 72.

14. The part of the instruction that calls for the student to look back on the experience and reproduce remembered elements in written form goes beyond simple conscious awareness.

15. See Hepworth, Rooney, and Larsen (n. 2 above). This is not to underrate such admonishments. Many of the world's major religious traditions prescribe practices, usually involving some meditative techniques, for attending to and experiencing the present in its fullness as a prerequisite to enlightenment (see Thomas Keefe, "Meditation and Social Work Treatment," in Turner, ed., pp. 155–80).

16. Thus Immanual Kant asks "how the 'I' that thinks can be distinct from the 'I' that intuits itself. . . . and yet [be] the same object" (*Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965], p. 167). See also John Locke, "An Essay concerning Human Understanding," in *The Empiricists,* abridged by Richard Taylor (New York: Anchor Books, 1974), pp. 72–73; and Sartre, pp. 46–49.

17. In the social science literature, see George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934). To use the term "postmodernism" is to risk entering an arena of debate that is politically, ideologically, and conceptually complex. On this matter, see Richard J. Bernstein, "Allegory of Modernity/Postmodernity: Habermas and Derrida," in *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity,* ed. Richard J. Bernstein (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 199–229.

18. Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (n. 6 above), p. 144.

19. Mead (pp. 135–226) distinguishes between two poles or "phases" of the self: the "me," which is the socially derived aspect of the self, and the "I," the aspect of self that responds and reacts to the social self. The social self can be observed objectively, not so the "I."

20. See Habermas, *Theory and Practice.*

21. This notion that the self comes into being in the act of self-knowing has been embedded in Western thought probably since Decartes's famous pronouncement made "being" contingent on thought. See also Rom Harré, *Social Being,* 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), p. 64; and Steve Woolgar, "Reflexivity Is the Ethnographer of the Text," in *Knowledge and Reflexivity: New Frontiers in the Sociology of Knowledge,* ed. Steve Woolgar (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1991).

22. Mead, p. 135.

23. See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). According to Nagel, methods for securing knowledge become more objective the less they depend "on the specifics of the individual's makeup and position in the world" (p. 5). Here the issue is self-knowledge.

24. See Paul Ricoeur's discussion of the tension between "distanciation" and "belongingness" in scientific knowledge (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* ed. and trans. John B. Thompson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], p. 61). See also Woolgar.

25. See Nagel, p. 26; and D. C. Phillips, *Philosophy, Science and Social Inquiry: Contemporary Methodological Controversies in Social Science and Related Applied Fields of Research* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987), p. 16. Indeed, this "partialness" of our self-knowledge is not necessarily viewed as a negative. For Martin Buber and for other religiously oriented existentialists, there is a transcendent aspect of the self that will always remain a mystery, thus protecting the self from being treated solely as an object (see Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, 2d ed. [New York: Scribner, 1958], p. 64; in social work, see Jim Lantz, "Mystery in Family Therapy," *Contemporary Family Therapy* 16, no. 1 [February 1994]: 53–66).

26. Psychologist Jerome Bruner describes this effort as "climb[ing] on your own shoulders to be able to look down on what you have just done—and then . . . represent[ing] it to yourself" (*On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* [New York: Atheneum, 1962], p. 101).

27. See Nagel, p. 5.

28. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991). In social work, see Mary Ellen Kondrat, "Reclaiming the Practical: Formal and Substantive Rationality in Social Work Practice," *Social Service Review* 66, no. 2 (1992): 237–55.

29. The language itself provides us with clues—a self who is "using" the self for professional purposes.

30. See Hepworth, Rooney, and Larsen (n. 2 above); and Sheafor, Horejsi, and Horejsi (n. 2 above).

31. See Hepworth, Rooney and Larsen; Lammert (n. 10 above); Northern (n. 2 above); Eileen Gambrill, *Critical Thinking in Clinical Practice: Improving the Accuracy of Judgments and Decisions about Clients* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990); Len E. Gibbs, *Scientific Reasoning for Social Workers: Bridging the Gap between Research and Practice* (New York: Macmillan, 1991); Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic, 1983), and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

32. This position is now routinely adopted in most general practice texts.

33. Nagel (n. 23 above), p. 3.

34. There are many nuances in how "self" is defined among those who call themselves postmodern (see Harré [n. 5 above]). The elements discussed here are generally accepted across many of these diverse perspectives.

35. See Lynn Hoffman, "A Reflexive Stance for Family Therapy," in *Therapy as Social Construction*, ed. Sheila McNamee and Kenneth J. Gergen (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1992), pp. 7–24. According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (10th ed.), the root meaning of "reflexive" is understood as the relation of something to itself, specifically a relationship of identity or sameness; other meanings are derivative. This contrasts with the usual meaning of self-reflection, which considers the self as other. Woolgar (n. 21 above) makes essentially the same argument, distinguishing between what he calls "benign introspection," or reflection, and what he terms "constitutive reflexivity." He defines the differences between the two processes in terms of the "distance" between representation and object represented, with reflexivity being constituted by proximity or identity between representation and object represented.

36. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 122–23.

37. Ibid.

38. See Nagel.

39. In developing the major arguments in this section, I am indebted to Ricoeur's discussion of the tension between "belonging" and "distanciation" as a central problem in the human sciences (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* [n. 24 above]; also see his *Oneself as Another* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992]). Although Ricoeur is a phenomenologist and not a constructivist, his arguments remain valid for the purposes of this section.

40. Of course, the distinction here between a knower-self and a known-self (self–other; I–me) is used as a heuristic device, not an ontological position (see Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* [n. 6 above]).

41. Nagel (n. 23 above).

42. Nagel, p. 27. In social work, see Kondrat (n. 28 above).

43. See Nagel; and Kondrat.

44. See Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, Mary F. Belenky, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, eds., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

45. See Jan Smedslund, "Necessarily True Cultural Psychologies," in *The Social Construction of the Person*, ed. Kenneth J. Gergen and Keith E. Davis (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985), p. 76. See also Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966).

46. Donald Carpenter, "Constructivism and Social Work Treatment," in Turner, ed. (n. 8 above), pp. 146–67.

47. See Andrew E. Curry, "The Family Therapy Situation as a System," in *Family Process*, ed. Nathan W. Ackerman (New York: Basic Books, 1970); Lammert (n. 10 above); and Lantz (n. 8 above).

48. The recent edition of one of the most well-known clinical social work texts now includes a chapter on constructivism (see Carpenter). See also Joan Laird, "Revisioning Social Work Education: A Social Constructionist Approach," *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 8 (1993): 1–10; and D. D. V. Fisher, *An Introduction to Constructivism for Social Workers* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

49. See Carpenter; Jay S. Efran and Leslie E. Clarfield, "Constructionist Therapy: Sense and Nonsense," in McNamee and Gergen, eds. (n. 35 above); and Joan Laird, "Family-Centered Practice: Cultural and Constructionist Reflections," *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 8 (1993): 77–109.

50. See Laird, "Family-Centered Practice: Cultural and Constructionist Reflections."

51. It is well beyond the scope of the present article to summarize the many perspectives that are considered under the terms "constructivism" or "constructionism." There is, however, an important distinction to be made between a more traditional social constructivist perspective and a radical constructivist position. For examples of a more traditional position, see Berger and Luckmann; and Alfred Schutz, *Phenomenology of the Social World*, trans. George Welsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1967). For examples of a more radical position, see, among others, Humberto R. Maturana and Francesco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992); Heinz von Foerster, "On Constructing Reality"; and Ernst von Glaserfeld, "An Introduction to Radical Constructivism," both in *The Invented Reality*, ed. Paul Watzlawick (New York: Norton, 1984). The social constructivist perspective is more likely to view experience as a co-construction mediated through human discourse and meaning. The radical constructivist position treats the human organism as a closed system and human experience as almost entirely biologically (structurally) determined. See Carpenter for a discussion of constructivist applications to social work practice. The perspective in this article is closest to the less radical social constructivist group of thinkers.

52. As Clifford Geertz has suggested: "The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures" (*Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* [New York: Basic Books, 1983], p. 59).

53. Those, such as William D. Lax, who subscribe to literary and textual approaches to constructivism suggest that the self can be conceived best as an evolving "narrative developed in relation to others over time that we come to identify as who we are" (William D. Lax, "Postmodern Thinking in Clinical Practice," in McNamee and Gergen, eds., p. 71). In social work practice literature, see Gilbert J. Greene, Carla Jensen, and Dorothy Harper Jones, "A Constructivist Perspective on Clinical Social Work Practice with Ethnically Diverse Clients," *Social Work* 41, no. 2 (1996): 172–80; and Mo-Yee Lee and Gilbert J. Greene, "A Social Constructivist Framework for Integrating Cross-Cultural Issues in Teaching Clinical Social Work," *Journal of Social Work Education* 35, no. 1 (1999): 21–37.

54. For example, Ruth Grossman Dean and Ann Fleck-Henderson argue: "Any assessment [practitioners] make of a client has something of them in it and is influenced by the context that they share and have created with the client" ("Teaching Clinical Theory and Practice through a Constructivist Lens," *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 6, no. 1 (1992): 13). See also Carpenter.

55. See Laird, "Revisioning Social Work Education: A Social Constructionist Approach."

56. See John Shotter, "Social Accountability and Self Specification," in Gergen and Davis, eds. (n. 45 above), pp. 167–201. See also Lax.

57. See Geertz; and Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). In the constructivist version of self, of course, this "location" that is the self is construed as fleeting, fluid, and dereified.

58. Fay (n. 6 above), p. 205.

59. This is apocryphally attributed to Pascal.

60. "The greater art of the sociologist," commented sociologist Karl Mannheim, "con-

sists in his attempt always to relate changes in mental attitudes to changes in social situations. The human mind does not operate *in vacuo*" (*Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953], p. 219).

61. See Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (n. 6 above), pp. 49–53. Of course, this is not to suggest that all macro-theorists agree with Durkheim on other theoretical issues.

62. Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 8th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1964).

63. See Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis;* Ira J. Cohen, "Structuration Theory and Social Praxis," in Giddens and Turner, eds. (n. 6 above), pp. 273–308.

64. Max Weber, *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization,* ed. and trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 88.

65. See Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis.*

66. See Fay.

67. See Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (n. 6 above).

68. See Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis.*

69. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (n. 6 above), p. 61.

70. Ibid., p. 65.

71. Michael Polyani, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

72. Fay (n. 6 above).

73. See Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology.* Unless one encounters the anomalous or the novel event, this monitoring is carried out implicitly and unproblematically. One is reminded here of Polyani's "subsidiary knowledge."

74. Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 102.

75. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology,* p. 63.

76. Of course, many factors enter into the reproduction of a language from generation to generation. For example, many nations have laws dictating which language shall be used for public discourse and education. In addition, there are some actors who have greater influence on the continuity of the language than others—literary or public figures, e.g. And, of course, the influence of technology is not to be underestimated. The invention of the printing press made it possible to advance local languages over the universal, scholarly Latin, and the development and expansion of the Internet is already altering the way languages are used. But, consistent with Giddens's theory, it is important to remember that these phenomena are themselves social products of social actors.

77. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology.*

78. There is a whole tradition of research in the sociology of education examining how class demarcations are achieved in and through the structuring of the daily activities of schooling. See Pierre Bordieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change,* ed. Richard Brown (London: Tavistock, 1973), pp. 71–112; Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control: Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions,* 2d ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); and Paul E. Willis, *Learning How to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Aldershot: Gower, 1981). This research has explored the "hidden curriculum," the implicit ways students learn from teachers and from each other about "how things are supposed to be" for people "like us"—i.e., for those in the same class strata.

79. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology,* and *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (both in n. 6 above).

80. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology.*

81. Fay (n. 6 above), p. 119.

82. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology.*

83. To say that social structures have an objective aspect is not to reify such structures or to give them the status of immutable laws. The constructivist notion that social worlds of meaning are created and recreated anew in every interaction draws attention away from the tendency for social actions to occur in predictable and repetitive patterns.

84. Berger and Luckmann (n. 45 above), p. 23. "The world" is the world we think of as

"objective," if objectivity is understood more in terms of intersubjectivity rather than distancation. "My world" is social reality internalized and given meaning by the self. These worlds interpenetrate with various degrees of correspondence or distortion.

85. See Fay.

86. Berger and Luckmann, p. 29.

87. See Mezirow, "A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education" (n. 6 above).

88. Eric Bredo and Walter Feinberg, *Knowledge and Values in Social and Educational Research* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), p. 383.

89. See Hepworth, Rooney, and Larsen (n. 1 above); and Sheafor, Horejsi, and Horejsi (n. 1 above).

90. See Greene, Jensen, and Jones (n. 53 above).

91. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (n. 6 above), p. 63.

92. The illustration is fictional. The example was based on the experiences of a hypothetical Caucasian female because, belonging to this social category, I anticipated that this would be the perspective from which I could address the issues with greatest familiarity. This decision is consistent with Giddens's notion that what one "knows" about social structures varies somewhat depending on one's position within those structures.

93. Although this case is hypothetical, there is empirical evidence that differences in hospitalization and commitment rates among racial groups do exist in the direction described in this article. For examples, see Harriet P. Lefley, "Culture and Chronic Mental Illness," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 41, no. 3 (1990): 277–86.

94. Such reasoning can form the basis for a "blame the victim" orientation to a given social problem.

95. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology.*

96. See Enola K. Proctor and Larry E. Davis, "The Challenge of Racial Difference: Skills for Clinical Practice," *Social Work* 39, no. 3 (May 1994): 314–23.

97. See Jeanette R. Davidson, "White Clinician–Black Client: Relationship Problems and Recommendations for Change from a Social Influence Theory Perspective," *Journal of Multi-Cultural Social Work* 1, no. 4 (1992): 63–76.

98. See Harold W. Neighbors, James S. Jackson, Linn Campbell, and Donald Williams, "The Influence of Racial Factors on Psychiatric Diagnosis: A Review and Suggestions for Research," *Community Mental Health Journal* 25, no. 4 (1989): 301–11.

99. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (n. 6 above), p. 5.

100. See Willis (n. 78 above) for a similar account of interactions and resistance that shape structural classism through interactions between middle-class school personnel and working-class youth in Great Britain.

101. Harry Specht and Mark E. Courtney, *Unfaithful Angels: How Social Work Has Abandoned Its Mission* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

102. See Carel Germain, "An Ecological Perspective in Casework Practice," *Social Casework* 54 (1973): 323–30; Carel Germain and Alex Gitterman, *The Life Model of Social Work Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); and Alan Pincus and Anne Minahan, *Social Work Practice: Model and Method* (Itasca, Ill.: Peacock, 1973).

103. Hepworth, Rooney, and Larsen (n. 2 above), p. 17.

104. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis,* p. 7. Laird, a constructivist, provides an example of this sort of reification: "We cannot become so infatuated with the beauty of the narrative metaphor that we ignore or fail to hold accountable the institutions and other forces that are powerful co-authors of the stories of these families" ("Family-Centered Practice: Cultural and Constructionist Reflections" [n. 49 above], p. 104).

105. Giddens and Turner, eds., *Social Theory Today* (n. 6 above), p. 282.

106. Ibid.

107. See Mimi Abramovitz, "Should All Social Work Students Be Educated for Social Change? Pro," *Journal of Social Work Education* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 6–11; and D. Ray Bardill, "Should All Social Work Students Be Educated for Social Change Roles? Con," *Journal of Social Work Education* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 13–17.

108. Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, 1970), p. 17.