

The self in social work

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Social work has a long and significant history in the use of the 'self'. The first part of this paper is a contextualising discussion around recent reforms to social work. The second part is a historical examination of the conceptualisation of the self in the contemporary era. This discussion is intimately wedded to notions of identity, 'social' and conceptions of the self. This discussion will review the major philosophical understandings of self, before examining the 'self' in social work. Recently social workers have developed the term 'use of self' to indicate important aspects of the professional relationship and how this term is defined rests on how one conceptualizes 'self'.

The final part of the paper will examine how social workers describe and involve the self that they bring to their therapeutic and non-therapeutic work. Participants in case-study, narrative accounts describe the self that they bring to their work as individualistic although at the same time stress the relational, positioned, relationship-based self. This examination carries the concept of the self from the notion of self as separate and constant to the self as a process in interaction.

Keywords: self, social work, professional practice, social, process

Introduction

The changing nature of social work is considered a positive 'moment' as a challenge to re-establish the value base and transfer knowledge and skills and practice and management to a variety of different settings (Johnson and Williams 2007:117). It is only through trustworthy, strong, knowledgeable and skill-based relationships with clients and others can social workers help clients reach their goals (McCoyd 2010: 1). A relationship based notion of self in dialogue with service users and valuing their experience can establish relational security that has found favour as a concept in secure mental health settings by the Department of Health (2010, 2010a), the Munro review of Child Protection report (Munro 2011) and in interpersonal relations (Adams and Jones 1999).

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2 The following part of the paper examines competing and contested uses of self in
3 helping professions. It starts with a historical examination of the emergence of
4 conceptions of the self in Western, predominantly philosophical, thought. Descartes,
5 Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche are considered to gain purchase of the conception of
6 self (Burkitt, 2008). The rise of the 'psy of self' adds a further dimension to how the
7 emergent conception of the self has gained a form of institutional recognition.
8 Finally, Foucault's contribution of the technologies employed on the self are
9 discussed. These discussions position conceptions of the self in relation to
10 contemporary developments in professional practice.

11

12 The latter part of the paper views the use of self in social work. Contested images
13 and representations of the self in the literature on the helping professions are
14 examined and three avenues are presented. The first is the way social work has
15 responded to conceptions of the self as a form of 'use of the self' from a relational
16 and relationship-based perspective. The second is the 'consciousness of the self as
17 an instrument for intervention'. The third is illustrative of a disassembled self as part
18 of a learning process. These forms of self, contribute to work-based learning in
19 social work practice.

20

21 **Context**

22 Social Work as a profession has undergone significant scrutiny and change over the
23 last decade. For example, professional registration and new Code of Practice are
24 being enshrined in legislation and there have been an important debates in an
25 attempting to identity, clarify and explore the role of social work and its value in
26 society (Bogg 2010; CSIP/NIMHE 2006; Parrot 2006; Merchant 2007; Ray et al 2008;
27 Scottish Executive 2006, DoH 2007). The Social Work Task Force (Social Work Task
28 Force 2009a, 2009b) was established as a joint initiative between the Department of
29 Health and the Department of Children, Schools and Families to undertake a system
30 wide review of social work practice and to make recommendations for improvement
31 and reform of the whole profession. One of the recommendations was the creation
32 of an independent national college of social work (Social Work Task force 2009b)

1 developed and led by social workers although financed through membership. Social
2 Work as a profession has now merged with social care and education, with closer
3 structural ties between health and social care within adult services and social work
4 and education for work with children, young people and families (Johnson and
5 Williams 2007:118).

6
7 The Task Force's comprehensive review has added weight, urgency and significance
8 to attempts of definition of social work such as the definition of the International
9 Association of Schools of Social Work and International Federation of Social workers
10 (2011) suggests

11 *'The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human*
12 *relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being.*
13 *Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at*
14 *the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights*
15 *and social justice are fundamental to social work'.*

16
17 To achieve this, Johnson and Williams (2007:122) suggest tomorrow's 'social worker
18 does not need to a "strongly bonded individual with a sense of self apart from
19 others' but, instead, someone who values and connects with others, using the
20 multiplicity of experiences of service users and team members to develop adaptive
21 and creative solutions'. This connected fluidity of relationship based notions of self
22 to achieve rights and justice will be discussed in the paper.

23
24 The National Occupational Standards (NOS) set for social workers clearly state that
25 understandings of the self are central to competence. There is a large focus upon
26 the journeys of the self to competence by meeting a set of levelled criteria to
27 demonstrate competence. The General Social Care Council suggests in its codes of
28 conducts that social workers must: protect the rights and promote the interests of
29 service users and carers; strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of
30 service users and carers; promote the independence of service users while
31 protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm; respect the rights of service
32 users whilst seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or

1 other people; uphold public trust and confidence in social care services; and be
2 accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and
3 improving their knowledge and skills. Although not explicitly focused on the 'self'
4 core precepts such as responsibility for maintaining on-going development carry
5 significant implications for the self in social work.

6
7 Social Work reform board, the College of Social Work and National Occupational
8 Standards provide an orientation to this discussion and prioritises the need to locate
9 discussions of self in the process of social work.

11 **Conceptions of the self**

12 The self has had contemporary expression from the ancient Hellenistic and Roman
13 thought (Gill, 2006), to a technologically mediated self (Jones, 2006), to being
14 mirrored in the home (Marcus, 2006). There is a wide and varied literature on *the*
15 *self* that reflects the rise and concern with identity, self-identity and its relationship
16 to self (Elliot, 2007; du Gay 2007; Elliot & du Gay, 2009). The seminal works on the
17 self with rich, detailed and extended reflections of the self are found with Siegel
18 (2005) and Taylor (1989). The self is anchored in conflicting discourses and
19 competing dialogues and is shaped and formed in the discursive apparatus in which
20 it is evoked. Indeed, contemporary deconstructive readings of the idea of the self in
21 works such as Siegel's (2005) comprehensive guide certainly mitigate against any
22 finality of definition. However, a historical (if partial, selective and limited)
23 consideration of the contribution of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche are
24 considered to gain purchase of the conception of self using the work of Burkitt
25 (2008).

26
27 Western notions of the self have emerged from diverse and contradictory social ,
28 political and cultural strands from Roman legal theory, Greco-Roman Stoic
29 philosophy, Christian theology and the metaphysical soul as kind of self-substance to
30 the advent of industrial capitalism (Burkitt, 2008: 25). Descartes contribution in
31 *Discourse on Method* is that we identify our existence through mental reflection on
32 our own selves. 'I think therefore I am' posits knowledge as a construct of the

1 human mind and a way of representing the world that extends beyond the individual
2 (Burkitt, 2008: 6). Through a radical doubt of everything we know including the
3 evidence of the senses he concludes that 'I was a substance ... so that this 'I', that is
4 to say, the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body'
5 (Descartes, 1968 [1637]:53). From Descartes the 'self' becomes a thinking substance,
6 of the non-material mind and material body, with a 'transcendental self' beyond the
7 finite experience of the embodied individual. Burkitt (2008: 7) suggests the self
8 embedded in Western thought becomes the bifurcation of the rational beings for
9 whom the mind is paramount for Enlightenment rationalists or irrational beings
10 ruled by bodily passions of the Romantics. Charles Taylor (1989) has argued that the
11 'expressivist' Romantic Movement in 18th century European society understood the
12 self as something to be made through an individual's creative expression in his
13 history of the self. Kenny (1968) argues Descartes introduces two selves against a
14 transcendental self by the 'I' that thinks and the 'I' that is. This dualism cannot
15 account for the ability to bring together diverse modes of existence and a thinking
16 and feeling embodied individual who lives in a particular place and time with life
17 experiences and social relations and relationships. Alternative histories can be
18 written from other cultural perspectives such as Confucianism and Buddhism (Elvin,
19 1985).

20
21 Kant's Enlightenment rationalism of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1966 [1781])
22 recognized that humans are natural beings that have sensations of the world that
23 provide information along with desires, needs and inclinations that mitigate against
24 reason (Seigel, 2005) so that the rational mind does not solely define the self. Kant
25 concludes that reason must be *a priori* or prior to experience of embodied
26 individuals to consist of the principles of reason and categories of thought to make
27 ordered experience of the world possible (Kroner, 1955). Burkitt (2008) suggests
28 Kant has three senses of self. First, the transcendental self that is capable of rational
29 thought and can abstract itself from embodied social, cultural and historical
30 circumstance, to be guided by *a priori* principles or the 'pure ray of apperception
31 that shines out its beam of light on the darkness and chaos of the world' (Burkitt,
32 2008: 3). Second is the embodied self who puts rationality into practical action.

1 Thirdly, Kant has the self in moral law that has a capacity to follow moral imperatives
2 rather than individual desire. Seigel (2005) suggests there is a tension between how
3 these selves interrelate in order to achieve unity in experience. The third 'self' of
4 following moral imperatives guides social work through the guidance offered by
5 General Social Care Council, National Occupational Standards and statutory social
6 work.

8 Following Descartes and Kant there is strong thread of Western thought that locates
9 the self firmly in the inner world of the individual that can then relate to society,
10 social relations, and 'others', from the conflicted security of a centred self. This
11 externalising reaching out of the inner subjective self to a social self resonates
12 through the conception of the self in contemporary society.

14 Hegel's dialectical philosophy of becoming sees contradiction, opposition, difference
15 and conflict as the drive to achieve unity or resolution of contradiction at a higher
16 level of becoming. Charting the historical emergence of the self, people become
17 self-conscious and aware of the possibility of a degree of self-making. The
18 contradictions the self experiences, such as between thought and feeling, reason
19 and passion, society and self, universal and particular, offer the possibility of
20 synthesis at a higher stage. The alienated self is an unhappy consciousness aware of
21 its present life but also its unrealized potential. The self is always in the process of
22 becoming resolving contradictions through a process of reconstruction. Burkitt
23 (2008: 13) suggests Hegel's major achievement is to understand humans as social
24 beings while retaining a notion of self as an individual in their own right but also as a
25 product of a dialectical historical process. As such, we have a relational
26 understanding of the creation of the individual self, in the totality of relations that
27 exist as a matrix in which we are constituted as selves.

29 Nietzsche rejected the idea that the self-conscious 'I' could be placed at the centre of
30 human understanding. In *The Gay Science* (1974 [1882]) Nietzsche argued
31 consciousness is the most unfinished and weakest part of the self that is charged
32 with mediating the instincts, turning inward to look at ourselves and to deepen our

1 self-analysis, to guard against our own desire (Burkitt, 2008: 13). This exercise of the
2 'will to power' creates the desire to dominate our own selves and other selves. For
3 Nietzsche, we mistakenly believe that that our identities and notion of self reside in
4 our conscious part of the self. The solution for Nietzsche is represented in the ideal
5 of the *Übermensch* or transcended, upper or over 'man'. This is the ideal that a true
6 self has yet to achieve and can only be achieved by an individual who can tame their
7 own desires and passions, and tame the chaos and destruction in the world and
8 affirm it all asserting joy rather than fear. These individuals can free themselves
9 from a collective morality and create themselves as a work of art like Goethe or
10 Picasso. This positive affirmation is a call to self assertion that has been co-opted in
11 ideologically motivated readings of Nietzsche. Burkitt (2008: 14) argues this
12 challenged the emerging conceptualisation of the self in the West by rejecting the
13 ordering of the self as a physical or a metaphysical substance.

14
15 For Marx (1990 [1848]), the social world and society is the totality of relations in
16 which the self is constituted. This is located with an historical, socio-economic
17 position so that social relations constitute the self as an individual located in a social
18 framework. Capitalism alienates us from our true social and co-operative self in a
19 practical and political project that would liberate the self from the fetters of a self
20 made in conditions not of an individuals' choosing.

21
22 Burkitt (2008) argues that to understand ourselves we must first abandon the image
23 of ourselves as self-contained monads or self-posessed individuals searching for
24 some identifying essence within that is the secret truth of self. Similarly, we are not
25 individuals who are the proprietors of our own inherent capacities that owe nothing
26 to society or to others. We are born into social relations that have been historically
27 made so we are situated and embodied individuals in a context not of our choosing.
28 Individual selves are formed from within times and places of contemporary capitalist
29 societies (Burkitt 2008: 189).

30
31 Authoring of self is a process and a practice that is constrained and enabled by
32 material and interpersonal situations. Burkitt (2008: 190) argues we are particular

selves informed by social worlds, the people to whom we are related, and with dispositions, tastes, interests and desires that guide, influence and shape our choices and actions. In this way, through exploration of these composite and conflicting selves we can approximate a unified self, a feeling of a centre to our being, of existing as 'I' in the world although never unified, unchanging or without contradiction, amidst a clamour of voices. Burkitt (2008: 190) suggests 'this is a core self that is never entirely sure of itself, never completed, always in the process of some degree of change, and open to the possibility of reconstruction'. Nevertheless, there are continuities and consistency in ourselves such as self-sustaining relationships like love and friendship, and some stable dispositional tendencies on which we act in a changing world. Giddens (1991) arrives at similar findings by charting the interrelationship of self and social relationships.

The intersection of self and social relations has been ably demonstrated and charted by Rose (1990). He provides a history of the self to conclude that we have a current regime of the self, in part constructed by psychology's rise of profoundly ambiguous relations between the ethics of subjectivity, the truth of psychology and the exercise of power. Psychology as form of knowledge, a type of expertise, and a ground for ethics governs subjectivity and self in the contemporary era. The conception of self has changed from autonomous, atomised self to a new individualised or enterprising self.

For Rose (1990) the image of an 'enterprising self', was so potent because it was not an idiosyncratic obsession of the right of the political spectrum, to the contrary, it resonated with basic presuppositions concerning human being that remain to this day widely distributed amongst all political persuasions. Rose (1990: 151) sums up these presuppositions regarding the self as follows: the self is to

- be a subjective being;
- aspire to autonomy;
- strive for personal fulfilment in its earthly life;
- interpret its reality and destiny as a matter of individual responsibility;

- find meaning in its existence by shaping its life through acts of choice.

The charting of the rise of the dominant discourse of self is echoed by Bauman (2000, 2009). For Bauman (2000: 21-2) the process of individualization, at the heart of self-development, essentially 'consists of transforming human identity from a "given into a task", and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance'. This task centred, goal orientation has put the self into process but is defining it by the end result. In its application to social work, this enterprising notion of the continually improving, accountable, responsible, choosing and autonomous self is written into the journey in the competence framework. Professional capabilities for progression to advanced practitioner, practice educator and social work manager have a process but goal orientated definition of the self, defined by external structures.

The arrival of a departure of the postmodern where the deconstruction and reconstruction of the self is fluid, fragmentary, discontinuous, decentred, dispersed, culturally eclectic and hybrid-like (Elliot & du Gay, 2009; xii). The argument for the destruction of the self is in the wake of the collapse of the modernist grand narratives of reason, truth, progress and universal freedom. For example, Bauman (2009) emphasises the decentred character of the self in the wider circuit of globalization. The 'atomization and privatization of life struggles, self-propelling and self-perpetuating,' are where the interior life of the subject, the self, became coterminous with the supremacy of the signifier. As Parton and O'Bryan (2000: 42) suggest 'there has been a general shift in our conceptions of the nature of human beings in the Western world from a social subject of solidarity and citizenship to, in more recent years, the autonomous subject of choice, self-realisation and self-agency'.

Rose (1990: 3) argues the image of the self has come under question both practically and conceptually. The self is 'coherent, bounded individualized, intentional, the locus of thought, action, and belief, the origin of its own actions, the beneficiary of a unique biography'. This fixed and frozen entity of identity of our history, heritage

1 and experience, characterised by a profound inwardness of a regulatory ideal of an
2 'internal universe of the self' has undergone contemporary challenge. For example,
3 the self has been technologically invaded, turned outwards and inwards,
4 supplemented and amended, to the point where Harraway (1991) refers to the
5 'cyborg' self.

6
7 The 'individualized self' under modernisation and the emergent discourse of the
8 twentieth century is captured by Geertz (1979: 229) who states,

9 [t]he Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or
10 less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of
11 awareness, emotion, judgement and action, organized into a distinctive
12 whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social
13 and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a
14 rather peculiar idea within the context of world's cultures.

15
16 There is a wealth of localised, specific, culturally diverse and contested notions of
17 the self. The rigidity and lack of temporal understanding of the self is, as Charles
18 Taylor suggests, 'a function of a historically limited mode of self interpretation, one
19 which has become dominant in the modern West and which may indeed spread
20 thence to other parts of the globe, but which has a beginning in time and space and
21 may have an end' (Taylor, 1989: 111).

22
23 Reflexively, we can recognise that the individual self is located within a number of
24 technological discourses derived from education, social psychology, and professional
25 practice. Reflection on the historical development of this idea such as in the work of
26 Foucault (2007, 2002, 1988, 1984, 1981) examines and explores the competing and
27 conflicting technologies at work on the self.

28
29 By historicising questions of ontology, Foucault's understanding of self found
30 expression in his emphasis upon power, from the Latin, *posse*, to be able, as a
31 productive force, and its relationship with particular inventions of 'the self'. As Rose
32 (1990: 152) indicates, 'the autonomous subjectivity of the modern self' may seem
33 the antithesis of political power, but Foucault (1984a, 1984b, 1984c, 1981 [1976])

1 suggests an exploration of the ways in which this autonomization of the self is a
2 central feature of contemporary 'governmentality' or 'modalities of government'.
3 Rose's notion of governmentality encompasses the 'the multiple strategies, tactics,
4 calculations, and reflections that have sought' to orchestrate 'the conduct of human
5 beings' (Rose 1990: 152). The 'contact between technologies of domination of
6 others and those of the self' is what Foucault (1988: 19) calls governmentality. The
7 development of the self is always in danger of being rendered as one such tactic of
8 governmentality. An emerging critical approach to the powers of government in
9 relation to the self (Dean 2010; Foucault 2007) provides two productive avenues of
10 exploration.

11
12 Technologies of the self are the methods, techniques and 'tools' by which human
13 beings constitute themselves. These are the forms of knowledge and strategies that
14 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others, a certain
15 number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of
16 being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness,
17 purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault 1988: 19).

18
19 In his later writings Foucault's historicist analysis of power as a productive social
20 force provides a particular focus upon *The Technologies of the Self* and suggests a
21 heterogeneous range of techniques of subjectification through which human beings
22 are urged to become more ethical beings. Foucault's writings imply that amongst
23 individuals such techniques provide grounds for defining their identities and in
24 regulating themselves in accordance with the moral codes inscribed within the space
25 produced by the institutional apparatus of the professions and higher education.

26
27 Throughout his work Foucault has concerned himself largely with the technologies of
28 power and domination, whereby the self has been objectified through scientific
29 inquiry and how the self constitutes itself as subject (Foucault, 1988). He also argues
30 that 'know thyself' 'constitutes the fundamental principles' and has inverted the
31 importance of 'take care of yourself'.

1 Foucault understood technologies of the self as a multiplicity of 'operations on their
2 own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being' that people make either
3 by themselves or with the help of others, so opening the possibility of reaching a
4 state of 'happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality' (Foucault, 1988: 18).
5 In the context of social work, this can be interpreted as particular operations on the
6 body of students that are undertaken by the students themselves, sometimes with
7 the support of others in order to enhance the wisdom of their actions in making
8 inquiries about an aspect of their own professional work.

9
10 Development of the self therefore embodies two inter-related dimensions of means-
11 ends structured technologies of the self: the first stage is already predicated upon an
12 ordering of human beings involved in accordance with the rationality of its own
13 particular protocols. Secondly, in agreement with the ordering of theoretical reason
14 (Heidegger, 1962) the precise locus for the human being is found to be one of a
15 multiplicity of possible technological 'inventions' we call the self mediated by the
16 discourses in which it may have been thrown in practice.

17
18 As a subject, the self is not defined by a series of characteristic attributes or
19 behaviours, but is constituted by technology. As an objectivised subject the self has
20 become dominated by technologies of power to which human beings have already
21 submitted themselves. But, Foucault was not inviting us to accept such technologies
22 of the self as a deterministic process from which we cannot escape (although he
23 presents limited possibilities for resistance) but his writings provide testimony to his
24 questioning of the origins of such technologies. Foucault's (2002 [1966]) desire had
25 been already made tangible in his earlier writings in *The Order of Things* to help his
26 readers free themselves from understandings of the self as a subject. In his first
27 chapter, '*Las Meninas*', Foucault brings to the attention of his readers the painter,
28 Velazquez's, pictorial opening to *The Order of Things*, in which 'the subject is elided'
29 (2002:18). In one short chapter the very existence of the subject is open to question
30 and his work problematises any finality of a fixed self and this self, just as it has been
31 created, can be erased.

1 Having posited the possibility of the self constituted by technologies and discourse
2 or the disciplining knowledge, power and practices in Western philosophical
3 tradition, the discussion will now turn to the profession of social work and social
4 work education. The conception of self in social work is developed to examine this
5 area of professional practice. The self is 'framed' in various discourses as a relational
6 and positioned self.

8 **The self in social work**

9 (Shaw 1974: 102) suggests one of the problems with considering topics like the self,
10 self-concept, self-esteem and self-actualisation within social work, is the feeling that
11 in so doing we are practicing a form of narcissism or self-actualisation. It is also
12 highly conducive to a neo-liberal agenda where conceptions of the self become an
13 objectified and commodified continual process of improvement. Shaw (1974: 102)
14 argues that conception of the self and its consideration 'is a concern with self-
15 development' and there is nothing intrinsically or ethically wrong with 'constructive
16 self-concern'. Indeed, this carries echoes for the reflective practitioner of ancient
17 Greek wisdom to 'know thyself', although Foucault has historicised this ontological
18 development and the individualising discourse of self in social work is seen to
19 emerge.

21 The self as a process of self-actualisation is seen in the work of Maslow, Rogers, Jung,
22 Reich, and Allport (Shaw 1974). All have contributed to a codified notion of the self
23 as embedded in a linear process of progress to some actualisable ending - a static
24 and frozen movement of the individual in a quest for self-actualisation. This
25 sequential and progressive notion of the self has developed in 'self-theory' (Shaw
26 1974), underwrites the competency framework and has distinct applications for
27 social work practice and education. Shaw (1974) suggests the history of social work
28 also echoes the development of self-theory. It begins with a 'soul-searching' of the
29 beginnings of social work in philanthropy and charitable trusts of the nineteenth
30 century, and working through the application of interventions, group work, hierarchy
31 of needs and the way that self-actualisation theory 'is primarily a challenge to
32 oneself' (Shaw, 1974: 103). The conceptualisation of the self although reflective in

1 part has a deeply ingrained telos and progressive development to an achievable
2 state of self knowledge and self-realisation. Shaw locates and positions Rogers
3 (1965), Argyris (1965) and Maslow (1954) in this self-actualising tendency that are
4 consistent with the existing structures, organisation and socialisation of the 'self'.
5 This self consists of sets of attitudes and beliefs, the filter through which experience
6 is mediated, the framework of meanings and guides for action.

7
8 Contemporary and seminal social work is informed by Coulshed and Orme's (2006)
9 work that states, professional social work practice requires that workers deploy a
10 wide-ranging repertoire of skills, underpinned by a value base that respects others',
11 'to respond to the diversity and experiences and reactions that are encountered
12 when working with fellow human beings' (Coulshed & Orme, 2006: 18). Even with
13 the recognition of the complex interaction between knowledge and process,
14 challenging notions of who produces knowledge, how it is used and what the
15 implications for practice are, they still conceive of the social worker as a self that has
16 strong echoes with an individualised self, cognisant of relationships and others, but
17 focused on the unstable and historically contingent self.

18
19 Harrison and Ruch (2007) suggest there is a heightened trend since the late 1980s
20 that places less importance on the 'self' in social work practice and education
21 although any reference to the 'self' does not appear in National Occupational
22 Standards with an attendant danger of a 'self-less' approach resorting to 'doing'
23 rather than 'being' social workers. The professional discourse and technologies at
24 work on the self in social work bring the doing self through technologies of
25 performance rather than the being self.

26
27 Social worker's use of self has been conceptualized in different ways throughout the
28 literature, there appears to be a lack of research regarding how social workers
29 describe and involve the self that they bring to their therapeutic and non-
30 therapeutic work (Reupert, 2007). In interviews about their experience of self,
31 practitioners described the self that they brought to their work as individualistic,
32 though at the same time stressed the importance of self when interacting with

1 others. Since the inception of social work social workers have noted the importance
2 of relationship in practice. More recently clinicians and other social workers have
3 developed the term 'use of self' to indicate important aspects of the professional
4 relationship. How that term is defined rests on how one conceptualizes 'self'. From
5 a relational perspective the concept of self changes from the notion of self as
6 separate and constant to self as process in interaction (Arnd-Caddigan & Pozzuto,
7 2008). This move has the positive development of a recognition of the fluidity and
8 flexibility of the self but neglects any recognition of the technologies at work
9 defining the self as an object to be manipulated and disciplined within the
10 professional practice.

11
12 Conducting case-study, narrative accounts through semi-structured interviews (Kvale
13 and Brinkmann 2009), participants in small scale research project provided a 'story
14 of self' that attempts to secure a centered and fixed notion of self. Participants
15 discussed their journey into social work to provide a narrative of their emergence
16 sense of self. As these stories materialize, the conflicting sense of self between
17 professional discourses, the fluidity of self, and the formative process of self were
18 reported. The importance of credentials and the institutional definition of 'who
19 people are' were seen as significant as were the 'maturational process' in the aging
20 process in professional practice. The time spent in practice and the recognition of
21 being seen as part of this professional group were also seen as important in peoples'
22 disclosure and construction of self. The process of entry into professional practice
23 was seen as definitive on arriving at a stable sense of self. For example, joining Post-
24 Qualifying courses present a destabilizing sense of self until one is reformed around
25 a social work informed value base and an emerging sense of self in professional
26 practice. The interviews suggest that people arrived with an individual sense of self
27 but through the process of social work training and practice their position shifts. For
28 example, one respondent suggests,

29 'In the sense that ... contrasting myself to [other professions such as
30 education] ... I was very sure that I identified myself as a social worker'. 'I felt
31 then that I was a social worker through and through, like a stick of rock'.
32

1 The relational sense of self comes from critical incidents or ‘tipping points’ where
2 individual engage in a new direction or course of action. One respondent, entering
3 teaching social work from practice suggests,

4 ‘Starting a professional doctorate, submitting an article define you and your
5 worthiness within the [professional] community ... [it] confirmed my role and
6 identity’.

7
8 Respondents also reported that in the process of ‘becoming’ a social worker it was
9 the relationships they established with fellow trainee colleagues and with
10 experienced workers that was important. For example, one respondent suggests
11 that the professional relationship she established with a social work lecturer while
12 conducting her CQSW to her Masters and to her PhD, was incredibly significant. The
13 relationship-based self, progressed and developed to become a formative moment
14 in a professional sense of self. The fascinating ‘stories of self’, in an initial case-study
15 pilot project of semi-structured interviews, will form the basis of future, ongoing
16 work.

17
18 Social workers have been identified as ‘instruments of change’ (Heydt and Sherman
19 2005). The conscious use of self is the term used by social workers to describe the
20 skill of purposefully and intentionally using ‘his or her motivation and capacity to
21 communicate and interact with others in ways that facilitate change’ (Sheafor and
22 Horejsi 2003: 69). From an American perspective, they argue conscious use of self is
23 not a new concept in social work. Various authors (Lee 1983; Leiby 1997; Jacobson
24 2001) have identified the shift in social work from its early emphasis on social reform
25 to its current emphasis on clinical practice also appears to have shifted the focus
26 from conscious use of self at multiple levels of intervention to self-awareness within
27 a one-on-one helping relationship. It has also turned the process from an
28 experiential exploration of ‘self’ to an instrument of practice. Arguably, this move
29 has moved a conflicting and multiple notion of self to a fixed, technologically
30 determined and discursively constructed objective instrument. Neuman and
31 Friedman (1997) emphasize the importance of self-awareness and conscious use of
32 self in the building of the relationship by identifying two key ingredients: self-

1 awareness through mastery of one's feelings and motivations as well as
2 understanding how one is perceived by clients. Presenting a simple and linear causal
3 connection Heydt and Sherman (2005) argue the worker's skill in this process builds
4 the relationship with client to deliver outcomes for practice. Reviewing a range of
5 teaching strategies, (role-play, visual methodologies, case-studies, videoing, self-
6 reflection), Heydt and Sherman (2005: 35) argue for conscious use of the self as a
7 'tuning one own's instrument', although they do recognise risks in self-disclosure
8 and the need for boundaries and confidentiality. Arguably, this move to the
9 instrumentality of self deepens and strengthens the technological determination of
10 self in social work.

11
12 Similarly, Jacobson (2001: 55) argues 'clinical practitioners are taught that self-
13 knowledge is vital to detecting transference, counter transference, and other
14 dynamics in the therapeutic relationship'. But, although key to therapeutic practice,
15 such efforts to 'know oneself' have not been emphasized as a foundation for non-
16 clinical social work activities, such as income maintenance work, employment
17 training, child welfare, or nutritional support. Using the 'conscious use' of the self,
18 the self is seen as a necessary precondition for becoming an instrument of change.

19
20 Miehl and Moffat (2000) suggest the social work identity is conceptualized based on
21 concepts of the self (Foucault, 1988), rather than concepts associated with ego
22 psychology. Social work students, teachers and practitioners have historically
23 attempted to gain a sense of ego mastery and control by the acquisition of theory to
24 enhance skill-based practice expertise. In so doing, they have attempted to manage
25 anxiety as a means to enhance learning. Traditional social work functions such as
26 acceptance, non-judgemental attitudes, and empathy (Biestek, 1957) have been
27 utilized to encourage practitioners to manage their feelings related to difference.
28 Miehl and Moffat (2000) argue, however, that the social work identity is enriched
29 when social workers allow their selves to be in a state of disassembly in the presence
30 of the other. When social workers experience their selves as complex and dialogical,
31 they are more open to the influence of the other and they make the case for

1 practitioners to work on a reflexive self rather than attempting to achieve ego
2 control through the management of anxiety.

3
4 So it would appear that the self in social work has moved from the self-theory of self-
5 actualisation, to a relational self constituted by others, elided from official
6 discourses, constructed as an instrument of change and presented in an anxious
7 state of disassembly. These competing and potentially conflicting notions of 'self',
8 have a significant role in social work education and the opportunity for student
9 practitioners to explore the 'self'.

11 **Social work education and experiential and reflective learning**

12 Ruch (2000) presents an argument of the self in reflective learning using a narrative,
13 auto-ethnographic approach. Ruch (2000) explores the key themes of holistic
14 approaches to learning, the significance of the self and multiple subjectivities, the
15 personal in the professional, and the importance of attending to the process and
16 content of learning. Examples of shortcomings in institutional learning environment
17 are included and drawn on to highlight the potential for more reflective approaches
18 within the social work education system. Ruch (2000) suggests that given the
19 anxiety-provoking nature of the situations student practitioners face, they need to
20 embrace reflective learning if they are to avoid becoming restrictive, routinised and
21 ritualistic in their practice. The use of the self in research in social work practice has
22 focused on the qualitative methodologies of auto/ethnography and narrative
23 approaches to understanding of reflexive practice in social work education.

24
25 The resurgent interest in the professional relationship can partly be understood as a
26 response to the neo-liberal agenda of economically driven and managerially
27 dominated practice contexts that foster a reductive perception of individuals as
28 rational consumers or commissioners of service (Harrison and Ruch 2007: 44). In the
29 current climate, with the pressures of the age of austerity, it is anticipated that
30 further reduction in any focus on the self in the relationship-based helping
31 professions will ensue. The demands of cost effectiveness, values for money, target
32 driven economically determined service evaluation will further exacerbate the

1 eliding of the subject, the reduction to a parsimonious self, and a diminished ability
2 to re-invigorate the importance of the self in helping. Alternatively, a
3 conceptualisation of a the self in a different voice (Gilligan 1982) or based on a
4 'caring relationships' (Noddings 1984) focuses on 'relational self' where the self is a
5 moral agent not detached and 'atomistic' but embedded in concrete social
6 relationships acquiring moral identity through interactions. The self is constructed
7 and maintained reflectively using expertise and experience for creating an active
8 community for decision making that is collectively accountable with engagement and
9 commitment from all and using the self as part of the process.

10
11 The centrality of emotions, 'care', communication, interpretation, dialogue, and
12 being with the 'other' provide a unity of hand, head and heart rather than a
13 detached atomistic rational agent or an anti-intellectual practitioner. The value base
14 is from a situated ethics that can attend to a 'plurality of voices' of equally valued
15 selves in conversation. As such this notion of self and the importance of
16 relationships meets the needs of social work in Powell's (2001: 67) suggestion
17 '...social work's value system is located in the classical humanist notion of a virtuous
18 society, based upon a commitment to humanity, equality and social justice, rather
19 than the vagaries of fortune that define market capitalism' and Cree (2000: 28)
20 assertion that 'social work has a long tradition of working alongside people, valuing
21 difference and having concern for social justice and inequality. These are the
22 aspects of social work that we must build on in the future wherever social work is
23 located'. A valued and relational self is part of this contributory and positive process.

24 25 **Conclusion**

26 This paper has reviewed the changing nature of social work practice and the historic
27 understanding of conceptions of the self. The application of conceptions of the self
28 to social work, social work practice and social work education suggests three
29 dominant themes that emerge in relation to the self. A North American conception
30 of the 'conscious use of the self as an instrument of change', a UK based 'use of the
31 self' and a focus on the disassembly of the self. It has been suggested that both

these conceptions carry with them the implicit difficulties of the objectifying process of instrumental rationality that distances 'social work' from the richness, diversity and insight of subjectivities, positionality, explorations of the self in a helping process through the value of experiential and reflective learning. These forms of learning need to form the platform for future work based learning and inform the curricula of all forms of social practice in social work and social care. Pedagogical experience and insight should create space for moments of a disassembled self to explore conception of the self being employed in professional practice. The social work education and practice needs to take account of the mobility of self in its engagement with the everyday and the fluidity and relational nature of the conception of the self rather than the absent or fixed current self.

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