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CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: EXPLORING THE VIEWS OF NEWLY-QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS IN STATUTORY SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: EXPLORING THE VIEWS OF NEWLY-QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS IN STATUTORY SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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Abstract

Cut to the chase

This thesis explores the ways in which newly-qualified statutory social workers (NQSWs) conceptualise social justice. Social justice is widely considered to be a central value to social work but lacks a coherent and consistent definition. The literature presents a range of conceptual variants, and while the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) for social work in England includes social justice among its requirements for social work practice, it does not explicitly define it.

Drawing on a combination of constructivism and critical realism, I treat social justice as a contestable and contested concept, but one that impacts, and is impacted by, events in world.

Fifteen NQSWs were individually interviewed (alongside five experienced practitioners) about how they understood or defines social justice, what they believed had contributed to their conceptualisation, and what their experiences of social justice in practice were like. The resultant data were thematically analysed. The way participants described their social justice conceptualisations varied. This may be because of the influence of pre-qualifying experience which is, by its very nature, individual.

The main contributions to knowledge of this thesis are threefold. The first is the approach taken to the research. The second is the finding that while participant concepts varied, their descriptions of practice experience were more cohesive. The third is the proposal of a new framework for conceptualising social justice in view of the findings; the Social Justice Tetrahedron. The thesis concludes with discussions of future research, and recommendations for the dissemination of its ideas in social work practice and education.

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This thesis is dedicated to my generous and courageous participants. Their concepts of social justice varied, their evident and profound desire to see it achieved did not.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas, and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and was granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 5 December 2016

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 80, 859.

Name: Jack Nicholls

Signature:

Date: 8th February 2021

The blacksmith and the artist
Reflect it in their art
They forge their creativity
Closer to the heart

Philosophers and ploughmen
Each must know his part
To sow a new mentality
Closer to the heart

Rush
Closer to the heart

Mr. Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Could the Prime
Minister tell us which of his policies was responsible for the defection to
Labour of Mr. Alan B'Stard?

The Prime Minister: I am not in a position to comment on Mr. B'Stard, but
I believe that the reason why we have managed for the first time in our history to
win three general elections, and why the hon. Gentleman's party has spent
a longer consecutive time sitting on the Opposition Benches than ever,
is that we have combined a strong economy, investment in public services
and social justice.

Stephen Crabb MP and Tony Blair MP
House of Commons
16th September 2006

Magicians guard an empty safe

Jim Steinmeyer

With thoughts of K
100 for 1 batting average

1. Chapter 1: Introduction to Thesis

Distant Early Warning

1.1. Introduction

This PhD thesis explores how social justice is conceptualised and understood by newly-qualified social workers in statutory social work practice. Social justice is widely considered to be a core value of social work. It is referenced or represented in international social work codes of ethics and practice, and in several quarters considered to be the/a mission or mandate of the social work profession (IASSW/IFSW 2014, BASW 2020). Despite the centrality of social justice as a term and a value in social work, there is a lack of clarity and consistency about what social justice means, how it should be defined, and what the pursuit or achievement of it looks like in social work practice (Hudson 2017, Gasker & Fischer 2014, Olson 2013, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b). The literature, both in terms of research and scholarly opinion, offers a wide array of variants and versions of social justice. There is, however, a reasonably consistent feeling that social work is, at present, challenged or impeded in the pursuit of social justice (Kam 2014, Thompson 2002, Craig 2002, Hawkins et al 2001). The term has also been used in modern political discourse in a wide range of ways, accommodating ideas across the political spectrum (Hudson 2017, Crossley 2017), in some cases applied to the point of mutual exclusivity.

This combination of deep, consistently stated importance on the one hand, and conceptual vagueness on the other, places social work in an uncertain place as regards one of its primary ethical planks. It means that the profession has, in its fundamental makeup, a value or principle that is considered ethically crucial, and commonly seen as under threat, but also very much undefined. Adherence to the principles of social justice is a requirement of social work practitioners and students in England, as set out in the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (BASW 2018). The still relatively new PCF

departs from its predecessor document by moving social justice from the preamble to the capabilities themselves. Therefore, at time of writing, the last few graduating cohorts of new social workers have been trained and assessed under a framework that has social justice as a professional capability, not just a contextualising value.

In contrast with much of the literature, which attaches particular meanings or definitions to the term with varying degrees of explicitness or justification, this thesis starts from the position that the meaning of social justice is contestable and contested, and thus uncertain. It takes a conceptual non-essentialist view of the term 'social justice' and does not assume *a priori* that one particular definition or conceptual component of social justice has automatic primacy or legitimacy over another. For example, unlike Hancock (2008), Bell et al (2015) or Olson (2007), it does not assume that anti-oppressiveness either is or it is not an automatic part of the concept of social justice. This does not mean that anti-oppressiveness is not an important social work value, or something social workers should not believe in and be concerned with. It simply means that no assumption can be made that it means the same thing as social justice, or that either is part of the meaning of the other.

1.1.1. Structure of this chapter

This introductory chapter will start by setting out the professional and wider context of the thesis, in which lies its rationale. It explains the place of social justice in the codes of practice or ethics that have bearing on social work in England. This is followed by a summary of the issues in the literature with regard to defining social justice and what social workers think it means, and a summary of the political context of how social justice has been used to serve different meanings and agendas. Having set out the professional and political situation, I give a brief account of the personal context of this thesis, and of how I arrived at this subject. The research questions themselves are then explained, and the chapter ends with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.2. The professional and political context

The conceptual uncertainty of social justice comes from, and is reflected in, three main arenas. Firstly, the professional codes that define and articulate the role and responsibilities of social workers are generally not specific in how social justice is defined, particularly the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (BASW 2018) and the professional standards of Social Work England (SWE) (2020). This is also reflected in recent announcements and statements by national and international. social work bodies. Secondly, the literature, both opinion and research, provides a wide range of definitions which are not necessarily, and certainly not automatically, cohesive with one another. Finally, the political context of the last twenty years has resulted in the term 'social justice' being bent and moulded to fit a wide range of agendas.

1.2.1. Codes of practice

Social justice has long been regarded as a central and essential value of the social work profession. It is a consistent and reliable presence in the codes, preambles and statements of values of past and present social work regulators and organisations (Social Work England (SWE) 2020), British Association of Social Workers (BASW) 2018, 2014) Health and Social Care Professions Council (2017), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IAASW) 2014, International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) 2012). The concept is however nebulous, contested and imprecisely defined in most of these documents. Codes of practice and of ethics, including those that directly govern, or have recently governed, social work practice in England, frequently set it as a core value for social work, but do not specify what they mean by it.

The IASSW/IFSW-created Global definition of social work reads as follows:

> "Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline
> That promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and
> the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of **social justice**,
> human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities
> are central to social work" (my emphasis)

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) (Topss UK Partnership 2002), which predated the Professional Capabilities Framework in England) explicitly draws its standards from the Global definition, and includes the line 'Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.' in its pre-amble. The NOS also includes a Statement of Expectations from those who use services, and carers; under 'Advocacy', they say social workers must 'challenge injustice and lack of access to services'. While both statements mention social justice in syntactic and conceptual proximity to human rights, social change, empowerment, liberation, well-being, development and social cohesion, they do not specify the conceptual relationship between social justice and any, or all, of these things.

The present regulator, Social Work England (SWE), makes one reference in its Professional Standards (2020). Section 1.6 requires social workers to 'promote social justice, helping to confront and resolve issues of inequality and inclusion'. Arguably, this sentence implies that social justice means the pursuit of equality and inclusion but does not set out how these concepts should in turn be defined, nor how the promotion, confrontation or resolution should look. As a regulatory principle, based on this language, establishing whether a practitioner has or has not fulfilled this responsibility is not straightforward.

One might argue that the meaning can be found elsewhere in the codes and to make links between social justice and, for example, fighting oppression or inequality, is straightforward. These codes, however, do not make clear links, nor establish conceptual relationships, between social justice and the other terms, which may or may not connect to it. Social justice, in the view of one practitioner or organisation, or even of most of them, might be related to anti-oppressive practice, but the nature of that relationship from a practice perspective is not clear in these provisions.

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The exceptions to this generally ambiguous approach are the IFSW Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (2012) and BASW's Code of Ethics (2014). The latter sets out five specific aspects and conceptual details of what social justice means. These are, in brief, challenging discrimination, recognising diversity, distributing resources, challenging unjust policies and practices, and working in solidarity.

While the level of detail, in comparison with other codes, is welcome, there remain two limitations. The first is that many of the terms that are used to define social justice, such as diversity, resource distribution or solidarity, are themselves contested in terms of their precise meaning and practical manifestation. Is solidarity, for example, an attitude, an approach to communication and expression, a particular set of actions such as marching, striking or campaigning, or a mixture of these? If a practitioner is limited in the extent to which they can distribute resources equitably, because of policy or funding constraints, is a verbal expression of solidarity sufficient for social justice to be enacted? The second is that BASW is not a regulator and there is no obligation for social workers in England to belong to it or to follow any of its mandates or ideals that are not also set out by formal regulators. Social Workers in England are also not directly accountable to the IFSW in the way they are to SWE requirements, or the PCF, both of which are more imprecise in their use of social justice.

1.2.1.1.   The Professional Capabilities Framework

Part of this problem is the relatively recent introduction of the social work Professional Capabilities Framework in England. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (BASW 2018), introduced in 2012 and amended in 2018, became the new framework for social workers in England, replacing the National Occupational Standards. The PCF is split into nine domains, each of which contains an array of capabilities to which social workers can be held and by which their progression and development can be assessed,

including time as a student and NQSW. As well as being arranged in horizontal domains, the PCF is also arranged in vertical levels which correspond to points of experience and progression in social work, running from point of entry to training up to strategic social worker.

For the purposes of this thesis the most relevant aspect of the PCF is its treatment of social justice. The PCF, which had a more detailed, comprehensive and holistic design than its predecessor, took social justice out of the realms of preamble and statement of intent (where the NOS housed it), and included it as part of the capabilities themselves; specifically, it is part of Domain 4: Rights and Justice. The relevant part of that domain says that newly-qualified social workers should "begin to integrate principles of and entitlements to social justice, social inclusion and equality in my analysis and practice"

That social justice now features in the body of the provisions, rather than only the preamble, is arguably a very positive step forward, but there remains no clear definition. The domain infers loose associations with anti-discrimination, rights and issues of poverty, but does not offer anything substantive by which one might clearly identify social justice. Social workers, and particularly those social workers who have trained under the PCF, are therefore required to demonstrate adherence to the principle of social justice without having a clear definition of what it is or how it can be operationalised.

1.2.1.2. Announcements and statements by professional bodies

National and international social work organisations have over the last few years taken various steps to assert a commitment or recommitment to social justice in the profession. BASW (2019) released Human Rights Guidance for practice and on the international context (Harms Smith et al, 2019a and 2019b), and the Social Work Action Network (SWAN), the constitution of which was originally agreed in 2009, commits itself to a vision of social work 'rooted in the value of social justice, which seeks to advocate alongside,

and on behalf of, carers and service users and which values.......individual relationship-based practice and also collective approaches' (SWAN 2021). The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW/ACTS) and the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) published apologies in 2019 and 2021 respectively for social work's parts in institutional abuses of indigenous Canadians/First Nations and Mother and Baby home failings. These pronouncements and publications have variously implied concepts of social justice that connect with first, second or third generation human rights, individual and collective notions of freedom, emancipation, anti-oppression and implicitly left-leaning political foundations, opposition to discriminatory system-level denial and unequal treatment, and the active creation and preservation of opportunity for social workers to raise concerns. In different ways, each contributes to the idea that social justice and/or concepts that might be associated with it are not sufficiently embedded in social work or practiced by social workers, either currently or historically. What they do not do is establish a clear definition of what social justice is, though they may contribute to understanding what it is not, particularly in terms of systemic abuse of power, a lack of respect for fundamental rights, and the notion that justice may be a casualty of social work seeking to establish itself as a fully-fledge profession.

1.2.2. Social justice in the literature

The literature features a variety of loose associations, either made explicitly or inferred, between social justice and one or more of a range of philosophical or values terms, in various combinations. These include equality, fairness, utilitarian equity, anti-discrimination, anti-oppression, rights, economic freedoms, diverse political standpoints, choice, diversity and advocacy (Kam 2014, Gasker and Fischer 2014, Chu et al 2009, Solas 2008, Hancock 2008, Hugman 2008, Thompson 2002). Different scholars offer justification for a particular model or mind-set of social justice (for example Adams 2013, Craig 2002, Thompson 2002), explore different potential variants (Gasker and Fischer 2014, Vincent 2012, Duffy 2010) or debate one another in writing (Solas (2008) and

Hugman (2008) on equality vs equity; Duffy (2010) and Ferguson (2012) on the place of economic justice in disability rights). Scrutiny however uncovers inconsistencies and a lack of clarity about the nature of social justice, and what its essential or non-negotiable features and components should be.

1.2.2.1.   Conceptual diversity in the research landscape

Alongside the opinion literature, social justice is a contested concept in social work research. Not only is there a lack of coherent, comfortable, universal definition (Olson et al 2013, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b), there is a lack of consistency even about the terms of debate governing the potential competing concepts. Points of divergence between different authors include

- o the inclusion, definition and interaction of/with equality, equity, rights, diversity and fairness in social justice
- o the role of the state, community and individual
- o the philosophical and political ideologies underpinning social justice
- o the level of practice at which social justice can, or should, be operationalised (such as systemic/macro, individual/micro)
- o the causes or manifestations of social injustice
- o the actual and/or ideal role of social workers in respect of pursuing social justice

There is scarce research literature about the translation of detailed social justice concepts applied to daily practice (O'Brien 2011a 2011b) or looking at practitioner conceptualisations; scarcer still in a UK context. Furthermore, studies that do consult social workers about their conceptualisations and/or practice experience often, though not always, take an *a priori* view of what constitutes social justice. By this, I mean that they predefine social justice as being synonymous with one or more of: equality, fairness, left-leaning politics, anti-capitalism, anti-oppression or advocacy (Bell et al 2015, Brown et al, 2015, Strier and Binyamin 2014, Buz et al 2013, Hancock 2008, Hawkins et al 2001).

While these pieces of work are very valuable to the topic and their pre-definitions are not illegitimate, they may, to use Guba and Lincoln's (2005) analogy, be asking Catholic questions of Methodist audiences, constraining the potential range and generalisability of their arguments. There are some non-essentialist exceptions, but these involve research conducted outside the UK. There appears to be no investigation of practitioner understanding/perceptions of social justice that both:

- o takes a non-essentialist perspective
- o focuses on UK practitioners

Some examples of research include:

Non-essentialist but non-UK

Olson et al (2013) facilitated focus groups exploring USA social workers' concepts of social justice. Their results indicated concepts of social justice consistent with social work values, making some distinction between equality and fairness, involving state and community. The authors note there was, however, no evidence of a clear overriding definition.

O'Brien (2011a, 2011b) surveyed New Zealand social workers' perceptions, finding that variable concepts of equality and/or fairness were used most in defining social justice, and that pursuit of social justice was largely at an individual- rather than system-level.

Morgaine (2014) used convenience and snowball sampling to recruit US practitioner focus groups to discuss their concepts of social justice. She found a range of views, but a preponderance of individual rights-based concepts, as well as concerns about political labelling and language, and moving beyond micro-level efforts

Hudson (2017) conducted open-ended survey, with 156 US PhD students, identifying a mixture of social justice definition terms, with no single term being used by 50% of respondents. Hudson claims a tendency for her participants' definitions to fit a modern US liberalist tradition, reinforcing societal norms in a way that a radical approach would perhaps not.

UK-based but essentialist

Hawkins et al (2001) compared newly-qualified and experienced social workers' frequency of use of 'social justice language', concluding that practitioners do not use much social justice language (per the authors' macro-focused definition), though NQSWs used more than experienced workers.

Stainton (2002) examined UK social workers' and clients support for a rights-based concept of social justice, by their views of direct payment delivery (also in Stainton and Boyce (2004)).

Non-UK and essentialist

Buz et al (2013) studied Turkish social work students' perspectives on a political activist, pro-welfare and anti-capitalist model of social justice, with results indicating that students believed the state should act for social justice.

Asquith & Cheers (2001) examined Australian social workers' 'moral base' in decision making, uncovering a reliance on personal values over professional values.

Hancock (2008) researched conservatively religious US social work students' concepts of a systemic (anti-)oppression model of social justice. She concluded with three groupings, distinguished through their ethical standpoints on social

oppression and preparedness to separate personal religious morality from practice.

Even if accepted uncritically in terms of their methods, these studies' findings suggest a contradiction; that while social justice is an important consideration for social workers, there is no clear indication that:

- new (or any) social workers have a clear, united view of what social justice is
- social justice in any form consistently informs practice, or is consistently viewed as viable as a pursuit in practice
- definitions between (and within) countries are consistent – therefore research from elsewhere may not reliably reflect the UK situation.

There is also little current research that explores the social justice perceptions, and more generally, the detailed values of UK newly-qualified social workers (NQSWs). Research on the NQSW experience concentrates on other aspects, including resilience and identity (Kearns and McArdle 2012; Bates et al 2010), management (Manthorpe et al 2015), career patterns (Choi et al, 2015), job satisfaction (Hussein et al 2014), practice dilemmas (Moorhead and Johnson 2010), and NQSW experience in emerging professional environments, such as social work in China (An and Chapman, 2014). Where the idea of NSQW values generally is raised in these studies, either they are not defined in detail, or a particular concept of social justice is privileged or used without interrogation.

1.2.3. The political context of social justice

There is a further contributing factor to this conceptually uncertain picture, and that is the political environment of the last few decades and the last twenty years in particular. Social justice has become a politically contested term; after a long if slightly loose association with the political left, the term has been claimed by liberals and conservatives to define and defend their agendas. In particular, the conceptual relationship between social justice and economic rationalism or capitalist systems has evolved, or at least diversified. Crossley (2017), writing of a Conservative-led government cites Lister's claim (2007), (written under a Labour government) that the question is now not about the desirability of social justice, but about the meaning and means of achievement.

1.2.3.1. From binary to buffet

Social justice was historically, and to varying degrees of explicitness, associated with greater and fairer provision of: public services and social safety nets; reduction of poverty and/or the improvement of the conditions of the poor; concern for and action in the interests of the working class and organised labour; advances in universal access to education and healthcare; progressive advances in civil rights for non-white people, LGBTQ+ people and women. Much of this was envisaged as involving a greater role for the state, epitomised in the UK through New Liberalism, the Beveridge report and then the reforms of the 1945 Labour Government.

Between the 1980s and early 1990s, social justice was often conceptualised in the political discourse as the mutually exclusive alternative to economic growth and popular capitalism, including by adherents of the latter, such as Friedrich Hayek (1974). Government could prioritise financial freedom and greater and more widespread private wealth, or it could focus on and extend social justice – not both. The political centre and centre-left, in the form first of the SDP-Liberal Alliance and then New Labour, started presenting this as a false dichotomy. Labour's Commission on Social Justice (1994,

Haddon 2012) placed its emphasis on responsibility, demanding and promoting economic success, and an intelligent welfare state with targeted policies (Crossley 2017). The socially conscious but fiscally concerned electorate were told they would not have to choose between the two. This professed ability to combine an efficient market economy and social justice (Blair 2006) was an aspect of what became known as the 'Third Way', and was accompanied by rhetoric around a rights-responsibilities contract (Travis and Sparrow, 2009), in which at least part of the social justice owed to the citizen was earned, not endowed.

1.2.3.2.   From buffet to synthesis

In the shadow of the 2008 financial crisis, and in parallel to the regulatory changes in social work, the term social justice evolved by further meiosis. The previously firm conceptual line between market economics and social justice was further relaxed, or blurred and weakened in two ways, which arguably temporarily merged. The coalition government between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats was preceded by social justice conceptual developments in both parties. The 'Orange Book' wing of the Liberal Democrats openly sought to move the party toward a classically and economically liberal position, which they claimed sat alongside social liberalism and social justice (Cable 2004, Analysis 2011). Members of this faction held senior positions in the 2010-2015 coalition government.

Modernising elements in the Conservative Party also promoted a concept of social justice compatible with centre-right outlooks (Osborne 2015, Duncan Smith (no date, © 2021)), Wallace 2015). This version of the concept was, in some ways, a departure from earlier left-leaning rhetoric, and in others, a way for the right to claim the left's language. This social justice concept placed an emphasis on employment as a self-evident good; state welfare in general as a dependency trap; charities and social enterprises as the ideal main arena of social provision, sometimes termed The Big Society (Cameron, 2009); and

support for routes to home ownership and the achievement of personal economic agency. Crossley (2017) describes this as the 'official' government concept of the time, arguably still now, based on ideas of making society function better and offering second chances through localisation, residuality (such as the 'troubled families' program) and tackling worklessness.

The conservative, or at least non-left, social justice concept has another dimension. Since 2010, the UK has been governed by a policy of austerity. This was presented as a necessary response to the financial crash of 2008, but has been often conceptualised as a choice rather than a necessity. Austerity has involved sizeable cuts to public services, residualisation and targeting of support to those seen by the government as the most disadvantaged, and a rhetoric around communities and non-statutory organisation doing more to help with social problems. This has intertwined with social justice concepts in competing ways – the right argue that social justice can be pursued despite – or even via – austerity, welfare reform and a smaller state. The left, and many social work voices, describe it in converse terms, where austerity is a cause or propagator of social injustice.

A combination of these liberal and conservative social justice concepts was also used to defend particular policy platforms enacted by the Coalition government, such as the Pupil Premium and Universal Credit. A new conceptual front in social justice was opened, which moved the concept from opposing market/capitalist ideas, to being able to exist alongside them, to now being philosophy encompassed within them. Crucially, for social work purposes, in this new use of the term social justice is conceptualised less as changing social systems to meet the needs of people, and more as helping (or coaching) people to comply better with the agendas and assumptions of social systems.

1.2.3.3.   From plural concepts to competing agendas

It is arguable that the term social justice has been used by political voices on all sides to mean whatever is contextually convenient, making a virtue of its vagueness. For the left, it is a more sellable concept than the prospect of untrammelled socialism (and, for classical liberals, social democracy). For the right, it is a moderating term to justify conservative stances, including austerity. Conversely, in the last few years the term has also been claimed by more radical and activist elements on the left (with approval and ownership) and the right (with mockery and derision); 'social justice warrior' or 'SJW' has become, respectively, a badge of honour and a pejorative rebuke, particularly on social media.

Because of all of this, social justice can potentially now mean social liberalism or communitarian self-reliance, economic radicalism or rationalism, state action (with or without the private sector) or community-based efforts, and modern progressivism to the extent of identitarianism and non-platforming. It can also be claimed by diverse, even contradictory, policy positions – social democratic investment in education via local authorities or Blairite-Goveite academification, Universal Credit or opposition to it, getting a job or a house, deficit cutting in the name of intergenerational justice; the establishment of a food bank or outrage at the need for it, rehabilitation or being harder on crime in the name of justice for the community. It is in this context, lacking a clear compass, that social workers must seek to embody and navigate social justice in keeping with the requirements of the PCF. Even if a social worker or a team has a well-fleshed out and considered social justice definition, that definition is now in competition with a plethora of rivals.

1.2.4. Personal

I wanted to include some personal context alongside the professional and political. While I do not intend to make myself into a self-orientated secondary or even tertiary focus of this thesis (Pillow 2003), the position of the researcher in a qualitative study like this is neither uninvolved nor objective, particularly when they are – I am – a partial part of the community that I am researching (Berger 2015, Ahern et al 1999, Shaw 1996).

I came to this topic through a circuitous route on which I built and evolved a particular view. This has now become a resolute instinct; an intense dislike and distrust of empty or unclear language, particularly where ethics and values are concerned. Without lapsing into autobiography, this instinct is informed by both my academic and practice background. I studied linguistics at undergraduate level, including sociolinguistics and semantics. I was struck particularly by the semiotic notion of signifier and signified – the connection between a word and its meaning being socially assigned and constructed, not inherent. I studied post-graduate level political research and, with these ideas in mind, wrote a dissertation on the relationship between liberalism and political centrism. Among other things, I learned that both terms were used in a wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory ways, often in the service of a political agenda. Essentially, anyone who wants to describe themselves as a liberal and/or a centrist (or not) would need to spell out precisely what they mean. Few do so.

When I entered social work practice, at the time of the transition from the NOS to the PCF, I was struck by the ways in which values language could be, and often was, bent and moulded to serve the meaning that the user wanted. I came to the view that, in general, social work values terms were ill-defined in practice, and that this mattered. The malleability of the term was, however, in and of itself, not what concerned me most. Banks (2014) says that regulatory codes have progressively and textually expanded on controls and sanctions of social work practitioners, but not what in terms of describing what a good

society should be. Banks's identified imbalance was reflected in my admittedly anecdotal practice experience. In case meetings, in supervision and team meetings, neither social justice nor any values terms were discussed with any frequency or depth. The exception to this was anything enforceable through legal or local authority provisions, and sentiments that responsibilised the client and reduced the onus on the state.

An ethical concept that is central to the profession but that can be turned to contrary agendas on different days causes me concern. An ethical concept central to the profession, that is so vague and ill-defined that it cannot be used for very much of substance, concerns me more. What concerns me most, however, is an ethical concept, central to our profession, that is so amorphous and intangible that it is simply not discussed at all.

An ancient Indian parable tells of six blind men who encounter an elephant. Each man feels a different part of the elephant and draws a different and erroneous conclusion based on what they experience; the man feeling the trunk believes the elephant is a snake, the one feeling the leg believes the beast is a tree, and so on. The problem with the tale is two-fold; firstly, visual impairment is no barrier to understanding what an elephant is, but insufficient time, discussion space and ability to ask questions may be. The second is that in the flawed tale, there is at least an elephant there to be identified. When thinking about social justice, newly-qualified social workers are not only being asked to identify an elephant, they are being tacitly asked to build one. It is the aim of this thesis to learn what sort of social justice elephant my participants are building, how, and what it means for them in practice.

1.3. Research questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions, by means of individual semi-structured interviews with fifteen newly-qualified social workers (NQSWs) and for contrast. five experienced social workers.

- o RQ1. How do NQSWs define and conceptualise social justice?

- o RQ2. To what extent do NQSWs ascribe their perceptions of social justice to their social work education compared with other influences?

- o RQ3. What do NQSWs perceive and experience as facilitators and barriers to pursuing social justice in their day-to-day practice?

- o RQ4. How do NQSWs' understanding, experiences and operationalisation of social justice compare to those of experienced social workers?

NQSWs are social workers at the start of their post-qualification career. Generally, the term refers to social workers who are completing their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE), which takes place in their first year of practice post-qualification (or part-time equivalent thereof). NQSW and ASYE are frequently treated as interchangeable but are not precisely synonymous. In this thesis I will refer to my participants as NQSWs, and only refer to the ASYE when specifically discussing the assessed year and its provisions and requirements. Experienced practitioners in this study are defined as qualified social workers who have been in practice for at least five years.

NQSWs working in statutory frontline practice were chosen because they were among the first cohorts to train and qualify under the then-new PCF, and who had come into and studied social work in the context of the recent political situation in the UK. This, as it pertains to social justice, was discussed in the introduction. These NQSWs qualified between 2016 and early 2019, and all were interviewed within their first year of practice. They were trained and evaluated under the auspices of the PCF, which unlike its predecessor documents makes commitment to the principles of social justice a

requirement. Part of the aims of this study is to explore the extent to which social work education and training has contributed to social justice conceptualisation, and in what way. For this reason, it is useful to limit the time period in which that education or training took place.

1.4. Thesis structure

How It Is

The thesis will be presented in seven chapters; this introduction is chapter 1.

1.4.1. Chapter 2: Thematic literature review

The literature review examines relevant research and scholarly opinion on social justice and social work, with a particular focus (in terms of the research) on the views of social work practitioners and students, on what social justice is, and their experience of seeking to practice in accordance with it.

The review is organised into four sections:

- o Diverse conceptualisations of what social justice is, and points of contestation therein
- o Perspectives on causes and manifestations of social injustice, with a focus on oppression and power disparities
- o Views of the sites and societal and structural levels at which social justice is, or should be pursued
- o Descriptions of the barriers to social workers pursuing justice

The review concludes that the concept of social justice in social work is uncertain and contested, among social workers, social work students and scholarly opinion. Furthermore, it concludes that resolving or deciding upon one aspect of a possible social justice concept does not necessarily determine another aspect; deciding, for example,

whether social justice should involve equality in some form does not automatically determine whether the focus should be economic, symbolic or both, or answer the question of whether the state or the community should be the principal agency of social justice.

1.4.2. Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter sets out the methodology and design for this thesis. It describes the epistemological outlook that underpins the study, which is a combination of constructivism and critical realism (Gergen 2015, Fleetwood 2014, 2013, Archer et al 2013, Elder-Vass 2012, Houston 2010, 2001, Bhaskar 2008, Burr 2003, Collier 1994), arguing that social justice is both a constructed concept and one that impacts, and is impacted by, more tangible aspects of the world. It sets out the design of the research, including the rationale for the choice of participants and the details of, and justification for, the design of the interview. This also includes consideration of the limitations of those methodological choices, and an explication of the ethical considerations. The chapter ends by describing the analytical process, which is a thematic analysis approach based broadly on Clarke and Braun's structure (2013).

1.4.3. Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter sets out the findings from the study. They will be presented in five themes that were delineated from the thematic analysis process, as set out in Chapter 3. These themes are

- o **Theme 1:** Social justice definitions can be grouped under a broad notion of entitlement, but nothing narrower.
- o **Theme 2:** Social work training is more of an important activating factor for social justice conceptualisation than it is a core influence.
- o **Theme 3:** Statutory social work is stuck in reactive micro-practice
- o **Theme 4:** Even micro-practice social justice is systemically impeded

- o **Theme 5:** Social justice facilitators are few in number, and either 'hard' or 'soft'

1.4.4. Chapter 5: Discussion Chapter 1: Examining the findings

This chapter discusses the findings through a constructivist and critical realist lens and seeks to explore and theorise about why the findings are as they appear to be. This is presented in four sections, each with a particular focus and argument:

- o the conceptual range of the term 'social justice' remains wide and uncertain, and cannot be easily narrowed, but only mapped it in all its complexity and variation.

- o the importance of personal experience in conceptualisation, combined with its inherent variety, is a possible explanation for this conceptual variability.

- o the place of statutory social workers' frustrated attempts to pursue social justice can be conceptualised and mapped using critical realism's layers of reality as a framework.

- o there are grounds for considering whether, despite the efforts of individual practitioners, UK statutory social work can still be justifiably seen as a social justice profession.

The chapter concludes by claiming, on the basis of the findings, that there is a case for a new framework for constructing a concept of social justice that takes account of the variabilities, contradictions and individual experiences herein described.

1.4.5. Chapter 6: Discussion Chapter 2: The Social Justice Tetrahedron

This chapter presents a model for conceptualising social justice in social work - the Social Justice Tetrahedron. The Tetrahedron seeks to address the points raised at the end of chapter 6 and give social workers a way forward in conceptualising social justice in social work. The model, quite deliberately, does not impose a definition on social workers – it provides a series of waystones establishing a common framework for the discussion of different concepts.

After explaining the rationale for the design choices of the model, it presents the four elements of the model, each of which interacts with the other three. Each element contains two or more 'meta-components', the nature and detail of which are explained in the chapter.

The four elements are:

- o Element 1: Philosophical social justice components

- o Element 2: Nature and location of barriers to social justice

- o Element 3: Role of the social worker in pursuit of social justice

- o Element 4: Reflection on influence of experiences

The chapter also anticipates some potential critiques of the model and seeks to address them.

1.4.6. Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter concludes the thesis, recapitulates the central themes and the research questions, and offers some thoughts about future directions. It starts with a summary of the study, reiteration of the findings, and the model proposed to move the situation forward. It then sets out the original contribution to knowledge of the study, which is threefold – the approach taken, the juxtaposition of the working answers to research questions 1 and 3, and the Social Justice Tetrahedron. The plans for dissemination are set out, followed by a discussion of how the tetrahedron, or at least the principles behind it, may be used in social work education, pre- and post-qualification. Recommendations for future research directions around social work practitioner conceptualisations of social justice are also provided.

The chapter, and the thesis, concludes with some thoughts about the future of social justice as a concept in social work, and why having more conversations about what social justice is or should be, matters for our profession.

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

Available Light

2.1. Part 1: Introduction

The literature review examines relevant research and scholarly opinion on social justice and social work, with a particular focus (in terms of the research) on the views of social work practitioners and students of what social justice is, and their experience of seeking to practise in accordance with it.

The review argues that the concept of social justice in social work is highly uncertain and contested in the literature. Even when two or more sources describe social justice using similar terms, the meaning of that term can vary. For example, a common theme in social justice is equality (Hudson 2017, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b, Solas 2008), but that concept of equality is not consistent throughout the literature (equality of outcome, of opportunity, of access, as diversity of treatment, as sameness of treatment). The position of the state vis-à-vis social work and social justice is another contested point, with the state being variously conceived of as a tool of justice, an obstacle to justice, and many things in between (Adams 2013, Wellbourne 2011, Craig 2002, Stainton 2002). Furthermore, it concludes that if seeking to form a concept of social justice in social work, resolving or deciding upon one aspect does not necessarily determine the form another aspect will take. Deciding, for example, whether social justice should involve equality in some form does not automatically determine whether the focus should be economic, symbolic or both, or answer the question of whether the state or the community should be the principal agency of social justice. This introduction will explain the approach taken to the literature review, the search strategy, and the chapter structure.

2.1.1. Ongoing critical approach

The chapter will work through a range of aspects of social justice in social work, as presented in the research and opinion literature. The aim of this review is to highlight and discuss the inconsistencies and points of contention in the construction of social justice. For that reason, most sections of this review, while concentrating on a particular aspect of the literature, will refer back to those discussed earlier to raise consistency issues. For example, when discussing Hancock's (2008) research on conservative religious attitudes to systemic oppression, consideration will be given to where her categories may, or may not, fit with the political perspectives of Gasker and Fischer (2014), Duffy (2010) or Clark (2006). This thread of ongoing critical comparison aims to support the main argument that the literature does not offer a consistent social justice concept for social workers to use. This is also why the review moves freely between research and opinion literature as it works through the different aspects of how social justice is defined.

The review operates, to some extent, from the perspective of someone journeying through the literature in search of a coherent concept of social justice. Without over-egging this metaphor, it is a useful tool for progressively unveiling the multiple layers of possible conceptualisation, and the ways in which these might interact. This approach allows for the presentation of issues of circularity and conceptual self-reflexivity that characterise attempts to define social justice, while still allowing for some kind of structure in the review. It will not surprise the reader, having read the introduction chapter, that the quest fails.

It is a task beyond even a doctoral thesis to review and critique, let alone cross-critique, every scholarly opinion on social justice in social work – the vagueness and malleability of the term makes it far too easy to use very widely absent clear explanation. What this review seeks to do is to illustrate the extent to which, and the multiple levels at which, social justice is contested and contestable.

Debates over the meaning and form of social justice have evolved over centuries (Reisch 2002). It could be argued that social justice is at heart a philosophical and ontological construct, with a stance, or multiple stances, on morality, goodness and the nature of being. These are addressed in the points where the literature review considers – among other things - equality, rights, fairness, politics and the role of the state and community. However while I am personally sympathetic to the argument that social justice is philosophical at root, the social work literature frequently treats it as a task, a target, a mission or an outcome – something much more practical and experiential. Indeed the first theme of the review – direction and obligation – is at once a matter of philosophy and ontology (who we are, when are we individuals or part of society) and practicality (how does justice get distributed, and to who by who). For that reason, this review cannot start with the assumption that social justice is primarily philosophical and ontological (unless we say everything is) in social work.

A systematic literature review in the traditional sense is not possible because any systemic approach would either be ludicrously expansive or prejudicial in line with what I, consciously or unconsciously, think social justice is, or what I think the limits of a standard or mainstream range of possible concepts would be.

It is most certainly arguable that a reader of this review could well see an absence of a text they view as offering a clear definition of social justice in social work. Without dismissing the said hypothetical text, it would not alter the core argument of this review, because any further source would fit at least one of the following criteria

- o It offers a simple definition of social justice that does not address every theme discussed in this review. For example, it may put forward a conceptual relationship between social justice and equality, economics and political ideas, but does not touch on the role of the state, the level of operation of social justice, or the place of law.

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- o It offers a complex and nuanced definition that does address all or most of the themes of this review, but for each of those themes one or more valid alternatives can be found in other sources.
- o It introduces a further theme that can be legitimately considered in seeking a definition of social justice in social work, alongside those acknowledged here. If so, the presence of a further theme would add to the number of possible definitional variants by a factor of however many options that theme contained. It would add further complexity to the core argument that there are many elements, each contestable and variable, that must be considered in a definition of social justice, but it would not undermine that core point.

At various points in the review, reference is made to 'points of interaction'. These are subsections of the review which consider aspects of social justice conceptualisation raised immediately beforehand and discusses whether and where they fit with other aspects mentioned up to that point. For example, after discussing the role of the state and/or the community, the ways in which these aspects do or do not cohere with political labels is considered.

The review is punctuated with tables summarising the different aspects – conceptual options, one might call them – of social justice conceptualisation expressed in the literature. As the conceptual options grow through the review, the tables are placed a-top one another. It is important to note that horizontal positioning on one row of the table bears no implied connection to horizontal positioning on another. In the neutral example below, the content of box A in table 1 has no particular affiliation or disaffiliation with box A in table 2.

Figure 1: Social justice conceptual variants - example table

[Table 1]		
[A]	**[B]**	**[C]**
[Table 2]		
[A]	**[B]**	**[C]**

2.1.2. Search Strategy

The search strategy used in the construction of this review involved a mixture of search terms ('social work' and 'social justice', and other combinations thereof, using 'AND' Boolean searches and 'social work' as a subject criterion when the search parameters permitted), and snowballing, sometimes into sources that were not specifically focused on social work, such as Rawls, but whose concepts were drawn on by social work scholars in their conceptualisations.

This resulted in a large number of sources, but also prevented the exclusion of articles that might have been relevant to the thesis but which would have been passed over by a more semantically stringent search. The articles' abstracts were skim read for explicit reference to social justice, and those that used it (even in an uninterrogated way) were read fully. If articles referenced other sources, particularly of research, then they were searched for. The snowballing-by-reference approach served to balance out the prospect of missing relevant work from the search term strategy. It is the nature of the subject, and part of the rationale for this thesis, that the concept of social justice is treated variably, interrogated at different levels, and in differing amounts of detail and assumption in the literature.

2.1.3. Chapter structure

The review is organised into four sections:

- o section 1 covers diverse conceptualisations of what social justice is, or should mean in the literature, and points of contestation and uncertainty therein

- o section 2 discusses perspectives on causes and manifestations of social injustice in the literature, with a focus on oppressive power disparities

- o section 3 considers different conceptualisations of how and where social justice should be operationalised; what the primary agency should be, and the societal level at which social justice is, or should be, pursued

- o section 4 considers the barriers to social workers pursuing justice, and proposed solutions

Each section refers to points of possible overlap or possible contradiction within itself and with other sections, to build up and present the complex and uncertain picture of social justice in social work literature.

2.2. Section 1: Philosophical components and priorities in social justice concepts
Spindrift

2.2.1. Introduction

This section of the review considers the philosophical concepts and priorities of social justice concepts from the literature, of which there are numerous variants on a range of fronts. Some clarification of the use of terms is appropriate; 'philosophical components' refers to any claim that social justice involves, equates to, requires or is connected with a particular ethical or philosophical notion. Examples include claims that social justice is related to equality, freedom, socialism or economic redistribution. 'Philosophical priorities' refers to the content of any claim that asserts that one philosophical component is more important than another; for example, that individual self-determination takes precedence over collective good, or vice-versa. 'Obligations' refer to claims made of a social justice concept that suggests something due to one person or institution from another. A wide range of components, priorities and obligations are found in the literature, singly and in combined forms. How they relate to one another is uncertain and worthy of exploration.

2.2.2. Structures and obligations

Before considering the possible conceptual contents or priorities of social justice, such as equality or participation, attention should be given to the broader structural options for justice, and the directions in which justice obligations should flow.

2.2.2.1. Legal, commutative, distributional and relational justice

One way of typologising social justice in the literature is by dividing it into legal, commutative and distributive justice. These are widely cited (for example, Colton 2002, Reichert 2001, Swenson 1998) and are defined concisely by van Soest (1995) in the Encyclopaedia of Social Work. These are differentiated on the basis of obligation

directions - of who owes justice to whom. Legal justice is defined as the justice owed by individuals to society. Commutative justice is rooted in civil obligations - to what citizens owe one another. These two forms of justice can co-exist in a social justice concept, but decisions must be made about which obligations are owed to society, possibly enumerated in law, and which are owed more horizontally, one citizen to another.

Distributive justice is defined in two main ways, which could comfortably overlap, but may not always. The definition of distributive justice that is the third part of van Soest's (1995) triad, inverts the legal version and is concerned with what the society owes the individual. It, too, can coexist with the legal and commutative models, but yet further distinctions must be made about allocating specific issues and provisions to the different obligation directions. This set of justice concepts raises questions even before other typologies are considered; when, for example, are you an individual and when a member of society, and is society the same as the state?

2.2.2.2. Distributive and relational justice

There are other ways of differentiating between variants of social justice. Vincent (2012) surveyed US social work research faculty members, exploring their concepts of social justice. He divided his participants' responses into distributive justice, relational justice and Sen's theory (otherwise known as capabilities approach (Sen 2009)). The third of these will be returned to later in the review – for now we will deal with Vincent's first two varieties.

Distributive justice as used by Vincent (2012) refers to Rawls' concept, regarding the just allocation goods, resources, opportunities or access. Rawls' (1972) view is that a just society is one in which goods and opportunities should be equally distributed and equally available except where inequality in the distribution is to the advantage of those with the least access. Rawls' much-referenced model, built on this concept, is the Veil of

Ignorance, which posits that if a group of people were designing a society with no knowledge of their own place in it in terms of allocation of goods or social hierarchy, they would design a just society in terms of social provision and opportunity.

Distributive justice, in this sense, is contrasted with relational justice. The focus of relational justice is on how people are treated by institutions, society and one another, which Vincent (2012) and others base on Young (1990). Young advocates that justice requires concern with issues of oppression, of imbalance in group access to resources and opportunities, and with balancing weighing community and individual rights against one another. It requires a structural critique of the existing distribution of rights that examines the systemic inequalities between groups and starts with concepts of dominance and oppression (Vincent 2012, Young 1990).

In the simplest terms, it could be claimed that if distributive justice is concerned with 'what people get', relational justice is concerned with 'how they are treated', though there may be frequent interaction between these ideas, for example when thinking about economic inequity. It is perfectly possible to have a justice concept concerned with both the distribution of goods and opportunities and the treatment of people, groups and institutions by one another. However (and this will be a common refrain in this review when examining typologies of justice and seeking a cohesive concept) decisions would need to be made about which justice issues fall within which justice categories. Let us assume a justice concept based on distribution in the van Soest (1995) sense; what is owed to individuals by society. The question can be asked whether it should also be distributive in the Vincent sense (concerned with questions about who receives what in terms of goods, rights and opportunities) or relational (and concerned with the nature and fairness of relationships between individuals and institutions). Is, for example, class discrimination an issue of resource distribution or treatment of people and groups?

Potentially it may be both, but if so, the next question to ask is what elements of class discrimination are addressed distributively, and which relationally.

When considering these definitional distinctions, a complication arises about how social justice is defined. Is our social justice concept going to be concerned with the allocation of things, the treatment of people, or both? Once that is decided, is it a matter for legal obligations owed to society, commutative obligations that we owe to one another, or distributive obligations (in the first sense) that society owes us? If we assume the last of these, and we accept Vincent's (2012) participants' definition of relational justice, we must still ask whether society at-large should be relied upon as a suitable agent of social justice. Directions and obligations are also further complicated when other ways of typologising social justice at a basic level are considered, including the place of rights, and the universality of justice provision.

2.2.2.3. Universal and situational justice

A further distinction exists between social justice concepts that are universalist, and those that are situational or conditional. Universal justice, as the name suggests, applies to all people, at all times, in all contexts. By definition there is no acceptance criteria or qualification, of age, nationhood, wealth or anything else – you are entitled to receipt of social justice, and social justice must apply to all. Rhetorically, there is a degree of preference for universality in much of the literature, or at least against exclusionary particularism between groups (Duffy 2010, Goldson 2002) but it is ill-defined and conceptually tricky when placed alongside other ideas.

Situational or contextual justice concepts are more nuanced and qualified; your entitlements and, potentially, your obligations are dependent on criteria. This may include your needs, your legal status, your financial standing, your identity, your power (or lack thereof), or your previous actions, determining your degree of deserving or merit.

Consider sick pay as a basic example of justice in action. Depending on how it is conceptualised in the terms above, sick pay entitlement may be based on

- o Your status as a citizen of a polity, or simply as a human being

- o Your financial status and need, and that of your family

- o Your level of illness

- o The amount of time you are off work

- o The amount of time you have worked for your employer

The first of these is conceivably universal, but the others are all, in different ways, situationally or contextually dependent, even contractarian. Determining sick pay entitlement by need, and determining it by employment record, may speak to very different philosophical priorities (of which more later) but both are situationally dependent (Reisch 2002). Some sources describe social justice in terms of universal entitlements with respect to basic needs (Hudson 2017, Bell et al 2015) – this notion invites a degree of situationism; if there is a universal and just entitlement to basic needs, then there are other needs or wants that are not awarded or distributed universally. These may be culturally defined (Morgaine 2014) or allocated by utilitarian concerns (Hugman 2008).

2.2.2.4.   Rights, redress, reward

One more point to consider regarding justice obligations in the literature is whether they are based on rights, redress or reward. These are again not necessarily mutually exclusive, but may be basically defined as follows:

- o **Rights (possibly including human rights):** Social justice is based upon the fulfilment and respect of the universal or conditional rights held by an individual, group or institution. Justice is achieved when those rights are protected and fulfilled. (Hudson 2017, Morgaine 2014, Vincent 2012, Murdach 2011, Duffy 2010, all practice codes referenced in chapter 1)

- o **Redress:** Social justice is based upon the repair of inadequate provision and/or reparation for unjust arrangements and situations. Justice is achieved when unjust situations are compensated for and improved (Vincent 2012, Reisch 2002, Rawls 1972).

- o **Reward:** Social justice is based on the just and proper allocation of deserved provision, opportunity or treatment. Justice is achieved when what is deserved occurs. (Vincent 2012, Reisch 2002).

One could, of course, have a social justice concept that includes all of these; a person/group has rights, they are rewarded under the terms of those rights, and redress is owed or sought when those rights are unfulfilled and/or insufficient. However, for such a concept to be constructed, decisions would have to be made, not only about what these rights are, but what both sufficient and insufficient fulfilment might look like.

2.2.3. Points of conceptual interaction: structures and obligations

How the different options for obligation and structure fit with one another is not clear. Conceptual uncertainties about how the legal-commutative-distributiontypology (van Soest 1995) intersects with the distributive-relational dichotomy (Vincent 2012) were considered above. There is also the question of how the universal-or-contractarian justice question coheres with issues of rights, redress and reward.

2.2.3.1. Justice as rights – universal or situational?

Some scholars' conceptualisations of social justice sit in, or alongside, universal or human rights, but with various levels of clarity and detail, as to the nature of that relationship. Chu et al (2009) for example, regard social work as a distinct profession because of its concern with fairness, equality, human rights and social justice. Murdach (2011) suggests social workers should push for a human rights-based approach, linking social justice work with human rights and describing the latter as freedom for all in a

variety of areas**.** The issue with such perspectives is the relative vagueness with which they use one or more terms, lacking a conceptual linchpin upon which to root their concepts. Statements like this implicitly suggest that social justice is related to these other concepts, including human rights, but not necessarily synonymously, or with any suggestion of conceptual hierarchy or subordination. Is, for example, human rights the same as social justice, or a subset or prerequisite of social justice (or vice-versa)?

A further issue with imprecise connections between rights and social justice is that the universality or situationism of the rights in question is often unclear, as is the extent to which the rights are contractual and can therefore be lost or reduced under particular circumstances. Reisch (2002) asserts that social justice becomes associated with social contracts, mutual rights and obligations, questions of liberty versus equality, and contribution versus distribution. Therefore, says Reisch (2002), the West needs a rationale for fair distribution accounting for contractual forms of individual contribution. As an example of contractarian justice, Reisch cites Hobbes' (2006) social contract, in which certain freedoms and resources are sacrificed by the individual in exchange for social protections from the state. A basic social contract could be (in Vincent's terms) distributionist, relational or a blend, codifying the terms of what is owed to whom by whom. However, contractarian approaches are neither necessarily separate or concurrent with a universalist view of social justice or rights. A right to justice may be universal within the terms of the contract but may also be wholly dependent on a reciprocal arrangement, also depending on the terms.

In his review of the development of justice concepts, Reisch (2002) offers examples of points in history when justice was contractarian, earned on merit, or even formalised as universal but within group or class, in a way that most would now would find draconian or discriminatory. This shows the potential vagueness of both a rights-based and a reward-based social justice structure. The universality or non-universality is in the eye of the

beholder if not formalised further, and a social contract is not always one entered into with an equal stake. Edwardian domestic servitude was a contract, but one entered into – perhaps better phrased as imposed – without parity between contractees.

2.2.4. Summary

As set out in the table below, the structures and obligations of social justice can vary, and combine in varied ways.

Figure 2: Social justice conceptual variants – 4-facet version

Typologies of social justice obligations		
Legal	Commutative	Distributive (I)
Relational	Distributive (II)	
Universal	Situational/conditional	
Rights-based	Redress-based	Reward-based

The situation is complicated further by considering, as the next sub-section does, other philosophical component options.

2.2.5. Philosophical constituent parts of social justice

A wide range of ethical and philosophical terms are used in the literature defining social justice. Different concepts appear to articulate, intentionally or otherwise, diverse priorities. These include equality (in different forms), equity, fairness, economic and non-economic justice, participation and citizenship, political justice labels and capabilities.

2.2.5.1. Equality and equity

A frequent conceptual accompaniment to, or component of, social justice is equality. This variously includes equality of treatment (O'Brien 2011a, 2011b, Craig 2002, Sheppard 2002), equality of outcome (Craig, 2002; Solas, 2008), and equality of opportunity (O'Brien 2011a, 2011b), and different sources make different kinds of associations – and

dissociations – between equality and fairness, and between equality and equity. (Hudson 2017, Morgaine 2014, Vincent 2012, Solas 2008, Hugman 2008). Hudson (2017), whose participants were surveyed for their concepts of social justice, found no given term was used by more than half, though equality and inequality were used with the greatest frequency (40.4%). These conceptual variations require critical exploration.

A particular point of debate concerns whether the goal of social justice, particularly in the hands of social workers, should be to push for an equality based on radical egalitarianism, or to pursue practical and achievable equity. The former argument says that social work should pursue much greater equality for everyone, rather than limiting itself to the reduction or mitigation of poverty, or to goals that are simply 'good enough'. An interesting debate on the question of whether social work, in its pursuit of social justice, should prioritise egalitarian equality over equity is captured by an exchange of articles between Solas (2008), who advocates radical egalitarianism, and Hugman (2008), who advances equity.

Solas criticises those who he said believe poverty is bad but inequality not unjust, citing Donisson (1991) in saying that society needs equality in power distribution and living standards, and saying that social work needs a social justice concept that sees inequality as both unacceptable and avoidable. The equity argument by contrast claims that in a world, and a practice context, of finite resources and opportunity, the better course is a social justice concept where equity is sought. In this latter concept, near-complete equality is not sought for its own moral sake; the goal is to provide and maintain a good level of opportunity and means for everyone (Hugman 2008). This argument is seen as utilitarian by both supporters, who envisage it as doing the most good with the resources available, and opponents, who see it as insufficiently radical, redistributive or critical. Another conceptual variation within social justice as equality, or as a component or goal of social justice, is between 'equality as sameness' and 'equality as diversity'. One of the

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major pieces of research that conceptually examines the overlap and/or these two equality concepts is O'Brien (2011a, 2011b), who conducted survey research on social workers' understandings of social justice in practice. O'Brien differentiates in his participants' responses between 'equality as diversity', and 'equality as sameness'. Equality as diversity incorporates differences between people, in which the responsibility takes the form of compensating for those differences, to prevent disadvantage. Equality as sameness', by contrast, is the concept of equality that operates on the basis of treating people the same, largely irrespective of individual difference (O'Brien 2011a, 2011b).

Some voices take issue with the idea of equality as sameness. Ife (2008) warns of confusion of equality with sameness, warning of a danger of excluding those who do not fit the single modern ideal, unintentionally treating them unequally even while treating them 'the same'. Ife (2008) says that post-enlightenment modernity is a poor context for social work, and partly for this reason, the profession needs to think in terms of different, but equal. O'Brien (2011a, 2011b) also raises the concept of social justice as equal access, achieved via the navigation of unfair criteria. The goal here is the pursuit of social justice by social workers in the form of improvement of client access, to provide help while operating in a system that does not provide equal access to welfare and benefit. There is no automatic or intrinsic association between two or more of these ideas of social justice as equality.

2.2.5.2. Equality and fairness

Social justice is also defined as the seeking or preserving of fairness. Fairness is described in various ways in the literature, and referred to in terms of both process and outcome. Of particular note are the ways in which different sources do, or do not, treat equality and fairness as similar or synonymous (Vincent 2012, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b, Craig 2002).

There is a question mark over the extent to which equality, equity and fairness mean the same thing with respect to social justice – Vincent's (2012) participants offer all three in their definitions, yet the conceptual content of the terms themselves are keenly debated by, for example, Solas (2008) and Hugman (2008). Multiple studies and opinion pieces on social justice in social work refer to fairness, but in many cases, they do not explicitly define or explain where it does, or does not overlap with equality (or equity). In his study of practitioner views, O'Brien (2011a, 2011b) found that 'equality' and 'fairness' were the terms used most frequently in participants' definitions of social justice, with 77 participants using equality in their definition of social justice, and 23 using fairness. 24 more 'linked both terms together'. 61 other participants also used 'advocacy', 'access', 'discrimination', 'rights', well-being and 'respect' in their definitions, though O'Brien (2011a) states these were not explicitly linked with equality and/or fairness, but notes that this does not mean that 'equality' and 'fairness' were not part of their thinking about social justice" (2011a, p.147). Hudson (2017) and Morgaine (2014) found similar uncertainties about how equality and fairness were defined, and whether they were similar/distinct.

Some concepts of fairness in social justice differ from equality. Hugman (2008), who considers equity to be a desirable aim, arguing that it is the better justice goal in societies with finite resources. Olson et al's (2013) participants, when conceptualising social justice, initially listed fairness, equality, equal opportunity and equal access to resources (such as health care), then progressed to including freedom, advocacy, human rights, social responsibility and civil liberty. Fairness was not consistently considered the same as equality, and some situations could, in their view, be considered equal, but not fair, because of deficits of opportunity. Participants mentioned treating people differently to achieve fairness of opportunity, which could link to O'Brien's (2011a, 2011b) notion of equality as diversity, and considered that everyone is entitled to a decent standard of living and well-being.

2.2.5.3. Economic and non-economic justice

Scholarly sources have different takes on the extent to which economic matters, and financial inequity or poverty, interact with social justice concepts. Some consider correcting issues of material inequality, a lack of financial resources, or the impact of poverty to be a major priority for any social justice concept. For them, social justice must be concerned with reducing material and resource inequalities in some form, although there is variance in the ways that they conceptualise the appropriate action.

A consistent, if not universal trend in social work literature, is the critical view that social justice cannot sit comfortably alongside market economics and capitalism, certainly in their more aggressive forms, and that some kind of material redress or redistribution is required to change the current system (Kam 2014, Thompson 2002). Murdach (2011) argues that social justice is, or needs to be, distributional and material; that it is insufficient to be just symbolic. Johnson (2002), writing on older people's care, asserts that charging for care for older people is not compatible with social justice. Craig (2002) defines social justice as having equal rights to meet basic need, which necessarily includes material or financial aspects, and Kam (2014) adds an economic class dimension to the justice concept, asserting that social work is supposed to be for the poor and for the prioritisation of disadvantaged groups. Kam feels it is more and more being focused on middle-class clients.

Others place the focus on justice issues other than the economic, suggesting that social or identity-based discrimination is the greater problem, and therefore should be the greater concern. Sheppard (2002) states that in mental health, a material concept of social justice is insufficient, and it must also be symbolic to address the unequal social status of different social groups. Duffy (2010), who critiques social justice as a concept that, in his view does not include the disabled, claims that oppression on the grounds of diversity is worse than capitalist oppression. Duffy's argument is that social injustice is

related to social difference, but that an economic understanding of this difference is insufficient. Duffy, after raising what he considers to be a passive exclusion of disabled people from the social justice discourse, offers a model of social justice based on a citizenship concept, supporting autonomy and dignity. He states explicitly that money is a core element of the model, thus reinforcing the idea that fiscal concerns must be addressed by social justice concepts, even though the fiscal element is not sufficient on its own.

The difference here, like all such points of distinction, should be caveated. No advocate for a material understanding of social (in)justice is necessarily minimising or dismissing the wrongness or damage of social exclusion, or vice versa. That said, Ferguson (2012), in a response to Duffy, claims that he fails to acknowledge conflicting agendas in current policy debate. Ferguson distinguishes between recognition and redistribution, claiming Duffy does not adequately address the latter. Given how definitions of social justice can be bent and shaped to serve different agendas (section 1.2.3.), it is nonetheless important to point out that the focus and priorities of different social justice concepts vary on this point, as they do on all points hitherto raised. The fact that it is still a source of debate, and that there are voices on both sides criticising what they perceive as a privileging of one form of inequality, unfairness or oppressiveness over another, suggests that the place of economic justice in social justice, and what social workers should do about it, is not resolved.

Some seek to consciously combine or reconcile economic justice and justice in other forms, touching on the emotional as well as fiscal aspects of economic injustice. Johnson (2002) problematises the material vs symbolic dichotomy for social justice, and Solas (2008), while saying that injustice between individuals needs justification, and that economic justice is not an end in itself, raises the question of what is owed to the poor in terms of their emotional experience as well as their material resources. Judd (2013) writing from a spiritual perspective, also links economic and material justice to the

emotional aspects of injustice, saying that a just society is one in which finite resources are utilised in the most efficient manner through policies that promote a sense of control for people, supporting personal freedom without fear of economic or physical calamity. Lombard and Twikirize (2014) say social justice encompasses economic justice, including the right to work, income, food, safe housing and medical care (Cowger 1989), as well as environmental justice.

Fraser (1995, 2000, 2008), drawn on favourably by the aforementioned Ferguson, opens this problem up by arguing that a focus on identity, and the associated injustices perpetrated on the basis of identity, occludes consideration of economic forms of injustice. She refers to this as a reverse Marxist analysis, in reference to the critique of Marxism frequently made that it ignores issues of identity, gender, ethnicity and other such characteristics in favour of a class-economics analysis (2000). Fraser says that both of these weightings are flawed, and that identity-based injustice - misrecognition in Fraser's terms - and unjust economic distribution are equally problematic from the perspective of trying to foster greater participatory parity and citizenship.

A fairly coherent model of economic and social justice in social work is offered by Olson (2007). In advocating a position in which social justice is defined as a mission to transform conditions that create preventable human suffering. Olson says that the purpose of social justice in social work is to illuminate the 'just world' for its clients. In doing so, and with reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Olson draws together some of theories above, placing distributive and relational justice in a coherent system. Olson says that economic justice occurs when the first two levels of Maslow's needs (physiological and safety needs) are met, conceivably paralleling with the distributive justice perspective. However, Olson says that *social* justice occurs when the next two levels (love and belonging, and self-esteem) are met, as both issues concern community provision of access to opportunity. Maslow's 5th layer occurs, says Olson, when a person has access to the

capacity to advocate for others, possibly aligning with commutative justice (van Soest 1995).

This model clearly differentiates between economic and social justice as separate layers, suggesting that social justice moves beyond the materially distributional and into something that resembles relational thinking. It sets a clear line that economic justice is necessary, but not sufficient, for social justice. The model is at first glance needs-based, and could fit a concept that is either seeking redress or applying universal expectation (or both, the latter as assigning what is deserved, the former giving it), but could also be framed in terms of rights, in that people have a right to expect that these needs should be met. It also opposes some of the minimum basic standard arguments for social justice, placing them in the category of economic justice, which might receive disagreement from some.

There are limits to this model, coherent as it is in comparison with much of the literature. Firstly, there are differing definitions of economic justice in respect of equality; the conceptual detail of the kind of equality/equity that Vincent's (2012) participants have in mind for their distributive justice, for example, is unclear. Secondly, but relatedly, Olson's model does not assign responsibility for making this justice happen – those in a position of power may believe that economic justice has been achieved/injustice avoided, while those on the receiving end of this 'justice' may feel very differently, a point that is returned to in section 3 of this review, particularly with reference to the divergent expectations of Holscher and Bazalek's (2012) refugee and host community participants.

2.2.5.4.   Participation and citizenship

Participation, inclusion and citizenship are associated with social justice in social work for some scholars, or some of their participants (Morgaine 2014, Adams 2013, Buz et al

2013, Duffy 2010, Ife 2008, Thompson 2002). The exact definition varies between any or all of: participation as the outcome of social justice; participation as the route to social justice, or as a necessary but not solitary component of it; participation as involvement in one's own dealings with social work; participation as empowerment toward, contributing to, or being heard in decisions about one's own life, needs and future; participation in one's community, or one's community being able to participate in wider-scale change. Citizenship is generally used in the sense of belonging, being able to participate in society in meaningful ways, and to have autonomy and dignity.

Some concepts of social justice are based around citizens' rights to participation and enablement, utilising rights rather than just having them. Buz et al's (2013) concept of social justice, for example, appears to be a politician-activist, welfarist, somewhat anti-capitalist and anti-oppressive concept, where rights are insufficient without addressing the structural inequalities that limit meaningful use of those rights. Duffy's (2010) concept of social justice is connected to his concept of citizenship. It includes the requirement to be morally positive, concerned with a person's control over their life, dignity, community involvement and independent living. Duffy lists the key aspects of this concept as authority, money, direction, home, support and contribution. All of this points to a concept of social justice which is part of a wider citizenship concept that has a focus on participation and autonomy. A fair society, says Duffy, is one where people treat each other with respect, with the grounds for respect defined in such a way that everyone gets sufficient support to achieve citizenship. Taken with his inclusion of money as an explicit factor in justice, this would suggest a position with both distributional and relational aspects and might cohere with the upper levels of Olson's model (2007).

Duffy's concept, which stands out as relatively well-fleshed-out amongst the literature, rests on notions of autonomy, choice, participation and meaningful freedom. It parallels with the capabilities approach, discussed later on, because it is concerned not only with

rights, but with the ability of all citizens to use their rights fully. Similarly, Ife (2008) says critically that much conventional writing on ethics and social justice frame the social worker as the ethical decider and the citizen as passive consumer and recipient of tokenistic consultation. Solas (2008), like Duffy, invites and requires citizens' participation for his justice concept. This suggests, from these authors at least, a partly commutative justice concept, but that is dependent on a degree of distribution (in the van Soest (1995) sense). They also, with van Soest's categories in mind, have uncertain, possibly moveable, implications for when we should view a person as an 'individual' and when they are part of 'society'.

2.2.6. Points of interaction: Philosophical constituents – part I

There is a wide range of ways in which one might combine the potential constituent parts in order to construct a social justice concept. Opting for a particular focus on one front does not necessarily equate to an automatic choice on another. One might, for example, decide upon an economic focus for one's social justice concept, but what that looks like, or should aspire to, will vary depending on whether the aim is equality, equity or fairness (and in what form). The same is true for a non-economic form of justice. Furthermore, if any of these six possible conceptual combinations also involve an element of participation, a view would be needed about when sufficient participation had been achieved in order to be considered just, and whether that participation was the process or the outcome.

The possible intersections of social justice-as-rights and the means by which those rights may be actually and practically used can become very complex, constructed in different ways with respect to equality/equity/fairness and economic/non-economic justice. Adams (2013), for example, considers social justice to be commensurate with economic, political and cultural freedom, and Kam (2014) adds to this, arguing that there is a global element to social justice, based around anti-exploitation, human rights and developing self-

determination for others. Stainton (2002) conceptualises social justice as a rights-based idea, where ~~to~~ the social worker is the negotiator of the client's valid claims against the state. Stainton sees a legitimate or just claims as those which encompass building capacity/autonomy, and support for (in this case) disability related needs. Each of these views has nuances of difference about how, and how clearly, they see rights met and facilitated.

This idea of 'valid claims', depending on what those claims are, arguably resonates with Hudson's (2017) concern about a social justice concept based in liberal legalism. It would appear to support the charge Solas makes when he claims that social work codes emphasise equity, rights, access and participation, omitting references to full equality, except in legal rights, and that even with changes to social structures, the focus is on what is unfair, not unequal. Solas argues for social work to be part of a radical social restructure to preserving equality in social justice more effectively, as equitability is based on concerns of utility of distribution, and this does not mean equality. This could mean an expansion of rights, or moving past rights to a different, less legalistic idea. Lombard and Twikirize (2014) however, who, like Solas, emphasise a more comprehensive and rich social justice concept, also see justice as strengthened by socio-economic rights that are legally enforceable by the poor and marginalised against the state. The sufficiency or insufficiency of a legal rights social justice concept perhaps therefore depends on the detail, breadth and useability of those rights.

2.2.7. Summary

The table overleaf summarises in broad terms the range of conceptual constituents that social justice might, or might not, be claimed to possess or be defined by. These may be combined in a wide variety of ways depending on the view of the holder of the concept. The complex picture is added to when political labels for, or when political concepts of, social justice, are considered.

Figure 3: Social justice conceptual variants – 10-facet version

Typologies of social justice obligations			
Legal	Commutative		Distributive (I)
Relational		Distributive (II)	
Universal		Situational/conditional	
Rights-based	Redress-based		Reward-based
Equality and fairness as components of social justice			
Equality of outcome	Equality of access	Equality of treatment	Equality of opportunity
Radical egalitarian equality		Pragmatic equity	
Equality as sameness		Equality as diversity	
The same as fairness	Fairness achieved through equality	Fairness as the process for seeking greater equality	Distinct from fairness
Economic and non-economic justice focus			
Economic focus of justice	Economic justice as a consequence of reducing social treatment disparities	Social treatment justice as a consequence of reducing economic injustice	Social treatment focus of justice
Participation and citizenship			
Participation and citizenship as a goal of social justice	Participation and citizenship not major social justice consideration		Participation and citizenship in process of achieving social justice

2.2.8. Political concepts of social justice

Several political and politico-philosophical concepts of social justice in social work are explicitly referenced in the literature, each expounding a different notion of what should be prioritised in the pursuit of social justice. Not infrequently, these concepts appear to use the same term (such as liberal, socialist, capitalist) in different ways and different constellations. There are also numerous instances, as with the different concepts of equality, discussed earlier, of particular political and philosophical values being associated with social justice without much interrogation. Olson et al (2013) summarise the issue neatly, saying that despite social justice being conspicuously central to the profession, it's definition is uncertain and can take in socialist and libertarian concepts,

and much in between. Craig (2002) provides a social justice idea that emphasises political rights over civil rights (in the narrow legalistic sense of the latter) and a framework of political objectives, but also suggests that how this manifests is subject to political debate.

2.2.8.1. Left and/or utilitarian concepts

There is a consistent, if sometimes vague and uninterrogated, association between social justice and the political left, in various forms. Numerous scholars either explicitly define or at least implicate social justice as being variously socialist, egalitarian, radical, progressive, liberal (in the American sense, where liberal = moderate left) or Marxist. Social justice is also frequently linked with or defined by ideas and actions, with which the left traditionally agrees: greater equality, reduced poverty, enhanced or fully realised rights for marginalised groups, class consciousness, feminist and critical race theory-informed approaches, critique of free market capitalism and economic rationalism, and opposition to spending reduction in public services generally and social work in particular. There is also a willingness to criticise governments that are ostensibly left-of-centre for being insufficiently radical or egalitarian, or overly authoritarian.

There is for some an overlap between utilitarian social justice concepts and left-leaning definitions – this overlap (or opposition to the overlap) is subtle, often more by implication. Gasker and Fischer (2014) suggest that a utilitarian concept of justice, which they differentiate from conservative and liberal-egalitarian, centres on action that leads to the greatest good for the greatest number in terms of distribution of resources. For utilitarian justice, one person's happiness counts as much as that of others, with respect to resource distribution for Gasker and Fischer's purposes, but overall social equity, rather than individual liberty or wellbeing, is the goal. This resonates with Hugman's (2008) utilitarian equity concept, which to Solas is insufficiently egalitarian and which might also be interpreted as insufficiently radical/left. It could also be seen to have a regulatory feel to

it, regulatory social work being distinct, for Thompson (2002), from his aspiration for a 'developmental' social work and a 'socialist' social justice.

The overlap or disjuncture between leftist ideas and utilitarian ideas is one of close interpretation. It is also a fine reminder that when dealing in political labels for social justice concepts, there is a need to interrogate their deeper meaning in the mind of those who put them forward. Morgaine (2014), for example, reported her American participants' concern about having social justice conflated with socialism/communism, and that right-wing voices such as Glenn Beck claimed that social justice meant forced redistribution and reducing individual property rights. Ferguson and Lavalette (2006) appear to strongly associate capitalism with bureaucracy. While this is by no means without merit, and suggests a situation for social work hampered in its pursuit of social justice by fiscally-motivated regulation, it is nevertheless worth pointing out that there can be a regulatory and, for some, oppressive quality, to the anti-capitalist left as well.

While left-wing ideas are fairly dominant, if disunited, they do not have a monopoly on social justice conceptualisation in the literature. Conservative-libertarian and classical nightwatchman-state liberal approaches are present in the literature, though, in several cases, these are mooted as intellectual exercises rather than as the personal positions of the authors.

2.2.8.2. Conservative and minimalist liberal concepts

Conservative, libertarian and minimalist liberal justice concepts are variously defined. A conservative justice concept discussed by Gasker and Fischer (2014) lionises an equal right to personal freedom rather than prioritising the maximum overall 'good'. In this concept, an inherent respect for the individual is central. Mandated distribution of resources to others is not considered to be free, therefore redistribution of goods is not socially just. Some also believe welfare encourages dependence, which is anathema to

liberty. This view of social justice aligns with Morgaine's (2014) participants' point about fear in the US of not being individual, and is comparable to Duffy's (2010) liberal concept, in which a minimalist state intervenes only in criminal law matters.

These social justice concepts are characterised by a non-interventionist state, and through individual freedom being ranked above collectivist welfare or notions of common good. Though less common, evidence also exists for socially or culturally conservative concepts of social justice, wherein social justice is conceived as imposing or defending the social status quo. This is sometimes informed by a religious standpoint (such as in the findings of Hancock (2008)), or the ideological stance that social justice should be enacted by the community and/or civic society, rather than by a state. Ferguson (2012) associates the UK Conservative Big Society idea with this form of non-state social justice but argues that it was also embodied by the previous New Labour government. It is worth saying that the idea of community-based, rather than state-imposed, social justice is also found in liberal and socialist-left concepts, albeit with different rationales.

Conservative justice concepts emphasise a variable mixture of social contribution and economically rational behaviour. Crossley (2017) describes an 'official' concept of social justice set by the UK Conservative-led (now wholly Conservative) government, wherein the priorities are making society function better, with second chances for vulnerable people, strongly refracted through a focus on worklessness. This is similar to the conservative concept that Hudson (2017) describes, with a focus on self-help, identity blindness and human capability development. The official concept, says Crossley, is sought through localisation, individualisation and service residuality (such as focusing on so-called 'troubled families'), and through presenting vulnerable people as investment opportunities.

2.2.8.3.   Liberal concepts

Some sources describe liberal social justice concepts that are distinct from conservative ones, or proffer justice concepts that fuse liberalism with more radical or progressive ideas. Hudson (2017) identifies a social justice concept in her participants' responses based on modern US liberalism, focused on legally defined rights and equality, and individual freedoms (Hudson 2017). She explicitly distinguishes this from a conservative justice concept, but argues that this liberalism reinforces white heteronormative capitalist norms, stopping short of systemic analysis of injustice or criticality of institutional power relations.

There are also some compromise or fusion positions advanced, between equalist left and freedom-based liberal justice concepts, wherein some provisions and support mechanisms are retained as social safety nets or welfare systems to support equality of opportunity, but other matters remain the purview of individual choice, preference and self-determination. These are described variously as left-liberal by Duffy (2010) and as liberal-egalitarian by Gasker and Fischer (2014). For the latter, the priority in this social justice concept is welfare (rather than liberty or resource distribution). Gasker and Fischer suggest that a liberal-egalitarian concept of justice may be the most appealing to social workers because it conceives of redistribution as a moral obligation, but in a context of equality and basic rights and opportunities.

Some political social justice concepts, with and without the liberal label, seek to blend or bridge a degree of universal provision with individual preference and, in some cases, responsibility. Duffy says of the left-liberal concept he describes, which balances welfare with individual freedom, that the degree of welfare provision available will be a point of debate. The same is true for the utilitarian-libertarian blend that Gasker and Fischer suggest is possible. Indeed all political justice concepts, whatever their stated priorities,

require clarification about where the lines and limits of the welfare, freedom, equity or capacity start and end.

2.2.9. Capabilities concept

Various sources, notably Gasker and Fischer (2014), suggest a social justice concept that is based upon, or draws from, a capabilities approach. The capabilities approach has spawned several variations, but generally comes down to the idea that people's freedom to achieve well-being in terms of terms of the capability to do and be what they value should be the main ethical and philosophical priority (Sen 2009, Nussbaum 2006, 2002). Particularity and context for the individual or situation are prioritised and supporting an ability by clients to do valuable things is more important than conforming to, or being constrained by, particular approaches. Those who support such an approach to social justice, such as Gasker and Fischer, claim it is more nuanced, and more situationally flexible than concepts based on a single philosophical priority, such as welfare or freedom. Because the capabilities approach has numerous measures for what constitutes a good life or a just situation, one may avoid the drawbacks that accompany imposing a single measure of justice on potentially multi-faceted situations (Gasker and Fischer 2014, Sen 2009, Nussbaum 2006, 2002). Arguably, it also has the virtue of having a place for both the individual, in all their distinctive specificity and uniqueness, and for welfare and opportunity-related concerns, that can be applied and extended to anyone, or any situation.

The capabilities approach is endorsed by Holscher and Bazalek (2012) in their discussion of their own qualitative research with refugees integrating into a South African community. Holscher and Bazalek (2012) assert that social workers need to understand their clients' life circumstances and promote and enhance their ability to live well. This, they say, may well require addressing structural inequalities, such as those found in the refugee research, including impaired access to private banks and official identification, as well as

opportunities that the host community, in its privileged position, did not think to make available to their new neighbours. This idea has resonance in other parts of the literature; Solas says social workers should maintain a paramount concern with difference and diversity, and work against homogenisation and hierarchy. Furthering this argument, Solas cautions against having a single measure of capability, proposing multiple measures and declaring that social justice is not achieved if any single measure is not met. Vincent (2012) also considers a capabilities perspective, saying Sen's approach differs from Rawls on the basis that justice begins with concern for individuals' capability to live as they would like, rather than with distribution, however ideal, from above. Individuals must have opportunity and capability to pursue what is most valuable in their lives.

Gasker and Fischer (2014) make the claim that social work suits a capabilities' approach because the other three ideologies that they list, (conservative, utilitarian, and liberal-egalitarian), are not suitable for all situations, and that a static definition stultifies the concept and fails to meet social justice, and possibly, social work, aims. They argue that the capabilities approach offers flexibility, but that this should sit alongside an understanding of the other three models of justice, applied flexibly to the context of specific instances of practice. This represents one of only a few authors that offer something of a properly set out concept and code for social justice; in this case, one that is cogniscient of individualist-collectivist tensions, which is conscious of different philosophical priorities and which is prepared to move between them as suits the situation.

2.2.10. Points of interaction: Philosophical constituents – part II

The capabilities approach may well support a social justice concept that bridges the gap between, or is able to move between, individual self-determination and difference, and

provision for everyone. However, in this flexibility we may also find its limitation, and need to consider how it intersects with other potential conceptual constituents of social justice.

The capabilities approach has been critiqued as both excessively moralising (and therefore problematic for concepts concerned with liberty, self-determination, certain forms of oppression and forms of both economic and non-economic justice) and as overly individualistic (thus difficult for establishing concepts that prioritise equality-as-sameness, and possibly as diversity, and universalism). It also does not have an automatically clear position in terms of van Soest's (1995) categories – as individuals, we may be owed certain things (universally or situationally) by society, but how that translates to commutative obligations to one another is not certain.

In Vincent's (2012) research, the participant responses that were considered to fit a capabilities approach included moving beyond both utilitarian and Rawlsian concepts; having a shared commitment to justice rather than just an individual commitment, a balance of equity and equality (potentially squaring the Solas-Hugman debate concerning which is the appropriate focus for social justice, but also potentially satisfying neither), and an absence of institutional and interpersonal oppression, and the spending of privilege to benefit others (perhaps coherent with Deepak et al's participants' aspirations (2015) and Olson's upper levels (2007)). These themes could all comfortably fit a general ethic of balancing individual difference of experience and need, with a level of equality and decent treatment for everyone. However, and with Gasker and Fischer's point about keeping their other three justice concepts in mind, this lack of limit could be a limit in itself. If any of the potential conceptual constituents can fit into a capabilities approach, then a philosophical or analytical compass of some sort is needed to articulate the line between individual benefit and collective good.

2.2.11.   Summary

At this point, the initial complexity of the picture begins to emerge properly. In searching the literature for a concept of social justice in social work, we find not only a range of options, but a range of option combinations. A social justice definition can potentially touch on different notions of equality, equity, fairness, economic and non-economic concerns, participation and citizenship and (reflected in the table below) a choice of, or refusal to choose between, different political constructs.

Figure 4: Social justice conceptual variants – 12-facet version

Typologies of social justice obligations			
Legal	Commutative		Distributive (I)
Relational		Distributive (II)	
Universal		Situational/conditional	
Rights-based		Redress-based	Reward-based
Equality and fairness as components of social justice			
Equality of outcome	Equality of access	Equality of treatment	Equality of opportunity
Radical egalitarian equality		Pragmatic equity	
Equality as sameness		Equality as diversity	
The same as fairness	Fairness achieved through equality	Fairness as the process for seeking greater equality	Distinct from fairness
Economic and non-economic justice focus			
Economic focus of justice	Economic justice as a consequence of reducing social treatment disparities	Social treatment justice as a consequence of reducing economic injustice	Social treatment focus of justice
Participation and citizenship			
Participation and citizenship as a goal of social justice	Participation and citizenship not major social justice consideration	Participation and citizenship in process of achieving social justice	
Political labels for social justice concepts			
Left, socialist, egalitarian	Left-liberal, liberal egalitarian	Conservative- libertarian, classical or minimalist liberal	Social or cultural conservative
Capabilities approach or Single political philosophy (flexibility to move between labels)			

The next main section of the literature review will continue this critical enquiry of social justice conceptualisation in the literature, by examining how social injustice is presented in the literature, particularly in terms of oppression.

2.3. Section 2: Concepts of causes and manifestations of social injustice
Beneath, Between, and Behind

2.3.1. Introduction

This section will discuss the way social injustice is described in the literature in terms of its causes and manifestations.

2.3.2. Social injustice in the literature

The question of how sources construct and describe social injustice, or the would-be targets of, and challenges to, the achievement of social justice, is relevant to this enquiry; indeed Morgaine (2014) reports participants finding it easier to identify social justice as the absence of social injustices. Numerous sources associate social justice with the combatting of oppression, and the promotion of, and support for, diversity and widening opportunities, particularly for marginalised or oppressed groups. Concurrently, social injustice is conceptualised and presented as the oppression or iniquitous treatment of particular groups or identities. Several pieces of research also shed some light on what might influence social workers' and others' concepts of social justice, including personal identity, educational experiences, religious beliefs and socio-economic standing. Interestingly, and concerningly, some research reveals the presence of discriminatory opinion in some quarters of social work student opinion, as a part of social justice thinking. As a caveat, the contexts in which the studies take place, and the methods they use, vary in such a way as to make strong pattern recognition somewhat challenging.

2.3.3. Social injustice as oppression and power disparity

A recurrent theme in the social justice literature is that of oppression, privilege and inter-group power disparity. Some sources near-synonymise social justice with issues around groups that are in unprivileged positions, including BAME people (minorities or people of colour in US parlance), women, LGBTQ+ people, refugees, and disabled people.

Several research sources define or describe social justice as awareness of, or action to rebalance or challenge, inter-group inequities, or at least relate social justice strongly to a pro-diversity and anti-discrimination position, particularly at the societal/structural level. This they do to various degrees of explicitness; Hudson (2017), for example, identified a predominance of what she saw as status quo US liberalism in her participants' definitions of justice. Hudson calls directly for a more radical concept, with greater focus on overcoming racial oppression, barriers and colonialism. For some it is more a case of inference or implication.

The research focuses on different populations when considering social justice as anti-oppression. Examples include pieces that focus on racial and ethnic oppressive inequities in a US college, the standing and human rights situation of women in India, structural oppression of LGBTQ+ people and female reproductive rights in conservative American areas, and the disadvantaged political and economic status of populations such as refugee communities in South Africa and social work students in Turkey. The partial reliance here on research with students, and in some cases clients, speaks to the lack of studies on this subject focused on qualified practitioners, particularly NQSWs.

Olson (2007) offers some possible theoretical grounding for this concept of social (in)justice; he claims that many communities benefit from what he calls 'T'ruth-totalising discourses' (T'ruth meaning 'Big-T truth' a la 'small-c conservatism'). These, says Olson, are social discourses not prefaced with subjectivity qualifiers like 'I believe', but presented as universally objective truths, in which a person, or group, may be among the dominators

and beneficiaries or the dominated and subjugated. As such, these T'ruths describe an unjust world that is presented as not open to alternative interpretation. Olson claims that social injustice is maintained via the repetition and propagation of these 'T'ruths', through which dominant groups retain power and oppressive status.

In some ways Olson's T'ruth concept intellectually coheres with the much-cited Rawlsian idea of the Veil of Ignorance, in that the very situation of the veil is not one that can be, or has been, enacted in modern society. In Olson's model, the distribution of rights and opportunities has been decided by those in positions of privilege, legitimising their place in social structures and hierarchies and who, in Olson's terms, will on some level, seek to preserve and repeat the 'T'ruths that serve their interests. Olson's modelling of these processes is useful but requires one to identify what form the T'truth takes. This may be highly situational and depend on the priorities of both the oppressor and oppressee.

To try to understand how social justice is conceptualised by the authors or participants in these sources, let us examine the detail of the form that the social injustice described takes, and the sources of it. It is very important to make clear that I am in no way seeking to hierarchialise oppression or claim that any of these authors are doing so. The order in which I present them should not be interpreted in that way.

2.3.4. Socially unjust structures and unjust attitudes to those structures

In all of these pieces, social injustice is presented as a mixture of oppressive structures and uninformed or ignorant attitudes about those structures. The structures in question include the state itself, either by intention or inaction, as well as prevailing cultural and/or economic structures that discriminate and limit opportunity.

In one piece, the situation presented is one of systemic oppression of LGBTQ+ people, and of women seeking reproductive rights and freedoms. Hancock (2008) studied the

attitudes of conservatively religious social work students to these groups with respect to systemic oppression. Hancock offers a concept of social justice as awareness and willingness to challenge structural oppression. She categorises students' attitudes into three groups, two of which display different forms of oppressiveness. One form is embodied by those participants who acknowledged the presence of systemic oppression, but who did not see it as particularly problematic because of their beliefs. The second form in this paper was of a different order; participants who the author categorised as recognising individual level oppression, and believing it to be unacceptable, their theological beliefs notwithstanding. These individuals were assessed as not recognising wider structural oppressive forces that were limiting or constraining rights.

The social injustice here is then potentially two-fold – either an absence of belief that such systemic factors are wrong or bad, or an inability to recognise systemic oppression at all (even when able to recognise and condemn individual discrimination). The latter of these arguably resonates with the findings of Deepak et al's (2015) study of social justice-as-diversity awareness in a US college class, specifically the finding that students of colour were keen that white students took it upon themselves to learn about structural racism and systemic oppression, and to become conscious of the ways in which they benefited, even if entirely unwantedly and unwillingly, from racist systems.

This commonality is also present in Holscher and Bazalek's (2012) research concerned with relations between a refugee population and their host community in South Africa. The host community, notwithstanding its good intentions, was reported as having one concept of need and basic life requirements for themselves, and another, more basic concept of the same for the refugees. If such a discontinuity could be seen in this situation as borne of a lack of thought, another study looking at the social justice conceptualisations of Turkish social work students describes what sounds like an oppressive system with greater intent and disregard. This study by Buz et al (2013)

concluded that their participants felt the main concomitants of being subjected to injustice were one's socio-economic status and political stance, with the strong sense that the oppression originated from the state and from neoliberal ideology. In both cases, albeit in different forms, economic low standing and diminished political status, are presented as predictors of systemic oppression and reduced opportunity and dignity.

Also working from a perspective of social (in)justice defined in terms of inter-group and societal-level oppression, Bell et al (2015) carried out research with a group of students who participated in a short study trip to India, focussed on human rights and social justice, particularly regarding gender. Participants were asked at pre- and post-trip stages about their understandings of social justice and human rights, and their view of the interaction between gender and social injustice, offering responses that associated social justice with fair distribution, equity and fairness, redress of social inequity, and advocating or lobbying for change. The participants reported that the trip enriched their understanding of gender-based oppression, and of social justice and human rights as global issues. It also reportedly helped some see gender justice issues as less 'other'/less located only in developing countries, and connect it with their own experience. Some also reported forming a stronger critique of the socially higher value placed on men and boys that they encountered.

The commonality is that, from the perspective of these sources, for social justice to occur, there needs to be both recognition of the injustice at a systemic level, and a willingness for the more powerful side of the equation to challenge and change it. The precise emphasis varies, but includes:

- o recognition of, and willingness to challenge, systemic oppression, even if in conflict with personal religious views and/or if one is an unwitting/unwilling beneficiary of the status quo.
- o moves to improve the socio- economic position of those at the less powerful end of the spectrum in question

o a better, more nuanced and more equal understanding of need, fulfilment and opportunity, particularly from the established institution, be that state or community

2.3.5. Points of interaction: Social injustice as anti-oppression and philosophical constituents

From these studies, and their commonalities, we could, in the quest for a coherent social justice concept, say that social justice means seeing and fighting oppressive systems in whatever form and context they occur. Sadly, it is not this simple - there are a considerable range of ways in which social justice as anti-oppressive action, and as a critique of power disparity, might fit with other conceptual options that have been discussed hitherto. The following subsections will explore some of these conceptual possibilities, and illustrate that conceptualising social justice as anti-oppression, while legitimate, does not resolve all other possible conceptual queries with respect to the economic/non-economic question, the issue of political labels, and to the obligations and structures of social justice.

2.3.5.1.   Interaction with economic and non-economic

The debates and distinctions between economic and symbolic social justice cannot necessarily be neatly mapped onto the concepts outlined or implied by the studies examined in this section. Using the terminology of economic and symbolic concepts of social justice sources (Murdach 2011, Wellbourne 2011, Duffy 2010, Olson 2007) it can be argued that Deepak et al (2015), Prior and Quinn (2012), Bell et al (2015), Hancock (2008) and their participants, adhere broadly to a symbolic view of justice, even for those who do not recognise types of oppression, such as some of Hancock's respondents. The question of economic disparity is nonetheless raised by Deepak et al and Bell et al, as well as by their participants, as part of their broad concept of social injustice. Buz et al's (2013) participants conversely focus in part on socio-economic status, for example, but

also on political status which may be interpreted as a form of symbolic oppression, even if not ethno-culturally based.

For Fraser (2000), misrecognition becomes status subordination when it is institutionalised rather than when it occurs at an informal level. Where the line may be drawn between these two versions of misrecognition is not clear. For example, given their potential future roles vis-a-vis state or community services, where do the more discriminatory of, say, Hancock's (2008) research participants fit? Are they simply perpetrating informal misrecognition, or will it translate to status subordination when there are enough of them, or when they work for the state?

2.3.5.2. Interaction with political concepts

These ideas arguably also interact and overlap with politically labelled social justice concepts, but not in a neat or straightforward way. Hancock (2008) considers that the ethic of individualism that she distils from her findings, could fit a classic liberal social justice approach. If so, this is an individualist nightwatchman state-type liberalism, in which homosexuality or reproductive rights, in this context, are viewed similarly to drug use in other contexts; as unwise choices that are nonetheless in the purview of the individual to make. A social liberal, or liberal-egalitarian/left-liberal perspective (Gasker and Fischer 2014, Duffy 2010) might require a greater degree of tolerance and active challenging of systemic oppression, whereas the ethic of individualism from Hancock's study debatably coheres better with Gasker and Fischer's conservative justice concept, or with Duffy's liberal concept. Similarly, the socially conservative outlook in Hancock's 'ethic of conformity' is not necessarily equivalent to the conservative justice perspective in Gasker and Fischer's (2014) paper; it is a more moralising position that mechanistically, though certainly not ideologically, feels similar to Clark's (2006) stance that social workers should have a concept of the good life and advocate for it, although the views of

Hancock's participants, that fit her ethic of conformity, clearly have very different (conservatively religious) standards to Clark's, for that good life.

None of Hancock's ethical perspectives implicitly cohere with a capabilities perspective. By contrast, Holscher and Bazalek (2012) and Duffy (2010) both conspicuously advance a capabilities approach in different contexts around oppression of particular groups (refugees and disabled people respectively). Similarly, though one might argue there are some implicit connections, there are no explicit and specific preferences in these studies for one model of equality or another, (of outcome, of opportunity, of access, equity rather than full equality etc.) only at best a general consideration that greater equality is a) desirable and b) commensurate with advancing social justice for the groups in question.

Buz at al (2013), and their participants, are consistently critical of economically liberal/neoliberal perspectives, but again it is not definite that their alternative of a more state intervention-based social justice model would fit best with one or more of Duffy's Marxist or left-liberal concept or Gasker and Fischer's utilitarian or liberal-egalitarian concept. Furthermore, a given economic view that agrees or disagrees with Buz et al and their participants does not automatically equate to any one of Hancock's three ethics of justice, which are broadly social rather than economic in purview. An individual social worker could be anti-neoliberal economically, but socially a conformist ethicist, in Hancock's terms. Conversely, they might be a cultural liberal pluralist, but in economic terms fit Solas' description of a practitioner that is moved by poverty but not inequality. This is a further example of some of the problems of applying politico-philosophical language to concepts of social justice in social work, in pursuit of a common spectrum of definitions, let alone a single definition, particularly transnationally.

2.3.5.3.   Obligations and structures

In terms of the structures and obligations of justice, many of these sources appear at first glance to have a relational justice base, concerned as they are with justice between groups and communities (Deepak et al 2015, Bell et al 2015, Holscher and Bazalek's 2012). However, in most cases, even if implicitly, questions of resource and opportunity distribution become involved in the concepts these scholars or their participants articulate.

It is also worth saying that there is no absolute and consistent commitment to a universalist concept of justice in the findings of these studies, only a strong sense that the conditions that one should fulfil to receive justice should not be based – variously - on an ethnic, gendered or socio-economic identity, leaving us with the ongoing questions of whether social work should be concerned with universalist or identity-based justice (Reisch 2007, 2008). Holscher and Bazalek (2012), whose research could be said to straddle the distributive and the relational, explicitly argue for at least a degree of situationism regarding what justice is circumstances; some of Bell's participants are situationist in their recognition of injustices between the developing and developed world. Conversely, one of the few suggestions of a universalist sentiment in the studies discussed here comes from a participant group that tended not to recognise structural oppression, specifically Hancock's (2008) 'ethic of individualism' group, who believed that all clients were deserving of respect. In terms of redress vs reward concepts, one can again find a strong implied sense of social justice as redress in these studies, but it is not always explicitly stated and, for some of Hancock's participants certainly, social justice has implications of reward for Biblical adherence rather than need or good economic behaviour.

Some broad commonalities have emerged from these studies – a general association between social justice and issues of diversity and inter-group inequity, oppression and comparative power. However, even if one were to take the view that there is a single,

perhaps nebulous, but universally graspable broad concept of social justice in social work, the findings of these studies would suggest that it is not universally shared or understood, and that it is modifiable by personal, professional or educational experience or, conversely, irremovable from religious morality. The studies explored in this section offer some interesting insights into anti-oppression-based social justice concepts. However, they include varied methodologies, designs and approaches that range from those that lack an explicit social justice definition to those that prescribe one, and then 'litmus test' it with their participants. It is also worth noting that in almost all cases, the studies that focus on a social oppression model, utilise students rather than qualified practitioners for their participants, and, to borrow and repurpose a comment from Gibson (2014), that the way in which social workers think and act as students, may be different to how they do in practice.

2.3.6. Summary

This section has sought to explain the association between social (in)justice and concepts of oppression inter-group disparity in the research, but also to set out some of the many ways in which this idea does not offer any greater conceptual clarity than the other potential conceptual components thus explored. Given these significant differences of conceptual starting point and approach, and the fact that a given perspective on oppression and social justice does not necessarily equate to (for example) a predictable political perspective or firm location with respect to structures and obligations, this literature only adds a further dimension, that of social anti-oppression, to the developing web of social justice concepts. This is reflected in the continuously expanding chart of possible conceptual constituent parts, reproduced in full overleaf with a new section representing a conceptualisation of social injustice as oppression.

Figure 5: Social justice conceptual variants – 13-facet version

Typologies of social justice obligations			
Legal	Commutative		Distributive (I)
Relational		Distributive (II)	
Universal		Situational/conditional	
Rights-based	Redress-based		Reward-based

Equality and fairness as components of social justice			
Equality of outcome	Equality of access	Equality of treatment	Equality of opportunity
Radical egalitarian equality		Pragmatic equity	
Equality as sameness		Equality as diversity	
The same as fairness	Fairness achieved through equality	Fairness as the process for seeking greater equality	Distinct from fairness

Economic and non-economic justice focus			
Economic focus of justice	Economic justice as a consequence of reducing social treatment disparities	Social treatment justice as a consequence of reducing economic injustice	Social treatment focus of justice

Participation and citizenship		
Participation and citizenship as a goal of social justice	Participation and citizenship not major social justice consideration	Participation and citizenship in process of achieving social justice

Political labels for social justice concepts			
Left, socialist, egalitarian	Left-liberal, liberal egalitarian	Conservative- libertarian, classical or minimalist liberal	Social or cultural conservative

Capabilities approach   or   Single political philosophy
(flexibility to move between labels)

Social injustice as oppression			
Particular situation not regarded as oppressive	Particular situation regarded as oppressive	Oppressive societal situation regarded as unacceptable ad a priority	Oppressive societal situation recognised, but not regarded as unacceptable/a priority

2.4. Section 3: Sites, societal and structural levels at which social justice is or should be pursued

Territories

2.4.1. Introduction

A concept of social justice in social work can draw on a wide range of philosophical concepts and positions, as discussed in the previous section. These myriad options create complex problems when trying to identify a clear and cohesive definition of social justice that social workers can adhere to and use. If one decides, when forming a social justice concept for oneself, that a particular philosophical aspect is a conceptual priority – fairness, say – then one needs to decide not only what that means, but also how it does, or does not, fit with the range of other options available. One of these further conceptual options is the question of who is responsible for pursuing or ensuring social justice, and at what level. This section will consider the views of the literature about the role of the state and the community as agents – or obstacles – to social justice, and the contested legitimacy of macro- and micro-level concepts of social justice.

2.4.2. Primary locus of social justice agency

The questions of where social justice is, or should be, operationalised, and of who has or should have responsibility for it, recur fairly frequently in the literature. This section will first explore and examine the way in which social justice is seen as the responsibility of the state and/or the community. Following that, it will examine the debate in the literature between those who argue that the pursuit of social justice is, by definition, a structural- or macro-level endeavour, and those who say that social justice can legitimately be pursued at the level of the individual worker and client.

2.4.2.1.   The state

Nominating the state as the ideal or primary agent of social justice efforts and action is not uncommon in the literature. A range of sources, coming from varied philosophical perspectives, suggest that it is, or should be, the responsibility of the state to ensure or maintain social justice, and certainly to seek to prevent social injustice. At a more detailed level, this is conceptualised in different ways, including in terms of the various conceptual options set out in section 2.2.

For some, the state is an essential part of the pursuit of social justice. Reisch (2002), in his historical overview of justice concepts, cites Hobbes' position that an external authority like the state is necessary for a just society. The state, says Hobbes, enforces laws and social norms to preserve peace and manage self-interest. The necessity (and imperfection) of the state in ensuring social justice is also supported by more modern literature - Buz et al's (2013) participants, for example, suggested that the state has a specific role with respect to welfare rights and political aspects of justice (even though they also implicated the state as an enabler of injustice). Irizarry et al (2016) draw on Margolit's view (1998) that the decent society is where institutions, including the state, do not humiliate people. Lombard and Twikirize (2014) assert that social justice in Ugandan and South African social work was strengthened by legally enforceable socio-economic rights and enforceable by the poor and marginalised against the state.

2.4.2.2.   Problems with the state

There are also criticisms of the idea of the state as the main repository of social justice, both in general terms and with regard to current realities or specific issues. First, is the inherent danger of any one institution having an exclusive hold over the concept of social justice, particularly if that institution has the reach of the state. In some sources, and related to the two previous points, the state is viewed as either an outright and intentional oppressor, or as a passive accessory to oppression, through inaction or bureaucratic

barriers. Reisch (2002) notes that the concept of the state that he discusses is arguably rooted in Westernism through the scientific revolution and the enlightenment, applying scientific discoveries to social institutions, and that this has shaped the relationship between state and welfare. If then the state-as-social justice arbiter is a western construct, it may therefore come with the flaws of a western construct; indeed Kam (2014) is critical of present western social work because of its reliance on neo-liberalism and conservative ideas. Some of Bell et al's (2015) and Morgaine's (2017) participants had similar concerns. This view implicitly suggests that other conceptualisations are therefore possible, perhaps less reliant on western models and, to borrow from Olson (2007), based around different 'T'ruths'.

The state has the potential to be an active purveyor or passive enabler of social injustice. One can conceive of the state as the ideal agent of justice and still perceive a state that is lax in fulfilling that role, as reflected in the views of some of Bell et al's (2015) and Buz et al's (2013) participants. An example of research that discusses the place of the state vis-à-vis social justice was carried out by Irizarry et al (2016), who looked at social workers in Australia working with people dealing with trauma resulting from social injustice perpetrated by official institutions, and how they conceptualised and sought social justice for their clients. A focus group of 12 experienced social justice practitioners were asked for practice wisdom about moving from interpersonal practice to seeking social justice, using an exemplar case study on social work done with female British child migrants. Their findings were analysed in part through Finn and Jacobson's (2003) Just Practice Framework, an aspect of which is power. Within that aspect, the participants said that social justice work requires them to be critical of power, that engaging with power inequalities without becoming dominant themselves is central to social work, and some of that power exercised through institutions. This suggests a complex contemporary relationship between social workers and the institutions that employ them, including the state, in terms of the pursuit of social justice as redress of state-inflicted wrongs.

Secondly, there are questions about whether the state is sufficiently competent, efficient or radical to advance various concepts of social justice. Some express scepticism about the state's efficacy or effectiveness in promoting social justice. Adams (2013) for example says that the state's role is to support egalitarianism, but expresses scepticism of the success of US state programs at furthering social justice aims, making the claim that social justice both involves and benefits the community, as opposed to the individual, state or private interest. There is also a view that the state is an outright obstacle for social work's pursuit of social justice. Wellbourne (2011) says the state erodes social work's position and its ability to pursue social justice, and that social work is limited by employer control. Thompson (2002) argues that social work, being state-mediated, is a problem for achieving change, and critics of the era of the Blair government (1997-2007/2010, depending on interpretation) point to a state that is concerned with punishment rather than benevolent support (Goldson 2002), a situation they considered antithetical to social justice. Potentially connecting with themes on inter-group inequity and oppression emergent in the previous section, Goldson (2002) is critical of New Labour's treatment of different social groups, stating that they focussed on child poverty much more than on people with learning disabilities, mental health issues or drug or alcohol issues. Such criticisms could be said to tally with Duffy's (2010) definition of unfair difference, particularly regarding disability. These are concepts of a state that prioritises some social groups over others in its dispensation of justice - ergo a state complicit in some inequity or oppression, potentially both distributive and relational. There are also reasons to be concerned about the state, and social work as an agent of the state, being the assessor of both need and right. If the state is both setting the criteria of what counts as valid need, and assessing all claims against those criteria, there is a case for saying it is marking its own homework in the distribution of aid.

Whether a social justice concept of state-as-distributor can also be utilised for justice as a mechanism of redress for injustice is debatable, considering Irizarry et al's work. The

example of contractarian justice mentioned just above can be reversed – the citizen may expect distributive justice because they have complied with legal and commutative justice, ergo an expectation of contractarian justice may be placed on the state. Injustice here is the state, or society, not meeting its responsibilities. Stainton (2002) views social justice as a matter of rights in terms of valid claims on the state, which must promote and be consistent with the claimant's autonomy, with the social worker as the negotiator of that validity. This could mean a contractarian understanding based on either reward or redress being cohesive with social work, where the role of the social worker is mediator of the allocation of the reward or redress.

Stainton is very clear that in his view it is not for the social worker to determine need – that rests with the client. However the conceptual space between rights fulfilled and needs met is potentially both small and fuzzy. Solas (2008) questions whether social justice is a question of merit, right or social control, and states that for rights to be effective, people need the opportunity to use them. Therefore, a social justice concept based wholly on rights (universal or contractarian) would be insufficient if the provision was not made for the effective use of those rights. The same is true for capabilities. If it is the role of social workers to negotiate the validity of claims, social workers may be seen as the mechanism for successful use of rights, but also the arbiter of unsuccessful attempts. As a case in point that takes in both economic and relational justice, Johnson (2002) raises the issue of charging for residential care, asserting that even if one favours a distributive model for social justice, this charging represents an intergenerational (thereby relational) unfairness. He notes too that home care costs a local authority less than residential care, and this is problematic if they (the authority) are the ones doing the assessment, determining the level of need and facilitating the care.

There is a running theme in the literature that constructs the state as the obstacle to social work being able to pursue social justice in a meaningful way, and that therefore it is an

institution that needs opposing or resisting by social workers. Thompson (2002) for example describes social workers as ideally being simultaneously in the state and against it. This opens up something of a problem of conceptual circularity, which works as follows; if social work is supposed to be an advocate for, and adherent to, social justice, then the test of that theory must be that we seek to define social justice, then measure social work's actions against it, and whether that aligns with the state's aims or not. If, however social justice is the purview and principal responsibility of the state, then for social workers to be adherents to social justice, they must work for the state – not only in terms of employment contract, but in lockstep with the state's outlook and social justice definition. If the state is failing to be a satisfactory agency of social justice, via any or all of the issues raised above, and social workers work for the state, can those social workers, notwithstanding their individual ideals, be agents of social justice?

This problem, of course, is further complicated by the presence of competing social justice concepts. A state that is pursuing a social justice concept that is legal (van Soest 1995), utilitarian or equitarian (Gasker and Fischer 2014, Hugman 2008), and rewards contributory merit rather than human need (Craig 2002, Reich 2002) will be critiqued by practitioners who favour a radical, egalitarian and distributive concept, whether the state is succeeding in its own terms or not. In such a scenario, should the state be envisaged as requiring challenge in order to become a better agent of social justice, or seen simply as entirely unsuitable for the role**?**

2.4.2.3. The community

An alternative is to site the primary responsibility for social justice in the community. Multiple sources (such as Adams 2013, Thompson 2002) suggest that the community is, or should be, distinct from the state as an equal or greater agent of social justice, based on one or both of two assertions.

The first is that a working justice concept that serves people must come from the people, or is at least more effective and/or more radical if it does. Some voices view the community as either 'a' or 'the' place where social justice can or should be sought and achieved. Adams (2013), for example, makes the claim that social justice involves and benefits the community rather than benefiting the state (which he says is ineffective at reinforcing egalitarianism), the individual or private interest. The second is that seeking of community resources is necessary for social justice because of the shortfall or inadequacy of state support. Olson et al's (2013) respondents, among others, made explicit reference to issues of state resources in the pursuit of social justice in their roles, and they claimed to need community as well as government resources. Numerous scholars and research participants exhort social workers to engage with the community, particularly those communities they see as marginalised, in the pursuit of justice. Thompson (2002) goes further, opining that social work should be seen as a social movement using community resources in seeking social justice, rather than as a wing of the state.

There is also a case for a social justice concept located principally in the community, based on social cohesion and identity and collective empowerment being a good in itself. Some identify cultural community values as an indelible part of this equation. Clark (2006), in his opposition to value-neutrality in social work, says that local community social mores mean that social work and social justice cannot be sought in a cultural vacuum, even if it was desirable to do so. Similarly, Ife (2008) suggests caution in grand justice theories that exist outside a historical/cultural vacuum, and Holscher and Bazalek (2012) actively advocate for a context-cognisant idea of social justice.

2.4.2.4. Problems with the community

It is worth making clear that the community is not well defined by almost any of the voices offering a view on the subject. The community could be categorised as a group of people

with common interests, by identity, geography or other criteria. Defining 'community' in social work literature could be a review in itself, and therefore seeking a definition to impose upon the sources covered in this review would be artificial, given that authors generally do not define it themselves. In this section then, the conceptual vagueness will be noted and accepted as an aspect of the literature, and given only this much definition: the community is not the state, and is not the individual. This lack of definition is one of the problems with conceptualising the community as the locus and main agency of social justice as action.

The next few paragraphs will argue that asserting that the community should be an/the agent or location of social justice does not automatically clarify what that means for questions of equality and fairness, of political and philosophical values, and of oppression. To use Vincent's (2012) categories, placing social justice primarily in the hands of the community raises questions about distributive equality and relational oppression or exclusion, even accidental. If financial and material resources come from the state, and communities receive different distributions from the state, then the state is still making the decisions about distribution. If, conversely, the community is responsible for creating its own social justice, then different communities starting with unequal resources may have different levels of expectation placed upon them regarding the pursuit of social justice for its members. This has precedent; Reisch (2002) points out that social justice has at various points historically been formally group or class specific rather than universal. Holscher and Bazalek's (2012) South African refugee research suggests that, at a conceptual or practical level, this is still true in some circumstances, in that the powerful are deciding what constitutes sufficient resources and justice.

A further problem of the community as the crucible of social justice emerges when we return to the issue of inter-group privilege disparity (the word 'crucible' is chosen purposefully, because here we are concerned with the community not only as the

purveyor, but also the recipient of social justice). Clarification is needed regarding the ways that a community would ensure that their justice did not exclude or oppress those who are different or marginalised, are in danger of becoming so, or who simply do not have the strength of voice to self-advocate. Reisch (2002) refers to a spectrum of justice positions, some of which have the communal perspective prioritised over the individual one.If the community is to be the principal agency or location of social justice, the question must be asked, at what point does this represent not only an alternative to state agency and resource, per Adams' (2013) position, but also a supplanting of individual agency and need?

Any community-orientated justice concept needs to articulate how, if at all, it accounts for the individual, lest the community itself become the oppressor (the same is incidentally true for state-orientated concepts). Some would argue that a social justice concept, wherein the individual is subordinated to the community, is no social justice at all, and certainly raises concerns from a relational social justice approach, from the perspective of Margolit's decent society (1998) or any concept of individual rights and freedoms. Pinkerton and Campbell (2002), suggest that social justice be pursued through a combination of the state, civil society and ideology, concerned with social relations secured by social rights (which among other things begs the question of which ideology, and which rights – both are contestable). They raise the potentially problematic dependence on local factors and culture, and warn against the oppressive potential of community work, where diversity and non-conformity are unwelcome. Pinkerton and Campbell themselves, however, raise a concept of social justice described as self-reliance, civic virtue and social cohesion, which could read as being concerned more with what the individual owes to the collective than what the collective owes the individual (either legal or commutative justice (van Soest 2006)). It could be claimed that this social cohesion model sits problematically alongside, for example, Hugman's (2008) argument that people have their own preferences for a dignified life, and that there is a risk of

ignoring human capability of people who run counter to the dominant culture. With Fraser's (2000) arguments about how institutionalised misrecognition turns into formalised status subordination in mind, it is not necessarily clear whether or at what point community-based subordination become sufficiently formalised, widespread or consequential as to have the same functional status as state-institutionalised subordination of the type Buz et al (2013) among others, discuss. Ferguson and Lavalette (2006) suggest that community-led and user-led approaches are key to an alternative paradigm for social work that resists bureaucracy and capitalism. However, truly user- or community-led provisions could still result in narrow, moralistic, responsiblising or pro-capitalist stances. It would depend on the preferences of the users or community in question. It may be - and this is not necessarily a problem in itself, or perhaps even necessarily a problem for Ferguson and Lavelette - that a community-led approach may not be wholly left-leaning, progressive or egalitarian. The implicit assumption in their writing however is that it will be, and that is a conceptual tether that other parts of the literature, such as Hancock (2008) or Bell et al (2015) do not bear out.

Almost by definition, placing social justice responsibilities within the community (or more accurately communities) means a degree of unequal distribution (at least in terms of equality as sameness (O'Brien 2011a, 2011b), certainly between communities and potentially between individuals. The latter point is not necessarily a problem, if the justice concept that is sought is equality as diversity, whereby the community responds to the different needs of its members fairly. However, the former point is not resolved easily unless the allocation of resources is proportionately the same to all communities, and the distribution within the community is decided internally. Even this arrangement only works in distributional rather than relational understandings of justice, and where a certain amount of distribution is still administered and decided by the state.

2.4.3. Points of interaction: State, community and political concepts

The politico-philosophical aspects of the community as a (or the) repository of justice, is not clear either - the reduction of state involvement in social justice and social work has been supported by both left and right in different ways. Thompson has suggested social justice can be facilitated via social reorganisation along socialist lines. If we regard the type of social movements described by Thompson (2002) as part of civil society and a partial solution to perceived negative state-control of social work, then we are at a point at which we are in partial agreement conservative small-state Big Society ideas (Ferguson 2012).

This leads on to a criticism of the idea of the community as the main locus of social justice – that, rather than being a critical and useful counterbalance to or replacement of the state in pursuit of justice, it is a mechanism for responsibilising citizens for their own welfare, either for reasons of ideology or resource cutting. This takes us into the realm a merit/reward-based commutative justice, and perhaps away from either an egalitarian and generously distributive welfarist social justice concept, or a rights-based justice where need and right are closely related. Engaging with this personal responsibility argument, Solas (2008) argues that a poor choice by a person does not justify society doing nothing about it, and he would impose unequivocal commitment to support individuals for chosen and unchosen consequences of their situation. Solas is still not in favour of infinite compensation, but says that punishing by denying compensation for poor choice does not promote responsibility, it gives incentive to deny responsibility (one of several flaws in the official social justice concept that Crossely (2017) critically describes). Even if one were to disagree with Solas and say a high degree of responsibilisation is good, one would either have to propose the universal terms of such an arrangement or say that it depends on the local social mores of the community. One of these allows little room for diversity, the other allows few guarantees of consistent equal rights.

2.4.4. Societal level: macro or micro

Alongside a range of views about the appropriate locus of social justice, there is a debate in the literature about the societal level at which it can, or should, operate. There is something of a division of opinion between those who take the view that social justice can only occur at macro-level (at the level of societal- or system-level change) and those who believe social justice can be pursued at the level of the individual as well. Some literature draws a line between individual, clinical or therapeutic interventions with an individual or family on the one side, and the act of advocating or seeking change at a systemic, social or macro-level on the other. The latter are considered social justice actions, the former, not. This distinction is important, as it categorises a whole – perhaps the predominant – aspect of social work, particularly in the UK, as mutually exclusive with social justice pursuit.

2.4.4.1. Macro-level

Some make a distinction between challenging or changing unfair structures (macro-level social justice), and helping clients adjust to unfair structures (individual-level practice). Thompson (2002) and Chu et al (2009) problematise the idea that therapeutic/one-to-one level work is connected to the pursuit of social justice; indeed it is suggested that such practice indicates a loss of social justice commitment by the profession (rather than the individual practitioner) and evidence of abandoning obligations to disenfranchised communities (Chu et al 2009, Specht and Courteny 1994). De Corte and Roose (2020) claim that social work often does not live up to challenge of changing unjust policies, merely affirming the status quo, which suggests, at least, a loose link between social justice and macro-level efforts, in aspiration if not action.

Chu et al say that social workers operate in a dual role under global standards; to both pursue social justice and to safeguard the well-being of individuals – ergo they conceive of the two activities as both worthy, but separate. They argue for what they see as a

redressing of the balance, for social workers to engage in social and political actions, improve policy and economic development and eliminate inequality. Olson (2007) conceptualises social justice as the transformation of conditions that create preventable human suffering, and Solas (2008), in his indictment of social work's lack of focus on widening equality, complains that in the current circumstances, social workers cannot directly impact causes of inequality, only draw more senior colleagues' attention to it.

Harrison et al (2016), drawing on the Council on Social Work Education advanced clinical practice competencies (2009), suggest that it is insufficient to work with individuals/communities in adjusting to injustice, and that practitioners should advocate at multiple levels, including above the individual. Harrison et al (2016) claim that micro-practice social workers made up 65% of the USA/Canada workforce, and the largest group of behavioural health workers. All of this fits with the idea that social justice is action to challenge inequality and oppression, whereas individual-level work has the lesser goal of helping people to adapt to the inequality or oppression from which they suffer.

Brown et al (2015) make a conceptual association between social justice and advocacy services. They carried out an analysis of advocacy-related resources and materials through 50 NASW (American) state websites, identifying a lack of information and resources relating to advocacy. The findings are interesting in themselves but, for the purpose of this study, what is of greater interest is the equating of a lack of information about advocacy with a deficit of social justice work. Brown et al say that social work originated as an advocating voice for the vulnerable and oppressed, to improve social conditions. Alongside this, Brown et al (2015) suggest critically that psychotherapy is the occupation of many social workers in the USA, which often means that they are receiving direct payment rather than redistributed state funding for social work. This, says Brown et al (2015), represents a shift of resources away from the vulnerable.

Hawkins et al (2001), in their examination of social justice language use by practitioners, expressed the view that the dominant discourse among the workers they interviewed more clinical/therapeutic/individualistic language. They also said the workers were focused on language concerned with interpersonal conflict, such as mediation, counselling or monitoring, rather than structural perspectives. They make a link between this predominance of individual/therapeutic practice language use, and a lack of pursuit of social justice. This link may be problematised even in terms of Hawkins et al's (2001) paper, as they associate terms such as 'advocacy' and 'discrimination' with social justice, when it is arguable that both terms can be applied to interactions between individuals as well as to efforts at a structural level. Notwithstanding this potential criticism of the nuances of language, the answers given by the participants as interpreted by Hawkins et al (2001) however at least support the notion that social workers are principally focused on micro-level practice, though the choice to associate, or not associate, this trend with social justice, is a decision of the authors.

Several pieces of research cited participants, or were carried out by researchers, who agreed with the distinction between the pursuit of social justice and practice with the individual. Some of Olson et al's (2013) respondents defined social injustice as systemic discrimination and denial of access to services caused by socio-economic factors. In terms of efforts to confront injustice, participants likened their efforts to reduce sexual violence to the building of a critical mass against racism, in that both required action beyond the level of one-to-one working. Relatedly, Irizarry et al (2016) suggest that social workers agree to embody civilised society (under Margolit's distinction (1998)), but pursuing a decent society was more difficult, because such endeavours lay outside the realm of interpersonal practice.

Some connect this critique with the socio-political context in which they perceive social work to be operating. In a commentary piece on Solas, Ife (2008) states that one cannot

have social justice in neoliberal/neoconservative times, and therefore a transformation of economic, social and political order is required. Not dissimilarly, Solas (2008) says that a utilitarian ethic in modern social work has benefit for one-to-one work with clients, but does not impact or affect structures. From this it could be inferred that a system-level change is needed for true social justice effort.

2.4.4.2.　Micro-level social justice as legitimate

Some voices do not draw such a firm line between individual action and social justice, instead claiming that individual-level, clinical or micro-level work by social workers can be part of higher-level social justice pursuit. Birkenmaier (2003) looks at a social justice educational research centre at that offers students opportunities to learn service skills and build commitment to change. An example of the kind of twin-level focus the taught by the centre is to support students in individual casework for mentally ill homeless people and in advocacy efforts with state officials for more funding for mental health services.

Birkenmaier (2003) asserts that this tension between individual work and system change has always existed, and that, starting with Jane Addams, social work has a history of both working to improve the lives of individual clients and alter social structures that sustain inequity. Birkenmaier enumerates a range of social justice activities. While the emphasis appears to be largely on macro-level efforts, Birkenmaier includes 'clinical' aspects, including engaging clients in reflection and dialogue, critical consciousness development and community involvement.

Some of Morgaine's (2014) participants said that clients saw social justice as the meeting of immediate needs, and Hudson (2017) identified what she saw as a micro-priority concern in her findings, with 'change' and 'systems' being raised by only 9% and 9.6% of her participants respectively. Kam (2014) and O'Brien (2011b) both make claims that social workers who are focused on social justice are focused on it more at the micro- than

the macro-level. While this implies that (a) some are not social justice-focused, and (b) it might be more productive/beneficial/conceptually consistent if those that were could engage with it at the macro-level, it also suggests logically that social justice can be practised, pursued and used as motivation at the level of work with individual clients, even if this is not the ideal forum.

Potentially fitting with the capabilities approach supported by Gasker and Fischer (2014), Kam (2014) suggests the social worker might be an ally for the service user, combatting oppression in the system whilst also developing capability in the service user. Kam (2014) pairs this with an assertion that social workers should employ constructionist, system-critical mentalities. This is subtly different from the 'social justice *or* individual work' position, as it implies that social justice can be done one-to-one, though ideally it should also be done at a social level. Swenson's (1998) views support this idea with the claim that clinical social work can in fact be social justice via the elimination of oppressive practice with clients and in college education. Asakura et al (2020) suggest ways of practising social justice at the micro-level through the integration of critical social theories in the conceptualising of clinical practice, engaging in transformative effortswhile navigating their professional responsibilities.

It is important to clarify that those who see social justice as an inherently macro-level pursuit do not generally diminish the value of individual-level work, they simply do not perceive it as social justice. Likewise, those who see micro-level social justice as conceptually viable, do not deny the importance, or conceptual legitimacy, of macro-level social justice efforts. Lombard and Twikirize (2014) explicitly identify what in their view are bridges between macro and micro-level forms of social justice, and Bell et al's (2015) participants suggest social justice could mean advocating for/with both individuals or groups and lobbying for change. This suggests that social work does need an individual

client focus, but that there are differences at the conceptual and critical levels about whether that is considered a legitimate part of a concept of social justice.

There are also voices who are opposed to conceptual division between individual work and societal-level action, and who conceptualise a social justice that can and should be carried out with individual clients. Multiple pieces of research identified a trend of social workers explicitly discussing individual-level acts of social justice (Irizarry 2016, Olson et al 2013, Vincent 2012, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b). Respondents to Olson et al (2013) viewed systemic efforts as important and requiring long-term strategy and community level work. An example offered was providing domestic violence education to older white male audiences, pushing the idea of seeing the person, not the condition (both coherent with anti-oppression and group-relations-based concepts of justice, and supportive of individual difference and non-judgementalism) and 'maximizing the democracy that's available' (p.32) such as targeting drug den property owners. Prior and Quinn (2012) reported similar goals, focused on both what the authors termed 'advocacy' – organised efforts to change policy, law and attitudes to create a more just society, guided by vision of political, economic and social rights - and individual action, such as standing up against derogatory comments and getting to know people from other backgrounds. Swenson (1998) argues that individual-level work with clients, in this case clinical work, is consistent with pursuit of a social justice ideal, and with associations of personal empowerment. Part of this could be said to align with the commitment of social work to work with people in the context and environment in which they live, and to work with disadvantaged people as actors in their own lives, rather than as victims, and engaging with a client's own moral framework in pursuit of change (Kam 2014, Chu et al 2009, Adams 2013, Craig 2002). These ideas might be interpreted as a nod not only to micro-level efforts, but to a capabilities perspective as articulated by Gasker and Fischer (2014). Others do not even make the distinction between the two lines of pursuit. Turner and Maschi (2015) for example, state that a feminist perspective considers a distinction

between micro- and macro-practice, or clinical and community practice, to be a false dichotomy.

2.4.4.3. Meso-level justice

Some sources touch on meso-level social justice, between individual/clinical practice and systemic change, either explicitly or allusively, but as with much else these are loosely and variably defined. If the organisations that practitioners work in or with are at the meso level, then some see it as a site of opportunity in one form or another (such as De Corte and Roose 2020) but others as a barrier (such as Solas (2008). If the community is seen as the meso-level, then those who argue for the community as the ideal agent of social justice could be seen as offering a meso-level concept of social justice action. While some stress the community's advantages as being closer to the recipients of social justice, notwithstanding the issues of social conformity addressed in section 2.4.2.4., that is a fairly geographic definition of community. If some communities are group-orientated rather than defined by physical space, or exist transnationally (both more likely and varied in the Covid-19 context), they might be seen as more micro or more macro. Thus, if considering a meso-level form of social justice operation, it is necessary to first be clear about what is and is not located in the meso-level.

2.4.5. Points of interaction: societal levels and philosophical constituents

As has been the case throughout this review, with each opinion of how social justice is conceptualised, a view of whether social justice can be/must be at the micro- and/or macro-level raises questions about how that fits with other conceptual constituent parts. If we assume that macro-level efforts fitted more or less with van Soest's (1995) distributive justice, focused on what society owes individuals, then where, for a community-minded social justice concept like that of Thompson (2002) or Adams (2013), does the macro-micro spectrum fit with commutative justice? Do those participants in Hancock's (2008) study, who either did not recognise, or were not concerned about,

oppressive structures, pose a macro-level problem for more open and diversity-conscious justice concepts, or, being individuals, a micro-level problem?

Arguing for the avoidance of universalist solutions in injustice, Fraser (2000) suggests that different forms of status subordination - and this could be applied to social justice more generally - require different forms of redress. This openness and avoidance of a prior commitment to a particular solution, is Fraser's strength but also weakness. When considering any given form of redress, or a range of different and concurrent forms of redress, the following issues from earlier points in the review would need to be addressed. Firstly, what political philosophical priority or priorities should inform the social parity that forms of redress should seek? Individual liberty, capability, socialistic welfare or something else? Secondly, who is determining what adequate redress looks like, and who is responsible for implementing it? if it is the state, that is accompanied by the issues identified in section 2.4. If it is the community, then depending on the self-identified needs of the community in question but could still result in a focus on economic issues to the exclusion of identity issues, or vice-versa. It could also result in the kind of segregation that Fraser aptly fears. Thirdly, social workers in situ, particularly state employed, may struggle to address either identity or economic base justice because of the limits on the reach of their practise (a subject that will be discussed in section 2.6 below).

Where the macro-micro question fits with political notions of social justice is also both interesting and uncertain. Thompson (2002) sees social work as being either developmental/ emancipatory or else as regulatory, the latter fitting with Ferguson and Lavalette's (2006) concern about social work focused on narrow pragmatism and behaviour management. He puts forward an argument that social workers need to have a twin focus in their practice, focusing on both practical human care for what he calls victims of liberal-capitalism, and restructuring society via collectivist gradual action on socialist lines. In some ways this represents a balance between assisting with the

situation as it is and seeking to change it at a social-structural level. Thompson's use of 'developmental' 'emancipatory' and 'socialist' would seem to fit Hudson's (2017) idea of radical social justice, which is set in opposition to American liberalism, legally defined entitlement and reinforcing dominant norms.

This twin-mission idea is slightly distinct from the 'fusion' idea of Gasker and Fischer's (2014) liberal-egalitarian model, and other combination concepts. The former seeks to manage neo-liberalism on one level, while combatting it on another. The latter seeks to incorporate the freedoms of liberal thought into a fairer, more equal model. A liberal-egalitarian approach could therefore be seen as a mid-point between the competing demands of freedom/individualism and equality/common good but would still require clarity as to how that mid-point is reached. Duffy (2010) refers to a similar concept as a liberal-left social justice model (presented as a mid-point between the smaller-state 'Liberal' and the more statist 'Marxist' concepts), defining it as being based on free choice in a context of social-economic rights and securities.

These two ideas – one of duality, one of middle ground - put social justice concepts that are explicitly referred to as liberal or socialist, in an interesting place. For Thompson, liberalism would seem to be the opponent of both idealised social justice and of macro-level efforts, whereas for Gasker and Fischer, and Duffy, it is either a moderator of left justice, or a guarantor of individual freedom within a leftish social justice concept. This might suggest that, with or without the liberal tag, a micro-individualist element to social justice might be not only necessary, per Thompson and others' view, but good in its own right.

None of these combinations is either more or less legitimate than another, but all are possible. Likewise, none of the questions immediately above them necessarily offers straightforward answers. However, in considering what the literature has to say about the

macro- or micro-level place of social justice, we identify yet another moving part in the search for a concept.

2.4.6. Summary

Whether social justice can operate with conceptual and ethical legitimacy at the micro-level of the individual worker is something of a fraught issue in the literature. In adding it, plus the question of the role of the state and community, to the now-expansive table (overleaf), the range of options from which a social justice concept might be built is seen for the complex thing it is. The final part of this chapter will, with reference to macro- and micro-levels, review what the literature offers on the role of the social worker and the barriers to that role.

Figure 6: Social justice conceptual variants – 15-facet version

Typologies of social justice obligations				
Legal		Commutative		Distributive (I)
Relational			Distributive (II)	
Universal			Situational/conditional	
Rights-based		Redress-based		Reward-based

Equality and fairness as components of social justice			
Equality of outcome	Equality of access	Equality of treatment	Equality of opportunity
Radical egalitarian equality		Pragmatic equity	
Equality as sameness		Equality as diversity	
The same as fairness	Fairness achieved through equality	Fairness as the process for seeking greater equality	Distinct from fairness

Economic and non-economic justice focus			
Economic focus of justice	Economic justice as a consequence of reducing social treatment disparities	Social treatment justice as a consequence of reducing economic injustice	Social treatment focus of justice

Participation and citizenship		
Participation and citizenship as a goal of social justice	Participation and citizenship not major social justice consideration	Participation and citizenship in process of achieving social justice

Political labels for social justice concepts			
Left, socialist, egalitarian	Left-liberal, liberal egalitarian	Conservative- libertarian, classical or minimalist liberal	Social or cultural conservative
Capabilities approach or Single political philosophy (flexibility to move between labels)			

Social injustice as oppression			
Particular situation not regarded as oppressive	Particular situation regarded as oppressive	Oppressive societal situation regarded as unacceptable ad a priority	Oppressive societal situation recognised, but not regarded as unacceptable/a priority

Focal point of social justice pursuit				
The State		and/or	The community	
As agent	As obstacle		as agent	as obstacle

Level of operation of social justice		
Macro/social level only	Can be macro/social level and micro/individual level	No distinction/false distinction between macro and micro level

2.5. Section 4: The barriers to social workers pursuing justice, and possible solutions
Wish them Well

2.5.1. Introduction

There are a range of barriers identified in the literature, that prevent social workers from pursuing social justice. Some are blamed on factors at the systemic level, which is consistent with the sense of separation between micro and macro-level efforts identified earlier. Some however could be interpreted as being, or as partly being, within the purview of the individual social worker.

2.5.2. Barriers at the macro and micro level

The barriers that might be considered at the system level, (for these purposes I am labelling 'system' as anything beyond the individual practitioner) included the limited availability of supervision/manager support and input in discussing social justice issues (Hair 2015). Agency-level concerns were also identified as barriers, including the pressure for efficiency, the limitations of agency mandates in which it is easier to work interpersonally than confront powerful sources (Irizarry et al 2016, Morgaine 2014), funding limitations and a focus on the bottom line (Birkenmaier 2003) and efficiency and short-term worker contracts (Irizarry et al 2015).

Olson (2007), with prescience of the wording of the apology by CASW/ACTS (2019), described the situation as social work having two missions – the professional project and the social justice project and claimed that the former, characterised by objectivism, is winning because they are conflated; the professional project, says Olson, allows social work to compete with other professions for jurisdictional turf, resulting in a narrowing of scope and a loss of participation in the social justice project, with which, he asserts, it has no common ideational ground, though made to appear as unified discourse. Olson (2007)

says that there are three assumptions underlying modernisation and professionalisation; an assumption of objective reality of the natural world uncovered by science, capitalisation of the market economy, and a differentiation of discourse of rights, all of which fit with Kam's (2014) critique of western social work ethics.

Barriers that could be argued as being either/both within the reach of the individual practitioner and systemic factors (or at the meso-level, but that is dependent on how it is defined) included a lack of knowledge and training in incorporating social justice perspective and social change activities (Birkenmaier 2003). A lack of time was also mentioned, including by research participants (Olson et al 2013, Morgaine 2014, Brill 2001), and, echoing Olson (2007), a push toward individual focus, and the achievement of professionalism through helping people to adapt to unfair circumstances (it should be noted that, per previous section, this kind of help was not seen by all as mutually exclusive with social justice). Tight criteria for accessing help were also mentioned as barriers, as were the ongoing disenchantment on the part of practitioners (Olson et al 2013, Jones 2004 as cited in Ferguson and Lavalette 2006, p310)), an uncritical simplistic attitude to social problems, and a loss of critical edge (Solas 2008).

Beliefs and identity were suggested as possible individual-level barriers. Asquith and Cheers (2001) reporting a finding that practitioners were tending to rely on their own values and beliefs rather than professional codes. Their study appears to have predefined the terms by which respondents' responses would be categorised, only one of which made reference to social justice. While they do not explicitly define social justice for the purposes of the paper, the authors make implicit connections with anti-discriminatory practice and equal access to resources for clients, as well as associating social justice with human rights. Asquith and Cheers say that while it cannot be drawn from their study that social workers do not value and utilise ideals of social justice in their thinking or practice, it cannot be concluded from this piece that they definitely do. This observation

stacks awkwardly with Hancock's (2008) findings, and the ideas of the likes of Lerner (2020), that socially or religiously conservative social work students may have difficulty with mainstream social work values. Personal identity was also raised as a possible barrier, in the sense that if one was not from a marginalised population, one may not find it as easy to take on a social justice perspective (Deepak et al 2015, Birkenmaier 2003).

Finally, and centrally to this thesis, a barrier that could sit at any of or through these levels; Holscher and Bazalek (2012) themselves note that their research reveals a sense of the outcomes sought by social workers, but not what social justice is at its core, or how it might be achieved, suggesting that one barrier to pursuing social justice could, in fact, be a lack of clear agreement as to what it is.

All of these claims about barriers rest on certain philosophical and conceptual assertions that are contestable, but they do all point to some necessity of appreciating human complexity, above-the-individual causes of injustice, and that problems require time and resources to resolve.

2.5.3. Proffered solutions

Various parts of the literature propose solutions to the problems and barriers that they identify, involving both attitude and action. Practitioners are advised to take on a justice perspective that goes beyond the individual client (Birkenmaier 2003), and to see connections between macro- and micro-level issues. Swenson (1998) in particular suggests ways of linking clinical (individual) practice and social change. These include considering psychological issues in wider frameworks, addressing basic unmet needs and encouraging clients to be involved in community empowerment and legislative efforts.

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It is also suggested that they attempt passive resistance to unjust elements (Buz et al, 2013). 'Passive resistance' was characterised as writing to newspapers and institutions, as opposed to 'active' approaches such as protests or boycotts, and that they draw attention to others in their organisations or those who work in parallel, and to unjust inadequacies in their own arena or service. This could be said to be meso-level action, which some might consider valid social justice action, but others would still see as not macro-level enough.

More specific suggestions or ideas come from De Corte and Roose (2020), Gibson (2014), Finn and Jacobsen (2003) and Olson et al (2013). De Corte and Roose set out a pathway for social workers to have dynamic involvement in policy development (De Corte and Roose 2020). Olson et al's participants report doing conventional work and unconventional work, over and above their core role, and perhaps working around it, to resolve a system-generated injustice. In the conventional camp, participants described individual and system/community level work, agenda building and mass community action. In terms of the 'unconventional', they included circumnavigating/manipulating systems to support clients (such as asking doctors to delay procedures to minimise financial implications for vulnerable clients).

Continuing the theme of the what the individual worker can do, Gibson (2014) advocates an approach toward pursuing and achieving social justice that connects to a 'redress' variant of the concept, as well as to ideas of oppression and identity. This is the Ally model. This model is based on the notion that social workers, regardless of their own identities in terms of membership of oppressed/oppressor groups, should be allies for, and take social justice action for and with, marginalised groups, and push for change. Gibson defines an ally as a member of the agent (oppressive) group who rejects the dominant ideology (what Olson (2007) would call a T'ruth) and acts against oppression to benefit its would-be targets. Gibson offers very specific lists of which identities and

groups comprise agents and targets of oppression, which may not be surprising from an American perspective, but these are open to question from a range of perspectives, particularly individualist concepts or concepts that are based on different social privilege binaries. Gibson's definition of social justice is comprehensive on inter- and intra-communal fronts, but less firm on other fronts, such as economic matters and political perspectives.

Finn and Jacobsen's (2003) Just Practice Framework encourages practitioners to consider their practice through the auspices of meaning, context, power, history and possibility. It has the strength of asking social workers to think about these things in their own way, or at least appears to do so. The limitation of the framework is, at least in my interpretation, the lack either of a philosophical starting point or the explicitly stated intention not to have one. In the context of the wider article, I read it as having an implicit progressive and egalitarian base, but it is possible to combine the five themes with a conservative or libertarian analysis, which may well not be their creators' intent.

Whether these suggestions for confronting social justice barriers appear appropriate or potentially effective, will, in part, depend on how social justice is conceptualised by any given person. A macro-only, radical, equality-of-outcome concept might regard unconventional actions as moral and well-intended, but not as social justice, because they are efforts to help a person adapt to unfairness, or at best to work round it. Conversely, a more commutative and perhaps utilitarian concept would see these individual approaches as valid, even, perhaps, as more effective than striving for high-level social change. In a concept dedicated to the idea that social justice should be community-based, any of these actions, irrespective of their other virtues or deficits, might be seen as non-social justice actions if they were done by agents of the state.

2.5.4. Problems

This range of barriers presented in the literature returns us to the central issue and idea advanced by this literature review; the problem in conceptualising social justice in social work is not simply that there are a range of coherent and distinct options. It is that, if, when forming a concept, a particular practitioner, scholar or agency makes a conceptual choice on one front, that does not necessarily lead to an automatic choice on another. The identification of an ideal role for social workers, combined with barriers to that role, and solutions to those barriers, will potentially be influenced and shaped by the philosophical construction of social justice that a particular practitioner holds or (and with more potential for agenda-driven approaches) that an agency prefers. Given the wide range of conceptual options and combinations set out in this review, which may well in itself not be exhaustive, we cannot assume what that construction will be in any given case, and therefore how that construction will inform efforts to overcome any of these barriers.

2.6. Conclusion

This review has sought to set out, in as logical a way as possible given the multiple layers of conceptual circularity, a representation of the different strands of social justice conceptualisation in the social work literature. The review has sought to argue that any effort to identify a coherent social justice concept is problematic for three interconnected reasons. Firstly, different sources describe social justice using different terms or combinations of terms. Secondly, even where two or more sources use the same terms, they are not necessarily used in the same way, or they are used fleetingly, so that the reader may not be certain of their precise meaning. Thirdly, a view about what social justice should be, or mean, on any one of at least six fronts, does not automatically translate to a particular view on any of the others. The variety of both conceptual options and practical barriers for social work and social workers is, frankly, massive.

3. Chapter 3: Methodology

Grand Designs

3.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodology and design for this thesis. It describes the epistemological outlook that underpins the study, which is a combination of constructivism and critical realism, arguing that social justice is both a constructed concept and one that impacts, and is impacted by, events in the world. It sets out the design of the research, including the rationale for the choice of participants and the details of, and justification for, the design of the interview. This also includes consideration of the limitations of those methodological choices, and an explication of the ethical considerations. The chapter ends by describing the analytical process, which is a thematic analysis approach based broadly on Clarke and Braun's structure (2013).

3.2. Epistemological Position: Constructivism and Critical realism

Subdivisions

This study was governed by an epistemological approach that combines constructivism with critical realism. It views social justice as something that is both an individually constructed, and therefore contestable, concept, and one that has force and impact upon social work and the world in general. It is therefore both conceptual, and conceptually real. Like other ideas, beliefs or ethical stances, it has the potential to effect – or prevent – change in the world, but the nature of that change may well depend on the way that a social justice concept is constructed.

3.2.1. Social justice as a conceptual construct

In defending the claim that social justice is a conceptually contestable construct, a logical starting point is to argue that it is not feasible to view it as objectively observable, and therefore it is unsuited to a hard realist or positivist approach. A positivist or objective realist approach would require working in terms of universal and exception-less statements, where events can be predicted and controlled (Gorski 2013).

To be able to carry out a positivist or hard realist study of conceptualisations of justice, one would have to do two things:

- Make a strong case for the existence of a natural and objective concept of justice that exists or could exist independently of human perception or interpretation, and the presence or absence of which is consistently observable and testable.
- Design and carry out research that 'litmus-tests' the validity, provability or replicability of that concept in particular situations; in this case the views, beliefs and actions of social workers.

Even if this were possible, it is not desirable for this thesis' questions. To do so would be to risk, as Morris poetically puts it, mutation from an exciting idea to a sterile question and hypothesis, and an anaemic depiction (Morris 2006). While not generally claiming positivist labels for themselves, several pieces of research exist in this field that come close to doing this. Starting from an *a priori* position of what social justice is, they classify aspects of practice, or spoken or written responses in terms of how well they fit that position. Such litmus-testing is not the focus of this thesis; social justice will be viewed here as a constructed and therefore contestable concept.

3.2.2. A constructivist approach

A constructivist approach may be broadly defined as one in which reality and established concepts are considered to be constructed by individuals or groups, rather than being independently, naturally and objectively observable. A simple example is a chair, the essential and defining characteristics of which are questionable when scrutinised (Gergen 2015). Likewise, the concept of equality may be constructed in a range of ways; the original 'equality' of the Thirteenth Amendment is markedly different from the 'equality' sought by the US Civil Rights movement.

A constructivist approach not only fits this thesis, it supports its rationale. For the constructivist, our understanding of the world comes from individual points of view, and it is not possible for one to view it outside the human experience, independent of situation and person. To understand social justice in social work, we must understand the perceptions of those who are engaged in it (Morris 2006).

It is useful to make a distinction between a constructivist approach, and a social construction approach. The constructivist, particularly the radical constructivist, argues that the individual interprets the world in their own way, and each of us therefore actively creates our own meanings derived through our own individual constructs, constructing the world in our own idiosyncratic way (Burr 2015, Kelly 1955). This is fitting for the picture of social justice that the literature presents. As the literature review sought to argue at length, social justice can be conceptualised not only in a wide range of ways, but in a combination of different ways. The identification of one component of a possible social justice concept – that it must involve fairness, for example – does not necessarily equate to the form another component of the concept might take. To make a claim that social justice must be defined as X or Y is to make a claim, or at least float the possibility, that someone else's concept is wrong, or at the very least, flawed or incomplete. The holder

of such a view is perfectly entitled to make that argument, but objectively proving it, or disproving the alternative, is a matter of judgement and conceptual preference, not positivistic objectivity. One could also make an argument that one particular concept of social justice is better than, ethically superior to, or more practical than, another, but this is, by definition, the pitting of one conceptual construction against another. One might be of greater merit, but that does not mean it is more objectively real.

The social constructionist, by contrast, views the interpretation and understanding of reality as a shared construction, in which we construct meaning together, through joint development of world views (Gergen 2015, Morris 2006). It is entirely possible to examine social justice from a social constructionist perspective; even if taking an individual constructivist perspective, our constructions are influenced and shaped by groups and environments of which we are part (Burr 2015). A collectively constructed concept of social justice is certainly possible. However, given the diversity of construction in the literature, the intention here is to start from the position of treating participants as individuals, with individual social justice constructions, that may or may not overlap and cohere, while remaining open to evidence of social forces contributing to individual or group constructions.

3.2.3. Limitations to a purely constructivist view of social justice

While the stance of viewing social justice as a construct, and an individualist construct at that, rather than an objectively observable phenomenon, is straightforward to argue, there are limits to a purely constructivist approach. If taken to its logical extreme, constructivism has two drawbacks. The first is that viewing the world only as a set of infinite individual constructions and interpretations presents us with a form of hyper-democratised realism – rather than one objective reality being steadily uncovered by the tests of positivists, we have as many realities as there are people to see them, none of which are subjectable to tests, only to mutually irreconcilable judgments. To have formed a construction of the

world is to have constructed a world (Fleetwood 2014, 2013). The issue here is that a constructivist, individual interpretivist perspective in its pure form, risks ignoring the real-world impact of, and on, constructed concepts, including, for the purposes of this project, the concept(s) of social justice. Elder-Vass says that constructionism (though I will apply his views to constructivism as well) can be seen as opposing forms of realism, to the point that extreme construction/tivists view all phenomena as social constructions, and that there is not an objective world of which we can truly have knowledge (Elder-Vass 2012).

The second drawback, related to the first, is that if there are only individual constructions, it is very difficult to operationalise meaningful critique or emancipatory change. If this project takes a completely constructed and negotiated view of social reality (Blaikie 2007) without any reality independent of individual interpretation, it risks becoming a descriptive exercise rather than something that examines real-world impact. This would limit the relevance of the thesis, and of the conceptualisations of the participants and others like them, for being usefully critical of structures and effecting genuine change (Elder-Vass 2012). It removes the potential for choosing an alternative construction that could have practical implications for positive change. As a result, its emancipatory potential is diminished (Elder-Vass 2012, Fleetwood 2013, 2014). This is not a comfortable stance for the spirit of this study. Words, and particularly words that are intended to convey ethical meaning or moral purpose, have an impact. Furthermore, the way they are understood, or more pointedly the way they are framed by those who would use them, contribute to that impact; the far-right nationalist Dutch Freedom Party, for example, has a profoundly different concept of 'freedom' to the liberal German Free Democrats.

This vague malleability is problematic for social justice in social work. Part of the rationale for carrying out this research rests in the contention that, bluntly, it matters what social workers think and believe about social justice. Those beliefs, potentially, create an effect through individual practice, and the maintenance or change of institutional policy. An

element of realism, and an exploration of the place of those beliefs in the systems and frameworks in which they sit, will affect, and are affected by, must be part of this study for that argument to make sense. Elder-Vass (2012) says that combining an ontology of constructed concepts with a form of realism increases the coherency of that constructionism, because it provides a means to analyse the causal mechanisms that create and shape (and I would add, are created and shaped by) the construction in question.

While the conceptual content and make-up of social justice is varied, contested and uncertain, its inclusion in social work codes of practice and ethics, suggests an anticipated effect of some kind, as an ethical baseline, an informing principle, a goal or a critical mindset. For lack of a better analogy, it is not a decorative garnish, but a concept intended for use by social workers. Analysing it purely in terms of individual construction is insufficient as a way of reflecting practitioner experience.

For this reason, the constructivism of this study is paired with a critical realist outlook. Critical realism facilitates an analysis and understanding of phenomena in a way that puts those things that a positivist would class as objectively observable, with those things a constructivist would see as conceptually contested. An aspect of realism, or a way of connecting constructed concepts with some level of real-world implication and consequence, is necessary to give the alternative constructions of the world some practical backbone and utility. Crucially, for the purposes of this thesis, it allows for that which is not considered objectively real to nevertheless be seen as conceptually real.

3.2.4. A critical realist view of social justice in social work

Critical realism, generally considered to have been originated by Bhaskar (2008) and his disciples. It is concerned with the nature of causation, agency, structure, and relations, and the implicit or explicit ontologies within which we are operating It is described as a

post-positivist alternative to both scientific positivism and pure constructivism (Gorski 2013).

3.2.4.1. Social Justice as Conceptually Real

Critical realism says that concepts can be real even when the things that they relate to, or signify, are not, or might not be actually, tangibly or quantifiably real. Fleetwood (2013) explains differences between real things and real concepts using the example of unicorns. Unicorns are not real in the way that planets and apples are, but the concept of unicorns is sufficiently ingrained in the collective consciousness, to be both real and have particular meaning.

So, for example; the earth's heliocentric orbit is, and was, objectively real before Aristarchus hypothesised it and Copernicus later confirmed it, but the idea of the sun going round the earth is real even though the objective reality of it has long been disproved. By same token, one may be an atheist while fully accepting the realness of the concept of God(s) to humanity, and acknowledge the enormous influence of others' individual or collective belief in God/Gods on history, politics and world events, both for social good and ill.

By the same token, the idea(s) of justice and the effect of those ideas on the world, and on social work practice, are real in the 'unicorn' sense, even if they are not real in the heliocentric sense. Social justice, even insufficiently defined, is a conceptually real concept within social work, not least by virtue of the fact that the principles of, and pursuit of, social justice are listed as part of the profession's mission, (including in the English PCF), and as central to the profession's work and identity. Part of the problem, and the rationale for this study, is that this makes social justice a force without a clear identity.

3.2.5. Applications of critical realism to this thesis

There are particular elements of critical realism that work well both with the topic of social justice in social work and with a form of constructivism that seeks not to surrender individual or collective potential agency to effect change; in particular open systems, emergent properties and tendencies, layers of reality, and norms and agency.

3.2.5.1. Open systems, emergent properties and tendencies

Critical realism operates on the basis of open systems, emergent properties and tendencies. It eschews both the concept and the seeking of hard immutable rules and laws, seeing the world as a set of interacting mechanisms and properties that activate, or do not activate, one another in myriad ways. Open systems are a central concept in critical realism (Bhaskar 2008, Collier 1994, Fleetwood 2017). Unlike closed systems, which are characterised by event regularities similar to the empiricist's and positivist's predictive forces, open systems have no such hard regularities; they are understood in terms of tendencies and combinations of causative effects (Fleetwood 2013).

Critical realism distinguishes itself from both realism and purist constructivism through its focus on relationships, processes and causal mechanisms. Fleetwood (2014, 2013). Critical realism views the world in terms of connections and open systems, including those that govern and impact on the ways in which we interpret events and ideas. Critical realists view events as being caused by multiple interacting causal powers (Bhaskar 2008), including those held by individuals and those attributed to social structures (Archer et al 2013). The effect of these powers depends on both the particular cocktail of powers at hand, and on the nature of their interaction with one another (Elder-Vass 2012). Elder-Vass' illustrative example is that of a laser pointer; when its components are arranged just so, and activated, directed light occurs. This light is 'therefore an emergent power of the pointer', rather than of any of its constituent parts, or even of all of them, if

not arranged correctly. The things that emerge from the arrangement of components are termed 'emergent powers' (Elder-Vass 2012). While this is a physical, observable event in the case of the laser pointer, neither the powers nor the components need be tangible. An individual's view of a particular concept – fairness, for example – may be from a combination of upbringing, education, religion, political perspective and personal experience, but one could not with certainty predict that a particular constellation of these things results in a particular concept of fairness. What may be more observable is a tendency for certain factors, in common between two individuals, to result in similar fairness concepts. This way of thinking applies well to social justice in social work.

Critical realists approach causation differently, and critically, seeking to avoid the reduction of examined phenomena to finite set of predictive rules (Gorski 2013). This approach, applied to this thesis, allows for the framing of an individual participant's social justice conceptualisation as a series of systems within systems, interacting in individual ways. These may include any, or all of, what they believe social justice should mean: to seek; equate to; involve; necessitate or be distinct from. The contribution, from their perspective, that any combination of personal experience, social work and other education, family background, practice experience or any other factor may have had on that concept, or on how it might be implemented in, or obstructed in social work practice. By definition, and because this is seen through an individually constructivist lens, this list is nowhere near exhaustive. Thinking in terms of tendencies, rather than hard rules, allows for an inclusive approach to the data. Consider the hypothetical example of a participant who says that right-of-centre parents contributed to them describing their justice concept as socialist – this may be representative of an interesting tendency, particularly if others say something similar, and therefore leaves room for the possibility of socially constructed group concept, but it is not devalued if, as a finding, it is an outlier.

3.2.5.2. Layers of reality

These open systems are envisaged as operating through three layers of reality. These are described as:

- o the empirical: experiences and perceptions of things by individuals

- o the actual: events and actions that take place beneath those experiences, which may or may not be visible or measurable

- o the 'deep' layer: often unseen, or at least not reliably and explicitly seen, rituals, codes, customs, norms and other ephemera that influence events, actions and perceptions (Bhaskar 2008, Collier 1994)

The three layers idea provides a useful language to discuss, albeit somewhat speculatively, all aspects of the question of social justice conceptualisations in social work. They have utility in considering how social justice interacts with another concept, such as rights, or how two or more concepts interact within a given individual's concept of social justice. They can be used to explore how combinations of experiences and ideas have contributed to individual participants' concept formation. They can be brought to bear on the forces that inform participants' stated experiences of seeking to pursue social justice.

Houston claims that critical realism can be used to improve constructivist approaches in social work practice and research (2001, 2010) and has argued for its utility in understanding deep and causal mechanisms that shape and impact the social world. He uses such an approach to explore social workers' assessments of situations (2005). In this thesis, this combination is used to explore participants' understandings of social justice concepts and, in particular, the ways they believe their individual concepts have been formed and shaped.

3.2.5.3.   Norms and Agency

The other aspect of critical realism that serves this study well is that of norm circles. A norm circle describes a situation in which practices considered the norm are replicated and reinforced by those within the circle. The 'circle' element speaks to the self-reinforced property. It describes combinations of ideas, actions, beliefs, repeated practices and, in the broadest sense, rewards for remaining within or reinforcing the norms (Elder-Vass 2012). In seeking an explanation for the concept of social justice held by practitioners, evidence for the presence or absence of one or more such norm circles may be established.

Houston (2001, 2010), drawing on Lorenz (1994 in Houston 2001, p. 845), claims that with occasional exceptions, UK social work has maintained a philosophical norm of apolitical and pragmatic disinclination to challenge structures. Others have concurred in various terms (for example Kam 2014, Solas 2008, Thompson 2002). In constructivist-critical realist terms, as set out by Elder-Vass, this state of affairs suggests that a particular norm circle, or set of norm circles, now permeates social work. Given the decision to start from constructivism, rather than the collective concept formation of constructionism, and the potential for social justice concepts to be agenda-driven, politically or otherwise, it is useful to have language with which to frame sustained, or imposed, social justice concepts or practices, such as the 'official' concept described by Crossley (2017). Elder-Vass's norm circles are ideal for the task.

Norm circles as explained by Elder-Vass, and the general assertion that social structures can have their own agency and influence, are not without scholarly critique. Sealey and Carter (2014) suggest problems with how norm circles, and norm circle membership, are defined. Elder-Vass (2013) responds by clarifying that norm circles are not as tightly defined as Sealey and Carter suggest, including not defined by the conforming behaviour of their adherents, but simply fit with tendencies. Hansson Wahlberg (2014) and Zahle

(2014) both query Elder-Vass' argument for the independent existence and causal powers of social structures. This thesis lacks space to dissect this fully, but for my purposes, it is sufficient to accept, or at least entertain, that if participants describe social structures or institutions as having agency and influence of their own, or feeling as if they do, that will be considered a valid part of how they see their own conceptualisation process. This thesis will broadly work from Elder-Vass' notion of the social worker as realist constructed subject whom, he says, is not immune from the influence of social forces, events and causal mechanisms influencing, but potentially possesses agency to have impact on them in return.

3.2.6. Summary

In this thesis, the central epistemological view of social justice in social work seeks to be relational about epistemology and how concepts like justice are understood, but partially realist about ontology, at least in terms of effects of and on those concepts (Gorski 2013). I seek to offer an epistemological standpoint that reflects not only my view of reality, but that provides a useful and fitting framework in which to understand, and critically analyse, social justice in social work. Social justice is a constructed concept rather than something objectively observable, but while the concept/s is/are constructed, the impact of events in the world, at various levels on and from the concept, is very real, and just as valid a part of the question.

3.3. Study Design

Working them Angels

This section of the chapter sets out the design of the study, including the sample, the interview design, and considerations of ethics and transferability of findings. It opens by describing the key overarching design choices and the reasons for these decisions, with reference to the limitations of existing research.

3.3.1. Key design choices and rationales

There are three central elements to the design of this study. Firstly, it takes a non-presumptive and non-essentialist approach to the concept of social justice in social work. Secondly, it gathers data through individual, semi-structured interviews, and third, it gathers that data from NQSWs in front-line statutory practice in England, from a range of authorities, teams and specialisms. This section of the chapter will set out in detail the rationale for these priorities, and the way in which they are embedded in the study. The reasons behind these choices are to a large degree based on observing methodological limitations of existing pieces of relevant research included in the literature review. These pieces contribute a considerable amount to the topic of social justice in social work. Each however has one or more aspects of their methodology or approach that has an impact on the extent to which they can answer the question of NQSWs' conceptualisations of social justice.

3.3.1.1. Avoiding predetermined concepts of social justice

The reason for seeking to take a non-a priori, constructivist approach to social justice has been set out in the previous section. This study seeks to carry out an exploration, not a litmus test of values or of language based on my biases or anyone else's, other than the individual participants. This is also part of the reason for opting for individual interviews, to provide a space where a participant is as free as possible to explore their own concept and work with uncertainty.

Several existing pieces of nonetheless excellent and useful research have, for the purposes of this study, the drawback of having an explicitly or implicitly predetermined social justice concept that they then apply to their questions and participants. Examples include an economic inequality concept (Buz et al 2013), a concept based on and linked to ethno-cultural oppression and diversity awareness (Deepak et al 2015), social oppression with particular focus on gender and sexuality (Hancock 2008) or a rights-based concept, but one epitomised by direct payment use (Stainton 2002). None of these social justice concepts are necessarily incorrect or illegitimate, but in predetermining how social justice is conceptualised, the claim could be made that they narrow either the range, or the analysis, of participants' responses. That is not necessarily a problem for these papers in and of themselves, but it has an impact on how their findings can be interrogated for the research questions of this study. Similarly, the work of Hair (2015), Prior and Quinn (2012) and Hawkins et al (2001) all draw on pre-defined social justice concepts, based on the authors' own views or those of other scholars.

Hair's definition of social justice is drawn from the IFSW/IASSW. The language of the social justice scale statements that Hair utilises, does not necessarily completely correspond to the clause in the code of ethics it is designed to relate to. For example, the statement that Hair intends to be indicative of sub-clause 4.2.5 'Working in solidarity' is concerned with advocacy, but solidarity can be, and often is, associated with society/community-level work, whereas 'advocacy' is sometimes associated with individual/one-to-one level work. One can advocate for someone without feeling solidarity with them. This is not to say that advocacy cannot be an aspect of solidarity, but the amorphous-nature of both terms, as well as the fact that Hair's social justice language has been pre-defined before the respondents provided their answers, means a firm conclusion cannot be drawn about the respondents' full understanding and perception of social justice.

Some studies do take an approach that largely avoids pre-definition. O'Brien (2011a, 2011b), explicitly seeking to explore social workers' definitions of social justice, allows the participants to define it in their own terms (with the exception of one numerical ranking question). Similarly, Olson et al (2013) give the absence of a common understanding of social justice as their rationale for their study and make clear that they were not looking at specific aspects of social justice from participants. In avoiding a predetermined concept, both studies reveal something of the potential breadth of the meaning of social justice, which this study is keen to accommodate.

3.3.1.2.   Utilising individual interviews

The rationale for individual interviews, rather than surveys, focus groups or data gathering by observation, is related to the previous point. This study aims to probe relatively deeply into how participants conceptualise social justice. Doing so requires the ability to follow up, seek in-the-moment clarification of their use of a term or idea, and to summarise their responses to see if they have been understood accurately. Furthermore, they allow for questions to be answered out of sequence, unlike a survey (even an open-ended one). Interviews also treat the practitioner as an individual, and avoids the potential drawbacks of focus groups where, even with a capable and considered moderator, dominant voices can take over and direct the discussion. The aim here is to discern and then compare individuals' social justice concepts, not to seek a consensus if one is not apparent.

Alongside the aim of avoiding pre-defining a social justice concept and testing participants against it, the focus of this thesis is, in the first instance, firmly aimed at individual conceptualisations, not group constructions. For this reason, I was determined not to use focus groups. Focus groups have considerable utility as a discussion generation mechanism, as utilised by Deepak et al (2015) who were seeking to maximise discussion about what had worked well on the course they had examined, and what should be changed in future. Olson et al (2013) and Morgaine (2014), two studies of social worker

perspectives of justice that avoid pre-defining the term, also utilised focus groups made up of social workers from different teams and practice arenas. While their work provided very interesting findings, and, in other respects, is close to mine in design and intent, I wanted to be able to explore individual, not group, constructions and experiences, and did not want to risk dominant voices taking over and imposing their concept.

I also wanted to be able to seek clarification through further probing and summarising – I would not predetermine a concept, so I needed a means by which I could explore what a participant meant by, for example, fairness, should they raise it. Buz et al (2013) and Prior and Quinn (2012) both used surveys to gather data, as did O'Brien (2011a, 2011b) and Hudson (2017) (both also non-predeterminers). Both papers' questionnaires were designed to avoid prior construction, and the sample sizes lend credibility to their findings. However, the questionnaire method, whilst allowing a decent sample size, does not in and of itself facilitate deeper probing of what participants understood by 'equality', 'fairness' and other terms problematised by the opinion literature (such as Solas (2008).

The same limitation exists for Hancock's interesting method of examining and theming participants' written work and classroom discussion. While it is conceivable that an open-ended or free text box-style survey might elicit detailed and clarifying responses, I wanted the option of summarising and checking my understanding of a participant's answers, or probing for examples or further explanation, in real time. This might have been achievable by a two-stage method of questionnaires and follow-up interviews, like Stainton (2002), but given the pressures experienced by my target group of newly-qualified workers in their first year, I was resistant to incorporating a written element.

Hawkins et al (2001) drew their data from participant responses to vignettes, to identify the social justice language – per the authors' definition – that they used. This approach is very apposite for a study seeking to litmus test a predefined justice concept. However,

in this thesis, I wanted to keep the opportunity as open as possible for participants to set out social justice, and indeed social injustice, in their own terms, without being influenced by case specifics provided by me, or by being concerned about giving the 'right answer'. I wanted all examples to come from the participant, not, as far as possible, from me and my particular biases, conscious and otherwise, about what social justice is.

3.3.1.3.   Focus on newly qualified social workers

NQSWs working in statutory frontline practice were chosen because they were among the first cohorts to train and qualify under the then-new PCF and had been students who had studied social work in the context of the recent political situation in England, which was discussed in the introduction. Part of the aims of this study is to explore the extent to which social work education and training has contributed to social justice conceptualisation, and in what way. For that reason, it is useful to limit the time period in which that education or training took place, particularly with the PCF in mind.

Alongside that narrowed focus in terms of time in practice, it was important to seek to recruit a range of participants in terms of the team in which they work, the specialism or field in which they practice, and the local authority for which they work. Much of the research has a sample that is limited to one team or educational institution (Deepak et al (2015), Bell et al (2015), Hair (2015), Hancock (2008). It was important to avoid, if possible, any dominance from one field and its particular concerns and issues. The day-to-day experience of social justice is part of the focus of this work, therefore it is helpful to draw on a range of different experiences, to avoid this study accidentally becoming, for example, an exploration of only child safeguarding practitioners' views of social justice. A diversity of participants on this front also helped the study remain open to any naturally arising overlap between field of practice and social justice concept (there was however no such overlap).

3.3.2. Population and sampling

The population of interest in this study is newly-qualified social workers working in statutory services in England. The rationale for interviewing statutory social workers comes from the present state of the opinion literature, the focus of much of which is the role of the state vis a vis the social worker regarding the delivery and pursuit of social justice (Adams 2013, Hugman 2008, Goldson 2002, Pinkerton and Campbell 2002, Thompson 2002, Craig 2002, Stainton 2002). Furthermore, what research exists is largely focused on statutory social workers (Hair 2015, Olson et al 2013, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b, Stainton 2002) or on students (Buz et al, 2013, Hancock, 2008). However, with the exception of the essentialist Hawkins et al (2001), none look specifically at NQSWs.

The study also included more experienced social work practitioners to compare their perceptions to those of newly-qualified workers. This was intended to aid in confirming or disconfirming (Patton 2015, Padgett 2008) whether their social justice conceptualisations had any connection with being NQSWs, or whether similar responses and themes could be expected from any practitioner.

Fifteen NQSWs were recruited and interviewed about their conception of social justice in a social work context, as were five more experienced social workers, also in statutory practice, using the same structure as the NQSW participants. A total of twenty interviewees fitted the rule-of-thumb regarding good interview cohort size (Patton 2015, Padgett 2008), and represented a practical and manageable amount of data. The criteria for inclusion were that they had been qualified for between one week and two years (in most cases under one year), or for the experienced participants, five years or more, and that they were working as a social worker (with that title) in an English statutory service, though they may have be the only social worker in a multi-disciplinary team. While there was an initial aspiration to combine recruitment via managers and other local authority gatekeepers and use of my own networks and those of colleagues, in reality gatekeeper

access was relied upon, at least in the form of managers putting my recruitment email out to their staff and facilitating volunteers contacting me. Participants came from four Northern England local authorities working variously in children's services (initial response, long-term and disabilities), mental health, hospital teams, adult services and older people's services.

For the purpose of this study, 'newly-qualified' is defined as normally up to 1-year post-qualification. Such a label is naturally contestable; it is arguable that a social worker could consider themselves past the newly-qualified stage at the point they complete their ASYE (usually one-year post-qualification), or their progression stage via further study. The rationale for opting for practitioners who are, by and large, up to a year out of qualifying training, is that under normal circumstances, this would be the time in which they would have completed their ASYE and would start taking on more independent responsibilities. It was decided to allow the inclusion of NQSWs who are up to two years post-qualification, partly for flexibility, in order to be able to speak with prospective participants who have only just finished their first year in practice, but also to allow for workers who have experienced a delay in finding statutory employment or who have been working part-time. As set out in the introduction, the NQSWs interviewed for this study were among the first cohorts to have been educated under the present PCF, the significance of which, with regard to social justice, was set out in the introduction chapter. The further cohort of experienced social workers – for the purposes of this study, social workers who have been in practice for five years or more – were included to explore whether the responses of the NQSW participants related to the fact that they are newly-qualified, or whether their responses were mirrored by their more experienced colleagues, and (in either case) in which ways. Team managers were not included in the experienced cohort, though senior workers were permissible if the majority of their work is directly with clients rather than a supervisory role.

3.3.3. Data collection and interview plan

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide (Sedlack and Stanley 1992), in order to allow space and time for them to discuss the topic of social justice in a way that reflected their views. An overly structured format would risk constraining their responses and artificially limiting or distorting the data. This is a constructivist study, therefore participants were given room to construct the concept in their own terms. Interviews generally lasted around thirty minutes.

In order to allow interviewees time to think about their responses, headline questions were purposefully moderately long (Spradley 1979), and participants were explicitly told that thinking about responses is welcome and encouraged. Though there were variations of phrasing in the actual interviews, the following three headline questions, each with a planned supplementary (each presented underneath the headliner in the list below), were all asked in fairly similar terms.

- o How would you define the term 'social justice'?

    - o Who do you think is responsible for the pursuit of social justice?

- o What has informed your concept of social justice?

    - o To what extent has your qualifying training informed your concept of social justice?

- o What is your experience of practicing in line with your concept of social justice?

    - o What helps you (and/or) makes it difficult to apply your idea of social justice in practice?

There will however be a set of key points that I will seek to address over the course of the interview in most cases, should they come up, but not before, reflecting the themes around social justice that have emerged from the literature, thereby avoiding the pitfall of an entirely structure-free interview (Mason, 2018). In a sense this means keeping part of the structure 'in reserve'. These are

- o the definition and place of equality, equity, diversity, fairness and other values terms in social justice
- o the role of the state vis a vis the community and the individual
- o the philosophical and political ideologies associated with social justice
- o the question of the level of practice at which social justice can, or should be operationalised (macro, micro etc.)
- o the actual or ideal role of social workers

For example, if a participant in the course of the answer to the first question ('How do you conceptualise social justice?' or a paraphrasing thereof) did not mention legislation in any respect, my raising of legislation could have resulted in anxiety in the participant that they should have mentioned it in their response, and they may feel under pressure to do so even if it is not part of their thinking about social justice. This is the kind of pressured response I have sought to avoid, not only for participant comfort but for methodological reasons. To be frank, if a participant did not consciously relate law or legislation to a concept of social justice, in any way, (including in opposition to it) I wanted that to be noticed during the analysis and coding. The (in)consistencies between what participants do not say is as interesting as those found in what they do say. For this reason, the interview structure was designed to seek clarification of the participants' responses rather than to constrain them in categories. Avoiding this kind of pressure is also part of the reason for conducting individual interviews rather than focus groups – the immediate presence of strong voices, or of the need to conform, may have distorted the data and led to stock answers.

By the same token, care was taken in the use of reflective summarising in the interview. Summarising is a useful research tool but could serve to unintentionally pin down a respondent to agree to a meaning that is presented to them, but one that they did not intend. For this reason, I was explicitly clear in interviews that participants can and should

correct me if I have misunderstood them in my summarising, and several participants did so. Also, for that reason, the interview preamble stressed that such clarifications and summaries are not personal contradictions (or endorsements) of their positions, but a means of exploration.

A small pilot study took place ahead of the main study. The principal purpose of the pilot, which included four participants, was to test the usability and suitability of the interview schedule and then evaluate and refine it, and to expose and 'dry run' dealing with unconscious bias on my part. Three students and one university staff colleague participated. In terms of the stated aims of the pilot, the interview schedule proved broadly very successful, and received good feedback from pilot participants, particularly with respect to the open-ended nature of the questions, and my use of speculative summarising. Most lessons learned were practical with respect to having my forms in the right order, and positioning the recording device.

3.3.4. Ethics and anonymity

Ethical approval for this study was sought from and granted by Northumbria University in December 2016. Participants were provided with a participant information sheet and debrief sheet respectively before and after the interview took place, and signed to confirm their informed consent to participate in the project. They were informed at recruitment and again in the interview preamble that they could withdraw at any stage without needing to provide a reason, and their data would be removed from the study. None of those who were interviewed did so. I took seriously the views that social work research ethics need to be concerned with individual self-determination and non-maleficence (Antle and Regehr 2003) as well as Dominelli and Holloway's (2008) view that one's primary ethical accountability in research is to the least powerful stakeholder. Dominelli and Holloway write this with social work clients in mind, but I felt applied just as much to the practitioner participants in this study, considering my potential impact not only on the data but on the

participants (Tracy 2010, Buckner 2005). Participants were informed that confidentiality would be maintained unless they disclosed dangerous or illegal practice or high risk to themselves or others, at which point advice would be sought from, in the first instance, university ethics and legal sources. None did so.

Participants were given assurances that there would be a high level of confidentiality and anonymity. I would not be referring to them in the thesis as anything beyond 'a participant', and would not describe them as participant A, B and so on. For this reason I have not described my sample in terms of demographic information or personal characteristics, and have only raised these elements of who my participants are when they themselves bring that information into their responses. I also wanted to allow the widest possible latitude for participants to say what they wanted, notwithstanding disclosure of serious risk or dangerous or illegal practice. This was in part based on my own experience of being an NQSW, which was characterised by feeling scrutinised and judged by my organisation. While not assuming all NQSWs have this experience, I wanted to avoid any risk of exacerbating that feeling, both to preserve the best possible chance of genuine responses, and for the welfare of my interviewees.

Given the open-ended nature of my interview questions, I foresaw a possibility that participants, in discussing their practice experience or the informing factors behind their justice concepts, might bring up difficult memories or refer to current events they found painful. Because of this potential vulnerability and the aforementioned responsibilities of social work research to those with the least power (Dominelli and Holloway 2008, Landau 2008, Antle and Regehr 2003), I was keen to anticipate and plan for this possibility. Carey (2018) warns of the tendency of some research organisations to be risk averse - I in fact found the opposite to be the case at least with respect to classifications of vulnerability, of which I took a very wide view in terms of participants' potential for feeling vulnerable in these interviews. I ensured that contact details for local mental health services, their own

human resources or occupational health teams, and the Samaritans, were made available to participants, informed them of the very small possibility of emotionally challenging discussions in the interview, and asked after participants' states of mind as part of the debrief. In the event several participants did discuss challenging or potentially traumatic or uncomfortable memories, but none reported negative effects in the post-interview debrief. All ethical provisions extended to main study participants were of course also extended to pilot study participants.

3.3.5. The research interview itself as a causal mechanism

This research project is an exercise that blends the critical realist's causal mechanism and open system of tendencies with the constructivist's individual interpretation of concepts and the world. It is on one level concerned with drawing out aspects of the actual reality but cannot escape the fact that this actual reality is, at the same time in part, still a construction that is itself based on constructions. I therefore also had to recognise that I, and my interview structure, were prospective causal mechanisms in their own right, and were part of the sense-making or meaning making process of the research (Hennink et al 2010). It is for this reason that I sought to design my interview schedule in as open-ended a way as possible and, with the exception of the headline questions, to focus my responses and secondary questions on clarifying, further probing and feeding back/checking what participants are seeking to get across.

It is important to be aware of the potential impact of the fact of the study itself, in terms of the critical realist's layers of reality. Through the interview process as an explorative and sense-making activity, and through interpretation of the concepts by participants and by me, ideas, themes and realisations had the potential to move between the deep, actual and empirical layers of reality from the perspective, or in the mind, of the interviewee (Bhaskar 2008, Collier 1994). Participants may, in-interview, consider and verbalise their

concept of social justice in a way they had not before, which (like in therapy or reflection) may result in them realising or refining their beliefs more explicitly than before.

If, for example, a participant reaches a hitherto unarticulated understanding, mid-interview, that their upbringing had a particular impact on their conceptualisation of social justice, then a potential causal mechanism has been identified. In other words, some aspects of any, or all of these, may not have been completely realised by the participants in fully conscious terms before the interview. For example, in the pilot study, two different interviewees said words to the effect that the interview had caused them to think about social justice more clearly, or that they had not considered aspects of their beliefs in as much detail before. This could be analysed as an instance of something moving from the actual layer to the empirical as it becomes consciously known to the participant. The same is true for their view of what has informed their beliefs around social justice, and how it fits with their practice experience.

3.3.6. Considering and mitigating my position

Moon et al (2016) stress the importance of stating one's own philosophical position in social research, because it defined the relationship between researcher and subject. I have sought to balance that claim with avoiding inadvertently making myself the subject of the research. Nevertheless, a keen awareness of my own position, influences and potential to influence, and my own construction of numerous aspects of this project is vital, as is so far as is possible a bracketing of my own position. In an inversion of Padgett's example of medical research (2008), I am part of this professional community, and needed to consciously reflect on that. I, as the interviewer, have my own views and positions regarding what social justice is, what it should be in social work and, possibly more problematically for self-awareness, what should be the key points of consideration and difference.

This is important in considering choices of question, in order to balance posing questions meaningfully to respondents (Briggs 1986) with minimising distortions of what the interviewee knows (Holstein and Gubrium 2012, Gorden 1987). For example, I take a personal and professional view that social justice should have a philosophically radical liberal base centred on the harm principle (Mill 1982) but combined with the active enablement of meaningful freedom in a way that separates me from orthodox classical liberals. Though I have these firm beliefs of my own, I am comfortable with and open to a wide range of political and politically-informed standpoints as regards the conceptualisation of social justice. The idea that someone may not have any kind of conscious political belief, however, is more of a leap for me, and has the potential to result in my trying to categorise such a person's responses into a political frame based on my own biases. For example, I think that belief in equality of outcome as a position to the political left of belief only in equality of opportunity. Thus, a self-statedly a-political participant who articulates such a view feels instinctively to me to be to the left of one who does not. To avoid lazily and disrespectfully grouping my participants' answers in my own convenient siloes, I sought to remain consciously in a state of what Pillow calls reflective recognition of 'the other' during both interviews and analysis (Pillow 2003, Berger 2015).

Scourfield (2001) refers to his own experience of studying the construction of men and women in a social work office, including the awareness and perception by interviewees of his own position as a man, a father, a researcher, and the effect that may have had on the findings. In the same vein, and alongside my own views and biases, I had to consider the possible impact on interviewees (and therefore on data) of how I might come across. My actual or perceived status as someone straddling the insider/outsider dichotomies of statutory/non-statutory practice and academic/practitioner identity could be a factor (Berger 2015, Shaw 1996). Furthermore, some interviewees could have been (and indeed were) practitioners whom I had taught as students, and who therefore knew of my

views and professional history. With this in mind, I took pains to make the interview approach explicitly non-cross examinational (Krueger and Casey 2000, Whittaker 2009), non-exploitative and compassionate (Pillow 2003), and make it very clear that they may speak freely and openly. Given my unavoidable role in creating meaning alongside the participant it was important to be clear that the study was in no way an evaluation of whether I, or anyone else, thought that they as individuals are pursuing a certain view of social justice correctly or satisfactorily.

3.3.7. Limitations

There are some limitations to the approach taken to data gathering in this thesis; it represents a set of intentional trade-offs made with the gaps in the literature and the epistemological outlook detailed above, in mind. Nonetheless they should be addressed explicitly.

The decision not to raise subjects from the literature review – for example equality, politics, fairness, oppression, the role of the state – with interviewees unless, and until, they raise them, is a conscious and purposeful decision. The risk here is that such an approach excludes the views of participants on particular subjects relevant to social justice, simply because I did not ask about them. To invert my earlier point about political concepts, a given interviewee may have had a developed and nuanced political view. Because they do not mention it during the interview however, I did not raise it with them either. That potential data therefore remains unavailable and does not inform the analysis and conclusions.

This is a valid concern. The counterargument runs as follows; taking the same hypothetical participant – the fact that they have a developed personal political philosophy does not mean that they connect that view with their concept of social justice, or that they associate the two things at all. To make the decision, as the interviewer, to raise the

subject, even though the participant has not, is to make the implicit decision for the participant, *a priori*, that social justice is associated with politics (which incidentally for me, it is). That association may not be there for the participant and the risks of artificially introducing it, in terms of data pollution of such a contested and uncertain concept, outweigh the opposing risks of omission. This arguably results in a certain amount of conceptual bootstrapping of terms, a limitation that features in some of the existing research (such as Prior and Quinn (2012), who define neither social justice nor connectedness with humanity (their other variable). In using individual interviews with follow-ups and summarising, however, I believe this study mitigates against that, at least to some degree.

As something of an antidote to this possibility, at the end of the interview, participants were asked if there was anything they would like to add, if it is relevant to their concept or experience of social justice, and if there was anything else that I should have asked.

At the same time, there will be aspects of the actual and causal reality, per Bhaskar's framework, that remain unseen and unseeable by both participant and researcher, which is to be expected in research that is focused on conscious conceptual realisation and perception. While, per Collier's (1994) example of the intoxicating potential power of unopened wine, one does not necessarily need to see powers actualised to know they are there, in these interviews I was reliant on the interviewee's own perspective and spoken account of their conceptualisation of social justice and its interactions with other factors. This is a relatively minor limitation (though still one worth noting) as this study is principally and consciously interested in participants' cognisant positions on the subject of social justice, rather than (in a deep sense) their lived reality. Even so, it is worth highlighting that this is a design choice and a conscious epistemological-methodological trade-off.

3.3.8. Concerning the absence of demographic participant information

It would be perfectly fair to ask why I made the decision not to collect demographic personal information from my participants as a matter of course, and therefore potentially be able to reflect on any correlation or link between personal characteristics and views of the concept or practise experience of social justice (or lack thereof).

Taking information about gender, ethnicity, sexuality, transitional status, religion, class, nationality, disability or complex family circumstances such as caring responsibilities at the beginning of the interview, or as a precursor to it, ran the risk of artificially focusing participants' minds on those aspects of themselves when answering the questions. I foresaw this was a particular risk in respect of question 2 which focused on what participants saw as the main influencing factors behind the concept of social justice they had articulated in response to question 1. To take a hypothetical example, a participant who identified themselves as LGBTQ+ may have focused on that aspect of themselves and the effect it has on their worldview, politics and philosophy in their answers more than they would have done had the subject not been raised by me. I treated demographic and personal characteristic information in the same way I treated almost all other possible conceptual components of what social justice could mean; that is to say that I did not raise them unless a participant did and then only with that participant. There are many sources identified in the literature review that define social justice, perfectly legitimately, in terms of one or more personal characteristic or demographic aspect (for example Bell et al 2015, Hancock 2008 and Duffy 2010). In my view, asking participants for that kind of personal information before the interview would be analogous to asking them to define social justice in terms of, say, equality, economics, socialism, or any other such conceptual term that features in some parts of the literature but not all.

There is also an ethical dimension to this decision. It is not for me as the researcher to ask participants in my study to define themselves in any particular way or set of ways,

anymore than I would seek to define them or have them define themselves as a past victim of crime, growing up in poverty, being British or English or anything else.

If of course participants chose to identify themselves in reference to personal characteristics or anything else while answering the questions I had posed, that would naturally be valid and indeed very interesting. What I wanted to avoid was unintentionally pushing them toward feeling they had to answer my questions in any particular way. For me, that included not requiring them to identify themselves in any particular way or with reference to any particular group unless they chose to and be sought to make their own connexion between that and the question of social justice. Some participants did exactly that, often in reference to class and socio-economic background. However, the fact that several also did not is a finding that my open-ended approach helped to facilitate, and that pre-emptive focus on demographic information might have skewed.

One might ask of course, given this concern, why not ask for that demographic information immediately after the interview. In my judgement, although that would have avoided the risk of prejudicing the immediate response is of my participants in the way I explain above, it could have been perceived as somewhat intellectually dishonest. If I had set out to compare self-identified demographic information with individual conceptualisation of social justice, that should have been front and centre in my participant recruitment materials and indeed in my ethics application. This thesis is looking at how individual newly qualified social workers conceptualise social justice and has taken very intentionally an approach that avoids predetermination and conceptual external influence on the part of the study as far as is possible. Where I to follow a relatively in depth and searching interview with a demographic questionnaire, it would be entirely understandable if participants felt like they were being categorised and their answers potentially linked with the demographic categories with which they identified, even if I explicitly reassured them that that was not the case. It would also be a jarring

contrast to an interview process for which pains have been taken to create an open, non-presumptive and non-judgmental atmosphere.

As well as these practical issues, there is an epistemological rationale for not taking this information except where freely volunteered in a study such as this. If one is following a constructivist-critical realist approach consistently, one would be on unsafe ground to presume that, for example, two white participants or two female participants conceptualised their whiteness or their gender in the same way as one another. To do so would be to fly in the face of the idea of potentially unseen mechanisms. Therefore even if this information was gathered and presented alongside the findings, no one could say very much of real analytical quality about a general relationship between gender or ethnicity or disability (even when self-described and self-defined) and the way social justice is conceptualised by the individual. The retort to this could be, 'well won't you be allowing for those definitions and connections to be raised as part of the participants answers?'. The response, which brings this matter full circle, is yes, but only if the participant articulates that connection of their own volition. Anything that makes them feel obligated to do so is arguably ethically unsafe, and most certainly methodologically unsound.

As a final thought on this subject, it is worth saying that even if I took willing demographic information from every participant, even if I were able to present that request for information in a way that was supremely open-ended and facilitated people identifying themselves in a non-prescriptive way, it is doubtful that any strong conclusions about any relationship between demography, or characteristics and social justice conceptualisation could be established with any security in a sample of 20 (in terms of the main question, a sample of 15). There is, in my judgement, no way to take demographic information that manages to be systematic, open-ended, participant-led and defined, and does not detract

from the basic approach to the study. Others may disagree with this position, but I have sought to explain and defend it to the best of my ability.

3.3.9. Transferability

This analytical plan, and indeed this entire methodology, falls on the side of seeking transferability rather than generalisability in the classical sense of both terms, due to the small sample size, concern with individual conceptualisations, and a constructivist and tendency-seeking (rather than rule-seeking) epistemological stance. However, Smith (2018) sets out alternative concepts of generalisability, some of which could be applied to this study. These include representational generalisability, where the findings of research resonates with experiences of the researcher and/or reader, and analytical generalisability, where research generates a new concept, theory or, as is the case here, a new model. Smith also considers transferability itself to be a form of generalisability, which he distinguishes from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) established claim that transferability means distinguishing between trustworthy and untrustworthy interpretations of reality. Basing his view on the epistemological assumption that knowledge is constructed and subjective, Smith claims that transferability occurs when one setting can consider adapting research from another (case-by-case generalisability). This thesis agrees with both the underlying stance of this assertion, and its version of transferability.

The aim of this project is to identify tendencies and explanations, not establish or prove causative laws, and then to discuss and consider what the implications of those findings are for social work, and for social justice. In the course of that explanation, the points of inconsistency between participants' conceptualisation, and the nature of those points, is of as much interest as points of agreement and overlap. Greater knowledge about both has high transferability potential and, in Smith's terms, generalisability potential. If, for example, the data reveals an inconsistency in how social workers incorporate the law into

their concept of social justice, or differ strongly in their view of what their social work education gave them, this knowledge may be transferable to practice contexts and training establishments across the country

.

Several voices say that it is for the reader of research to decide on its potential transferability **(**Korstjens and Moser 2018, Houghton et al 2013, Lincoln and Guba 1985, Morse (2015) disagrees, saying the researcher is the one doing the abstraction of emerging concepts and theory. I am content to blend these approaches – I will seek to offer a transferable, and potentially generalisable (in Smith's analytical and representational sense), piece of research. However, a part of the dissemination process will be for others, particularly social workers and students, to see if they recognise their own experience in both findings and model. The potential impact of that dissemination will arguably be the final measure of what Houghton et al term the 'soulful and imaginative' assessment of quality that qualitative inquiry (2013, p12).

3.4. Analytical approach

The Camera Eye

This section will set out the analytical approach of this study.

3.4.1. Thematic Analysis

The data from the interviews will be thematically analysed, broadly following the structure and process articulated by Braun and Clarke (2013, Clarke and Braun 2017), which offers a combination of open-endedness and rigour which suit this project. Braun and Clarke's exhort the researcher to maintain continuous reflexivity, which I incorporated into the coding and theming process. The rationale for this analytical approach here will be set out in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

3.4.1.1. Open-endedness

Thematic analysis is described as a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) in relation to the views, experiences and practices of participants. It works through the identification of codes in the data, and then by grouping the codes as 'organising concepts' which are termed 'themes' (Braun and Clarke 2013). Thematic analysis is argued to be more of a method than a methodology, which may be applied across, and tailored to, different epistemological approaches, including the constructivist-critical realist standpoint of this thesis. Braun and Clarke consider it an inductive approach with particularly usefulness for exploring new subjects or ideas, which the topic of this project is, to a large extent. The idea is to go beyond description and into identification and interpretation of the data's key features (not necessarily all features), guided by the research questions.

3.4.1.2. Reflectiveness as an interpretive safety valve

Guest et al (2012) compare qualitative research with Bruce Lee's fighting style, which was intended as a liberation from adherence to closed and limited combat disciplines.

This openness is, for me, embodied by thematic analysis in particular, but it is an openness that requires reflective rigour. Most qualitative research methods advise the keeping of a research log or journal, part of the attraction and utility of thematic analysis is the ingrained place of the reflective log as an essential part of the analysis, in which key emerging ideas are noted. A research log was particular useful in this project for recording the thoughts behind my choices of code, so that I could be as explicitly aware of them as possible, and return to re-examine them. It also served as place to log initially rejected codes and themes, which may have become relevant again later. Personally, I do not like written logs when already enmeshed in a textual task, so instead, I used audio recording for reflection.

This level of rigour is invaluable in a project such as this, where both conscious and unconscious bias may impact on the interpretation placed on the data, and where we are dealing with multiple layers of interpretation. For that reason, the analytical steps from Braun and Clarke's model, on which I have based my own analytical process, were helpful in cross-checking, remaining recursive and, to a degree, self-policing during the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2020). Because of the clear aim of avoiding the sort of *a priori* approaches to social justice conceptualisation that have been critiqued in the literature review, it was key to build reflective mechanisms into the analytical structure, to reduce or account for my own biases and conceptualisations, influencing the analysis.

3.4.1.3. Analytical mindset

It is both healthy and helpful to briefly but consciously unpack the standpoints and assumptions that informed the way the analysis of the data took place (Braun and Clarke 2019). Drawing on section 3.2 which set out the epistemological outlook of this thesis, the analysis operated on the following principles

- o that knowledge and concepts are constructed by individuals, possibly by groups

- that their constructed nature does not preclude them from being conceptually real

- as such, being conceptually 'real' things, they can impact and are impacted by other things and events

- that the analysis should remain aware of the potential reaching of data saturation points, but equally be careful of presuming it has been reached

- that it should avoid boxing the themes in a final conclusive sense into the three research questions until late stages, and be prepared to not do so at all if the themes emerging from the data appear to suggest a more complicated constellation

- that a reflective log should be kept throughout analysis as it is occurring , to help acknowledge and mitigate my biased, and closely track how themes emerge, merge or subdivide

- that the log should be continuously referred back to in order to keep an eye on identified, and presently unidentified, biases. In other words, keep reflecting on past reflections to see if there are gaps in the sorts of things I am noticing

- that the process of complicating and narrowing the data in the stages of thematic analysis should be used to reflect on the themes as they occur

3.4.1.4.   Analysis process

The interviews were transcribed by me rather than by using a service. The transcription criteria included mis-phrasings, stumbles, spontaneous re-phrasings and fillers such as 'do you know what I mean', 'you know', 'kinda'. The analysis broadly followed the six phases of thematic analysis as set out by Braun and Clarke (2013), focusing on the continuous and gradual refinement of first codes and then themes, with some variation from Braun and Clarke, as suits the particularities of this project.

3.4.1.5. Coding and Theming Progression

Once an interview had been transcribed, an initial coding process took place, drawing codes, as far as possible, from the data's own language. My initial instinct was to err on the side of over-coding, and potentially produce too many codes in the first analytical sweep, in order to minimise the impact of assumptions that particular themes align with one another, and to keep my process rigorous but not rigid (Morse 2015). As interviews were conducted and transcribed, 263 initial codes were created following the data and using language from it. Examples include:

Figure 7: Examples of initial codes

Equality ≠ fairness	Opportunity	Money and aspiration	Bad classmates	Limited to signposting
Poverty makes harder	Saving state money	Assumptions by professionals	Openness	Rights as needs met
Fair treatment	Not included	Legal rights	Voluntary sector – more range	Choice
Engaging at crisis point	Family	Political family	Family don't know law	Variable outcome negative
Responsibilised	Needs to be 'so bad'	Fair conduct	Hope families solve for self	Generosity

Even at this stage, there had to be a conscious effort to resist trying to identify themes too early, because doing so would run the risk of artificially pre-categorising data from interviews coded in the middle or toward the end of the process. As a safeguard of sorts, any themes that I thought I saw, were noted down separately.

3.4.1.6. Recalibrating my approach to better capture participant experience

Following a process of code grouping, further coding and refreshment of the groupings, I realised a need to slightly amend my approach. I had aimed originally to do a conceptual mapping exercise in this thesis, and emerge with either one, or several definitions or sub-

definitions, of social justice, or some indication that such unanimity was not possible, or at least not discernible from my data. I was looking for a logical breakdown of conceptual philosophical strands, which put me in danger of what Probst calls falling in love with a particular interpretive path (2015).

I now approached the data with the mentality of trying to work out how best I could represent the story that these practitioners were telling me. These interviews were not simply verbal exchanges of information – they had an emotional and experiential element that was at least as important. While this study is firmly thematic, rather than narrative or discourse-based, what I was missing in my earlier code groupings was the reflection of the real situation of my participants. What I had to do was to go back to my data to really understand was what it was telling me about the battles my participants were fighting, and the nature of the perceived obstacles to pursuing what they saw as justice. I had reflected this in my initial codes, though a fresh look at (and listen to) the data suggested a few more, but I had not reflected this sufficiently in my code grouping, and my movement toward themes.

After finessing and re-aligning the code groupings, I examined and re-examined the themes to decide which did and did not work via fresh examination of the raw data (Braun and Clarke 2013). This took me through several stages naming and re-naming my themes, ending with a final five.

3.5. Summary

This chapter has set out the methodology and design for this thesis. It has described and sought to justify the constructivist-critical realist epistemological outlook that the study uses, arguing that social justice is both a constructed concept and one that impacts, and is impacted by, events in and tangible aspects of the world. It has also described and explained the rationale for the choice of participants and the details of, and justification

for, the design of the interview. The potential transferability of the findings of the thesis, and the potential limitations have been set out, as have the ethical considerations and the analytical approach. The next chapter sets out the findings of the study in the form of the themes that were delineated from the thematic analysis process.

4. Chapter 4: Findings

Afterimage

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will set out the findings from the study. They will be presented in five themes that emerged from the thematic analysis process, as set out in Chapter 3. These themes are:

- **Theme 1: Social justice definitions can be grouped under a broad notion of entitlement, but nothing narrower.**

  Values language and social entitlement are broad consistencies in participants' otherwise diverse social justice definitions.

- **Theme 2: Social work training is more of an important activating factor for social justice conceptualisation than it is a core influence.**

  Social work education is an influencing factor on social justice conceptualisation, but one that interacts with personal and practice-based experience.

- **Theme 3: Statutory social work is stuck in reactive micro-practice**

  The statutory social worker role is constructed as limited, as regards pursuit of 'social-level/societal-level' justice.

- **Theme 4: Even micro-practice social justice is systemically impeded**

  Statutory social work exists in a system and context where even micro-level and reactive social justice is barriered and limited.

- **Theme 5: Social justice facilitators are few in number, and either 'hard' or 'soft'**

The things that were described as helpful to and facilitative of social justice are either 'hard' (systemically hardwired, inflexible and unchangeable if flawed) or 'soft' (unreliable, inconsistently represented and dependent on individual relationships)

From the outset, it should be made very clear that while there was great variety in some aspects of the responses, none fitted neatly into either the NQSW or experienced practitioner cohorts. Where there was conceptual or experiential variety, it was present in both groups. The only, and expectable, exception, was the number of years' worth of illustrations that experienced practitioners could draw on, and in some cases that this meant they could contrast experience in different services. That was also true for some NQSWs who referenced previous jobs or placement experience.

A balance has been sought between the fulsome inclusion of direct quotes from participant interviews and the maintenance of a flowing, readable chapter that presents the five themes as clearly as possible. Previous drafts of the chapter contained more standalone quotes, and it was judged that this style of presentation resulted in a halting and staggered meter, which made the material lumpy to digest when reading. Where reference is made to the number of participants that responded in a particular way, that number refers to the newly-qualified participants (in line with the research questions and overall thesis topic) unless clearly stated otherwise.

I have, for reasons stated in section 3.3.8., not taken or disclosed participant demographic information in a systematic way. I would therefore, ahead of setting out the findings, like to make clear that every practitioner I interviewed had a personal and, from my observation, deeply felt social justice sensibility, irrespective of how they articulated it or the labels that might be put on it. They related stories, some involving traumatic events or very poor treatment, to explain how they came to their concepts, and were candid

about the challenges they faced in their job. In a range of different ways, they all cared about social justice as they understood it, they wanted to advance it, and showed both frustration and resolve about their experiences of that effort. It was my privilege and honour to speak to all of them.

4.2. Theme 1: Social justice definitions can be grouped under a broad notion of entitlement, but nothing narrower

Participants' social justice definitions and examples were all constructed from, or in relation to, a language of values. They responded to the question of how they would define social justice by using terms that were suggestive of a level of ethical, moral or philosophical belief of what is good or right. Though almost all respondents then went on to explain their definition through practical or experiential examples of what they saw as either social justice, or social injustice, it is worth emphasising, that social justice was in the first instance generally connected with a language of values followed up by a language of action

Participants' answers variously encompassed explicit reference to one or more, but rarely all. of the following: equality, fairness, rights, choice, freedom, anti-oppression and anti-discrimination. Participants all brought in at least one of these terms, some used several, and all without direct prompting. Many participants also incorporated economic (or sometimes explicitly non-economic) aspects, but with different angles on how they interacted with other ethical concepts. Others introduced political elements to their conceptualisations, with the same caveat.

Amid this variety of values terms employed, and the philosophical/practical level at which they were conceptualised and discussed, only one constant became evident through the analysis - the idea of just entitlement. All participants' concepts of social justice in social work, however they explained, it can be conceptualised in the following statement:

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someone is entitled to something that they are not getting, or may not get, and the non-getting of it is contrary to social justice. The word 'entitlement' is chosen deliberately, and by me, as the only term that is both adequately broad and loose, and appropriately emotive. The breadth is necessary because of the range of explanations given by participants: the identity of the someone(s); the basis for the entitlement; the nature of the something; the nature of the obstruction (or possible obstruction), and the remedy/ies to that obstruction all varied among the responses.

The variety manifests itself in the diverse values terms. and combinations thereof, that participants used in their definitions; each will be discussed as part of this theme. Given that this study does not assume synonymy between any two given values terms (for example. not assuming that 'rights' automatically equate to 'fairness'), the spectrum of terms, the meanings attached to those terms, and any combinations of terms used is considered to be broad.

In their use of these terms, participants' responses also varied in what might be called the focal points of their answers; where for them social justice should be enacted, or was most needed. Whatever term(s) they used, their answers covered one or more of the following:

- A values term as a stand-alone concept with the implication of it being an implicit good (or an implicit bad if not present)
- Matters of opportunity, fulfilment, personal growth, self-direction and achievement in life
- Access to help and social support when it was needed
- Individual/one-to-one dealings, interaction and treatment

For example, take those respondents who involved 'rights' in their social justice definition. Different participants touched on one, some, or all of the following:

- Rights (general, legal, human or moral) in and of themselves (or the implicit wrongness of the denial or deficit thereof)

- Rights in regard to self-determination and control of one's life (or the lack thereof)

- Rights to support, help and care as needed (or the failure of them to be fulfilled)

- Rights to decent interpersonal treatment, honesty and consideration (or the absence of such behaviour)

It is worth acknowledging that this is a long theme, in terms of wordage, because the theme is, in part, an illustration of a lack of fine coherence. As such, it has a range of facets to cover.

4.2.1. Equality

When seeking to define social justice, equality was raised by eleven participants, but in different ways. Social justice was described by one participant as 'equality for all irrespective of background, economic position, race, gender... if that is not the norm, it means striving to make it the norm'. Another characterised it as 'making it equal (which) is equality for everyone, no discrimination – race, sexuality, age, everybody's equal'.

Equality was defined by participants who used it in a range of ways, variously connected with access, opportunity and starting point in life. Some explained social justice in terms of equality of access to services, to help, choice or opportunity. To a greater or lesser extent, several participants said that inequality (in terms of treatment, economic standing, or both) impacted peoples' ability to gain access to welfare, education and other services, either in general or in line with what the participant felt was deserved or needed. For some, the unequal access issue was partly one of processes that were difficult to navigate. One participant said it was 'about making sure things are equal, everyone can access what they need to access', giving the examples of benefits and housing, and saying 'some people are struggling more than others – our job (is) to help'.

Some participants focused their comments about equality on equal opportunities. The opportunity in question was raised both with respect to the opportunity to get social support when needed and the opportunity to grow and develop in life and improve their circumstances. Inequality, including, but not limited to, financial poverty, was perceived as both a cause and consequence of social injustice. 'Inequality' said one 'means not having equal or the same access to services as others....... poverty creates inequality in society, for a family or individual from a less moneyed background (sic) possibly won't have the same opportunities as someone who has more disposable income, or services'.

There was something of a spectrum in terms of how much, in the ideal, participants reported wanting to radically redistribute material means or wanted to reduce the impact of unequal material means. Some described increasing equality as something one pursues through opportunity, others defined it more in terms of a level socio-economic starting point. Some participants defined social justice in corrective terms in respect of opportunity, providing the same opportunities and services to those who cannot afford them by themselves, to 'level them up to those who can'. There were nuances of difference between what degree of equality was ideal and desirable. One participant said 'there'll always be differences in wealth, you can't (have it) like in communism where everyone's equal… it's where things are accessible'.

One said explicitly that equality is different from equality of opportunity, in that the latter allowed more issues to be considered. They said that 'with equality you reduce the disadvantage of unlevel playing fields and impact on outcomes' but said one 'can take more into account in the case of equal opportunities – race, religion, economics'.

For some participants there was a theoretical or abstract quality to the concept of equality, somewhat distinct from practical reality. This is interesting, because no other ethical term received such a differentiation, with the possible exception of 'responsibility' (which was

uniquely and explicitly prompted by me in the interview). One respondent said that they struggled with equality because everyone has different needs and solutions, and because 'austerity means not enough resources for equality... we won't ever have a world where all can have equal access'. Another said that equality was 'a kind of ideal basis for the ordering of society' and 'a bit scientific', and that other terms, such as fairness, were better fits for the practical activity of pursuing that ideal.

4.2.2. Fairness

Fairness was mentioned by nine participants as something they associated with social justice. Those who did were not always the same participants who mentioned equality – eleven mentioned one or the other but not both, and one mentioned neither. Several mentioned it in their initial definitions, describing social justice as: seeking, or equating to fairness; an increase in fairness; the impulse to change unfairness; or the act of changing and challenging unfairness. The emphasis varied among respondents between fairness as an outcome and fairness in processes and treatment, though these were not in all cases mutually exclusive.

As with equality, some participants explained social justice as fairness in terms of access, both to general opportunities in life, and to services or help. When asked to explain further, many participants found it easier to explain in terms of what they saw as unfairness, or as obstructions to fairness.

For many participants, fairness meant less time and fewer barriers and prerequisites for people to access help, including, for some, fair treatment of clients by local authorities and/or social workers regarding fair treatment and opportunity in the process of social work involvement. One described fair access as 'not having loads of hoops and delays, long waits to be seen' until the social worker 'end(s) up trying to prevent family breakdown rather than just responding to appropriate need'.

Other participants said fairness in process was 'important in family work and assessments, in making decisions, looking at all evidence'. Two discussed fair treatment by them or by their local authorities, regarding clients having their voice heard in the professional process. One said that fairness meant, with professional boundary caveats, treating clients 'as if they were my family… giving the best service possible', and being fair to families worked with through assessments, judgements, decisions – looking at evidence, decisions that reduce risk'.

One interesting view on fairness came from a participant referencing a child protection case. A mother who had, in the view of the participant, failed in her responsibilities to her children, would have both those children removed and placed into long-term foster care or adoption. The view was expressed that this, while not a fair outcome for the children, was the best available, and was a fair outcome for the mother. This suggests a view of fairness in which a poor outcome might be, on one level at least, a just outcome.

4.2.3. Rights, choice and freedom

Rights were also recurrent social justice descriptors for participants (nine NQSWs in total). For some participants rights were a fundamental element of their early or immediate answer when defining social justice; for others they were introduced in answers developed around equality, fairness or other ethical concepts. There was, therefore, movement and some variation between the idea of rights as stand-alone concepts, and rights as mechanisms for defending or achieving social justice expresses in other values terms.

Some participants who raised rights when defining social justice connected them with the concepts of choice (six) and freedom (three) to make decisions for oneself – this represents a rare consistent co-occurrence of values terms. One, discussing care

planning for older people, stressed the right 'to choose, to be free ... choosing what you want, outcome you would like, what you would like to do …being able to make that choice, not for someone else to make it on your behalf'. Another participant, who also associated social justice with equality, said 'everyone has the same rights, same opportunities – empowerment, encouraging people to make own decisions'. They agreed with an in-interview feedback summary that they were saying people should have different outcomes because of different choices, not because of systems determining different outcomes, and responded by saying they 'don't have cookie cutter service, it's the right service for the right person at the right time'.

Some who defined social justice in rights terms explained their view with reference to ensuring or defending legal rights. One participant, for whom rights were central to their social justice definition, focused on choice, freedom and the legally protected right to make an unwise decision as protected in the Mental Capacity Act 2005. Another drew on the same legislation regarding the right to have a decision made in one's best interest.

Some who linked social justice to rights did so with regard to human rights. One said 'everyone has a right to family life and private life under human rights'. Another said they had to deploy human rights language when engaging with 'families (who) want to push (their older relatives) into care homes immediately'. Others conceptualised rights as being equivalent to needs met, and therefore that if there is a failure to meet a need, then a right has not been properly upheld or substantiated.

4.2.4. (Anti-) Oppression and (anti-) discrimination

Oppression, oppressiveness, discrimination and efforts to reduce or combat them were parts of several participants' definitions and explanations of social justice, explored and defined in different ways. Five participants raised oppression, seven discrimination, with

two overlaps. One said social justice is 'a general term that I'm struggling to define .... but discrimination is a massive part of it in various forms'.

Responses varied between those linked (not mutually exclusively) to individuals, to particular marginalised groups or to broader society-level concepts. The 'anti' modifier is bracketed because in most cases, participants who mentioned oppression or discrimination did so as something social justice should, or does, combat, stand opposed to, or is obstructed by. As with 'unfairness', they tended to phrase it in the negative. Several participants linked oppression and/or discrimination to one or more of the other ethical terms discussed in this section, particularly rights. One participant, drawing on their experience of working in learning disabilities, saw 'freedom of choice as important ...about removing control… people should have freedom to take risks, make unwise decisions'.

Numerous participants defined oppression and/or discrimination in terms of particular groups in society. One said 'characteristics shouldn't be a reason why someone doesn't get access to services… getting jobs if disabled, mental health issues affecting access to work'. Several made links between discriminated-against groups. One participant was specific in describing the identities they had in mind as 'I suppose the classic disadvantaged groups, starting off as women, men in some circumstances, anyone of any kind of BME group, anyone of sort of not your run of the mill average sexuality, or gender or anyone that's sort of outside of the box being a white man, straight, middle classy kind of an idea, anyone out of that box'. Another participant, with observed experience of disability discrimination, said that what they had seen 'widens out to' other forms of prejudice.

Several participants linked their justice concept (inversely) to discriminatory or oppressive action, intentional or otherwise, by figures in relative power, authority or professional

positions, including some social workers. This was generally described as a result of prejudicial presumption, de-valuing attitudes or ignorance. One participant gave an example of a child they were working with, who they felt was treated as 'trouble' by their school more readily because of his poorer background. Another said 'social workers shouldn't be able to say (they) don't want to work with older people, or any given group' and that 'older people get (the) bog standard 'cos (they are seen as) not around for long'.

One, who said they considered discrimination and racism as a social justice problem, referred to instances where what they considered discrimination in thought, possibly without intention, had occurred. This included a client not speaking English, and the resultant need for an interpreter, potentially making this 'a difficult case' from a colleague's perspective. The participant said that this issue of difficulty 'shouldn't even be a thought entering a workers' head'.

While some participants connected oppression and/or discrimination with other values terms such as equality or rights, one articulated a distinction between the two concepts, saying that (anti) discrimination was more around individual action to address 'unfair treatment of protected groups, and the inequality they face in day-to-day life'. They described oppression as more broad-level and systemic, saying that 'oppressed groups or families, that's almost their normality, it takes an individual or group or charity to say no (it's) not right, not how it should be'. They also said 'some who are oppressed don't know it, don't recognise' the level of discrimination against them. As examples they offered 'cultural or ethnic groups' and disabled people.

Another participant, who had spoken strongly against discrimination by professionals, made a distinction between oppressive judgements and professional judgements to help alleviate or identify oppression. They said that '(social workers) ...need to address what is uncomfortable… or (they) might bypass important things... trying to make judgements

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about how got there, how they are oppressed, then work from there, try not judge on presenting problem'.

4.2.5. Responsibility

Unlike other values terms, which were left to participants to mention unprompted or not, all were directly asked about responsibility for social justice (section 3.3.3.). All participants said that everyone in society held responsibility for the pursuit of social justice, but they varied in terms of how that responsibility was, or should be, distributed.

4.2.5.1. Vertical differences in responsibility

Five participants thought in various ways that while everyone bore some responsibility, a higher or more powerful position in an organisation and/or societal hierarchy meant a greater degree of responsibility. For these participants, while everyone was responsible for the pursuit of social justice, there was a socially vertical difference in the type or extent of that responsibility, almost on an ought-implies-can basis.

One participant said they felt that while being higher up the hierarchy equated to more responsibility, everyone had a responsibility to raise issues of social injustice, but that those higher up the system had a commensurately increased responsibility to effect change. Another said that while everybody was responsible and should contribute to social justice, people outside social work do not know and presume its simpler than it is. They also said that the 'buck stops' at the level of government policy, local and national, which at present they regarded as not being good.

One said they felt responsibility for social justice was a government issue, and that it should be less of a priority to be in the top ten economies and more important to look at 'how wealthy is everyone, what opportunities do they have, what services are available

to everyone – we (the UK) would have much better social attitude to things – we might have the most money, but where is that money?'.

One participant who took a tiered view of responsibility on the basis of knowledge, argued that the Brexit referendum was flawed because it meant 'uneducated people (including self) decide', asking 'how can they make decisions' without the appropriate knowledge. They clarified that this was a criticism of education structures, not of those taught within them. The view that greater power or higher authority equated to greater responsibility to act, by no means equated to a belief that this responsibility would be fulfilled by the powerful.

Some others took a different view, saying that grading expectations in terms of social justice action was unhelpful, disempowering or patronising to those lower down the social spectrum. They opined that anyone can work toward achieving more social justice, or that everyone had a more-or-less equal responsibility. One participant said it should not be for 'politicians' only to make change, and made the point that their own (younger) generation were showing a willingness to take action. Another said that the idea that only those up the social structure could affect change was 'patronising to lower classes' and cited historical mass- and grassroots movements.

4.2.5.2. Horizontal differences in responsibility

Two participants suggested that the responsibility might differentiate horizontally rather than vertically – that the social justice remit, so to speak, of a parent was different to that of a police officer, a business owner or a social worker. One participant said everyone was responsible, but 'particularly people in a position to change that, not just in professional roles, though they do have ability to promote social justice, but everyone does'. They also said that promoting social justice was an element of 'general human nature, though not everyone acts that way, but especially professional roles, people

working with others, people-type jobs including social workers on daily basis with the community'.

As well as those opposed to correlating responsibility to social rank or professional status, some participants (NQSW and experienced) actively emphasised responsibility down the perceived social hierarchy and/or to the level of the individual. One described the modern social work role as 'empowering families to give opportunities, plan child safety together, support and gradually step back'. They contrasted this with their perception of how social work 'used to be' (working to/for clients, not with). Another participant effectively applied the out-implies-can approach to personal responsibility, saying those who are able should be responsible for their own justice. Another participant said the view of successive governments, not necessarily entirely their own, to 'encourage people to be active citizens .... encourage people to work, move off welfare'. They also advocated a balance of responsibilities between the system/state and individual.

4.2.6. Economic and non-economic elements

A considerable number of participants (thirteen) raised notions of economics or poverty in their discussion of social justice, though they varied in the extent to which they perceived there to be an economic element, and to the extent that they would like to address that element. Some said they wanted greater material equality between individuals, families, classes or groups, in terms of a starting point in life, either/both as a point of general principle, and/or to reduce its prevalence as a causative factor behind inequities in the availability of social support. Others were less focused on the differences themselves, and more on making those material differences between people matter less, for the purposes of opportunity, accessing support or making use of social and cultural resources, such as theatre, youth provision or sport.

Some who noted an economic element to social (in)justice were also clear there was a non-economic or supra-economic aspect, and that these were related. One said it was 'hard 'cos you can't blame someone for growing up in wealth/connections, but (some opportunities) are advertised to some people more than others.....some families can access opportunities through lots of money'. They reflected that 'parents don't always see that, living day by day by what (they) can afford'. Another said that cultural and artistic pursuits were important to them, and said they had been struck by friends who identified as working class, who had said they would never think of going to a theatre because of a perceived class difference ('full of posh people').

Participants also suggested the issue was cyclical, and that in deprived communities, the inability to break into this opportunity system might result in an anti-aspirational sentiment of 'why should we try?'. Others said that more individual resources equated to more ability to access services, and that fewer resources impacted on outcomes. One for example said 'people without resources struggle to do so......services should be available and should be easily accessed for all'. Another claimed that 'in reality differences in personal circumstances and money means people don't get ... the right service at the right time'.

Also commenting on the impact of economic inequalities on treatment of, in this case, older people by the state, one participant said that it was 'easier with the current generation (of older people)' because they owned their house so were in a position to self-fund. Self-funders 'can have choice' in care homes, because, but also problematised by the fact that, 'care homes have top up fees, some very high'. Those reliant on the local authority for funding cannot have such choice. As a result, they identified a 'double unfairness' for their clients which was both striking and bleak: those with means and savings were forced to use them on care costs, those without face a reduced choice.

4.2.7. Political labels for social justice concepts

Six participants made links between political values, beliefs or labels and their concepts of social justice. Of those who did, all but one made some link between social justice and the political left and/or the Labour party to various degrees of explicitness, exclusivity or agreement.

4.2.7.1. Left/Labour

The majority of participants (five) who brought explicit political labels into their social justice concept made a link between social justice and the political left and/or the Labour party. This tended to be because of an assertion that the left cohered more with values such as equality or fairness, than the right, that they were more concerned with the vulnerable than the right, or that the left spoke for, and represented the working class, of which they considered themselves a member. For some it was a combination of these: one opined that 'the link is equality, attitudes associated with left, what's wrong with helping people? Nothing wrong with having a social worker'. Another said that for them social justice fitted better with 'Labour, for the working person, downtrodden ...conservatives are out of touch with normal people'. A third linked party with social attitude, saying 'it links to people's attitudes about each other... I'm a Labour supporter, I like Jeremy Corbyn, he doesn't fit the mould ... he's a bit left but that's ok, more push means more progress' (NB: Mr Corbyn was Labour leader throughout the period in which interviews took place).

Two participants made connections between their view of politics and their self-classification in class terms, associating respectively working-class identity with Labour and, less explicitly, middle class upbringing with the Conservatives. One said 'I'm probably still more for the working class and that's just 'cause of my background and where I've come from'.

Another said their left-wing belief and support for Labour was generationally ingrained, and that they toyed with voting for another party once, but was pleased they did not. They said that this perspective 'was 'born into you' not just in terms of politics but thinking about and caring for other people.

4.2.7.2. Right/Conservative

Two participants said that the political right and/or the Conservative party could connect with a form of social justice, but generally said that it was an economic or employment-based concept. None fully identified with it personally; one said 'Conservative social justice - no, or if it is it's economic, or doesn't get reality of life ... different view of world'. Another said of the right 'they think work hard, get on ... great concept, not everyone can do that. People at the bottom need help, need a foot up, Conservatives don't help, especially with Universal Credit'. A third, who grew up in a conservative family, associated right-leaning attitudes with both a preference for the past and preservation of personal status; they said some on the right were 'kind of old fashioned and who like the way things used to be and like the fact that people were segregated into groups, and they like winning'.

4.2.7.3. Centre or non-partisan

One participant made reference to the political centre. One said that in their view the centre, as well as the left, could be concerned with social justice as they saw it. The other, originally from another more left-leaning country, said that back home they are a centrist, but in England they are on the left, without having changed what they believed in. Two participants claimed social justice was a political term or involved politics, but explicitly said they were not making a party distinction, and did not articulate ~~and~~ an explicit left-right leaning (though one expressed explicit dissatisfaction with the then-present, Conservative, government).

4.3. Theme 2: Social work training is more of an important activating factor for social justice conceptualisation than it is a core influence.

Participants described arriving at their social justice concepts via different routes, but the responses indicated a fairly consistent range of factors that influenced their concept of social justice. For all participants there was a constellation of some of the following:

- o background and early/personal experience

- o pre-social work employment and education

- o social work training/study

- o time spent in practice

The precise structure of that constellation, and the shape of interaction between the different factors, varied between individuals, but some trends were apparent from the analysis, and they will be discussed in this section.

While many participants cited different ways in which their social work training and education had shaped their conceptualisation of social justice, other elements of personal and professional history and experience were, in broad terms, much more consistent as stated informing factors for social justice conceptualisation. Social work education or training was often seen as a developer of pre-existing 'gut' concepts of (in)justice, and thus can be seen as a modifying or activating influence. Similarly, many participants said that their practice had added to, reified, changed or challenged their concept since their training days.

4.3.1. Personal experiences, background and past work

4.3.1.1.   Childhood/upbringing/family experience

Seven participants cited elements of their own childhoods, upbringings, family life and background and school-age education as having contributed to their social justice conceptualisations in a fundamental way. The particular combinations of influences were different for each person, and took both positive and negative forms.

Several talked about their own upbringing being important. For some this meant being raised with an ethical or moral outlook that they felt fitted a social justice outlook – variously, an ethic of kindness, sense of civic duty, belief in equality of people or respect for others. One said they were raised to see 'everyone the same, slight differences, but everybody should have the same opportunities and rights'.

Some participants linked their own sense of class to their social justice concept in terms of finance, resources and opportunity – one identified themselves as working class and growing up with little. Conscious of coming from a family, or area, of fewer resources and opportunities, they said that being in that situation impacted on how they saw society – for some this came with stigma, for others it imbued a strong, class or community identity. One said their concept 'comes from being working class, (finding it) hard to climb up from own history... all was unfair'. Another said of their belief in social justice that they had 'always had that view even prior to social work …(growing up in a) political family......generations of miners and strikers'. Some who identified having a middle-class, fairly privileged upbringing said that they were made aware, either explicitly or through later experience, that others in society did not have such security and opportunities, and that contrast informed how they thought.

For others, elements of upbringing exposed them to either opinions or experiences that gave them a view of injustice. Some participants identified the views or attitudes of members of their families as being a kind of motivation-by-opposition. Realising they did not share certain values with family members meant they started forming their own views of the world and society. One indicated eventual dissent from their parents' conservative political outlook, though they also stressed that they still viewed them as moral people who had 'good values'. Another cited a parent's view which they described as one of 'less sympathy…but that he was probably thinking … of responsible adults rather that people with less agency or opportunity'.

Some participants rooted aspects of their social justice concept in difficult or painful experiences that either occurred, or were consciously realised, in adolescence or adulthood. Other participants gave examples of family members or close friends experiencing social injustice in a range of ways, including personal or family experience of domestic violence, experiencing or seeing bullying and school-age social exclusion, or a being denied opportunities because of poverty, class or a lack of parental encouragement.

One respondent reflected on their own family experience of an adult member being adopted when practising in their own role. Another said, 'I was brought up with a violent father...women didn't have places to go…'. From that experience, they believed that 'everyone should have a right to live safely and without threat' and said they 'went into social work because I wanted to change how people see things...see they have got a choice'.

Another also raised experience of domestic violence, where they felt the (middle class) social circumstances of the perpetrator 'made it look different to professionals ... (I) didn't feel treated fairly because of 'small details'. They compared this with another situation

where the perpetrator had a criminal background and professionals were quicker to engage. While keeping to my stance of not profiling individual respondents in detail, it is worth noting that these two participants, with personal or family experience of domestic violence, worked in different team types and different authorities, and differed from one another on many of their other answers. They are strong (as well as brave and candid) examples of why Theme 1 is so broad, because even similar personal experiences cannot be assumed to result in similar justice concepts.

For some this was replicated in elements of their primary or secondary school life, such as bullying or being left out, which they linked to developing anti-discriminatory instincts. One participant connected their values with 'my own experiences growing up - I get quite passionate and defensive about things because I've experienced feelings of not being equal and not having the same chances as other people'.

An example was given around the experience of being from a council estate and having social work involvement as a child, unlike their peers. Of not being invited to school friends' birthday parties as a result, they said 'it sounds so petty ... I used to take it dead personal cos it's probably cos like I'm from the way I am and I'll get really personal about it'. They connected this to their belief in equality of chances 'and why I came to the job in the first place'.

4.3.1.2.   Past Employment and Volunteering

Seven participants identified pre-social work employment and/or voluntary work as an influence on social justice conceptualisation. Depending on their age and individual circumstances, this encompassed a longer period of time for some than for others, and jobs varied in terms of how related they were to social work, though most referenced previous work involving care of, or support for, people in some form.

Some participants took positive lessons from their previous roles of working with people as community workers, youth workers, support workers or charity/social enterprise employees. They variously cited examples of practice, efforts, expressed views, impressive colleagues or enjoyment of certain types of work that those roles had involved. Some of them noted that these roles had exposed them to new ways of thinking about the world in general, or about specific groups, or to new levels of understanding of problems faced by people, or by specific populations. Two participants who had worked in physical and/or learning disabilities said they gained, or galvanised, a belief that everyone should be able to 'achieve' and 'enjoy life and rights' like anyone else. Others cited examples in previous roles of poor practice, negative attitudes and active or passive discrimination, evidence of insufficient resources or other barriers to client successes and opportunities, as part of what inspired their conceptualisation of social justice. In many cases they described this using the language of Theme 1, saying that something was, for example, 'unfair' or 'not right'.

Additionally, one participant with past employment in retail, said that their social justice concept was retrospectively influenced by that period; when training in social work, they reflected on the fact that, when in their retail job, they did not think about unfairness around some being able to afford to shop, and others not.

For some, their present role had changed how they thought about social justice, and they contrasted their social work post with earlier employment, often with a view that the latter enabled greater pursuit of social justice. One, also with a disabilities background, said they had more scope to campaign and a sense of mission in their previous role, and another, a former youth worker, noted the greater extent of their involvement with clients compared to being a social worker.

4.3.2. Social work education and training

Participants were explicitly asked about the influence of their social work training or university study if they did not mention it in response to question 2 unprompted. The responses can be categorised into three loose camps, of which the answers of any given participant may sit in one or more. There were those who saw it as important in forming their social justice concept, by adding something (the specifics vary) to an existing value base or instinct. There were a minority who either felt it provided little or nothing significant on this front. Some said they took this view at the time, but later came to the view that it had contributed – sometimes as a result of the interview itself. There were also several for whom practice experience was the more significant influence, or for whom practice experience had challenged, changed or reified their concept of social justice since their training. This is discussed here, and is also relevant to Theme 3.

Several participants said that their social work training was of considerable importance in their conceptualisation of social justice and/or was the first thing they mentioned when asked about what had contributed to how they saw it, often unprompted by the planned supplementary question. For almost all of these participants, however, their social work training was not the fundamental beginning of their conceptualisation of social justice per se – that was down to one or more of the personal history factors set out above. They described their training as adding, articulating or clarifying something that sat alongside or developed a view of social justice that they already held. Many described having a sense of justice/injustice before their course, either in the form of a gut feeling or some experience of what they now understood to be injustice, but that training added to or developed. This took a range of different forms, and the following examples are not necessarily discrete or mutually exclusive for any given participant.

4.3.2.1.   University/training providing passion, grounding or 'fire'

One said their concept of social justice had 'mostly come from uni' - that they were aware of inequalities before but terms like social justice were new to them and they became more aware during the course. They said their course was geared toward 'be(ing) that change, go into the world and change … feel empowered'. Another said that 'university put the grounding in, gave fire and passion', and a third said that having been given a practical task in local area supporting the establishment of a rehabilitation centre when in training, they felt they had been 'spurred into action' and 'fired up'.

4.3.2.2.   Training provided the will/skill to challenge poor/oppressive practice

One said that university had an impact because it changed how they thought and made them more willing to challenge others, whereas they did not much before. They also said that, when they worked in a care home (before and in parallel to their training) they would challenge bad or oppressive practice in a way they would not have done before they started training. Another, who went through a non-university fast-tracked training scheme said they 'did a couple of hours' on social justice and were pushed to see 'leadership as a way of tackling injustice'.

4.3.2.3.   Training added a different, broader, or macro-level perspective to existing instincts

Some participants described the impact of their social work training as offering a widening perspective on beliefs they already held about (in)justice. For these individuals, there was an existing concept of social justice (or injustice), expressed using one or more of the terms in Theme 1, but prior to their training, these were largely conceptualised at an individual, family or community level. Social work education, these participants reported, 'gave a wider view' in one form or another, such as looking at social justice issues at a

national and international, or possibly systemic and political, level, or by making them aware of potential causative mechanisms of social injustice, and providing 'greater tools for critiquing systems and structures' and 'a questioning attitude … helped by research-rich lecturers'.

One said that they probably did study social justice at university, but did not see it as something one would learn academically 'in a textbook'; they described it as 'social – something you see and you feel'. They did however, later in the interview, credit university with revealing how 'social justice has changed over time (such as) women's experience being different now (though still unjust) ... forms of poverty (contextualising the increase in food banks)'.

For some, the widening perspective was to do with the present practice landscape of social work provision. One said 'uni contributed by (independent) organisations coming in who are filling a gap'. Another valued being 'exposed through training to different organisations that that did work they were not aware went on before'.

For some, this happened through placement rather than classroom learning. One said that their first placement, in a refugee service, they encountered what they described as different kinds of social injustice in terms of the issues and challenges that asylum seekers and refugees face. They said that contrary to popular perception, asylum seekers actually receive 'horrific housing, £30 a week' and described it as a 'hidden world' with horrific procedures, where the 'stats don't fit what's happening'.

4.3.2.4. Training added a theoretical framework or concept language to articulate existing instincts

Similarly, but not identically, to the previous point, several participants talked about learning social work theory as being instrumental in developing their social justice

concept, because it provided them with a range of models, lenses or language with which they could explore and contextualise their existing, sometimes interrogated or unvoiced, positions. One said 'uni gave a wider view, language for concepts and theories - ladder of participation, systems theory'. Another said that 'university training had various links with values, including giving a language of theory and models to values I already believed in'. Another put it more concisely, describing it as 'pretty phrasing to accompany beliefs I already held'.

4.3.2.5.   Training provided legal knowledge, intervention models and toolkits for action

For yet more participants, learning about law, policies, models or experience of intervention gave them what they felt to be a toolkit for engaging with social injustices in a practical way. The exact formulation varied by individual, but a common thread was the role of university teaching or training in moving them from seeing or experiencing social injustices, to having the beginnings of an approach to engaging with them. One said 'the values and drive were there before but learning about legislation and rights....provided a toolkit, especially for work with or challenging other professionals'. They said they had a sense already of being nurturing, and of how to treat people, but their training had provided a toolbox that supported their basic ethical stance, particularly regarding understanding legislation that served as back up to their values (they highlighted the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Mental Capacity Act 2005). They also said training 'justified' their communication skills and showed them they are 'usually quite good, giving people a voice where they wouldn't have one.'

4.3.2.6.   No or little contribution from social work education

For four NQSW participants – a minority, but not an insignificant one - social work education or training was not something they thought influenced their social justice concept very much, locating their main influence in practice or life experience. Some now

saw it as having contributed but not at the time; others maintained their view of its low impact for their concept. When asked about the contribution of their training, one said 'not massively' and that their 'psychology degree before contributed more around mental health......covered some things in social work training, but didn't change my personal view which is core'. Another who said their training had little influence said the subject was 'never approached, only came to light in doing the job' and suggested that a course would have difficulty in relating to different injustices in different areas.

One participant, initially said the contribution of university to their concept of social justice was 'probablies none – when you say social justice it was never really mentioned, that term, it was never really mentioned an awful lot', but went on to say 'I suppose it's so broad it's probably come up in ways I'd not actually realised'.

4.3.3. Impact of time in practice on social justice conceptualisation

Almost all participants said that in one way or another, their time in practice had influenced their concept or view of social justice. The majority suggested that to a greater or lesser extent, they experienced systemic challenges to practicing social justice as they saw it.

Some, however, said that their concepts of social justice were based more on their time in social work employment since qualification, rather than their university learning or their training. One said they were not sure where their view came from, but thought 'this year of practice' has been formative. They thought there may be personal elements, but that they have only noticed that because they are more aware of it because of the job. Before that, they believed they 'didn't know and didn't notice'. They said that in looking back now they thought 'x isn't fair' but hadn't seen it in terms of social justice.

For some, social work training was described not only as not contributing, but as being actively irrelevant to social justice in reality. One said 'I think before that it was more theory behind it......but when you put it into perspective it's a whole lot different to what you're taught I think'. They went on to say 'I think actually what I learnt in uni was completely irrelevant, the only actual thing that was relevant was the law side of it and obviously the theory side in terms of development and attachment and things like that'.

One participant suggested an environmental rather than curricular reason for this feeling, saying that part of the issue with their university experience compared with their practice situation is the comparative strength of the relationships, contrasting poorer relationships with their university cohort ('just awful, they were judgemental, everything you get told not to be at Uni……. competition ... you're trying to be the best social worker in the room') with their present team, where 'everyone's very supportive, you'll get people that tell you how it is, but not in a nasty way'.

All participants were asked about their experience of trying to practise in line with their own social justice concept. Those who identified a combination of personal experience and university education as being the main influences on their social justice concept, generally said that their practice experience had challenged, and in some cases, changed their views.

Some participants said that their time in practice had impacted on their social justice concept in terms of first principles or focus. One participant made an interesting values distinction where they claimed their university training sought to instil an equality-as-sameness concept that they now did not believe was practically viable, because people are different, with different needs. This participant said that equality was not wrong as an idea, and that they originally intended to work more anti-oppressively and effect major change, but found that this was much harder in practice.

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Others suggested in different ways that their ability to manifest or pursue social justice, as they saw it, was more limited in practice than they anticipated. This will be further discussed in theme 3, but it is worth noting here, that for some, though they reported this experience, it did not impact on their fundamental beliefs. One, for example, said 'I wanted to be a social worker to do more ... now there's more paperwork changing lives less so … (but) my ideal view's not changed'. Others said that their thinking about it had been crystallised or reified by time in the job.

4.4. Theme 3: Statutory social work is stuck in reactive micro-practice

Themes 3, 4 and 5 could in one sense be seen as three facets of a single aspect of the findings; the practice experience of participants in pursuing social justice. The decision to delineate and represent them in three themes reflects the main distinctions in the findings regarding barriers and facilitators of social justice, after several processes of theme refinement.

Participants were broadly consistent in their discussion of whether or how statutory social workers could be effective pursuers and agents of social justice, as they saw it. The conceptual and experiential reasoning behind this position was based on three main points, which are set out below.

4.4.1. Near-inability to pursue justice at a social or macro-level

Nine participants said that they felt unable to effect much change beyond their immediate clients, or to improve things at the societal level. They could work at the individual or micro-level, but rarely do much in terms of engaging with societal problems at a level at which they could change things more fundamentally and/or for more people.

Several said directly that societal-level impact was not only beyond their personal experience of their role, but also that it was beyond the statutory social work role generally. One participant said it was harder to correct inequality because of an inability to engage with causative factors in the limits of a statutory role. Another said that at university, they were given radical social work ideas that they found 'uplifting' but felt they 'can't do in the real life of the job'. Strikingly, they wondered in the interview that having trained to be a social worker, they may be in the wrong job, and saw a distinction between their practice and bigger issues. Others expressed similar sentiments about the nature of their role. One said of their own role that they were 'guessing nothing in the job description to promote social justice'. Several respondents expressed frustration or regret at the feeling that even when they could achieve a measure of justice, it was usually at the level of an individual or family. Some emphasised the importance of drawing attention to systemic problems; one said that 'if you don't stand up and say this is not working or there's issues here .... then the person at the top might not know there's any issues, they might be ignoring them'.

One said that in their degree they were pushed to have the 'moral obligation' to pursue social justice and 'be that change... it's drummed into you', but in reality, and in the job, it was difficult to be the change. They agreed with idea that they are often confined to effective change at a lower level, rather than a broader level. This participant said that reality is different to the taught expectation where you can have the ability to change policy and legislation, but that the focus has to be on the individual client and trying to improve things for them that day.

4.4.2. Limitations of time, constraints of workload and boundaries of professional remit

Thirteen participants identified time (including time to think), workload pressure and what they saw as the tightly defined remit of their role as barriers to what they saw as social

justice. This suggests that social justice is seen as a time-consuming pursuit that potentially requires nuance and effort. One said 'a lot of social workers are so overstretched they don't have time to think'.

Participants suggested that time limits may have impact not only on practical ability to make change, but on outlook and attitude. One said that social work needed to focus on bridging the gap between macro and micro via extra training because they do not have, or cannot make time, for thinking about social justice and inequality in daily practice. Once one shifts into work, they said, 'all thoughts and opportunities for change get less' and therefore social work is 'maybe not the right job to have for that'. Another said 'it's) hard because of austerity, not enough hours and not everyone is on same page…..(it) depends on how dedicated people are to treating (clients) fairly'.

Some suggested that time pressures pushed them to a basic, residual, 'good enough' concept of social justice. One described their practice priorities as 'now more basic', and another said 'time is a difficulty, when I first started, I had a protected caseload, I was doing every last little bit, welfare rights, housing, school ... now caseloads are slowly increasing, main thing is 'are they safe' – not how I want it to be'. Yet another said 'it's the first job I've had where I wish it wasn't 4 o'clock ... no one goes home on time, you could do it forever'.

Several expressed scepticism that their role would allow them time/freedom to be involved in justice pursuits outside of statutory work, and that they would need to pursue social justice efforts in their own time. Others mentioned that they felt more able to pursue social justice in previous voluntary/independent sector jobs.

Some participants also suggested that client perception of the remits of the social work role, accurate or otherwise, added to the limitations they were faced with. One said they

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felt '...perceived as being invasive, as interfering, or as taking children away'. Another claimed that 'compared to the voluntary sector...people think they are there to remove kids and tell them what to do...the social work role has different connotations'.

4.4.3. Reactive rather than preventative working

Nine participants pointed to their role being one where they had to work reactively rather than preventatively, or where it was very difficult to work preventatively. Several participants said that they felt limited to working reactively to crises or near-crises, because it was only at that point that a client or family situation was sufficiently severe in terms of statutory thresholds. Several suggested that even when the antecedents of a problem were reasonably obvious, they felt they were only in a position to react to a crisis or an escalation of a situation, either because of the practical resources available (time, funding, space amid the rest of their caseload), or the limited nature of their remit as a statutory social worker or that of their team. Correspondingly, several gave examples of cases where a situation was not yet at a critical point, or was no longer at a critical point, and therefore the potential for their involvement was limited by their remit, but where they could see the potential for (re)escalation. Several said that opportunities to intervene sooner are missed and mitigate or prevent crisis because of these strictures.

One participant working with disabled children said that because of thresholds governing when support could be implemented and a social worker involved, they felt that their local authority was reactive, not proactive, in its support of its clients. They described it as 'it's got to get so bad'. They described themselves as a 'proactive person' who struggled with the restrictions on their role. Another participant said that there was a difference working in their present local authority and a placement in a different one with regard to engaging with wider issues due to 'the level of violence, the level of poverty'. Another, said that by the time their clients (older people) worked with social services, they have already had a life of antecedent experiences, including the impacts of social injustices, and therefore it

was harder to seek social justice in later life if the person did not have established support already. For a smaller number of participants, there was, however, more of a leaning to social work practice based on encouraging self-solving of problems and seeing that as a form of empowerment rather than residuality.

One of the main antecedents that participants reported feeling unable to affect was the client or family's financial situation. They felt they could not significantly change the individual's or family's financial circumstances, let alone challenge the forces that contributed to it. Some also described not being able to affect the way in which poorer or under-resourced clients were discriminated against by the processes with which they had to work. One gave the example of a 'care home who only take private funders ... (who)… could meet the needs (of those who need statutory funding) but don't'. Some suggested this also worked in reverse, where economic advantage could lead not only to material advantage but expectations of more deferential treatment. They described a sense from some wealthier clients of 'we've got all this money so why are we putting our children at risk?'. Others suggested that another aspect of reactive working was that the state was often initially under-involved from their perspective, then became interventionist to the point of oppression, so that 'even the 'least intrusive' option can still be pretty intrusive'.

4.5. Theme 4: Even micro-practice social justice is systemically impeded

As the previous theme set out, many participants problematised whether they could be considered to be practising in line with social justice, as they would ideally see it – at a macro-social level and/or in preventative rather than simply reactive work. A further theme delineated from the data is participants' perceptions of the constraints they face even in pursuing a micro-level and reactive form of social justice. These barriers and impediments took various, and variously interacting, forms.

4.5.1. Lack of statutory resources

Eleven participants gave various examples of social injustices that were connected to a lack of, or imbalance in, statutory resources. Several either made general comments about a paucity of funds or options for clients or gave specific examples of when they were unable to meet client requests because of funding gaps or lack of service provision. One connected this problem with cases with less common aspects, saying there was no provision to support a female perpetrator of domestic violence, compared with extant resources for male perpetrators. Others, discussing hospital discharge and care planning, said that the 'family tell you what they would like, but you can't provide it because of funding and service gaps', and that 'the financial aspect of residential/nursing care placements, result(ed) in best interest decisions having a fiscal element that was not necessarily in the client's best interest, even if other aspects of the placement were'.

4.5.2. Poorly designed welfare system of hoops and tick-boxes

Nine participants made frequent reference to a bureaucratic and process-driven sensibility governing, or affecting, elements of their work, which was variously described as passively constraining clients (preventing them from getting help) or actively constraining them (mandating compliance with particular tasks and targets). The impact of these forces and structures were frequently described as 'jumping through hoops' or 'ticking boxes'. This was accompanied by the sentiment that the social welfare system in both economic and non-economic aspects was ineffective and did not reflect people's actual needs, particularly if they were vulnerable. One participant described it as 'the way the system's set up you're fighting a losing battle half the time and when you do have a chance it's like very limited options... sometimes I feel like you just kind of jump through hoops'. They felt that this was not meaningful, represented a loss of humanity and a tick box exercise rather than a social justice effort, for example: 'ah, has the violent dad been to the perpetrator programme?' tick!'.

Another expressed frustration at wanting to do things and being unable to because of money or procedure, saying it was 'difficult having to work a certain way (within tight, frustrating processes)'. They recalled a case of 'a 14-year-old looked-after child staying with his grandfather...not allowed 'cause he's not been assessed, and they're saying 'why can't just stay here?''. One participant said that what they would like to see change was 'ideally more opportunities for people, more access to services, not have to jump through hoops, services readily available when people need them, not waiting lists and thresholds'.

Participants' criticism of welfare system operation also extended to the broader design. One, while arguing that poverty had a role in social (in)justice in terms of how it interacted with policy and access, said 'a lot of social policy and legislation and government policy restricts people ... it becomes a problem, almost like the policies are hindering people already in poverty', adding that it meant that once in poverty, it was hard to get out.

A few participants talked about the loss of opportunities, that people on low income/benefits experienced, even if their basic needs were met. One, reflecting on their own activity-filled childhood by contrast, said the attitude they perceived in the powerful was that 'this is x amount that people think you can live on with X amount of children'. 'Even if true', they continue, 'what about basics beyond rent or food?'.

Several participants specifically referenced the thresholds of Universal Credit. One said 'some families have a certain number of children have … better or less opportunities than others in terms of how much they can claim with rules of Universal Credit, and that's not fair'. Comments were also made about criteria for accessing benefits or support, described as very specific or narrow. One participant cited an example of punitive thresholds at work, recalling working with family in which 'the mother got herself in debt through her own choices, but had tax credits reduced by £120 per week ...(this was a)

big deal with three kids in house....and this was the maximum amount they can take off someone, no warning'.

4.5.3. Clients navigating the system: lack of knowledge and/or support network

Eleven participants emphasised their frustration with the belief that not only they, but their clients, needed to know how to access and navigate the social support system. This was described as disadvantaging those who either did not know the system, or what help was available, or didn't have adequate support to advocate – possibly agitate – on their behalf. Connected to this was some participants' comments about working with clients' families who made demands that either overrode the client's rights, or exceeded what the state could provide, because of their lack of knowledge of what could be offered in terms of support. One reflected that though 'things (feel) out of control as a social worker, (they feel) even further out of (a) family's control'.

One participant articulated certain sentiments around knowledge and access with particular clarity, therefore their responses are set out fairly extensively. However these sentiments were also shared by other interviewees. This participant said that 'even to access a social or the services we provide or universal services ... (there is a) massive difference between who knows and who doesn't know. They said 'some people know about services, know how to get them and will fight, others didn't even know the service existed - how do I get them?'. They said 'it's difficult for people to know about these services', saying that a key factor was 'what they've got to support them to find out about these things – can even be as simple as not having family/friends, no word of mouth, loads of barriers finding and getting access – if you don't know what you don't know'. They said, with empathy, that it 'feels like it's who shouts the loudest – if I was the family member I would be the family from hell, ringing and ringing, and it works! That's a social

injustice that it depends on that'. Others concurred; one said that families need to 'know how to manipulate the system' to get support for their children. Another said that a lack of family support could be both cause of social injustice, and a form of social injustice itself.

4.5.4. Client and family responsibilised by the state

Six participants discussed clients' families either being resources, or being seen as resources by social work or statutory organisations. Several referred to actual instances or hypothetical examples of clients who either had to rely on their families for support, even to their own detriment and/or that of family members, or cases where a client either had no family support or social network to lean on, no contact with family, or whose family were not able or equipped to care for them.

One children and families worker said they viewed the family position as stressful, because parents have to find out the local service offer for themselves, then apply for help. They said it feels invasive, that stigma may be a factor, not least because the family's enquiry 'might go through as safeguarding' if their concerns or inquiries are heard by a team other than theirs. They speculated that local authority systems may aim for families resolving more issues themselves, rather than going to the state for help. They recounted situations where '(social work) could have intervened earlier, maybe the system hopes parents and families solve it themselves'. Another participant said they had 'learned (from practice, that) …we always tend to put it back in the hands of the family' by which they meant that (in this case), where possible, it was for the family to work to make a child safer. For that reason, they said, the family are seen as a/the central or primary place of social justice pursuit.

A participant working with older people said that carers and families can have a positive or negative impact on the client but being in that position can also have an impact on a

carer's life. They offered the example of an older client's daughter whose personal situation had deteriorated through her caring responsibilities. In taking that role, the daughter and carers like her, were 'saving the state a lot of money'. They agreed with the summary that this was an injustice for client and family alike.

It should be said that other participants' utterances could have been included in this sub-theme but were included instead in the 'reactive practice' element of theme 3. This was one of the tightest calls in the theming process, in which the final distinction was made between those speaking about barriers to macro-level impact, and those discussing barriers in micro-practice. It should also be made clear that some participants expressed a more positive view of passing responsibility, albeit supported, back to clients and families. One participant took the view that their purpose, and the purpose of social work, was to empower families, 'sitting down together and working out how to keep children safe, rather than the social worker telling (them)'. They said that they, in time, 'will seek to step back' and, in an interesting contrast with other participants, said that 'the aim is now to empower families to solve issues themselves ...it wasn't like that 20 years ago' where they felt the social worker did 'for' and 'to' rather than 'with'. They said they would say to clients 'if you didn't have me what would you do – ok, you're right, do you need my help or can you do it alone?' They said that they were keen on looking forward, asking where the client wanted to be in x years, or using the miracle question. This, they said 'gives an end point for when the social worker is not around'. Another participant, discussing client responsibility, said that part of the problem for social justice was inaccessibility of support and an unfair system in terms of navigation for those in need. They also said, however, that individuals had a responsibility to live up to, and that there was an issue of presumed entitlement on the part of some of their clients.

4.5.5. Perceived and actual issues of power and attitude

A fairly consistent thread in participants' experience of seeking social justice practice, or perhaps more accurately, seeking to fight social injustice, was the role of people and institutions who hold a degree of power over others, the impact of the decisions they make, and the speculated reasons for those decisions. Fifteen participants variously levelled criticism at political elites and centres of governmental power (national and local), and the disconnection of the welfare system from the actual experiences and needs of people who use it.

Ten participants (both those who did and did not mention supportive managers in theme 5) also located the perceived distance between powerful and non-powerful at the level of senior managers or other higher-ranked social work professionals, as well as governmental systems. Some offered anecdotes about dealing with care budget panel managers when seeking funding or support to assist a client, and the frustration of being told no. One said that 'you almost have to fight management'. Another described the limited 'understanding from people higher up, not being involved in day to day with vulnerable and oppressed clients'.

Others were critical of the attitudes of non-managerial professionals, including other social workers in some cases. Some of these points described passive examples – social workers who appeared more process-driven than value-driven, who stuck rigidly to the remits of their own job rather than sometimes doing extra, or who said they were cynical about clients and the prospect of positive change. Others were more active; one participant critically observed that some social workers 'enjoy power'.

Several participants commented on the knowledge gaps of, and attitudes towards, clients or practice held by professionals working alongside social workers, and in some cases by social workers themselves. Participants said that at times there was a need to stand

up to other professionals, and other agencies' staff who were being barriers to justice or fairness. One participant said a key part of their job was to advocate for marginalised voices (young people in their case) in multi-professional meetings. Another speculated that they did not know if every professional was similarly driven by values to make an effort in their job.

4.6. Theme 5: Social justice facilitators are few in number, and either 'hard' or 'soft'

When invited to discuss what they believed to be helpful or useful in pursuit of social justice in their role, participants generally offered two kinds of answers – 'hard' factors and 'soft' factors. The 'hard' describes practitioners using the enduring, and largely unmoving, unchanging dimensions of their role. This generally means use of the law, but depending on how one thinks about it, could be argued to include personally held social work values. The 'soft' describes things that are either difficult to regulate, or that cannot be relied upon to be present from one role to another – a good team ethic, supportive environment and management, provisions and options beyond the state, and the ability and option of working beyond or around the core mandates of one's role.

4.6.1. Use of law to support clients

A frequent and recurring theme from participants' answers concerned the role of the law in social work practice, and in the pursuit of social justice. Nine participants cited pieces of law as being useful and supportive struts and bulwarks in the achievement of social justice, or at least the mitigation, reduction and avoidance of social injustice. A common response was some variation of the claim that a major piece of law, such as The Children Act 1989, 2004, the Mental Health Act 1983 am. 2007, and the Care Act 2014, was consistently helpful in being able to refer to and protect the rights of the client or family with whom that worker is practising.

The language used by participants when explaining the usefulness of law falls into a spectrum between those who saw the law as a mechanism for supporting and achieving social justice, but not the same thing, and those who saw it as something synonymous with/conceptually entwined with social justice. At one end is a discourse of legally mandated provisions as bare minimum for social justice, but not necessarily sufficient, and the other is of social-justice-as-legal-rights-met.

The first of these was represented in a range of stories and anecdotes in which participants gave examples – abstract and specific, of where they could fall back on legislation to defend the approach that they were taking with their client. At this end of the spectrum – and it is an imperfect spectrum with internal overlaps – respondents were framing requirements of law and policy as a backline for their efforts. The other end of the spectrum had a partially or predominantly law-based slant on a rights-based concept of social justice, in terms of first principles (though not all who said this mentioned rights in ways described in Theme 1).

An important point about this - for many this was in part a hard backline, a firewall of sorts, to guarantee a minimum level of justice, redress, needs met or rights respected. This backline was well below what many participants said they would like to be able to offer their clients. Many of them suggested that same legal provisions and obligations that supported their efforts also placed limitations on the aspirations of those efforts.

For those who saw social justice as the fulfilling of legal rights, there was for most a level of effort involved around advocacy, explanation or sourcing funding, suggesting that the existence of the law was not sufficient, or not seen as sufficient, to guarantee just and consistent application.

In part linked to this issue about the limits of law as a social justice tool, numerous participants gave examples of the law being an oppressive thing for their clients, or society generally, either in actual impact or in appearance and feel. In particular, this manifested in terms of using statutory structures to protect, but also to impose upon people, or to decline as well as to grant services and funding.

4.6.2. Working around one's core role, and using non-statutory resources

Five participants referred to having to work around their core role and/or having to signpost clients to the voluntary or charity sectors in order to fulfil their concept of social justice. For some, this came across as a way of combatting limited state resources and remits. One participant expressed this succinctly; 'the...voluntary sector is filling a need'. For others, including those speaking from their own experience of working outside the state, voluntary sector organisations were, by their nature, in a stronger place to engage with social- or macro-level justice issues and/or to work more preventatively and pro-actively.

The way the language was constructed around these actions was revealing – they were consistently framed as being extra, outside, marginal, additional or requiring extra effort and even a level of cunning. One said that there were times they had to 'worm in' and do extra things around their statutory role, which resulted in other social workers telling them that, for example, liaising with housing services was 'not your job'. Another experienced practitioner said they encouraged their newer colleagues to look for opportunities and signposting points beyond the main confines of their role. This participant was offered an in-interview feedback summarisation of these activities being 'the (free) biscuit with the coffee' and readily agreed with the analogy.

4.6.3. Supportive colleagues and managers, sharing resources and ideas

Seven participants mentioned collegiate support, being in a mutually supportive team, where ideas, solutions, knowledge of resources and difficult practice issues were shared and discussed, or having a good immediate manager who was supportive and helpful, while still aiding and pushing the social worker's development. One said they have '... got a really good team, a lot of support...'. Others talked in terms of having people with whom to discuss case issues, saying that 'people will share ideas, help you out with cases...'. One described a particular practice process they were known to be expert in, with which they could support colleagues who dealt with it less frequently, but also suggested the reverse was true; 'if I need a different way of doing something, there's always someone to ask who knows more than I do about a particular process'.

4.6.4. Going back to one's own values in thought and in action

The final factor that some participants (seven) felt helped them pursue social justice was, perhaps appropriately given where the substantive content of the chapter started, social workers returning to their own values. This took the form of both values-as-beliefs, and values-as-actions. Good communication and honest behaviour with clients were mentioned by some as something that facilitated social justice in practice. In a longer quote that is nonetheless worth repeating in full, one participant said of core values;

> 'I really like that in this job you always have to come back to that the young person.... is paramount and their safety is paramount and you're not able to sort of come back from that ... the young person is at the centre...(its) like having a one rule (to) always come back to and you can argue this way and that way but you always come back to that rule and say actually is this in the best interests and say is this going to be best for them is this going to be safest, how do we do that?'

Others gave answers that echoed this kind of view. One described themselves almost in terms of values-as-identity, saying 'I am person-centred, I want to know about their life,

see them as an individual'. Another considered the context of practice for the family, making the point that social workers often work with families at 'the worst time of their lives … social care can be part of problem ...'being fair gets a level of respect from families … genuineness is important'. They said they kept this in mind even when away from direct interaction, by asking themselves how clients might feel if reading their case notes back.

4.7. Summary

This chapter has sought to present the findings of this study through five themes that represent the issue of social justice in statutory social work, as presented by the participants. Practitioners are, in various ways and through diverse constructions, fairly consistently describing a conceptual formation that draws on an alignment of, and interaction between, personal, professional and educational influences and experiences. While varied in conceptual detail, there is a consistent theme of supporting, defending and/or extending just entitlement, as they see it. 'As they see it' is, however, the key phrase – the variations and combinations are diverse. They also readily identified what they saw as impeding their efforts to pursue their concept in practice, at the macro- and the micro-level, as well as some fairly consistent, but generally situational, factors that helped.

The next chapter explores these findings, with particular focus on trying to map the conceptual range of the term 'social justice', and the place of personal experience in also considers statutory social workers' frustrated attempts to pursue social justice, using critical realism's layers of reality, and whether, given these findings, there are grounds for questioning if statutory social work can still be justifiably seen as a social justice profession.

5. Chapter 5: Discussion chapter 1: Exploration of the findings

Carve away the stone

5.1. Introduction

This chapter comprises a discussion of the findings in and of themselves, and in comparison with elements of the literature. Specifically, it seeks to explore, explain and theorise about why the findings are as they appear to be, through the lens of the constructivist-critical realist epistemological framework detailed in the methodology (Section 3.2.). The discussion will be presented in four sections, each with a particular focus:

The central argument of this chapter, with the research questions (RQs) in mind, is as follows. Participants (NQSW and experienced) gave not only a wide range of social justice definitions, but a range of combinations and stacks of values terms (RQ1). This diversity may be because of the key place of pre-qualifying personal experience which is, by its very nature, individual (RQ2). That personal experience is complemented by the different roles that qualifying training provided, and by practice experience, which was more consistently described between participants (RQ3). This suggests a curious and concerning situation, in which practitioners who describe varied social justice concepts nevertheless describe similar obstructions to their ability to practice those concepts. Given the impact of austerity since 2010, and the public sector reforms that predate it, this might explain the lack of significant differences between NQSWs and experienced participants (RQ4). These findings also behove one to ask whether statutory social work can continue to style itself as a social justice role.

The wide conceptual range of the term 'social justice' in the findings (section 5.2.)

This section explores and explains the conceptual options of social justice, with reference to the findings and the literature. The difficulties of forming a viable, coherent concept, or

range of concepts, are set out. This includes going beyond the possible conceptual contents of social justice and exploring the possible forms of the conceptual and operational relationship between social justice and its prospective components, and between one component and another. It is argued that, after considering the literature and the thematic analysis of findings, there is still little to no evidence for a coherent definition beyond the broad and diverse notion of 'entitlement'. The very wide range of possible variants and combinations are visually mapped out.

Experience as a possible explanation for this conceptual variability (section 5.3.)

This section considers the ways in which varied combinations of participants' personal, educational and practice experience, and perceptions of that experience, and the ways they say that it has shaped their social justice concepts. Experience is, in one sense, fairly easily themed and typologised: childhood, family and upbringing; pre-qualification work experience; social work education/training; social work practice experience. At a more detailed level, however, this typology is limited, because, for different participants, they interact in different ways. The findings suggest interaction and/or overlap between concept and experience, wherein one affects and changes the other, in a range of directions. Possibly because it is such an ill-defined concept, individuals can make a wide range of associations with social justice, and therefore conceptualise it through their own experience and pre-existing beliefs. Conversely it may be that people define it in a way that is reliant on personal experience, contributed to by training, and that explains the diversity of conceptualisations. This section seeks to map some of those interactions as an open system of interacting mechanisms and potential tendencies.

Seeking a framework in which to understand the present place of statutory social workers in social justice pursuit, from practitioners' perspectives (section 5.4.)

Despite this wide range of myriad individual social justice definitions, and possibly because of diverse influencing factors, a picture is building of social workers being

obstructed in their pursuit of social justice – however constructed – by what feel like broadly immovable and inaccessible forces and mechanisms. These forces largely prevent macro level social justice and heavily impede micro-level social justice.

This section focuses on exploring the barriers and (fewer) facilitators of social justice as reported by participants. A descriptive framework is proposed for understanding the self-perceived position of statutory social workers, presenting what they reported as being able to affect and not affect. This section uses the language of critical realist layers of reality to posit that the statutory social worker is, or at least feel themselves to be, in a fairly powerless position with regard to the pursuit of any concept of social justice, because of the sense of forces acting on them, or their clients, beyond their reach and influence.

Considering whether, with the findings and the framework identified immediately above, statutory social work in England can be justifiably seen as a social justice profession (section 5.5.)

This final section considers whether, given the self-reported situation of statutory social workers, the impediments to social justice pursuit are environmental and contextual around social work, or are now inherent to the role itself. It explores what kind of concept of social justice would be necessary in order to view the statutory wing of the profession as a social justice actor, and whether that concept would be legitimate.

The chapter will conclude by claiming, on the basis of the findings, that there is a case for a new framework for constructing a concept of social justice, that takes account of the problems and contradictions herein described. Specifically, this must be a framework that addresses the incoherence in definition by steering between both too narrow and too broad a concept, one that utilises experience, identifies gaps and facilitates direction without diktat.

5.2. Considering the conceptual make up of social justice

Test for Echo

Apart from the broad conceptual umbrella of entitlement, it is not easy to distil a coherent social justice concept that includes some things and excludes others. The entitlement theme is as much an indicator of definitional breadth as of cohesiveness. As set out in the findings chapter, participants' answers do not neatly cohere with one another. While several, in some instances, may, appear to have some conceptual underpinnings in common, any given two or three such participants will diverge on another point. For example, several participants included fairness in their definition, and arguably expressed similar ideas about what fairness meant. Those same participants, however, varied in whether they brought oppression into their conceptualisation. Of those that did, their explanations of oppression were different from one another. Thus, if thinking about just three participants, and just two possible conceptual components of social justice, we see something like this:

Figure 8: Simple comparison of participant concepts

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Uses fairness concept A	Uses fairness concept A	Uses fairness concept A
Uses oppression concept A	Uses oppression concept B	(Uses no stated oppression concept)

The picture becomes much more clouded when considering twenty participants, and several potential versions of seven or eight conceptual components. To understand a phenomenon, it is necessary to understand the constructions of those engaged in it (Morris 2006), yet these findings emphasise the extent to which Burr's (2015) claim of the individual nature of construction is appropriate. The constellations of conceptual underpinnings of, and attachments to, social justice that different participants describe, are fairly individual. If looking at one particular option, some consistencies can be discerned, but when looking at all the concepts that participants did, and did not, include, those consistencies become much broader, and rely on greater and greater levels of

assumed synonymy or antonymy for coherence, such as assuming or deciding that equality = rights, or does not = fairness.

This is also the case when participant responses are considered alongside the literature. Most of the conceptual variants found in the literature, can also either be found in the answers of some participants, or at least appear similar. If one takes a particular author, one can find at least one participant who coheres with them on an element of their social justice concept, but few cases of a particular author, and a particular participant, cohering on all points. Some participants, for example, gave answers using political language that might cohere neatly enough with Duffy's liberal/left-liberal/marxist typology (2010), and some inferred, like Duffy, that economic injustice was not the only/most urgent form of injustice, but few said both. This range and diversity of conceptualisations suggest that, like Fleetwood's (2013) unicorn, social justice is conceptually real to each participant (and each author). In this case however, the unicorn however looks different or is described differently by them all.

5.2.1. Conceptual Stacking of Social Justice and one or more other concepts

The situation is further complicated by consideration of the possible arrangements of these concepts in relation to one another. These are not stand-alone concepts that necessarily align and arrange in a single, or even a limited number of ways. Consider oppression; oppression is presented in both social and economic terms by different authors, and different participants, with some explicitly or implicitly concentrating on, or prioritising one over the other, and in some cases defending the importance of one to the exclusion of the other. Murdach (2011), for example, emphasises the economic element, whereas Duffy highlights the non-economic. Olson (2007) offers an explicit stacking, wherein economic justice is essential but insufficient for social justice. All three sentiments are echoed by some, but not all, of my participants. The link between social

justice, economic issues and oppression is constructed differently by different participants, with individual relationships between them, and therefore different effects.

This requires explicit consideration of what might be called conceptual stacking; under what terms and circumstances is one concept subordinate to, foundational on, or necessary for another. Take, for example, the question of whether fairness should be considered a subset of, a pre-requisite of, or a consequence of, social justice. Here are the main variations from findings and literature, expressed in terms of the conceptual relationship between social justice (A) and any given values term (B). They are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and different participants combined these possible stacks in different ways.

Figure 9: Possible relationships between social justice and any given concept

A	Is		B
	Requires	As part of concept	
		To be said to have occurred or be occurring	
	Seeks		
	Is the result of		
	Is a prerequisite of		
	Is action to achieve		
	Modifies in meaning		
	Modifies in application/action		
	Involves		

One issue of these multiplicitious stacking options is that without exploration of these varied concepts and concept combinations, individual social workers may operate on the basis that their construction of social justice is shared, when it is in fact partly or wholly

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not. In critical realist terms, a false or phantom norm circle is created, where the universal norm is assumed by everyone, but not actually there.

Some researchers have assigned broader categorisations to their participants' responses using political or philosophical language (for example, Hudson 2017, Vincent 2012, Hancock 2008, Gilligan 2007), all of which are potentially legitimate. I cannot draw those kinds of conclusions from my data; the variations in responses means I cannot assert that one participant's individual conceptualisation maps neatly onto another's, at least not without being unhelpfully steered by my own biases and preferences.

5.2.1.1. Example: The stacking of social justice and equality

In considering conceptual stacks, let us look at the example of equality. Those participants who connected their concept with equality were asserting one or more of the following basic constructions:

- o   social justice is equality
- o   social justice involves equality
- o   social justice is the pursuit of equality
- o   equality necessitates or involves social justice

We will take these one at a time. If it is as simple to say social justice is equality, then the connection may initially be straightforward; A = B = A. If something is equal, it is socially just, and vice-versa. However, such a connection hits two immediate problems. Firstly, there are different forms of equality (sections 2.2.5.1. and 2.2.5.2) and varied claims about their relative legitimacy. Secondly, if social justice is something else in the mind of another person – fairness, say – then for both persons' statements to be workable, equality must = fairness. There is a concept available where that is straightforward, expressed by some of my participants and some of O'Brien's (2011a, 2011b), Morgaine's (2014) and Hudson's (2017) participants, for example. However for some participants

equality and fairness are similar, different but overlapping, or quite distinct from one another (to say nothing of those who raised only one of these concepts, or neither).

Another possibility is to loosen the conceptual bonds slightly, and say that social justice is, or involves, the pursuit of equality. In this we create a very loose and inarticulate norm, where not only definition, but the means and nature of the definition, are very thin and malleable. Several questions still apply – what kind of equality? Is this to the exclusion of social justice, involving the pursuit of other ethical concepts? How much equality needs to be pursued, or achieved, in order for social justice to be said to have been pursued or achieved? And what kinds and for whom? Participants' answers varied, with respect to equality and other terms that they used to describe social justice. This last point about 'for whom' is important; Goldson (2002), Duffy (2010) and Hancock (2008) all in different ways discuss scenarios where some groups in society receive justice, but others do not. Following from that, if a workplace creates a more equal and supportive policy for staff who experience mental illness, is that a social justice achievement, or would the positive change need to affect more people beyond that workplace, or a larger number of groups? Is it social justice for people with mental health conditions, but not for, say, religious equality, or gender equality?

With RQ1 in mind, considering how NQSWs conceptualised social justice, it might be more cogent, therefore, to accommodate those who linked social justice with equality to say either that social justice involves equality, or that equality involves social justice. This 'involvement' might be simply an expression of conceptual underpinning – for example, equality is a necessary, but not solitary, component of social justice (comparable to Olson's (2007) take on economic justice). This might take the form of a belief (you need to believe in equality to be socially just) or of a chronological prerequisite (equality must be achieved in order for social justice to be achieved). In any of these arrangements, it means that social justice can involve or require equality, without excluding the possible

or necessary inclusion of another ethical term, such as fairness, or anti-oppression. Multiple stacks and combinations of conceptual inclusions and exclusions are articulated in the literature – compare the egalitarianism of Solas (2008) with the 'official concept' described (not endorsed) by Crossley (2017).

This would allow for the inclusion of many participants' diverse views of the relationship between equality and fairness. Some said they were identical, or nearly so. One participant proffered that equality and fairness were 'similar', and that equal rights equated to being treated fairly, and treated the same as everyone. Another participant, associating unfairness with inequality in starting points in life, said they find some children's beginnings compared to others' unfair, and that they 'see it as part of (the social work) job to correct (a) lack of fairness'. Others saw them as distinct, but related. One said that equality was more 'scientific' – something of an ideal state for a society – and that fairness was making it happen. All of these differ slightly in terms of the relationship between equality, fairness and social justice, but all could be broadly comfortable in a social justice concept that *must* involve equality, but *can* involve other things. Participants who did not reference equality however are still left out.

5.2.1.2.   Beliefs and/or mechanisms

Conceptual interaction goes beyond stacking, relative prioritisation and questions of whether a given conceptual component is essential or optional. When seeking to define a concept like social justice, there is a conversation to be had about whether any given sub-concept of social justice is a belief or a mechanism. That will depend in part on what a given concept has to say about what the 'doing' of social justice looks like, and how it is classified. To explain my meaning, I will continue with the example of a social justice concept based on equality and rights.

Rights as a concept can exist as a sensibility or moral standpoint, and can also be encoded in law and policy (Martinez-Herrero and Nicholls 2017). One could argue of course that equality, fairness and anti-discrimination are also enshrined in law and policy, and that therefore this is either a false distinction, or one that applies to all ethical terms used here. A legalistic social justice concept would counter that that while these concepts can be protected in law and policy (whether to the correct extent is another matter), the mechanism used to do so, is that of rights. The practical manifestations of equalities legislation, for example, are all in the form of rights established, protected, extended, and in some cases removed (the right to discriminate on grounds of sexuality, for instance) and responsibilities imposed.

If a given concept of social justice is one that anticipates any action or practical change, this would suggest that a rights component, or something like it, is essential – a social justice mechanism of some form, to accompany and reify the belief. This would suggest a particular relationship between, for example, rights and equality, in terms of how they contribute to a social justice concept. If a social justice concept involves the seeking of equality, it is almost impossible for progress or success in such a goal not to involve some kind of change in rights in law/policy, or efforts to ensure that said law/policy is properly observed. In this scenario, equality serves as an 'ethical belief', and rights serves as an 'ethical mechanism'.

The literature has examples of what might be seen as situations where there is an ethical belief but not a mechanism, or vice versa. Numerous authors describe situations where practitioners are operating from an ethical belief framework, but report being short on useable mechanisms (Irizarry et al 2016, Olson et al 2013). Conversely, Holscher and Bazalek (2012) and Hancock (2008) report situations where there are mechanisms for social justice as they conceive of it, for refugees and LGBTQ+ people respectively, but also elements of the local population who lack the ethical belief to use them.

This suggests that a possible concept of social justice might be constructed as follows:

- social justice involves one or more ethical belief terms
- a defence of those ethical beliefs and the pursuit of their being extended and strengthened should both be inherent to social justice
- social justice also involves the use of the pursuit of ethical mechanisms
- the ethical mechanisms are the means by which those ethical beliefs are advanced, embodied, established or protected
- the ethical belief informs the ethical mechanism, and the ethical mechanism allows the belief to be pursued and achieved

So, to continue with equality and rights as examples of components of social justice, we have a basic concept in which social justice seeks, and is informed by, equality, and pursues the establishment and protection of rights that enable and potentially extend that equality. When this is happening, social justice is being pursued, thus social justice is equality activated by, and emerging through, establishment and use of rights. This is a somewhat legalistic concept of social justice.

However, in a social justice concept that is less legalistic, rights could be conceived of as the 'belief' element, and equality as the 'mechanism' component. If one were to see the 'doing' of social justice at the location of civic sensibility or economic structure, rather than legal provision, then a concept could be viable in which belief in individual, or community rights, was enabled by a culture of egalitarian sensibility, rather than by legal codification. This is something of a moral obligation concept of social justice.

The distinction between the two is significant. is important; one is concerned with how people *should* be treated; the entitlement and the justice is contained in behavioural and cultural norms. The other places it in terms of how they *must* be treated; the entitlement

and the justice here is contained in legal enumerated provisions. In either case, or in any other permutation, the conceptual make-up of social justice is not just a matter of agreeing conceptual components, but on how they may modify or activate one another.

5.2.1.3. The operational focal point of social justice

Discussion of different notions of the mechanisms of 'doing' social justice, of which there are a variety in the findings, raises in turn the question of where and when social justice should operate - in all circumstances, at the point of need or to prevent unacceptable levels of need, as reward or as redress? Participants' answers were varied almost as much on this as on other aspects of the concept. Consider two participants, who both saw economic inequality as a contributing factor to social injustice. For one, the barrier, and thus the point at which justice should ideally operate, is the economic inequality and the forces that drive it. For the other, the barrier is at the level of access to support itself: the impact of economic disparity on accessing help, was of greater concern than the disparity itself. For the latter participant, social justice involves reducing some of the impacts of economic inequality, operating at the points at which people seek social support. For the former, social justice involves reducing economic inequality as-of-right, operating at a deeper, more fundamental level. The distinction is particularly interesting in the socio-economic context of austerity and cuts, given that they have led to both an increase in poverty and a reduction of help with its consequences. Thinking about social justice-as-economics as an open system, these two practitioners have different views of the nature of the emergent powers at play. For one, the contingent power of economic poverty is activated, or emerges, when the need for access to help arises. For the other, it is more inherently emergent, or at least emerges and is activated long before contact with social work occurs. These kinds of distinctions are present in the literature; for example, Solas' (2008) point about the difference between opposing poverty and opposing inequality, or the fact that two out of three of Hancock's (2008) participant

groups accepted the existence of social oppression against particular groups but differed as to whether they saw it at the level of individual interaction or at a more systemic level. It follows that this also affects, and is affected by, what the holder of the concept views as the basis of just entitlement. A social justice concept that centres on fairness, a level of individual responsibility and an anti-discriminatory component, may accept an entitlement that is absolute and universal regarding relational treatment, irrespective of actual or perceived identity differences, but more conditional on need and inability to be self-reliant, as regards economic assistance, service involvement and distribution. Such a concept differs from both the participants mentioned immediately above, given their shared (if differently operationalised) focus on economic injustice.

Unless these three social workers discussed this, and either agree who is right, or come to a compromise, there is potential for the client experience to be perhaps considerably different, depending on whose individual construction they happen to interact with. Those differences may not be important, or it may be a fundamental causal mechanism for particular practice actions or events – the particularities of the case may be what activates them.

5.2.2. A Working Conceptual Typology?

Taken as a whole, participant answers do not offer much more than the literature in terms of deep conceptual coherence on a concept of social justice. Neither data nor literature allow for a particularly unified concept outside of the very broad umbrella of entitlement. As set out above, disparities exist within and between:

- o conceptual components and use of values terms
- o conceptual stacking and interaction
- o beliefs and mechanisms
- o location of barriers to social justice and point of operation

Because of the range of ethics terms employed in the definition of social justice by participants and literature alike – or rather, not alike – we remain without much clarity as regards a tighter concept of social justice. Because of the diversity of options for stacking those concepts, in relation to how they interact with, supersede or exclude one another, we are also no closer to a range of discrete or semi-discrete concepts. We cannot, for example, group all of those who defined social justice as anti-discrimination together in one conceptual bloc. This is partly because they meant (in so far as they said) slightly different things in their use of the term, but more importantly because the conceptual relationship between (anti)discrimination, social justice and any other concept – belief or mechanism – cannot be consistently established from one participant to another.

For now then, we remain working at the level of speculating and inducting a set of conceptual ranges which may interact in multiple different ways, representing, at the conceptual level, open systems of emergent powers and conceptual tendencies being shaped by individual constructions. The data and the literature taken together can be mapped as a set of loose categories through which one might make connections and thus form a concept of social justice.
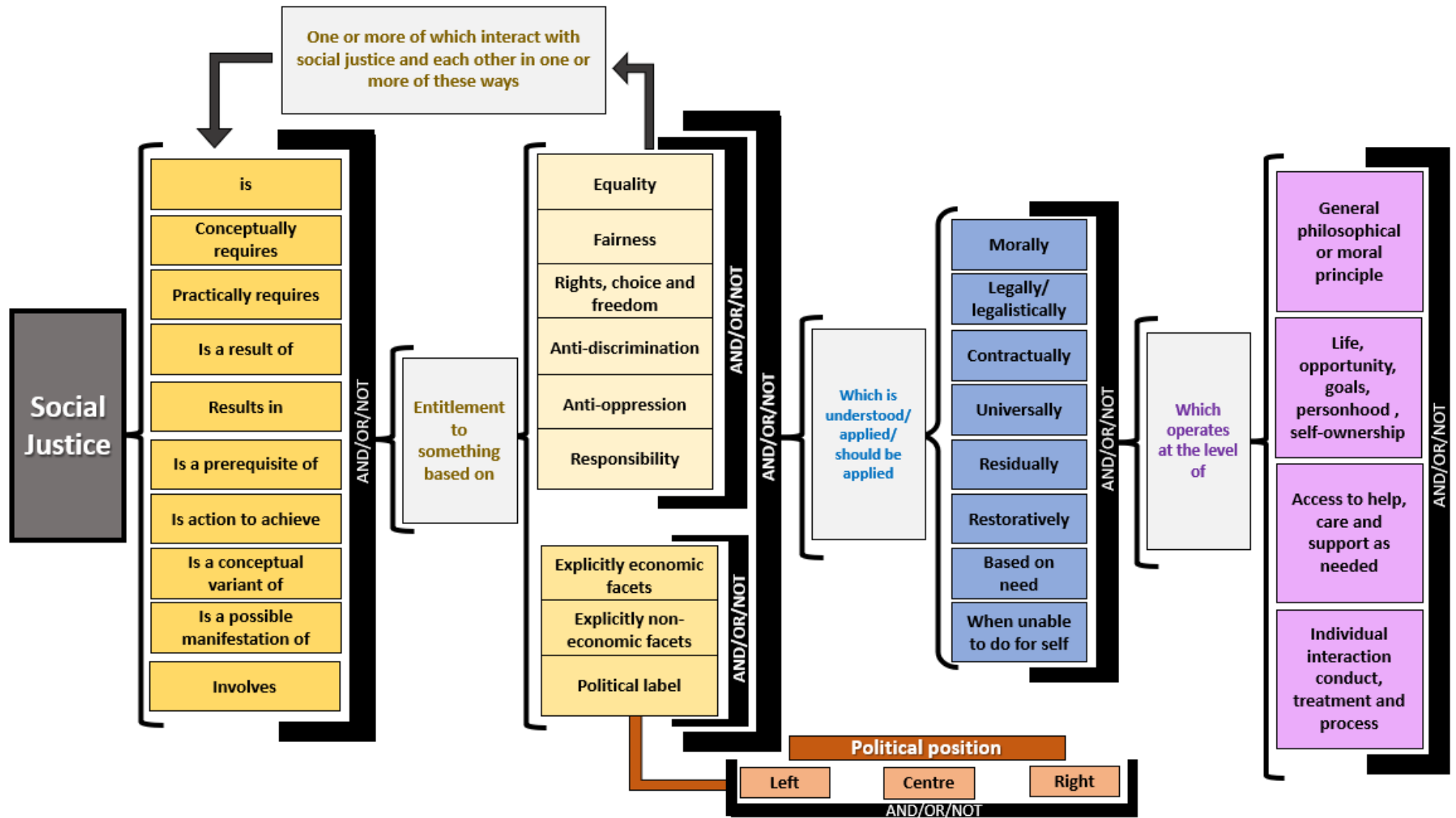
Those categories are:
- o **Ethical terms informing an entitlement to something:** This is the range of terms that participants and literature sources utilise to describe and define social justice as they saw it, all of which can be used singly or in combinations to support some notion of entitlement.
- o **Conceptual relationships:** The nature or form of the relationship between two or more concepts. That includes the interactions between one or more of those terms and social justice itself, or the relationship between two or more of those terms used to describe and define social justice.

- o **The nature or basis of the entitlement:** the various options from the findings and the literature for the form and conditionality (or unconditionality) of the entitlement. It is possible for more than one option from this category to be selected, because the entitlement in question may have two or more elements to it, or may vary in its conditionality based on context and situation.

- o **The level of occurrence:** The point at which this entitlement is or should be manifested and, therefore, the justice pursued or performed. Conversely, this category could be expressed in terms of the location of the obstacle or barrier to the fulfilment of the entitlement.

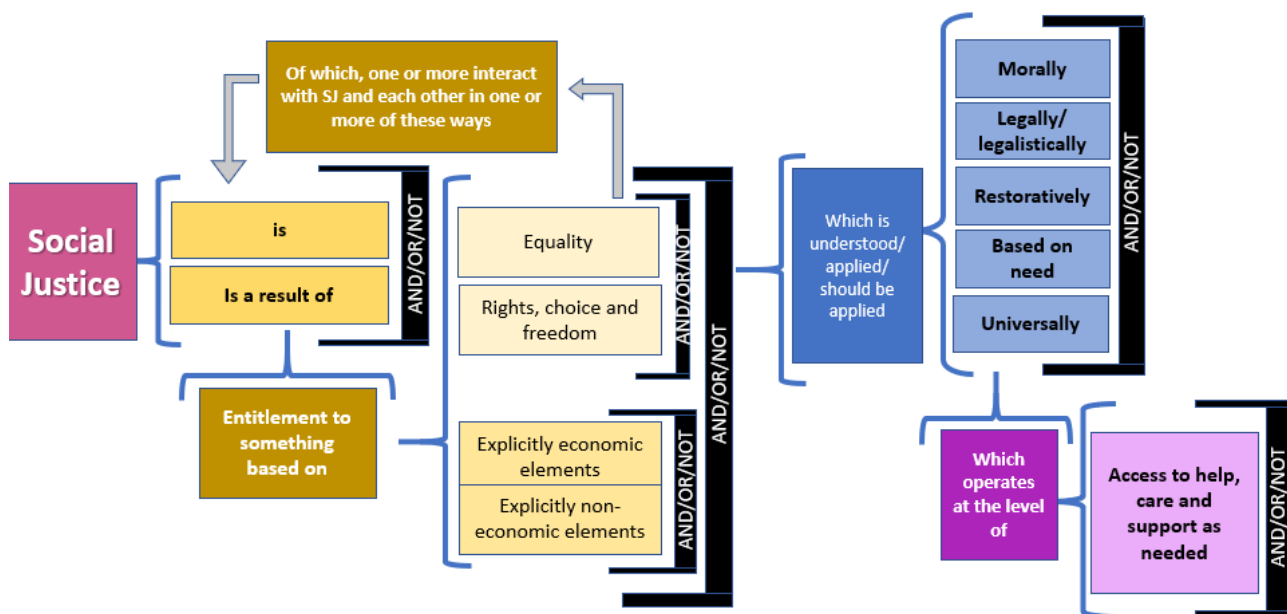This is all represented in Fig 10 overleaf:

Figure 10: Conceptualisations of social justice as varied notions of entitlement

Some example conceptual combinations, based on particular participants, are as follows.
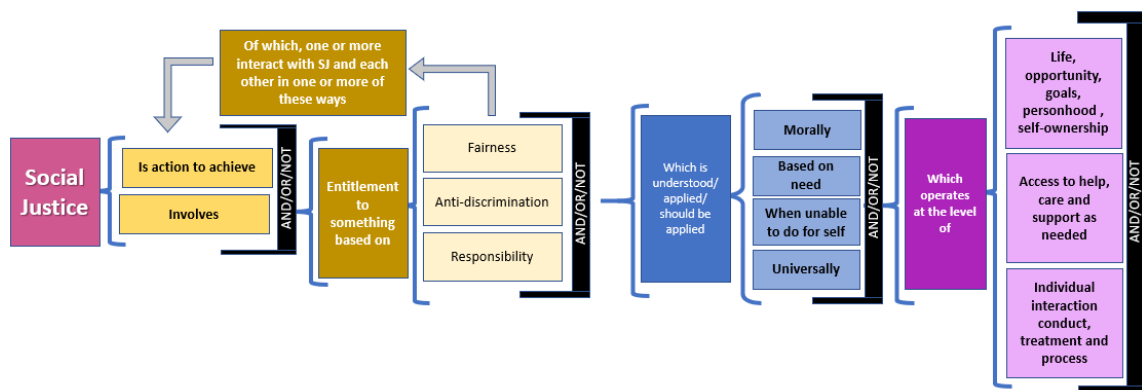
- o **Vignette 1:** Social justice is conceptualised as being a result of rights, choice and freedom being protected and facilitated. It requires a practical consciousness of equality, and equality and rights interact on the basis that a) rights must be equally applied and equally useable and b) having and availing oneself of a right means that the ability and entitlement to do so is not affected by either economic or non-economic inequality. This justice concept is rooted in an entitlement that is universal, but based on need, and restorative when injustice has already occurred. It is a moral entitlement, but should also be a legal entitlement. However, it operates at the level of access to care and support when needed, and is focused on making inequality matter less in the use of rights, not on ending inequality in and of itself.

Figure 11: Social justice concept vignette 1

- **Vignette 2:** Social justice involves fairness, and combatting unfairness, particularly in the form of discrimination, which is a barrier to just entitlement. It is an action to achieve, and therefore results in, preventing discrimination that impacts on ability to live and achieve as one would wish to. There is a responsibility dimension that applies both to the powerful and those in control of welfare systems, but also to individuals to do what they can. This entitlement is moral, and is activated on the basis of need and when someone is unable to do something for themselves. Within that caveat, it is applied universally. It operates at the levels of opportunities and life goals, access to support, and individual interactions.
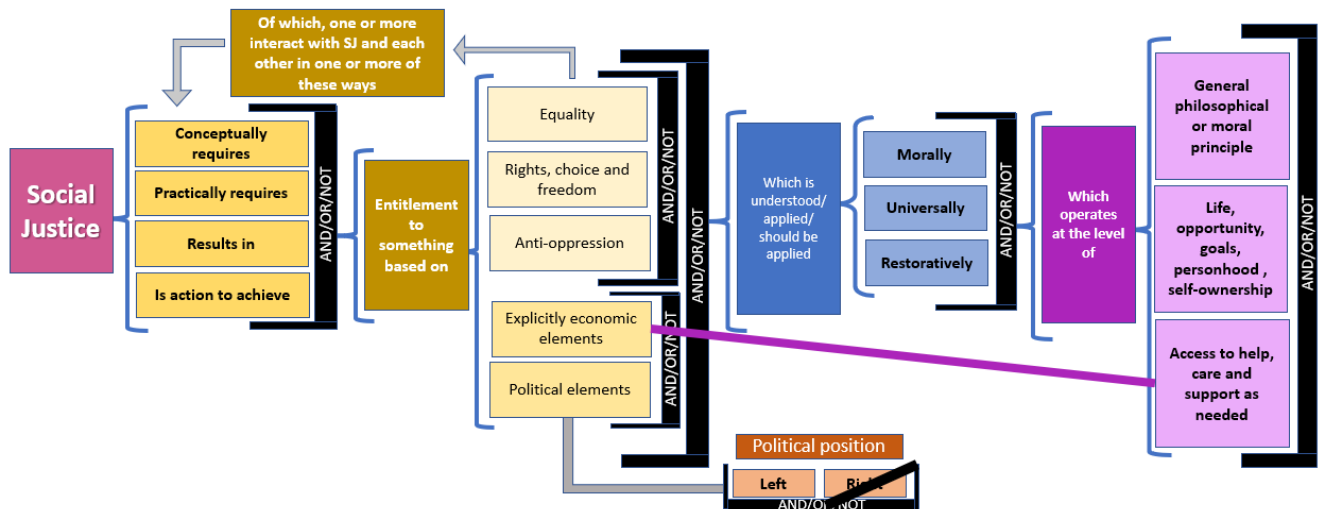
Figure 12: Social justice concept vignette 2

- **Vignette 3**: Social justice conceptually requires, and results in, equality, rights, choice and freedoms, and like vignette 1, makes a connection between equality and rights on the basis that rights need to be equally useable for all. There is an explicitly economic element to this concept, and it resides on the political left, to the explicit exclusion of the political right. This social justice is/involves action to achieve anti-oppression, and is moral, ideally universal, yet for now, restorative. It applies at the level of general principle, life goals and direction. It also applies at the level of access to help but considers economic inequality to be a cause of need, rather than just as a barrier to help.

Figure 13: Social justice concept vignette 3

It is profoundly important to make clear that this is a descriptive rather than prescriptive model, there are no right or wrong combinations of selections from the categories. This is not about seeking or representing finite sets of constructions, but exploring the many variables in the open system that is social justice and social work, as conceptualised as real, impactful phenomena by these participants (Bhaskar 2008, Collier 1994). There are some similarities between this descriptive model and the visual representation Morgaine (2014) constructs from her findings. The levels or layers of her model are however more defined and placed in a hierarchy – social justice is the middle layer between individual rights and cultural shifts. I cannot make such a precise claim for my participants' concepts.

Without being able to narrow or frame the findings any further than this, or to narrow the social justice concepts in the literature further through the findings, the holding conclusion at this point must be that there is still little cohesion to be found, other than the broad idea of social justice involving social entitlement. The idea of this section has been to explore and illustrate the variety of ways in which it can be conceptualised. The next step is to consider a possible explanation: the impact of participant experiences.

5.3. The Place of Experience in Concept Formation

Emotion detector

Participants' experiences, and the way their experiences were conceptualised and understood, appeared to be at least as important a contributor to how social justice was understood as more abstract philosophical ideas. While participants all reached for ethical terms to define social justice, all also made connections with real world personal experiences and events, either before, or during, their social work training, or from their time in practice to date. This took a positive form for some; they saw or experienced something that seemed, or felt, like justice done, or at least justice sought, and that informed what they thought it was. This was in some cases, a practical substantiation of a concept of justice, that they had been told about at the 'ideas' level. More frequently though, it worked the other way around; an experience of theirs that contributed to a gut feeling about what was just, or unjust, later illuminated, labelled or made more conscious by learning about philosophical concepts. Likewise, there are negative examples following the same mechanism – an individual experiences an injustice which is made easier to articulate by exposure to language or ideas, or vice versa.

If social justice as a concept is a contestable construct and an open system, as a constructivist critical realist approach would see it, so is the conceptualisation process itself. A range of influences can, in multiple combinations, serve as causal phenomena, or the emergent/contingent powers on which they are causatively activated. What may be seen for one, is unseen for another, and what may be the activating element for one may be the 'activated on' element for another. Furthermore, what exists for one person at the actual layer, or starts there, may be at the empirical level from the perspective of another. Constructions may at the same time be both products of social forces and formed in individual ways (Burr 2015) While we cannot claim that X+Y+Z always = A, from a constructivist critical realist perspective, that is not problematic – the goal is to find possible explanations, not hard rules.

For many, of course, it is not so straightforward or so binary as this; experiences and ideas interplay in a much less linear and tidy way, and in a constructivist and critical realist framework, the boundary between experience and idea, event and concept, is much fuzzier than the above hypotheticals imply. The process is also not necessarily chronological or linear; to experience an injustice and then later to learn about concepts that give it language may change how the experience is understood. Furthermore, and of significance to many of these participants, additional experience can in turn impact on and change the understanding of both earlier experience and previously held concepts. This was reported or suggested by many participants with regard to their time in practice changing, often in a negative or limiting way, what they thought about social justice as a viable pursuit for social workers such as themselves. This suggests a link between the answers to research questions 2 and 3, where to varying degrees the kinds of practice experience described in response to question 3 informs the answers to question 2.

These findings are relevant certainly to research question 2, but also possibly offer insights about the answer to question 1 and may in turn be contributed to by those of question 3. They also resonate with the literature, particularly the sources that researched social worker perspectives, which are rich with the impact of practitioner frustration or disillusion through social forces in the form of agency mandates, funding providers, short term employment contracts (Irizarry et al 2016), a lack of resources, community barriers, personal risk, burnout, the feeling of treating symptoms not causes (Olson et al 2013) and the lack of time or support to pursue social justice goals (Birkenmaier 2003).

This complex and individual interaction between experiences and ideas is a possible, or partial, explanation of the variety of ethics terms used by participants to define social justice in answer to research question 1. When we talk about understanding the construction of a person involved in a particular phenomenon (Morris 2006), in this case

social justice in social work, that can and should, include speculative and tendential exploration of how the construction was formed.

While there are some broad commonalities between the kinds of experiences and contributing factors that participants identified, the detail of those experience was more diverse, as was the way in which they explained and described them. Someone whose early experiences include inconsistent support for their achievements when young, and a resultant feeling of being unappreciated, could conceivably come to frame their justice concept in terms of fair opportunity, or the importance of helping people to achieve and aspire. The same broad idea could be reached by someone who felt they were supported, but in due course became aware that others in society were not. However, this second person might – and I stress might - reach more easily for equality as a term through which to express their concept of social justice, because they have noticed inequality between their position and others'. The first person might reach for fairness, because of personal experience of what they deem to be unfair. The precise mental process can, to an extent, only be speculated upon even after interview. However, social workers who described these personal experiences, and who used these respective terms, were both present among my participants.

For all the variation in participants' employment of ethical terms to define social justice, the considerable contributory role of experiences in participants' concepts may help explain why 'entitlement' is, though imperfectly, the best-fitting broad umbrella concept under which to house the diverse responses. To experience what one perceives as an injustice to oneself, or to perceive one happening to another, is to see a deficit between what should happen and what does happen, fails to happen, or is denied. Furthermore, it has to be a deficit that matters, and that has some kind of ethical resonance. That is the commonality between the diverse experiences, ideals and conceptual interactions

that happen to and for different individuals with respect to what they reported as informing their justice concepts.

5.3.1. Challenges in establishing specific experience-conceptualisation relationships

There are two main dangers in trying to describe actual and hypothetical examples of the kinds of processes that may be informing participants' social justice concepts. Firstly, in keeping with acknowledging the importance of experience in concept formation, the possibility exists that my personal filters might make me more or less sensitive to particular constellations of experience and concept. Even with the greatest possible reflexivity, neither I nor any researcher would be able to completely divorce our own conceptual filtration system from highlighting certain possible factors and interactions, more than others. Secondly, with an eye on the unseen activators and causal mechanisms potentially at play, participants themselves, and therefore any given student or practitioner, will be challenged in managing an objective view of all of the conceptual and meaning-making interactions in their own mind. There will be forces and mechanisms that remain unconscious and unseen even after the most robust research.
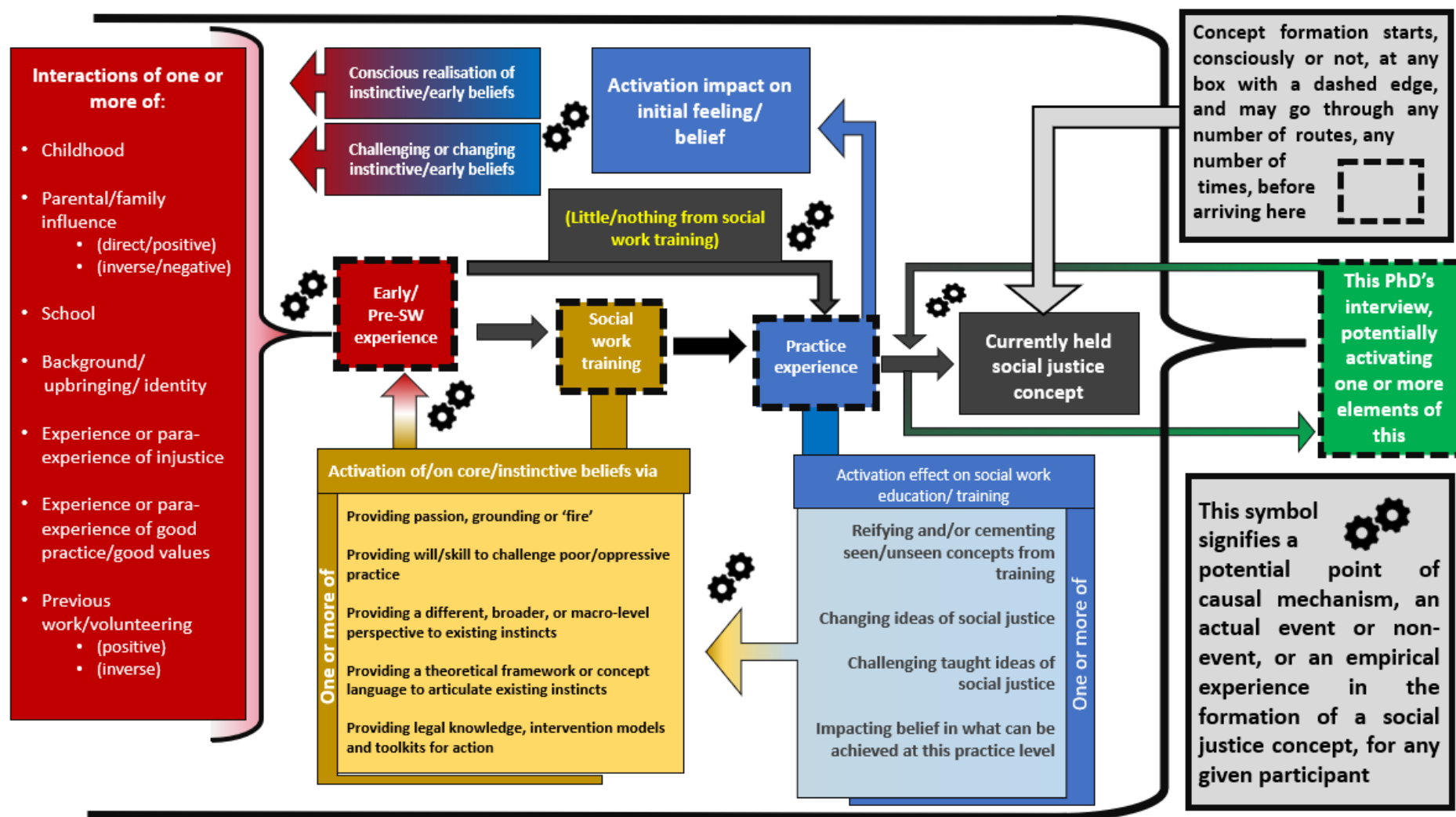
5.3.2. Descriptive Modelling

With both these issues in mind, I have created a descriptive model (Fig 14) of the infinite possible routes one might take in this concept formation process. The model is necessarily complex, non-linear and multilateral, and allows for any number of routes between critical realism's layers of reality (Bhaskar 2008, Collier 1994), depending on the perspective of the concept holder. For both these reasons, the already huge number and variety of routes one might take through the process described in Fig 14, must not be seen as either final or total, but as illustrative of a set of by no means exclusive causal mechanisms or tendencies.

One can feasibly start with any of the four boxes with dashed lines, which represent personal and pre-social work experiences (red), social work education/training (gold), social work practice experience (blue) or even this study's interview itself (green), as points of conceptual formation, actualisation or realisation. Participants' journeys through this set of processes are different, both in terms of what they can and what they cannot consciously discern. What may be thought of as a causal mechanism by/for one, may be seen as an actual level event by/for another. Contrast, for example, those who found university training confirmatory of consciously held values, with those who found the same training revelatory on previously unconsciously held values. Which experience serves which function depends on the individual, and the perceptions of the individual (Burr 2015, Morris 2006).
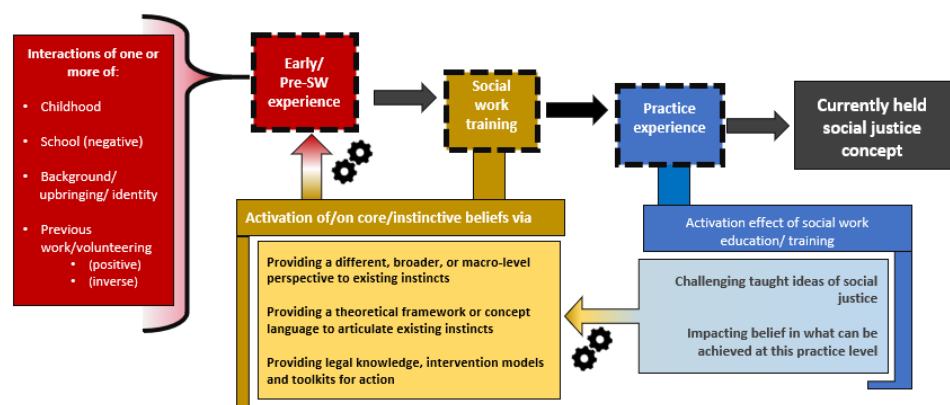
The possible routes one might take through these processes, and this model, are potentially infinite in number. As tentative examples, not prescriptive paradigms, the full model is followed by three possible vignettes that might describe the journey that an individual may consciously or unconsciously take, drawing on participant examples and the literature. Different aspects of each may conceivably be causal mechanisms, emergent properties or examples of tendencies that are creating, realising, activating or shaping concept formation.

Figure 14: Mapping of diverse concept formation processes

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- Vignette 1: Personal negative experience of school amplifies feelings of fulfilment and satisfaction from volunteering outside education. This consciously motivates choices of where to seek part-time employment, which are charity- and care-oriented (rather than, say, retail). Finds work in a support organisation for children with learning disabilities. Over the course of these experiences, concepts form semi-consciously, as emotions or instincts. Of particular importance is the feeling that a person's actual, or perceived, external characteristics, should not prejudice their chances to achieve what they want in life, or how they should be treated by others. They train in social work which clarifies, expands and labels these ideas, particularly adding an economic aspect to their existing beliefs. Their adolescence and early work life had been in a fairly middle-class area, where social and identity differences impacted, but financial inequalities did so less (or at least less visibly). They qualify and go into practice in a quick-turnaround field, and rapidly realise the limitations in this environment for practising in line with their values, except in a marginal and residual way. This changes how they feel about the workability of the above concepts, and how achievable they are, but not their fundamental beliefs in them.
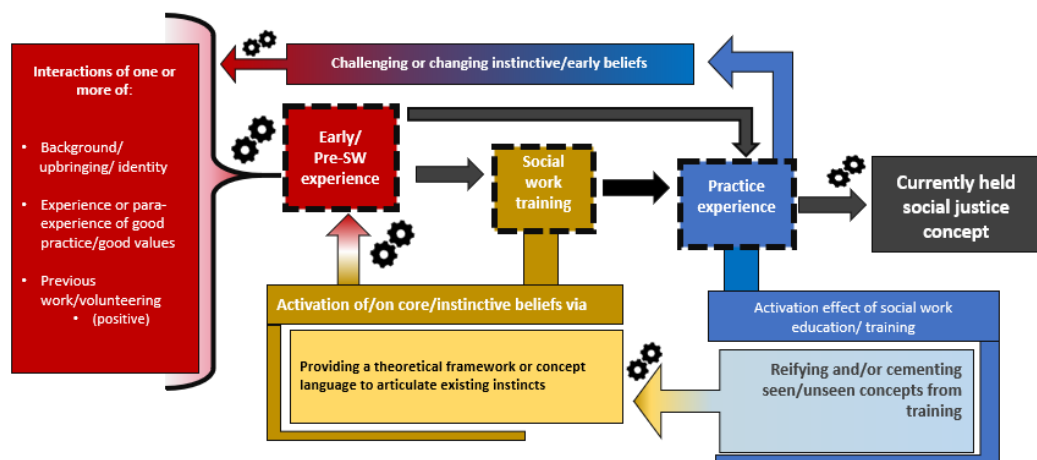
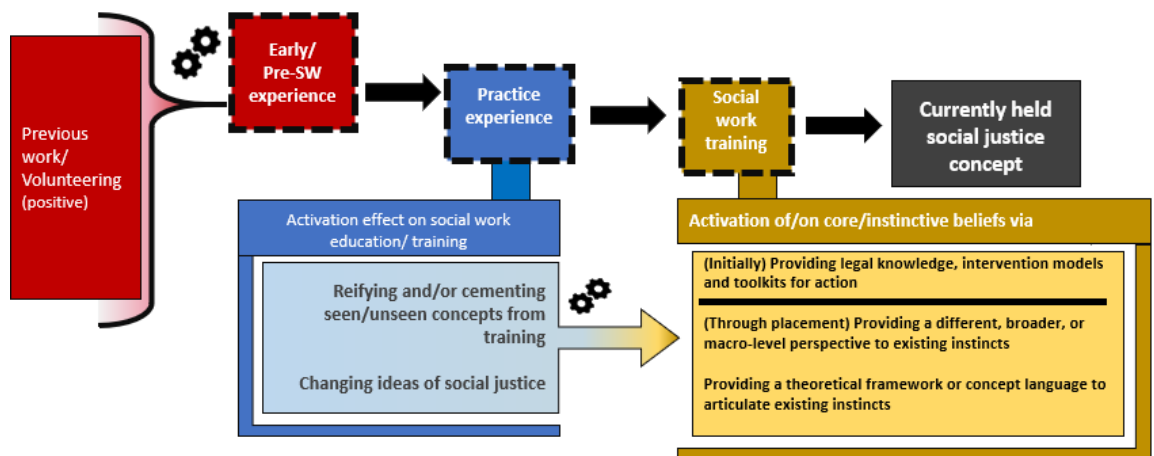**Figure 15:** Concept formation vignette 1

o **Vignette 2:** Person has several years' experience working in care and support roles in a range of fields and with different client groups. Deeply committed to individual client/patient/pupil welfare from a position of kindness and compassion, but does not think very much in terms of wider social issues and systemic forces. Has a slightly conservative view of individual responsibility, and of who deserves access to welfare and support, linking it to perceptions of a given person's capacity to act for themselves. This is the basis of their concept of entitlement. They decide to go into social work because they want to up-level their work life as they see it – in this they are embodying something akin to Olson's 'professional' mentality (2007). They are introduced to concepts around inequality, the impact of poverty and austerity, and geographic differences in wealth. They connect these wider concepts with past work, meaning that they think differently about possible causative factors behind the situations of individuals once in their care, a re-evaluation that continues in practice. While still focused on the situations of individual clients and families in their social work practice, and while not having personal professional ambitions to challenge wider social forces, the understanding of those forces impacts on their dealings with their clients.

Figure 16: Concept formation vignette 2

○ **Vignette 3:** Through their social work training, this person takes note of social justice and ethics and values ideas, and certainly understands why they matter to the social work profession, but sees the finer points of these concepts as inferior to, or at least unnecessary in the face of, common sense. They are more focused on learning, developing and demonstrating practical social work skills, like assessment, care plan writing, court skills, and use of law, because they believe this will be more helpful for the role they want in children's safeguarding, having worked in that field in an administrative role. They certainly have an ethical frame of reference, but tend to rely on their own gut feelings of fairness and unfairness when dealing with classroom case studies or early placement work. Once assured that placement is going well in skills terms, they relax slightly, and start to understand the place of social justice-related ideas. They acknowledge their own tendency toward impatience with conceptual matters (what they, slightly incorrectly, call 'theory'), they start connecting different justice concepts with reflection as part of supervision, taking them on board as part of developing their reflective skills. Practice has served to reify and actualise these concepts in a way this person can grasp, appreciate and use.

Figure 17: Concept formation vignette 3

For absolute clarity once again, these are neither mutually exclusive exemplars, nor reflective of a particular participants. They illustrate three different possible routes through the conceptualising processes of which there are multiple, perhaps infinite, variants. While avoiding finite rules, they also seek to illustrate three of the many, many possible ways that, in extrapolating out from my findings, ideas and experiences may interact with one another toward an individual's conceptualisation of social justice.

The place of post-qualifying experience in practice requires particular consideration and further exploration and, if possible, explanation. For all the inconsistency in the granular conceptualisation of social justice by participants, and the diversity in how the concept formed for them, there was much more consistency in the reporting of barriers and the descriptions of practice experience. This is echoed in the literature, particularly research with social work practitioners who described not only the barriers and obstacles to pursuing social justice, but the emotional strain and professional ennui that accompanied them (Irizarry et al 2016, Olson et al 2013, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b, Birkenmaier 2003). Morgaine (2014) includes a reference to barriers to social justice efforts in her visual representation and, like some of mine, her focus group participants described a lack of time to think about social justice, and to see the big picture, as well as emotional and pragmatic challenges and a feeling of theoreticality about social justice, or aspects of their own concept of it. Taken together, this suggests, in Elder-Vassian terms, the formation of a norm circle in which social worker agency in social justice is limited, and – crucially – resignedly accepted as being limited; that this is the way it is.

It is not enough to just observe that once in practice disillusion sets in for many, and affects how they feel about achieving social justice, and in some cases about the concept itself. An attempt should be made to theorise about, or conceptually framework, how this happens, to better consider the implications and what might be done about it. This will be the focus of the next section.

5.4. Perceiving the position of statutory social workers through critical realist layers

Best I can

As set out in the findings chapter, participants, for all their variation in terms of defining social justice, were more consistent in their description of barriers, to their pursuit of it. Barriers and impediments were described both at the level of participants' own practice and in terms of preventing engagement with social injustices at a broader or societal level. The way that participants generally spoke about these barriers suggested a recurring idea of being able to see causes, and possible solutions, but not to engage with them. The picture being painted was one in which the statutory social worker was at one (low) level or layer of work and influence, but there being other layers that are visible, or partly visible, in their effects, but to which statutory social workers had limited or no access. The potential for deconstructing and seeking to understand this situation in terms of the levels of reality that critical realism advocates – empirical, actual and real – presented itself.

As a reminder of what was set out in the methodology, critical realism distinguishes between three layers of reality; the empirical, the actual and the real:
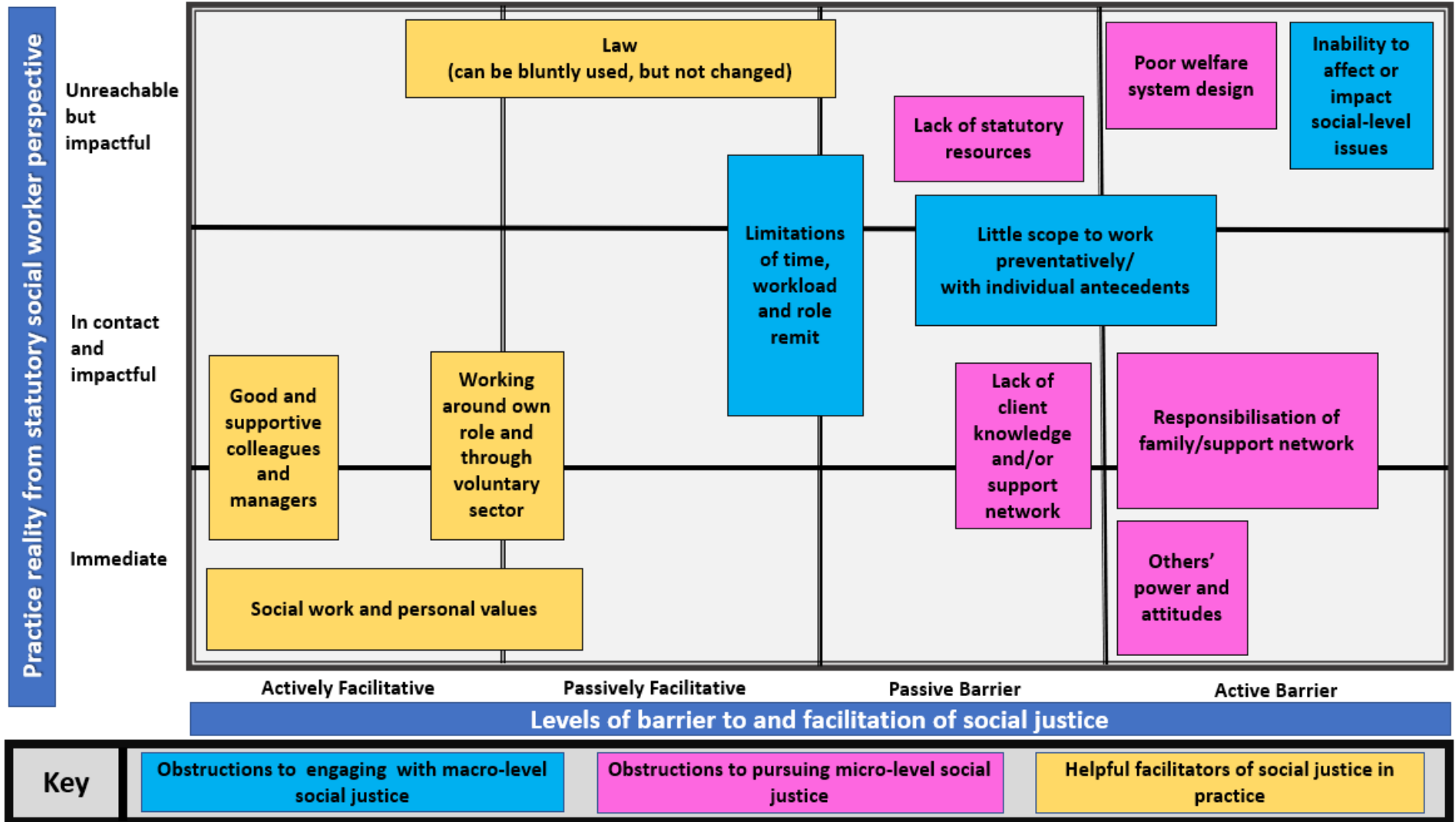
- o the empirical: experiences and perceptions of things by individuals
- o the actual: events and actions that take place beneath those experiences, which may or may not be visible or measurable
- o the real: often unseen, or not necessarily reliably and explicitly seen - rituals, codes, customs, norms and other ephemera that influence events, actions and perceptions (Bhaskar 2008, Collier 1994)

This three-layer model of reality serves well as a visualising tool for the experience of the social worker seeking, and frequently being frustrated in achieving, social justice. The three layers offer useful language for conceptualising the descriptions given by participants of the landscape of multiple snakes and rather fewer ladders. The 'snakes' –

obstacles to social justice action both at the micro- and macro-level, were generally described as being largely, or entirely, beyond the reach of participants to effect. The 'ladders' – those factors that could prove helpful – were generally useful for resolving or mitigating an issue of injustice, not preventing it or engaging with it at the root cause.

Figure 18 arranges the barriers and facilitators of social justice that came out of the analysis of the data along the horizontal axis. I have further split them into those that were described by participants as seeming to be due to intentional choices or actions by an individual or an institution, or that were due to forces and factors which were more inert, or which did not have a clear originator. I have labelled these 'passive' and 'active'. The vertical axis shows practice reality as experienced by social workers, differentiated by how close or far away the barriers to and facilitators of social justice feel. I have labelled them 'immediate', 'in contact and impactful' and 'unreachable but impactful'.

Figure 18: Participants' experience of social justice in practice

I am not, I should say, arguing that there is an objective reality in which different levels of statutory and societal systems, formal and otherwise, precisely and perfectly correspond to critical realist reality layers. I am proffering the possibility that there is sufficient evidence to use the language of the layers of critical realism to describe the situation as seen by statutory practitioners.

As examples, I offer two perceived active barriers to social justice at the micro-level – a poorly designed welfare system, and the power and attitudes of others. The welfare system is placed at the 'unreachable' level, because participants reported being able to see it and recognise and feel its impact, but to be able to do very little to change it. Others' attitudes and power, including that of some DWP staff enforcing the inadequate benefit system, is also an active barrier, but one that statutory social workers can and do engage with, though they would generally prefer that they did not have to.

Having discussed macro- and micro-level obstructions, it should be explained that identifying a clear meso-level, even of obstructions rather than solutions, is difficult. Most participants made fairly clear distinctions between the immediate arena of their practice and the wider social or systemic forces that they struggled to effect. One might speculate on where a/the meso-level is located in participants' accounts, but identifying it with precision or even speculation is difficult. Conceivably the negative attitude of a senior professional, such as a headteacher, could be meso-level, but could also be seen as micro-level. Local authority protocols might also be meso-level if compared to national government or capitalism in general, but might also be conceived as, or feel like, powerful macro-forces. Partly because of this difficulty, no barrier or facilitator in Figure 18 exists wholly in the mid-level.

It is worth saying that there is generally no consistent link between participants' stated conceptualisation of social justice, and their feelings about the barriers and facilitators of

social justice. Three participants, for example, with different ideas about both the political aspect of social justice and the location of responsibility for it, all raised the issue of welfare systems as social justice barriers.

5.4.1. Critical realist view of hard and soft help

This deconstruction of the statutory social worker position, using critical realist layers, fits well when applied to the factors that participants said were facilitative of the pursuit of social justice, as well as the barriers. Having described this relatively small number of stated helpful things in terms of being 'hard' or 'soft', one could also describe them, using critical realist language, as being 'enduring and potentially activated' (in the 'real' layer) on the one hand, and 'useable if present and activated' (at the actual and, once activated, at the empirical level).

In the latter category are things that cannot be relied upon to be so constant, or are not consistent everywhere; supportive and engaged colleagues, the presence and accessibility of a voluntary or independent provision, the space, time and energy to do 'extra' things outside what they see as, or are told is, their main role. In the former category we might place law and legally established rights and provisions; they may change, but not likely to do so as a result of an individual social worker's actions, and certainly were not conceptualised by participants as changing through their endeavours.

One could make a case for personal ethics and social work values being in either camp. Conceptually they could be seen as enduring if one were to take a values-centric view of the social work role. If so, they are activated (possibly almost permanently) by the cases that practitioners encounter. If, however, they were constructed as more ephemeral and marginal, not as consistently present or evident in all social workers, then they belong in the same camp as the 'soft' assets; they are helpful if they are there, and if they can be

utilised (activated). This is where they have been placed on the diagram above, given the internal-to-person way in which they were generally described by participants.

This suggests one possible point of consistency in social justice definition: social justice is, in present circumstances, difficult, perhaps impossible, to really achieve. That is a norm reinforced by a mix of passive and active interacting forces. This constellation of participants' perceptions of the barriers to, and facilitators of, social justice prompts a difficult question. If the ability of the statutory social worker to affect many of these barriers is, or is felt to be, so limited, and the facilitators, with one exception, so situational and inconstant, are we justified as seeing the impediment to social justice action as contextual and environmental to statutory social work, or must we now consider whether it has become inherent to the role?

5.5. The nature of the gap between ideal and practice: contextual and environmental, or inherent to the role?

The Main Monkey Business

The data and literature suggested a gap between the social justice ideals, however conceptualised, and the practice reality for social worker participants. This is a crucial point, not least because reference to, or inference of that gap, was consistent across participants with very different stated concepts of social justice. The precise nature and location of this gap is not certain and requires discussion. The two broad possibilities are

- o **option 1:** the gap is environmental and contextual. The statutory social worker role is one in which social justice (by one definition or another) may be theoretically pursued and potentially achieved, but it is profoundly limited in its ability to pursue and achieve it in practice, because of their present working situation.

- o **option 2:** the gap is role-inherent. The statutory social worker job, despite the motivations and personal values of any given practitioner, and the best efforts of

educators and trainers, is not one in which the pursuit of social justice is a priority, nor should it be an expectation.

On first inspection, it may appear to make little difference which statement is more reflective of reality, as both can lead to the same problem – frustration and inability to achieve change on the part of statutory social workers. I would contend that the difference is deeply important, even if it is primarily one of perception, not least from the constructivist-critical realist perspective that concepts and thoughts have an impact on the world that is 'real' – in other words, how we think about things can be as impactful as what we do.

Of these two possibilities, option 1 effectively says that the pursuit of social justice is profoundly challenging for statutory social workers for a range of reasons to do with time, resources, remit and influence. For a statutory social worker to seek social justice, by whatever definition, for their client, for a section of society, or for society in general, it will be hurdled, barriered and hard. Option 2 however, is more fundamental: it says that the role itself is not a social justice role. In comparison with option 1, that changes the claim, subtly but vitally, from 'it's really, really hard to do your job' to 'it's not really your job' – something that some participants reported hearing from social work colleagues.

5.5.1. The view of the literature

Relatively little of the literature on social justice makes a clear claim one way or the other, and in some cases different aspects of the same author's work could – and I stress, could - be read in both directions.

5.5.1.1. Environmental

Views that arguably lean toward the environmental perspective include Solas' (2008) suggestion that social workers cannot (at the time he writes and probably still now)

directly impact causes of inequality, and the comments of Irizarry et al (2016) that social workers find striving for Margolit's (1998) civilised society easier than for the decent society, because the latter lies outside the realm of interpersonal practice. Irizarry et al also refer to agency mandates as barriers (rather than, say, practitioner intent or values). Olson et al's (2013) participants refer to conventional and unconventional actions, which suggests social justice efforts against/despite prevailing forces, including community-level obstructions, as well as efforts to build a critical mass beyond individual means. Asakura et al (2020) and De Corte and Roose (2020) offer strategies for social justice practice at the individual level and the influencing of policy respectively.

These positions, suggestive of external rather than inherent barriers to social justice practice, cohere well with the respective claims of Birkenmaier (2003) and of Finn and Jacobsen (2003) that social workers embrace social justice by virtue of membership of the profession, and that social justice commitment is role-inherent, even when it is not always personal-value-inherent. For these authors, social justice for all other varieties, is a thing that is hard to do, but worth seeking, and is constructed as such because of social forces and mechanisms in the statutory social work environment.

5.5.1.2.   Role-inherent

There are other parts of the literature that could be read as supporting the idea of a role-inherent deficit of social justice ideals in practice. Olson (2007) conceives of social work as now having two projects – the professional project and the social justice project. Solas (2008) suggests utilitarianism (which he views as insufficiently radical) is prevalent in social work organisations, and both Thompson (2002) and Chu et al (2009) claim that a focus on individual-level practice suggests a loss of social justice commitment. Solas suggests that social workers are more concerned with survival and accommodating dominant discourses, and Clark (2006) says that because of a minimalist liberal outlook, some social work interactions have become transactional. Morgaine's participants (2014)

suggested that social justice requires a cultural as well as a legal shift, and Hudson (2017) is comparably fundamental, arguing that social work does social justice by pushing dominant norms like whiteness and capitalism and that social workers need to resist and focus on systems and institutional power relations. Perhaps the strongest claim in support of a role-inherent social justice practice gap is Olson et al's (2013) finding that social workers are going above their regular roles, a sentiment echoed by some of my participants. If social justice is beyond practitioners' regular responsibilities, in their minds, or those of others, it is arguable that environmental factors alone are no longer culpable, even if they were the original cause of the decline.

Here social justice is constructed, through social forces and mechanisms, as a thing that statutory social workers do not really do, except occasionally, thinly, reactively and marginally. This somewhat parsimonious reading of the literature is slightly unsafe. It is perfectly arguable that some of the views I have cited here in defence of an environmental location of the barriers to social justice could be commandeered by the case for role-inherency. The reverse is also true. The broader point is this – it is far from straightforward to clearly identify whether the evident gulf between aspirational social justice beliefs (of whatever shade) and real-world practice is around the social work role or actually within it. Neither literature nor participant responses offer a coherent answer either way. However, exploring both possibilities as hypotheticals is worthwhile. Assuming one scenario or the other is true, what are the potential implications for social work remaining a social justice profession?

5.5.2. Implications of either possibility

Consider the ramifications of option 1 - the statutory social worker role is not conducive to social justice pursuit because of environmental and contextual factors. The question which then presents itself, is what would need to change for it to be more conducive, and therefore more construable as a practical social justice role? The three main issues

identified by participants, and supported by others' research (Irizarry et al 2016, Olson et al 2013, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b) were:

- the (in)ability to work preventatively and with antecedents of injustice
- the (un)availability of more time and resources
- the (lack of) means to push for change at a higher/more socially impactful level

If these things changed, then the statutory social worker role could be conceptualised as more of a social justice-pursuant role in experiential reality, as well as the ideal. The potential for change on these fronts, even if unrealised any time soon, could mean that the statutory social worker role retains the characteristic of being a social justice agent, albeit embattled.

The first two of these three main barriers are potentially the easier to fix – I must emphasise 'easier', not necessarily 'easy'. Under circumstances less governed by an austerity agenda, it is conceivable that social workers might have more time and/or smaller caseloads, and therefore more ability to work preventatively, or to engage with individuals or families before problems escalate to the level they must, to warrant their attention, at present. For many participants, the mere fact of their involvement with a client or family, was a social injustice, because if the situation had received lower-level intervention earlier, it might not have been needed. Furthermore, if there were consistently available lower-need services that statutory social workers could contact, or refer to quickly, then even if the social worker's own work remained reactive, they might feel they have more ability to at least signpost preventatively.

This second possibility, it should be said, while probably welcomed by many of my participants, would not necessarily make them feel more able to pursue social justice in their role. It would just allow them to feel more confident that justice was available, and that they could reliably signpost to it. There was a clear trend that even when signposted

services were available, participants often felt that they were not 'doing' as much justice as they wanted to in the statutory social worker role. Likewise, the comments some made about working round, or doing extra things, are symbolic of the distinction they saw between their core role as a statutory social worker and the justice they were able to seek.

The third of these barriers to statutory social workers being social justice actors is more challenging, because it would require change at a structural or systematic mid-level at least, and ideally high-level. As set out in Theme 3 in the previous chapter, participants consistently reported a feeling of inability to confront what might be considered causative injustices. They can help a client navigate the benefits system, but they cannot change the system itself, or even advocate for a change to anyone with the power to do much. They can make representation, firmly and diligently, to managers and care panels for their economically disadvantaged clients, but they are not able to change either the panel process or the budgets within which those senior managers have to work.

If these barriers, particularly the last, cannot be changed, and the environment and context of statutory social work remains much as it is presently perceived by my participants, then the question should be asked: can, and should, statutory social work be conceptualised, at its core, as a social justice role?

5.5.3. The statutory social work as a social justice agent – or not

The first step is to consider whether there is a viable concept of social justice that does not rely on being able to affect change at a social level, only an individual one, and that could operate in a context of limited resources and a more reactive than preventative workload. The second is to see if that concept can fit with participant responses and the literature. If there is not, or if there is, but it is a concept that is unsatisfactory in terms of

participant responses and literature, then the reality of option 2 must be considered: statutory social work is no longer, or not currently, an inherently social justice-based role.

Drawing on the participants' accounts and the literature, key constituent elements for such a concept might include:

- o identifying social injustices and seeking redress, repair or mitigation when the chance for prevention has passed

- o engaging as best one can with barriers and obsfucating processes in one's own services and partner services

- o advocating for one's client(s) using whatever appropriate assets are available, including social-level concepts and a social justice analysis framework to understand, explore and explain the problems clients experience

- o remaining motivated by and committed to wider social justice ideals and drawing attention to them, even if unable to directly engage with them at a high level, or do much more than react to them at an immediate practice level – a 'social justice as faith' idea, perhaps

The literature is divided on whether this kind of work can, or should, be legitimately classified as social justice action. A considerable proportion of the literature either implies or explicitly states that this kind of work, however laudable and necessary it may be, does not really constitute social justice action (sections 2.4.4. and 2.4.5.). Scholars articulating this view variously claim that in individual level casework, social workers are: not impacting on injustices above individual casework; not redistributing or taking on privilege and entrenched power; reinforcing and pushing adaptation to, rather than challenging of, unfair, unequal or oppressive systems; fitting the client into societal conformity; or focusing attention on the victims of capitalism, racism, or gender inequality, rather than the perpetrators and causes (Irizarry et al 2016, Harrison et al 2016, Brown et al 2015,

Olson et al 2013, Chu et al 2009, Solas 2008, Ife 2008, Olson 2007, Gilligan 2007, Birkenmaier 2003, Thompson 2002, Hawkins et al 2001).

Those who do see a role and legitimate conceptual place for micro- or individual-level social justice also do so for a range of reasons, including: conceptualising social justice as a motivator for social workers as much as it is an achievement; the belief that engaging with injustice at the level of the client is still social justice action, even if it does not lead to wider change; and that micro-level action by social workers can lead to justice at the meso-level (though again, how and where the meso-level is conceptualised may be individually determined and subjective).

If this thesis accepts the idea that individual-level or client-facing efforts are valuable, but not social justice, then in one sense we have reached a conclusion: social justice is by and large not in the day- to-day remit of statutory social workers. The environmental and contextual barriers are so immovable that the role itself has become residual, reactive and micro-focused. The remainder of the thesis could discuss how this might be remedied, but it would mean accepting social justice as presently being beyond the day-to-day pursuit of statutory social workers. The norm circle stands - to borrow wording from Jackson and Livingstone (1982), the adventure ends here.

However, that view does not comfortably fit with the views of my participants, and frankly does not honour their efforts. Most said, effectively, that it was very hard to pursue social justice in whatever form they understood it, but not impossible. Most also cited social justice, as they perceived it, as a continuing principle or motivator, however frustrating or challenging the pursuit had become. To say their efforts are not social justice-related is an undeserved simplification, and a diminution of most of their views, ideals and efforts.

By the same token, however, to mould a social justice definition to fit their reported practice realities is unreflective of many of their other comments, and of the criticisms and concerns of the literature, including some who support the idea of micro-level social justice, about the residuality of the present role. A concept or model of social justice is therefore needed that addresses and incorporates both of these aspects, while also being cognisant of the place of experience and the variety of social definitions that were reported and may come from that experience.

5.6. Summary and case for a new approach

This chapter has sought to argue and explain that identifying a clear, cohesive notion of social justice that does not encounter contradiction from some participants or points of literature is problematic, and that a potentially huge range of different conceptual components, combinations, constellations and hierarchies could be considered equally valid. They can be combined under a very broad umbrella of entitlement, but this serves as a basic typologising tool, not a cohesive definition. A potential explanation for this range of thought and conceptualisation is the consistently stated importance of personal experience, often affected or catalysed by social work education, but not so frequently originated by it. Part of that experience, for many, is time in post-qualification practice, including the experience of encountering the barriers, and the rather fewer facilitators, to pursuit of their social justice ideals.

The range of concepts and concept combinations that participants used to describe social justice is wide, but the barriers they identify are much narrower and largely consistent. A picture emerges that, as a statutory social worker, whatever your social justice philosophy, it will be reliably frustrated by some combination of the same seven or eight limitations of practice reality. Following from these findings, the question of whether statutory social work can continue to style itself as a social justice role is considered.

The options from here are as follows: there can be a continued wringing of hands at the nature and scale of the barriers. To stop there would mean we are not only missing the chance to do something with social justice that is emancipatory or useful, we are leaving the situation voided, and uncertain – with force, but without meaning. This would paradoxically reinforce the norm circle of how hard social justice is to pursue in any conceptual form, and potentially reduce, not develop, social work agency.

We could make the case for doing better. For that to be useful, we would need a reasonable cohesive concept of social justice that could be pursued. However, the first two thirds of this chapter have discussed findings that show the limits and shortcomings of imposing a concept on practitioners from above and/or fitting one to contemporaneous social work realities. Even if that was feasible, it would fail to respect and incorporate the individuality of the pathways that take people to their concepts of justice. A model is needed to address this, and, for all their fine qualities, the present array of existing options for building a model do not do all that is needed. The next chapter will proffer and explain a third option – a model for exploring diverse concepts and practical implications, but within a common framework.

6. Chapter 6: Discussion chapter 2: Towards a model for social justice conceptualisation – The Social Justice Tetrahedron

Armour and Sword

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will offer a model through which individual social workers and social work students may construct a concept of social justice in social work. The model is called the Social Justice Tetrahedron, a name that is derived from the shape of the model, which is that of a net of a tetrahedron (a four-sided triangle-based pyramid). The model has four elements, each of which interacts with the others, and is designed to facilitate the formation of a social justice concept with philosophical, critical, professional, and reflective aspects. The aim is to help the user to form a concept that is genuine and authentic for them, but that navigates through particular waystones to structure the concept formation and to ensure that particular aspects are included in some form. It is designed to avoid the opposing pitfalls that accompany either a single, firm and exclusive concept, or a landscape of potentially infinite constructions that may not be mutually intelligible or practically useable. The Tetrahedron also seeks to bridge the gap between idealised and pragmatic notions of social justice, facilitating a social justice conceptualisation process that has a place for social work and the social worker, as well as illuminating where the profession can do more or do better.

The intended outcome is to support a common language for social justice in social work, where concepts can be organically formed, discussed, critiqued and improved by one another. A key element of making this happen will be the real-world use of the model in social work education, both pre- and post-qualification. Considerations about how this may be best conducted will be raised in the conclusions and recommendations chapter.

The purpose is to create a social justice framework that:

- o gives some more philosophical structure than that which emerged from data and literature

- o offers something useful and constructive to social workers, including statutory, at the practice level

- o allows for the identification of gaps between ideal and reality, and for critical analysis of barriers, and of causes of injustice

- o embraces and draws on experience and reflexivity

6.2. Possible approaches to concept formation

There are three broad options for how to approach forming a new concept of social justice. One can start by seeking:

- o a single, firm concept,

- o a range of multiple, discrete, equally valid concepts

- o or a model or framework with a set of core components, but which allows for a range of points of variance

The first two of these options have drawbacks. No single, firm, deep concept is supported by the range of perspectives in the data. Such a definition would require fine detail definitions of various sub-concepts and therefore exclude some participants' views as conceptually 'wrong'. This is against the spirit of a study that has explicitly sought to avoid an *a priori* mentality and, per Funge's finding (2011), takes us away from the idea of exposing practitioners and students to a social justice perspective, and toward the harder ground of trying to ensure they believe in a particular one.

Seeking multiple, discrete and equally valid concepts of social justice avoids this problem but has other drawbacks. Multiple discrete definitions are no more reflected in the data than a single perfect concept. They would also require typologising, which would be

governed by ideologically-driven extrapolation, by me or whoever else (for example Gasker and Fischer 2014, Duffy 2010). We would therefore have not only a diverse set of definitions, but diverse and competing options for stacking or heirachicalising them. Furthermore, just as the case for a single definition would be stronger if participant concepts were more mutually cohesive, the case for multiple interacting concepts would be stronger if participant concepts were not as messily and multilaterally overlapping as they are.

That leaves the possibility of a model with some fixed components, but with scope for conceptual variation in a range of directions. This approach has the potential to be the most useful concept for the profession and for practice, because it combines a degree of clarity and consistency with space and inclusivity for variation and interpretation. It is this kind of concept that informs the model being proposed in this chapter; the Social Justice Tetrahedron.

6.3. Underlying principles for this model

The concept formation model advanced and explained in this chapter rests on several working principles, detailed here.

6.3.1. Facilitative model:

Unlike other models that I have built into this thesis, this model is not descriptive. It is for using and, ideally, for discussing. Some of the choices and prompts I have made are based directly on the findings, others are included as an attempt to rationalise or accommodate the gaps and inconsistencies in the findings, or between findings and literature. The model uses the principles of Socratic questioning, in that it prompts users to articulate their conceptualisations of the various aspects of the model. In doing so, it serves as an activator (in the critical realist sense).

6.3.2. Principle of positive conceptualisation

The model is constructed to facilitate the formation of conceptual components in the positive or affirmative, for example, to define equality, rather than inequality. This is an intentional decision to push the user to think about social justice, and the social worker role in it, as positive notions, then identify what appear to be barriers and impediments. Numerous participants found it easier, understandably perhaps, to explain what they meant by unfairness or oppression, for example, rather than fairness or an absence of oppression. This model works on the basis of identifying positive concepts in the first instance.

6.3.3. Normative standpoints

This model rests on certain normative stances based on my research findings and the literature. Some of these are based on the findings and analysis and were set out in the previous discussion chapter.

- o Social justice is a positive concept, not simply the inverse of social injustice
- o Social work is and should be concerned with the pursuit of social justice
- o Social justice has a philosophical underpinning
- o The identification of a barrier to justice axiomatically creates the moral imperative, if not necessarily the clear means, to address it. Day-to-day/individual practice is at least potentially a legitimate aspect of that concern and pursuit
- o Experience is key to concept formation, consciously or otherwise

The Social Justice Tetrahedron: Elements and meta-components

Superconductor

The Social Justice Tetrahedron works on the basis of asking the user to consider four different elements of social justice in social work, and the ways in which they relate to one another. It is a practical model in the sense that it is designed to be actively used, and ideally to be discussed between groups of students or practice colleagues. For that reason, there will be reference throughout this chapter to the 'user' of the model, imagined to be social work practitioners and social work students, as well as potentially managers, clients and members of associated professions. Its primary function is to be a mechanism establishing a basic common language and framework, through which individuals can form a concept of social justice for themselves. This approach – particularly element 1 - shares some commonalities with Finn and Jacobsen's model for just practice (2003) in that it too is built on a range of prompts and spurs to reflection by any social worker, student or organisation that would use it. The Tetrahedron is however more structured and more directive in terms of the waystones it places before the user. It is intended to be used in a particular order.

This kind of frameworking model involves two pieces of terminology that I will be using throughout, and which I will now explain; elements and meta-components. The Tetrahedron has four elements, and each element has several meta-components. Anyone using the model is asked to consider not only all four elements, but all meta-components within.

6.4.1. Elements

The term 'element' here refers to an essential part of the social justice concept. Anyone using this model to build a concept of social justice in social work will need to consider and respond to each of these elements.

- o **Element 1:** Philosophical social justice components

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- o **Element 2:** Nature and location of barriers to social justice

- o **Element 3:** Role of the social worker in pursuit of social justice

- o **Element 4:** Reflection on the influence of experiences

The model is designed to be approached in the order 1-4-2-4-3-4. The idea is that one starts with identifying a positive concept of social justice in philosophical terms, then picks out the barriers, and finally considers the social work role in the achievement of that concept in the face of those barriers. After considering each of the first three, however, the user is asked to consider element 4, and reflect on what their experience has contributed to the answers they are providing. Therefore, the user is asked to return to the reflective centre of the model at least three times.

6.4.2. Meta-components

Each element of the model is split into between two and four meta-components. A conceptual component, for the purposes of this discussion, is a concept that is itself part of a broader concept. The conceptual component may be essential or optional, depending on the nature of the concept in question, and the epistemological prism through which one is viewing it. A meta-component is a component of a concept that must be considered as part of that concept, but the precise manifestation of which is open to debate, interpretation and variance.

As a basic example, consider a sandwich. Bread can be seen as a meta-component of the concept of a sandwich. The bread in question can be any one of innumerable variants (rye, pitta, baguette, thick white), but for something to be considered a sandwich, in most culinary contexts, a requirement is at minimum two pieces of bread, at the top and bottom. Of course, one can talk about an open sandwich, but the very presence of the modifier 'open' is indicative of the extent to which this is a departure from the norm. Likewise, one can use 'sandwich' metaphorically, such as a 'sandwich course', but elementary querying
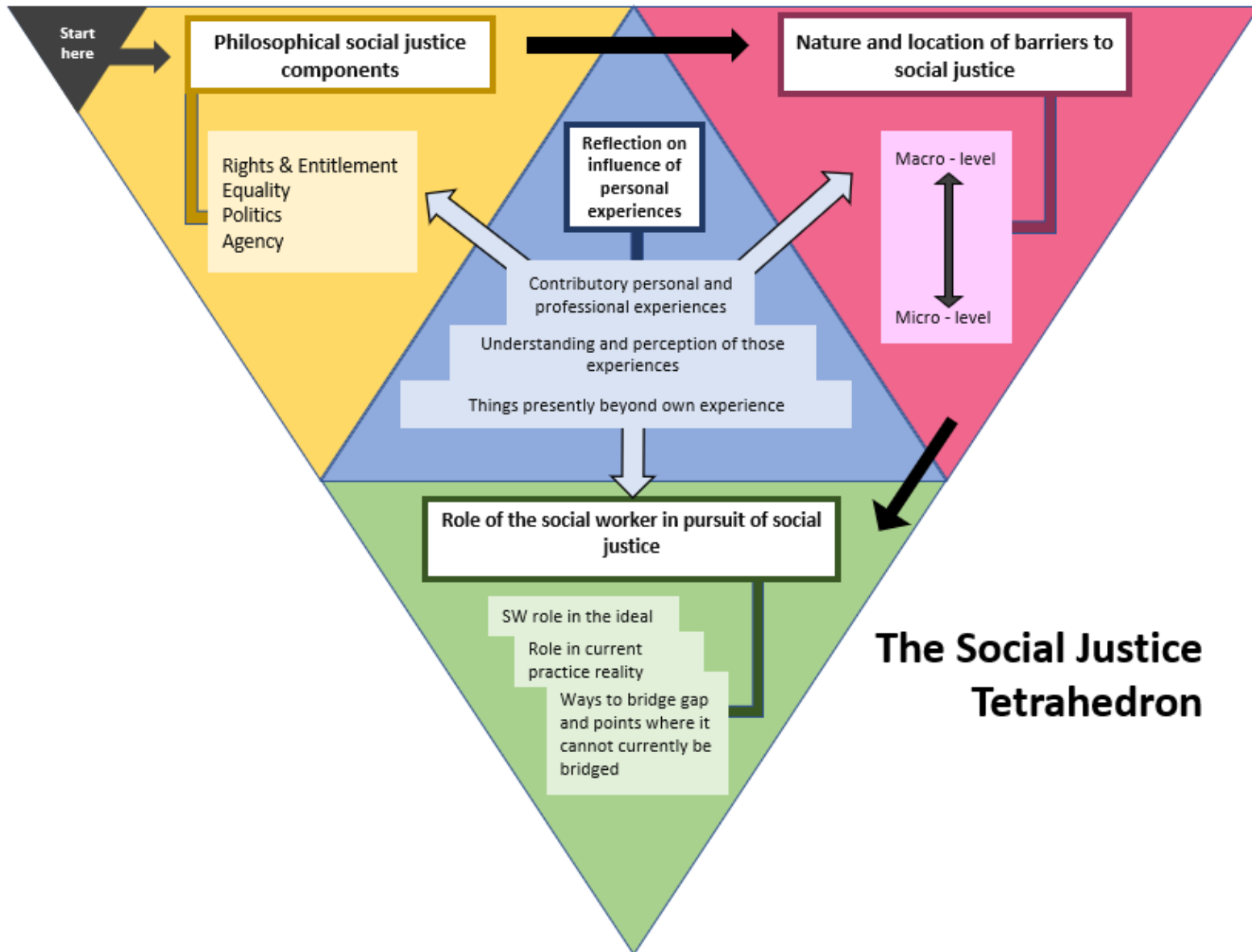
of the metaphor will be met with an explanation of what is the 'bread' and what is the filling. Thus, even when bread is not literally involved, it is a reliable, nay essential meta-component of the concept of a sandwich.

In proposing this model, I am arguing that concept formation of social justice is served better by meta-components than by components with fixed definitions. I will, for example, argue that equality is an essential meta-component of social justice philosophy, which is to say that I will argue that any concept of social justice in social work must consider equality as an aspect of it, but that the precise detail of that concept may vary, and is not firmly defined by some authority.

In some ways the Social Justice Tetrahedron is an operationalising of the first three original research questions, developed and improved through analysis of the answers given by participants. These findings, as well as themes and discontinuities in the literature, have informed the meta-components that serve as a common framework of waystones for other social workers and students to use. Element 1 is a form of research question 1, refocused to include particular philosophical points. Elements 2 and 3 break up research question 3, so that the user can consider first the barriers, and then what they might do to address them. Element 4 takes the core aim of research question 2 (and depending on the career trajectory of the user, conceivably question 4), and adds meta-components to prompt more structured reflection. The Tetrahedron is inspired by the questions and the responses in one other key way: my participants, and other practitioners, deserve a way forward.

Figure 19: The Social Justice Tetrahedron

Summary of the elements and meta-components of the Social Justice Tetrahedron

6.4.2.1. Element 1: Philosophical social justice components

This concerns the ideal philosophical makeup of social justice. The user of the model is asked to outline what they think social justice should mean in the ideal, and in philosophical terms, via the following meta-components; **rights and entitlement, equality, politics** and **agency.**

6.4.2.2. Element 2: Nature and location of barriers to social justice

This element asks users to identify what they see as the real-world barriers to the social justice philosophy they have articulated via the previous element. The meta-components here are **macro-level barriers** and **micro-level barriers**, which serve as two ends of a continuum. Having identified a barrier, the assumption is that this means we need to seek to remove or mitigate that barrier.

6.4.2.3. Element 3: Role of the social worker in pursuit of social justice

This element concerns the role of the social worker in pursuing social justice. The user is asked to articulate their view about the place of the practitioner in advancing the philosophy that they have articulated through element 1, and in overcoming or mitigating the barriers they have identified through element 2. This is done using the following meta-components; **the ideal social work role**, **the social work role in current practice reality**, and **ways of bridging the disparities between the two**.

6.4.2.4. Element 4: Reflection on the influence of personal experiences

This element was included in the model because of the consistent influence of experience in concept formation that emerged from the findings. The user is asked to consider the

potential influences on their responses to the other three elements of their own experiences to date. This is through the following meta-components; **contributory personal and professional experiences to date**, **understanding and perception of that experience**, and **things currently beyond own experience.**

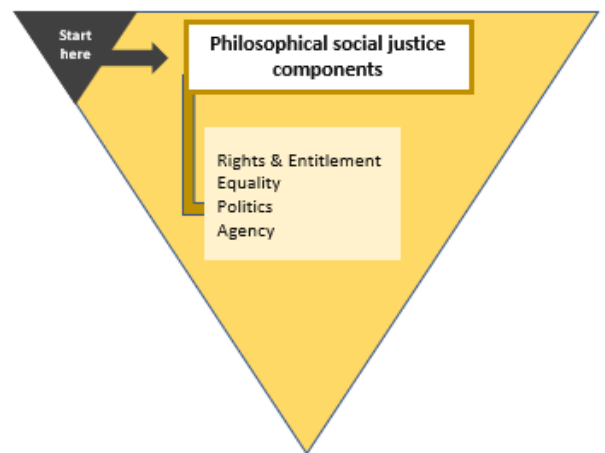## 6.5. Explanation of the elements of the model

6.5.1. Element 1: Philosophical social justice components

The first element of the model concerns the ideal philosophical makeup of social justice. In using this element, the user of the model is asked to outline what they think social justice should mean in the ideal, and in philosophical terms. They are asked in particular to reflect on, and articulate, what forms of the following meta-components should fall within the purview of social justice, on the basis that any concept of social justice in social work must involve some version of each of the following:

Figure 20: Social Justice Tetrahedron Element 1: Philosophical social justice components

- o **Rights and entitlement:** what is owed to, and available to, an individual or group
- o **Equality:** balance of means and standing between one person, or one group, and another
- o **Politics:** ideal relationship between individuals and social institutions
- o **Agency:** ideal amount and forms of control and opportunity held by people, groups and institutions

6.5.1.1. Meta-component: Rights and entitlement

The principal reason for saying that some concept of entitlement needs to be part of social justice, is two-fold. Firstly, as set out in the previous chapter, entitlement is the most comfortable umbrella under which participants' concepts can cohere, albeit in very broad terms: the idea that social justice relates to a person, a group or all people, being socially entitled to something. Secondly, it is very difficult to form a concept of social justice that does not involve some kind of entitlement concept. The precise variant of who is entitled to what, and on what basis and conditions, is more open and contestable, but it is difficult to conceptualise any form of justice that does not have something to say about what people, or some people, deserve to have. The responses from participants, for all their other differences, certainly have in common a thread of entitlement to something, be it opportunity, access, support, money or choice. Similarly, most examples and expressed frustrations of an absence, or failure, of social justice, involved either a lack of entitlement, or an entitlement unjustly barriered. Put simply, for every participant, someone deserved something, and was either not getting it, or was in danger of not getting it.

To make a case against including entitlement as a core meta-component of social justice philosophy is problematic. The diverse concepts explicitly articulated in the literature (sections 2.2. and 2.3.) can all be connected with the idea that someone is entitled to something, even if that something is an absence of intervention or being left alone, as in Gasker and Fischer's conservative concept, or Duffy's liberal concept. The failure to provide that something is a failure of social justice. One could argue a concept of social justice, based primarily on something else, such as civic duty, or a utilitarian view of the good society. However, any such concept would still need a measure of entitlement in some form. I will briefly consider some possibilities to illustrate the point.

Consider social justice as duty or responsibility, in which the most important element of a social justice concept is the fulfilment of what you owe to others. The focus is placed on you, the individual offering, creating or providing social justice for others. Such a notion has some basis in the literature – van Soests' (1995) typology phrases social justice variants in terms of X owing something to Y, including what citizens owe society (legal) or one another (commutative). It could also be aligned with a virtue ethics-based view, as set out by Dunk-West (2018). However, in any ethic where there is an owing, there must logically be an entitlement. In van Soest's commutative justice, for example, you owe duty to fellow citizens, but are also entitled to their duty to you.

Another option is social justice as utilitarian distribution, in which the primary consideration is the equitable handing out of resource and opportunity by the organising authority to do the most good for the most people. Social justice is here conceived as the meeting of need, and possibly secondarily of want, but refracted through a majoritarian lens. There is a basis in literature here too, from Gasker and Fischer (2014), Hugman (2008) and Dunk-West (2018), but, also again, there is a place for entitlement. In a utilitarian distributional concept of social justice, any given individual is entitled to equal consideration under the utilitarian calculation, albeit not necessarily to equal expectation of satisfactory outcome.

6.5.1.1.1. Possible concepts of entitlement

While it is difficult to conceive of a social justice that does not involve a form of entitlement, it is important to say that being able to see a particular social justice concept in terms of entitlement does not prevent it from being oppressive to some; that depends on the nature, reach and conditionality of the entitlements in question. If it is accepted that social justice must have entitlement as a meta-component, the discussion then moves to considering the form and operation of that entitlement. We must ask:

- who is the someone holding the entitlement?

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- what is the something to which they are entitled?
- what is the nature of the entitlement?

The question of the nature of the entitlement has several options and hierarchical stacks available. Do we give preference to legal entitlement, moral entitlement, respect for what is good or for what is fair (by whatever definition)?

Let us say, for example, that it is moral, fair and good to a) defend people's ability to use their legal rights to say, dignified care when ill or vulnerable, and to b) intervene when they are unable to do so. It may be that provisions exist in law to ensure that this care is provided, in which case there is overlap – not necessarily complete synonymy – between moral and legal entitlement. If in social work we advocate for, or defend, a client's entitlement to care on a legal basis, we are opting for a primacy of legal entitlements, emphasising rights that are written into law. They possibly are morally correct and good, but are primarily to be adhered to because they are the law. When the law changes, or when the policy around the use and delivery of the law changes (e.g. funding thresholds), a legalistic sense of entitlements means that whatever a right is, that must change too.

An alternative is to prioritise defence of moral entitlements. If this is the basis of our arbitration, of who is entitled to what, then what is written into law is second to what is morally correct. Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, for example, is morally wrong, and remains morally wrong whether a particular polity has laws against it or not. Making this argument gives primacy to moral, rather than legal, entitlement.

The issue here of course is that morality is both individually diverse and culturally defined – absolute morality in all things is hard to crystallise. Furthermore, the place of the family in terms of the care of vulnerable members, is a matter of moral judgement, but is also one of need and resources, and these are governed by the universality or conditionality

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of legal entitlements. Two families in similar situations may have diametrically opposing perspectives yet both be working from morally good intentions. One family believes it is right to keep their relative safe, and therefore places them in a residential home. The other believes in promoting their independence and wishes them to remain at home. Whether either option is workable, never mind moral, in part depends on the resources of the family, the client and the state.

For many participants in this study, there is an interplay between these two ideas – many describe seeking to utilise legal rights concepts to defend what they believe to be moral entitlements, but they are doing so in an asymmetric situation. The law is static until, and unless, changed, whereas morality, while having a certain level of cultural normative pressure, is fluid and subjective.

The conflicting nature of different entitlements, and different types of entitlements, would seem to support the idea that a meta-concept of entitlement makes for a better core component, than a single, fixed concept of entitlement. Including it as core means that anyone seeking to understand, or take on a social justice concept, and certainly anyone seeking to join a social justice-informed profession like social work, would have to think about it. Keeping it as a meta-concept encourages, if not requires, the critical asking of the question 'what are just entitlements?'

Having entitlement as a meta-component of social justice in social work, means that the question of who is owed what is an essential one in concept formation. On its own, however, it does not preclude some potentially unjust manifestations of entitlement, such as some of those set out by Reisch (2002). To guard against that, other meta-components are needed, including the next one; equality.

6.5.1.2.   Meta-component: Equality

The case for including a meta-concept of equality as a core component of a social justice concept is not so straightforward as that for entitlement. While many participants made reference to equality, several did not, basing their definitions in other ethical terms, such as fairness, or rights. Furthermore, while it remains a major recurring theme in the literature, it is not completely consistent there either, and where it is raised, it (or its definition) is a point of debate (for example Solas 2008 and Hugman 2008). It is also not so comfortable a conceptual umbrella as 'entitlement', under which to place myriad notions, and it is not clear that all social workers, including some of my participants and those in other scholars' research, see it as central or even important (O'Brien 2011a, 2011b, Hawkins et al 2001, arguably Hancock 2008).

Equality is not of course always well-defined, but it is ingrained in social work codes of ethics and practice (SWE 2020, BASW 2018, 2014, IASSW 2014, IFSW 2012). It is almost unarguable that equality is, as a broad ideal at least, a part of social work values. Someone who wanted to argue that social work should not concern itself with equality, would, as with leaving bread out of a sandwich, still have to explicitly address it when making their case. At the very least then, equality is part of the social work value pantheon; the choice is then whether we consider it as a distinct and parallel value to social justice, or whether we purposefully overlap them. In asserting that equality is valid as an essential meta-component of social justice, I am asserting the latter option – social justice needs to have an internal equality component.

6.5.1.2.1.   Possible conceptualisations of equality

Having sought to defend the legitimacy of equality as part of a social justice concept, it is important to recall the wide range of definitions of equality in participant responses and the literature. Some examples include:

- the concept of a more equal society in terms of reduced income inequality for everyone

- equality of access to opportunity, irrespective of differences in resources, including financial

- equality of access to help, welfare and support, irrespective of differences in resources, including financial

- equality of treatment and ability to have a voice, irrespective of specific identified or perceived characteristics

- equality of opportunity or aspiration, irrespective of background

- equity, but not strictly-speaking equality, of opportunity

- equality as a basic informing principle or belief

- equality before the law

Some of these concepts of equality align comfortably with one another, and with particular definitions of entitlement. Other combinations are mutually contradictory. It is entirely viable that a user of this model could reject one or more of these variations because they feel them to be either insufficiently radical, or overly interventionist, and there may also be some who want a more fixed and firm notion of equality as part of their social justice model. I argue that allowing diverse equality concepts into the conversation, and into the concept formation process, is beneficial. Because of this divergence of thought and understanding about what equality is for participants and in literature, or should be, and how it might be sought or operationalised, a meta-concept is preferable to a single irreducible version.

Choosing a particular concept may suit a particular circumstance or time, but may be an impediment to justice in another. Equality of opportunity applied in a 'sameness' format may do nothing to rebalance real differences between some individuals and their situations, but in other situations it might. An economic view of equality, even a radically

redistributive one, may reduce disparity of income and means, but will not necessarily change attitudes toward marginalised groups. Keeping it open at one end allows for a critical perspective, to continually re-examine whether a given notion of equality – and therefore of justice – needs to be updated or modified.

Having a meta-component of equality also serves as a counterweight and check on a meta-concept of entitlement. If prompted to consider both, it may guard against a view of equality that places outcomes over rights to divergence, and a notion of entitlement that is more conditional without much justification. Including both is a partial defence against oppression. However, neither meta-component necessarily offers a mechanism for the critical analysis of prevailing structures and macro-mechanisms that can influence, enhance or impede a given idea of social justice. For that, we require the next two meta-components that will be considered: politics and agency.

6.5.1.3.   Meta-component: Politics

The third meta-component of the philosophical element of the Tetrahedron is politics. It is important to make clear here that this component encompasses two overlapping but slightly distinct things. The first is/are the ideal relationship(s), from the perspective of the user, between the individual and the institutions of society, including the state. The second is the political terminology that some might use, and indeed some participants and literature sources do use, to describe their preferences around those relationships.

Somewhat like equality, the case for including politics as a core meta-concept for social justice has to overcome the point that it is not universally explicitly brought up, either by participants in this study, or scholars in the literature – some make explicit links to it, some do not. The argument could be made that it is a separate concept to justice, or a conceptual 'optional extra'. The case for including politics as a meta-component of social justice rests on the following point. A concept of social justice needs an element that has

something to say about the organisation of society, the values informing that organisation, and the institutions managing that organisation, including, but not limited to, the state. Almost all participants and scholars have something to say about what is just and, more frequently, unjust, about prevailing social arrangements. Following the principle of positivity in the formation of a social justice concept, users are asked to identify what they see as the ideal arrangement, the better to enable them to identify the barriers in element 2.

Among those participants and those sources who do make political links with social justice, the strength of feeling, and readiness of connection, was often both strong and rapid. This is not a quantitative study, so while numbers are not irrelevant, strength of feeling and richness of data is a legitimate consideration. Those who do not explicitly raise politics in terms of ideological or party labels when discussing their concept, nonetheless mention justices or injustices where the state and other social institutions are presented as either the partial perpetrators or partial resolvers of the situation. Obvious examples are austerity and refugee policy.

Politics, as a meta-component, does not only concern potential users of the model who have a partisan loyalty or party preference. Some will want to explain that with labels like 'feminist', 'socialist', 'pragmatist' or 'centrist'; such terms and identities are deeply important for some participants, authors and, most importantly, future users of this model, as they are for me. With or without such labels, the idea here is to articulate what, in terms of social justice, is the ideal relationship between the individual and the state, and of both of those with other social institutions, in the view of the user.

One might ask; if politics is to serve as a meta-component, and if this model is open to a degree of pluralism, why not other forms of philosophy or ideology, such as utilitarianism, or religion? The response is that when those ideas inhabit only the role of idealistic or

'theoretical' ethics, they can be considered within the meta-components of entitlement and/or equality. When they inhabit the realm of government, policy and social organisation, they become, by definition, an aspect of politics. What cannot be so easily assumed to be an aspect of political arrangements is the allocation of agency to individuals, groups and institutions, to act or not act. This is the focus of the final meta-component in this element.

6.5.1.4.   Meta-component: Agency

The fourth meta-component of the philosophical element is agency, and there are two main reasons for its inclusion. The first is that any conversation about injustice generally involves discussion of opportunity, self-determination and control of one's life, or deficits and imbalances therein (Irizarry et al 2016, Finn and Jacobsen 2003) including in the form of oppression, discrimination or the maintenance of exclusionary social norms (Hudson 2017, Deepak et al 2015, Buz et al 2013, Hancock 2008). The other elements of the Tetrahedron are concerned with identifying barriers to justice and the social worker role in doing so, and agency inequities of one form or another are likely to be part of that. In order to discuss that, it is necessary to first discuss agency itself, and allocations of agency, in the ideal and the positive as the user of the model would like it to be. This may include the role of the social worker, and potentially of others, in the pursuit of social justice.

The second reason for including agency as a meta-component is that discussion of it opens consideration of both the provision of choice and capacity to pursue choice – the right to do or not do something - and the provision of means and opportunity to do it or choose not to do it. The other three meta-components of this element – entitlement, equality and politics – have the potential on their own to be focused either entirely on what people, groups and institutions should have, receive or be allotted, or on what they should be expected to do, and the responsibilities for justice that they should hold.

Including agency as a meta-component provides a counterweight to social justice concepts that might, intentionally or otherwise, be either paternalistic or responsibilising in their top-down allocations.

By agency, I mean the meaningful and efficacious ability of a person, group or institution to control, change or influence events, or to choose not to. As well as positive agency, this includes the ability to oppress and to combat oppression, depending on how it is used. Agency in this sense could overlap with capability, as used by Gasker and Fischer (2014), Holscher and Bazalek (2012) and Vincent (2012), but I do not wish to pinion users to take up a capabilities approach, hence the use of 'agency'.

A case for not including an agency element in a social justice concept is difficult; any set of 'principles of social justice' – indeed any concept of justice, even one that is monolithic and one-dimensional, will make implicit or explicit claims about the justness or otherwise of prevailing distributions of agency, capacity, freedom, choice or power. Of course, there is a case to be made against any given interpretation of how empowerment, capacity or opportunity should be distributed, and whether a given distribution is, or is not, socially just. This range is reflected in both findings and wider literature. Participants varied in where they located, for example, the ability or capacity to effect social justice – often beyond themselves and/or their clients – but all had a view.

One could also argue that discussions of agency are inherent in one or more of the other three meta-components in this element – that is perfectly possible, however the same argument applies here as applies to equality and entitlement, being a check on one another. Someone using the model, especially from a social work perspective, might well talk about agency in relation to entitlement, equality or politics, but they also might not. For the reasons above, I argue that any concept of justice needs to explicitly countenance the distribution of agency, therefore it needs to be a meta-component in its own right.

By the same token, the having or gaining of agency, is also no guarantee of the preparedness to use it. Discussion of agency distribution absent discussion of the other three elements, particularly entitlement, means that one could conceive of an idealised distribution of agency without consideration of what it should be used for, and indeed when, it is up to the holder of that agency to use it.

6.5.1.4.1. Possible conceptualisations of agency

The question remains whether a social justice concept in social work should be more specific in terms of the ways in which it incorporates agency. There are various options, none of which are mutually exclusive

- the agency of individual social workers to work for the benefit, welfare and empowerment of their clients, balanced with their power (or duty) to intervene and make decisions that compromise clients' freedom
- the agency of social work clients and potential clients to control their own lives and maintain or restore their own independence
- governmental agency (or lack thereof), locally and nationally, to allocate or remove, dictate policy and shape discourses
- the agency of social work as a whole and of its partner agencies and professions (generally and relative to one another) to affect positive change (or hamper it).
- The agency of groups and sub-groups within society to empower themselves or one another
- the agency (or lack thereof) of social work managers and senior leadership to agree support, define roles and remits, and guard resources
- the effective ability to challenge others' use of their own agency

Different concepts of social justice will potentially argue that the agency and thus the responsibility to pursue that justice should lie in different places, or that the present and
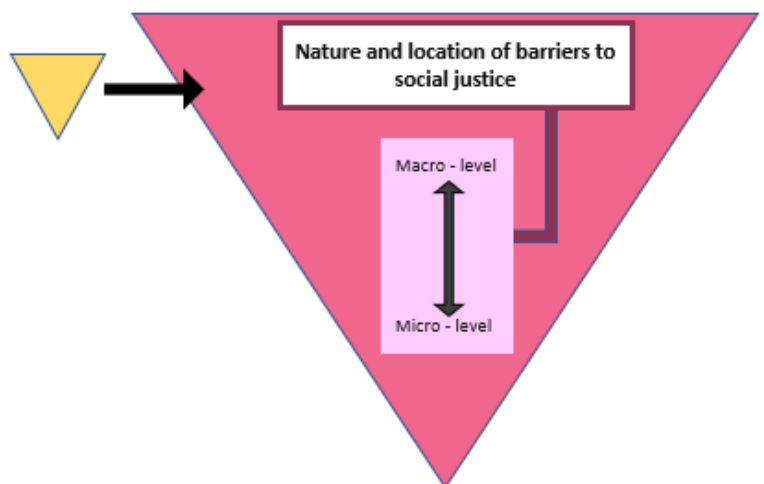
potential agency imbalances and inequities can be found at different points. A more individualist concept of justice, perhaps in line with Duffy's (2010) liberal night-watchman state concept, might argue that the state should have limited powers to keep basic social order and safety, and that the main agency and thus responsibility for social justice lies with individuals. A concept more similar to a capabilities approach may see the individual as the ideal locus of their own agency, but claim that all other layers have a responsibility to use theirs to make this more of a reality. Voices focusing on systemic oppression of particular groups or identities (Hancock 2008, Holcher and Bazalek 2012), may locate the inequity of agency at the social group level, but vary on where the responsibility for resolving it is – government, institutions and community groups, or individuals.

6.5.1.5. Summary

After working through this first element of the model, the user will hopefully have identified a positive philosophy of social justice that incorporates their concepts of rights and entitlement, equality, politics and agency. The next element concerns the identification of the barriers to that concept being enacted and pursued.

6.5.2. Element 2: Nature and location of barriers to social justice

The second element of the model asks users to identify what they see as the real-world barriers to social justice, both at the macro- and the micro-level or, if preferred at the societal/ structural level, and the level of individual interaction and

and location of barriers to social justice

practice. These might include existing welfare systems, societal

or individual attitudes, a lack of client information, the correlation between poverty and

access to help or the capitalist system at large – and this list is far from exhaustive. The

identification of a barrier behoves the moral imperative, if not necessarily the immediately

apparent means, to seek to remove, or mitigate that barrier. A comparable mindset would

be this; if a part of a building developed a fault – damp, wiring problems, subsidence –

the identification of the problem would behove a recognised need to fix said fault. It may

or may not be within the responsibility or capacity of the identifier of the problem, and it

may, or may not, be substantive and/or urgent, but in identifying the issue, the marker is

laid that it must be addressed. Likewise, in this element, the identification of a barrier to

social justice automatically creates the moral impetus for engaging with it. Whether the

addressing of a particular barrier is, either ideally or in current reality, within the purview

of social work, is a separate question, and the focus of element 3.

6.5.2.1.   Meta-components:

The meta-components of this elements are

- o **Macro-level barriers**
- o **Micro-level barriers**

These meta-components operate as two ends of a scale, rather than as a binary choice.

This means that users are encourage to identify barriers that they believe fit between

these levels, or that occur at more than one level. The element does not impose an explicit

meso-level, so as to enable the maximum possible conceptual freedom for users in how

they want to describe barriers. An explicit meso-level would prompt users to stratify their

answers into three sections whereas an open scale allows them to articulate barriers that

are distinctly meso-level, and barriers that exist across levels (that go into or through the

middle, rather than only being in the middle). If accepting the legitimacy of both macro-

and micro-level barriers, the legitimacy of a meso-level is almost automatic, but having a

scale rather than a tripartite set of hard layers allows for conversations where different users place barriers at different levels because of how they see them.

In designing this element of the model to prompt the user to identify macro- and micro-level barriers and action points, I am potentially setting myself against those who claim or imply that social justice is, by definition, only performable and achievable at the macro-level, or who had research respondents that did so (Irizarry et al 2016, Harrison et al 2016, Brown et al 2015, Olson et al 2013, Chu et al 2009, Ife 2008, Thompson 2002, Hawkins et al 2001). I will set out here my defence of the legitimacy of micro-level social justice barriers, and explain why a model of social justice can, and should, recognise barriers at both levels and possibly between them, though individual users of the model may think about them in a huge range of different ways.

6.5.2.1.1.   Meta-component: Macro-level barriers to social justice

A macro-level concept of social justice carries considerable advantages; aspiration toward widespread change, concern for the social and the systemic, analytical and critical guarding against unjustified responsibilising of the individual for societal problems. While arguing for the validity of a micro-level social justice concept, the macro-level concept of social justice must continue to be discussed, envisaged and fought for.

There are however deficits to a social justice concept that only works at the macro-level, and for which barriers can only be identified at the macro-level. There is a risk that the challenging of those barriers becomes a vague aspiration that does little more than depress values-driven practitioners, because of its unreachability, and their powerlessness to achieve it, or meaningfully pursue it. Many of my participants offered such sentiments.

Let us take the example of a social justice concept that has, as a philosophical component, greater financial equality, and the macro-level barrier that is identified is, depending on one's political bent, capitalism, or an overbearing state. The individual social worker, for all they believe in greater financial equality, is not in a position to change either barrier from where they are – as much was said by most of my participants. In such a concept, social justice becomes a philosophical idea that operates in a similar way to a loose religious faith – it is something social workers certainly believe in, and perhaps aspire to, but do not generally 'do' at the granular level because they are not able to. Social justice barriers identified only at the macro-level make for a wonderful pre-amble to a code of conduct, but do not provide practical elements that social workers, especially at the moment, can work towards and feel they are achieving.

Furthermore, macro-only justice barriers risk leaving aside, or at least deprioritising, individual clients with very specific situations. They may well still be affected and impeded by macro-level issues, but risk being overlooked, or dealt with in an insufficiently personal way, because their situation does not fit into a recognisable macro-level issue.

6.5.2.1.2. Meta-component: Micro-level barriers to social justice

If we allow for a definition of social justice that is more ground-level, more focused on the individual client and the immediate barriers between them and justice, and more orientated toward supporting equitable access to the support that the state might offer, it arguably becomes a more practicable idea, suggesting barriers upon which practitioners might conceivably be able to have an impact.

If however, and inverting a previous point, the profession only supports a micro-level notion of barriers to social justice, then it may help practitioners to feel they are overcoming them more effectively, and more often, but it has given up on its analysis of macro-level barriers to social justice. A micro-concept of barriers without a macro-level

element, means that the prospect already looms large of an individualising and responsibilising concept of social justice, that places the actions for repairing social injustices squarely in the lap of individuals, rather than wider society. This concept already has well-established philosophical roots, and rests on a mixture of liberty rhetoric and expected social conformity. To use Gasker and Fischer's conservative social justice (2014), the official concept (Crossley 2017) and the language of legal justice from Van Soest (1995), a micro-level-only form of social justice would be primarily focused on what the individual owes society, and how they need to adapt themselves to society, rather than anything society, or the state, owes the individual. Just as a macro-only view of barriers risks excluding person-centred and therapeutic approaches, a micro-only view of barriers would have had little space for, say, the Disability Rights movement, Stonewall or Black Lives Matter.

6.5.2.1.3. The case for conceptualising barriers to social justice at and between the macro- and micro-level

The Social Justice Tetrahedron frames the 'barriers' element in both macro and micro terms. It also invites users to identify what they believe to be a barrier at each level, or indeed between them or across them, rather than telling them. A model of social justice that facilitates the identification of barriers at both a macro- and a micro- level has several strengths. The presence of the macro-level allows for systemic and structural critique, philosophical and ethical consideration about how the world works, should work, or might work better, and facilitates the clear identification of social-scale barriers. If one can, in the 'philosophy' element, articulate a concept of social justice, one can use it to identify the wider-scale obstructions with more clarity. The presence of a micro level in the identification of barriers, allows for the conceptualisation of a justice that can be pursued by the individual – for our purposes, the social worker – and for the individual client or family. It has the potential to be accessible, meaningful and fulfilling for the social worker.

6.5.2.1.4. Defending the legitimacy of social justice working at the micro-level

I have, immediately above, argued for the legitimacy of both a macro and a micro view of barriers to social justice, and that the identification of a barrier behoves the moral aspiration to remove or mitigate that barrier. This in turn, and in the teeth of some of the literature, means embracing at least the partial viability of a micro-level version of social justice.

The charge could be laid that, in making these claims to substantiate my model, I am shoe-horning the social worker into the role of social justice agent, rather than allowing space to say that social justice is not a major consideration of a social worker's role in the present age. It could be claimed that, in arguing for a concept of social justice action at the micro-level, I am allowing social workers to believe they are agents of justice, while they are in fact not addressing social-level injustices at all. Such a charge would be legitimate on the face of it – many of my participants and those of other projects felt they could not generally affect structural problems and barriers to justice. It deserves serious rebuttal.

It is perfectly true to say that just because an idea has a benefit to morale, or to a sense of professional purpose and identity, that does not mean it is intellectually rigorous or legitimate. An idea, or a particular conceptualising of action, can be desirable, pleasing or reassuring, but that does not make it either intellectually legitimate or give it any effect on the world. Practitioners believing and saying that they are, in their individual case work, practising and facilitating social justice does not in itself mean that they are. Historical examples abound, within and beyond social work, of people believing they are doing something significant when subsequent reflection reveals this is not the case. Indeed, in social work's own international history, there have been practitioners and projects motivated by the belief in good, that are now seen correctly as active injustices.

The idea of a social justice concept that has macro- and micro-level elements cannot be defended purely on the basis of it being a nice idea. It must have some rigour and reason behind it. This I will now seek to offer.

The first defence of a multi-level social justice concept comes from the literature. Numerous scholarly voices, and research participants of other studies, proffer and explore an individual-level social justice idea; social workers who report frustration and inability to affect system-level change, but who make, or find, opportunities to seek justice for their clients in so much as they can (Irizarry et al 2016, Olson et al 2013, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b).

Alongside these pieces of work, most participants in this study stopped short of saying in absolute terms that they never get to pursue social justice. When answering the third main interview question, about their experience of what helps and does not help, almost none said that nothing helped at all. Participants identified considerable challenges to the pursuit of justice, and limitations on their own role, but while some expressed doubt that their job related to social justice, few approached categorically saying that social justice was one thing, and their role was another.

There remain voices from the literature that stand by a social justice definition that can only be social, system or macro-level, and excludes individual-level practice. The views are very helpful reminders of the importance of maintaining a critical view of overarching social forces, but the location of the line between social justice and individual practice is not consistently clear. Essentially for them, justice can only be social, if it is at a sufficiently high level in its outlook, operation or impact.

Criteria for such a distinction could include
- o the level at which it takes place in terms of power and governance structures
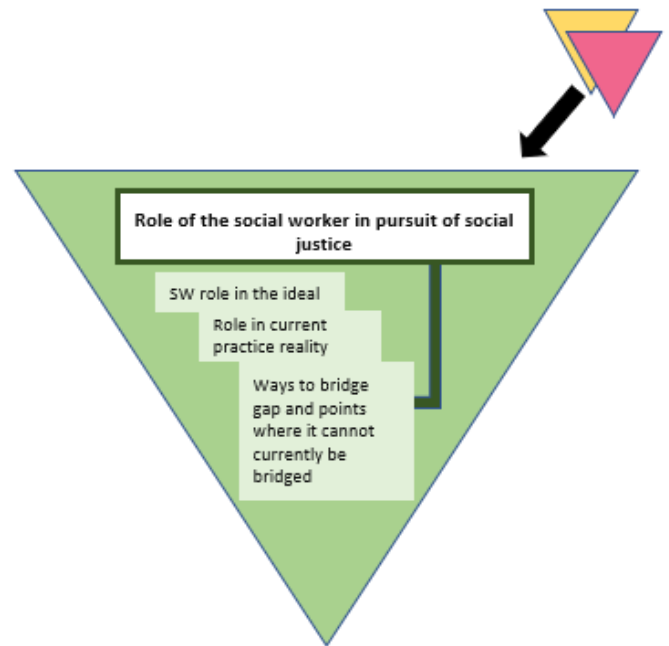
- the perceived radicalness of the change sought

- the extent to which it would require a shift in policy or attitudes

- the number of people who would need to change, or be pushed to change behaviours to make it happen

- the amount of resources that would be needed or reallocated

- the number of people it would impact on, or the permanence of the change.

These are all perfectly worthy points of distinction, but without specific thresholds, the points at which micro-level efforts transition into social justice (or fails to) is subjective. Is the establishment of a new local homelessness service social justice because it impacts on a whole area, or not social justice because it is still helping people out of homelessness, rather than addressing the causes that create homelessness in the first place? Users of the model can of course place the barriers where they see them, but the micro-level barrier remains valid in spite of the literature opposed to it.

Having offered this element to prompt identification of barriers to social justice, the next element asks users of the model to consider what they believe the role of the social worker should be in overcoming them, and to identify gaps between that ideal and the reality of practice.

6.5.3. Element 3: Role of the social worker in pursuit of social justice

The third element of the model for conceptualising social justice concerns the role of the social worker. The position, place, role and potential of the social worker in the pursuit and achievement of social justice is much discussed both by my participants and the literature, in different ways and with different forms of focus, ambition and optimism.

Figure 22: Social Justice Tetrahedron Element 3: Role of the social worker in pursuit of social justice

In a model facilitating a social justice concept for social work, the action element of social justice, and specifically the role of social workers in that action, should be part of that concept formation. This is particularly true if the model is intended to inform practice, as this one is. The two previous elements of the model respectively address what social justice should be philosophically, and what and where the barriers are to that philosophy. It is logical for the next step to focus on what our profession can do, is doing, or might do in overcoming or mitigating those barriers.

This element contains three meta-components to guide the user:

- o **Meta-component:** the ideal role of the social worker in pursuit of social justice

- o **Meta-component:** the role of social work in current practice reality

- o **Meta-component:** ways of bridging disparities between the ideal and practice reality

One important point is to stress that unlike the two previous elements, this element includes both the ideal and reality. The idea is that users ask themselves, firstly, what they would like social work's role to be in advancing their social justice philosophy over, or through, their identified barriers, and then to ask what they think social work's role is in practice. The aim is both to support them to be aspirant and idealistic, and to be critical of the actual situation.

6.5.3.1.   Meta-component: The ideal social work role

This component asks the user to identify what the role of the social worker should ideally be in the pursuit and advancement of social justice. By this, I mean the role and actions that Tetrahedron users would like to see social work take, in addressing the barriers they identify in element 2, in pursuit of the philosophical tenets they articulate in element 1. This might include social workers operating at the macro-level, campaigning on local, national or international legislation changes, and acting as part of large scale multi-professional or multinational projects. It might mean something closer to the level of individual practice, being able to help individuals, families and communities against the inequities and obstacles they perceive when considering element 2, or something in between. The important thing here is to ensure that anything articulated by the user in this meta-component should be in reference to one or more aspects of their answers to element 1, and one or more aspects of their answer to element 2.

6.5.3.2.   Meta-component: the social work role in current practice reality

This component asks the user to articulate how they see the social work role in the pursuit of social justice in terms of current practice reality. Again, answers to this should be with reference to elements 1 and 2 – what in current practice reality, is the social worker's role in advancing the social justice philosophy that the user has articulated through element 1, and through the obstacles they identified through element 2.

For those using this model who are already in practice, it may be that their response to this part of the model reflects their own practice environment. If my participants' comments, and those of others' work, are any indicator, it may, at the present time, be a limited and residual role, quite far from their ideal concept. Some of their answers to this meta-component, particularly with macro-barriers in kind, may be 'nothing/very little'. While disheartening, that is also precisely what this part of the model is designed to expose – the limits, beyond general terms, of the individual social work role in pursuing any justice concept.

6.5.3.2.1.   Examples

o **User 1:** Social justice philosophy should include equality of access to social support, on the basis of need, irrespective of one's financial, personal or geographic circumstances. This is barriered by a welfare system that generally requires access to and familiarity with the internet, applies rigid appointment scheduling and an unwelcoming and stigmatising atmosphere. In the ideal, social work would be able to advance social justice by pushing for changes to the welfare system, liaising with local, specialised DWP staff and campaigning to culturally destigmatise the use of state support. In reality, they feel limited to intervening in specific cases, advocating for their client where able (and when permitted by the system), securing short-term concessions and sanction reprieves, and supporting clients to live on meagre benefits, helping them adapt to unfairness.

o **User 2:** Social justice includes a relationship between state and individual, where the individual is not just permitted but supported to live as they choose and to pursue their own fulfilment. This is barriered at macro-level by funding cuts, particularly in continuing education, and at micro-level by unconscious attitudes around class. Ideally, social work would work with schools and family support

hubs in an enabling and preventative way, with funds that could be allocated to support individuals to pursue their ambitions and life choices. In reality, social workers feel limited to crisis management and supporting people up to a basic level of welfare (particularly adults), rather than to their version of a rich, full and choice-based life.

6.5.3.3.   Meta-component: Bridging the gap, and identifying where it cannot currently be bridged

The final meta-component in this element represents in some ways the culmination of the whole model; it asks the user to consider how social work might bridge the gaps and discontinuities that they have identified between the ideal and actual role, in the pursuit of social justice. The user can think about this in general terms, but is encouraged to think in specific terms, if possible, perhaps for their own role, if already in practice, for their team if they are in a management or senior position, or for their future role or placement, if they are a pre-qualifying student. Ideas focusing on particular aspects of bridging the gap can be found in the literature (examples include Asakura et al 2020, De Corte and Roose 2020, Hudson 2017 and Finn and Jacobsen 2003).

The hope is that this step can be a more cohesive and thought-out exercise than might otherwise be the case, because of the earlier effort to identify a) positive philosophical components and b) specific barriers at both higher and lower social or structural levels. The question of the ideal vs the actual position of social work re social justice could be put to practitioners, students and others on its own, but the guided yet open process, firstly explicitly identifying a concept, then some specific barriers, will contribute to a more robust process.

Answers to this may be, and should be able to be, diverse and varied. What is important is that any given user links back to the philosophy and barriers they identified in elements
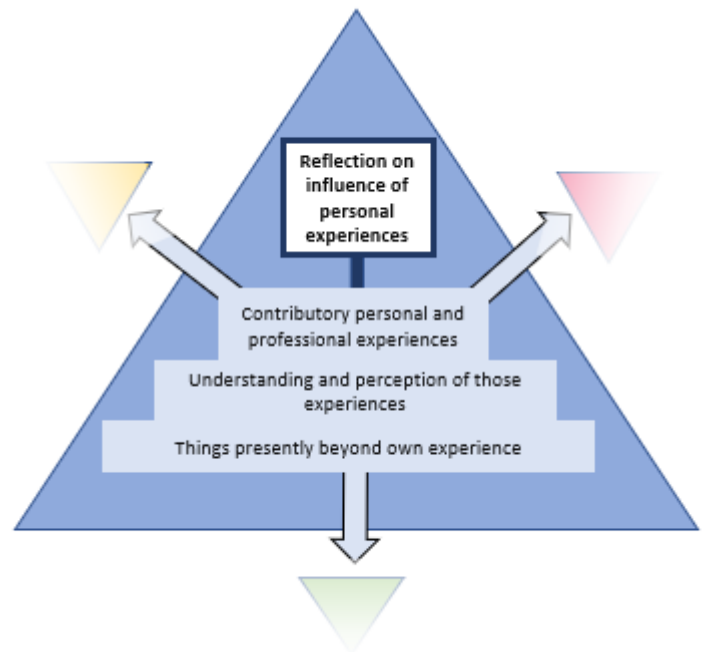
1 and 2. There is nothing wrong with amending or evolving either of those elements' answers in light of the process of navigating element 3. However, if this occurs, it should be through a realisation of further thoughts on one or both fronts, but especially regarding element 1. The worst thing that this model could produce is a social justice philosophy that is reduced in its philosophical ambition in order to fit neatly with perceived practice realties. If a gap between ideal justice philosophy, or ideal social work roles, cannot be bridged, it is really important to say so. Without that, part of the critical element is lost.

6.5.4. The ultimate aim

Zig Ziglar said the first step in solving a problem is recognising that it exists. The version of that wisdom that this model, and this thesis, employs, is this; the first step in pursuing a value is deciding what it is. The hope of this model is that it helps social workers to pursue social justice and aspire to greater ability to do so. This it seeks to do from the position that in order to think meaningfully about how to fight for something, one first needs to know what one is fighting for. Based on the data, and the work of the like of Asquith and Cheers (2001) on social workers' ethical baselines, I argue further that one also needs to personally connect with what one is fighting for. That is what lies behind the fourth element of the Social Justice Tetrahedron.

6.5.5. Element 4: Reflection on the influence of personal experiences

Thus far, this chapter has set out the first three elements of the social justice Tetrahedron model – the philosophical make up of social justice, the barriers to its pursuit, and the role of the social worker in that pursuit. The fourth and final element of this model concerns the impact of the experience of the person using the model. This element requires the user to consider the potential influences of their own experiences to date on their responses to the other three elements.

Figure 23: Social Justice Tetrahedron Element 4: Reflection on the influence of experiences

three elements. This is done through the following meta-components.

6.5.5.1. Meta-component: Contributory personal and professional experiences

The user's experiences in life, personal and professional, up to this point, that they see as most relevant to their conceptualising of social justice

6.5.5.2. Meta-component: Understanding and perception of those experiences

The potential influence of the subjective understanding of those experiences on concept formation

6.5.5.3. Meta-component: Things beyond own experience

The things that may currently be beyond their experience

The importance of experience in the formation of concepts, and the complex and multilateral interactions between ideas and experiences, was set out in the previous discussion and findings chapters. Almost every participant brought experience from before, during and after social work training into what they thought had influenced their ideas about what social justice was. Where there was a difference and a chronological change between their 'ideal' justice concept and practice reality, that was often explained by and through experiences, especially of practice, sometimes of education. Experience was fundamental in almost all participants' explanations of social justice formation, but the precise calibrations were fairly individual.

The experience element is therefore placed in the centre of the model, rather than being a fourth corner. The idea is that when considering their answer to one of the other three elements, or the relationship between them, the user must always be asking how their answers are influenced by their experiences. As a user of the model considers their thoughts about the other three aspects in turn, they are prompted to reflect on where, and how, their own experiences impact upon them. As an example, imagine a person considering the entitlement meta-component of Element 1. The model asks that they reflect on their own experience concerning entitlement, their own view of that experience, and those things that lie beyond that experience. The idea is that in doing so, they will consider the impact of those reflections on how they think about entitlement.

It is also possible that the reverse will happen, as it appeared to do for some participants. Considering a concept may change or affect the way they think about their own experiences. Reflective cycles, and indeed shapes more complex than cycles, are very possible in this model. So, to continue with the example, in reflecting on how their experiences influence their concept of entitlement, a user may notice ways in which that reflection impacts on their understanding of their own experiences.

The argument for including reflection on experience as a distinct and central element of the model, rather than as an ancillary aspect that is secondary to the process, is threefold. Firstly, by being an essential element, it recognises and respects the unique and important place of experience that my participants' answers suggest. Secondly, it utilises a common positive emotional aspect of that experience, which one might describe as 'fire', 'heart' or 'gut feeling' about (in)justice, that language and study may elucidate, but may not, in and of themselves, generate. Thirdly, and as a tonic to the previous point, it facilitates a supportive critique and reflexiveness on the potential limits of one's own experience, and the possibility that there are justice issues that ones' own experience might not encompass or reveal. In broad terms this borrows from Johns' Reflective Cycle, which requires its users to consider influencing factors on their actions (Johns 2017) as well as the gamut of social work literature on education through reflection, and particularly personal constructs (Burr et al 2016) life-story reflection (Specter-Mersel 2017, Lam et al 2007, Yip 2006), value pluralism (Houston 2012) and consideration of what is not known (such as Lerner's use of the Johari window (2020)).

Thirdly, and relatedly, it offers a get-around of sorts to the inescapability of subjectivity. Because we cannot ever emerge entirely from our own bubbles, cultural or otherwise, we cannot truly utilise a Rawlsian Veil of Ignorance (1972, Vincent 2012) or generate any other cultural vacuum in which to theorise our ideal justice. This is a large part of the rationale for having a meta-component concerned with things beyond the user's experience, to encourage recognition of the impact of not knowing what it is to be, for example, transgender, homeless or deeply religious.

The approach of this model takes the best of both; it acknowledges the lack of objectivity in concepts shaped inescapably by experiences, uses it to produce conceptual richness, depth, detail and psychological buy-in, but also challenges it, by asking users to say

explicitly what the connection is between their experiences and perceptions, and their concept.

This assists the model in safeguarding against the twin potential problems of coherent concept formation earlier described – a single top-down concept, and an infinite range of individual concepts. If a single and exclusive professional concept of social justice is imposed from above, it risks generating more lip service from social workers than genuine buy-in. Codification may facilitate adherence, but not necessarily ethical uptake. The Tetrahedron approach establishes core components to a social justice concept, while also validating individual perspectives and plural routes to it. Put more simply, if one can find one's own way to a concept by being involved in its construction, one may well be more invested in it.

Conversely, a landscape of completely individual social justice concepts may be less authoritarian, but is also of less practical use. This model takes the best elements of individual concept formation – a sense of genuineness and connectedness - and provides facilitation through a common framework. The individual user must engage in their own concept formation, but with an eye on current realities/ideal changes, and on their own biases and filters.

Depending on the career point that the user of the model is at, the minutiae of practice may be a more or less prominent part of their thinking. That in turn may influence the extent to which their own practice dominates their thoughts about the 'social worker role' element, or the 'experience' element. This level of variance is not a problem for the model, because anyone using it is prompted to consider how their experience, and things outside their experience, is impacting on their conceptualisation. If a veteran worker who has become slightly micro-focused and jaded, draws predominantly on that in the first

instance, that is fine; they will be prompted to consider that predominance. The same applies to a first-year student with no experience of direct practice.

6.6. Anticipated critique of the conceptual openness in this model
Freewill

The criticism could be made that this model is still too open-ended, and that it opens the way for views of social justice that social work might find unpalatable. It is certainly possible to use this model to argue for conservative, responsibilising, small-state and socially conformist notions of what justice looks like or should look like. Examples might include the belief that some entitlements should be income-based, that equality is only within the purview of social justice as equality of opportunity, that the barriers are all at the micro-level and are the responsibility of clients themselves, and that the role of the social worker is to support people to conform to norms and thus reduce social problems.

There may well be those who would prefer a model, or a definition, that excludes such elements by design. I do not concur, for several reasons. Firstly, unradical and small or big-c conservative social justice and social work are criticised by much of the literature, but they are conceptually coherent in themselves, and referenced in various forms by scholarly sources (Gasker and Fischer 2014, Lee 2014, Hancock 2008, Levin 1982). Those who oppose such concepts, among whom I would, incidentally, largely include myself, should engage with them and argue against them in clear terms, in order to defend more radical or progressive concepts of social justice. Secondly, if we look past the labels, and take them out of the constellations we assign them, non-radical and conservative concepts share some philosophical components with more radical or progressive stances. Libertarian freedom and socialist emancipation are not necessarily different in instinct, though they may be in approach and delivery – it depends on the holder of the view.

What is more serious is the possibility that someone could use this model to argue a concept of social justice that is outright and explicitly discriminatory. A determined user of the model could push for a view of justice that is, for example, partial in its distribution entitlements on racial or gender lines, and that lists among its barriers the Human Rights Act 1998, or the Equalities Act 2010. In trying to do so, however, they would have to navigate the Tetrahedron's in-built requirement to consider, for example, equality. Such a case would be difficult to make, and straightforward to deconstruct using the various provisions of the model.

This model actually defends against intentionally discriminatory justice concepts better than either a single, exclusive and imposed concept, or a landscape of infinite and equally legitimate individual concepts. The latter offers no safeguards at all against the private holding or public verbalising of racist, sexist or other oppressive ideas, because the opponents of those views have no as-of-right greater claim to legitimacy than do their proponents, other than recourse to other aspects of social work values. The former may offer very firm rulings against such attitudes intruding into practice, but they do little to challenge the private holding of the views themselves – lip service is encouraged, buy-in is not.

6.7. Social Justice Tetrahedron Vignettes

Three vignettes representing different outcomes of using the social justice tetrahedron can be found below. It is very important to say that these are speculative and illustrative examples, not prescriptive exemplars. For that reason, I have not labelled them as anything other than vignette 1, 2 and 3.

- **Vignette 1**

This practitioner conceptualises social justice as the entitlement to have ones needs, particularly material needs, met if they are in danger of falling below a certain basic minimum. They conceptualise equality as equal opportunity to access help and support when needed, and attached to that a belief in inclusiveness focused on bringing people into social communities. They take a political view that it is the role of the state to maintain a degree of social cohesion, and that its responsibilities around distribution and meeting need come from that, and from a commitment to meaningful citizenship, rather than being motivated by egalitarianism per se. They believe that individual people have inherent agency and responsibility, but may need help at particular points in their life to empower themselves and contribute to the good society.

They see the main barriers to this social justice concept, at the macro-level, as a lack of investment in community services by the state and other large institutions, and an excess of 'bright ideas' at the expense of straightforward provision of support. At the micro-, and to an extent meso-, level, they identify the barriers as technocratic attitudes and unbalanced levels of responsibilisation that do not align with need and agency.

In the ideal, they would see social work's role as supporting communities through participation, the development of civic pride and the extension of belonging to those currently excluded. In reality however, they see social workers as being trapped working in a state that is at first under involved and then uses its legislative remit to intervene autocratically. As a bridge between the real and the ideal, they suggest using individual casework to progressively develop relationships and networks with community services, so that a network of these services can be available to work with people in both preventing and responding to social need.

The above ideas come from difficult childhood experiences marked by serious family illness and bereavement, in which community resources, volunteers and religious organisations seemed to offer more support than the state. From this the practitioner has reflected on the benefits of belonging and of self-reliant communities and families where possible. They are however aware but they have not had the experience of being actively or passively excluded from a community or group of which they wanted to be part, and while by no means wealthy, have had limited experience of having to struggle in terms of basic material resources.

- **Vignette 2**

This practitioner conceptualises social justice in a way that is very much based on first, second and third generation human rights. They believe everybody has an inherent entitlement to a home, relative safety, a minimum income, good health and health care, food and shelter, and see equality as broad similarity of basic outcomes, a relatively even distribution of opportunity, and ongoing corrective measures to support members of historically and currently oppressed groups. Their political stance centres on state-led redistribution, wherein individual people have a duty of social civility to one another, but not a priori a duty to the state. State agency should be used to promote people's agency. They see the barriers as stemming from the macro-level and trickling down. There is for them insufficient money being put into social support, compromising the state's ability to meet need and rights in a meaningful way. They also see the 'no rights without responsibilities' rhetoric as antithetical to the act of supporting people's needs in a rights-based way. Stemming from this, at the micro level they identify barriers as being unrealistically high thresholds for accessing help, limited time for people-focused professionals to even do signposting, and certainly not enough time to work with antecedent problems and social disparities.

They see the role of social workers in the ideal as close to Thompson's (2002) dual mandate; helping the victims of liberal (perhaps better termed neoliberal) capitalism and in parallel working to improve society by making it fairer. They view this as being fairly hopelessly obstructed by social work practise reality which is residual, corrective and compliance-seeking at best. They find the idea of bridging the ideal in the reality difficult, and at present can only suggest trying to relocate social work interactions in the world of moral arguments rather than state-determined entitlements, and where possible advocate and form partnerships for local change.

Much of this is based on the experience of living in poverty in the early part of the childhood and adolescence, and then moving to a more comfortable middle class lifestyle in their mid-teens. When reflecting on that experience they identify a certain level of guilt, and anger that lots of people remain in poverty. They are however aware that because of the juxtaposition of their early life, they do not believe they have ever experienced what might be termed working class pride, and they find it difficult to understand the distaste that some people in poverty have for what they see as charity.

- **Vignette 3**

This practitioner bases their social justice concept in a sense of liberty under the law, wherein the state or other sources of power have no right to constrain the individual absent good reason. They believe in self-ownership and property rights as core entitlements, and principally see equality as equality in legal standing, though they accept that material and perceptual issues contribute to inequality in this area. They take a political view that the role of the state should be minimal and where possible the state should give back power to people. They believe that non-state power hubs, such as independent businesses, organisations and communities are more attuned to, and effective in, meeting the needs of the people who make use of them. These organisations can deviate from whatever are considered social norms as long as they protect and

respect individual rights and do not harm people. They believe that the individual is sovereign and self-owning, and therefore has inherent agency, whereas the state and other large organisations only have agency by contract and consent.

In terms of barriers to seeing their concept of social justice achieved, they identify at the macro-level an authoritarian state interested in seeking compliance with its own interests and those of large corporate entities. These sources of power serve to propagate a blended culture of dependency and blame which disempowers individuals from controlling their own lives. At the micro-level, they see this manifesting as tightly controlled and constrained resources, including money time and influence, and a managerial culture that means social workers and other professionals cannot do more than help people move towards a more compliant way of living.

In the ideal, they would like social workers to be among the agents of gradual redistribution of money and opportunity, serving as the brokers of sustainable help and meaningful freedom rooted in the philosophy that the individual person is the expert in their own life. They regard this as unlikely because of operating in a state that combines the centralisation of control of the left with the miserly asocial hierarchicalising of the right. As a way to bridge the ideal and the reality, they suggest developing one's own networks of non-state actors to reduce the extent that the oppressive state can keep people in the cycle of dependency blame and compliance.

Much of this comes from experiences that have contributed to a lifelong hatred of being told what to do, especially on the basis of autocracy, tradition and unconditional obedience. They are aware of their strong feelings about this, and they know that they place a premium on the liberation of everyone in terms of their life and their property. They are aware however that different people at different times in their lives needs varying

amounts and forms of help, and that not everyone is as hostile to self-sustaining traditionalism as they are.

6.8. Summary

Through this chapter, I have sought to offer a model through which individuals may construct a concept of social justice in social work. The model – the Social Justice Tetrahedron – has four elements, each of which interacts with the others, to facilitate a social justice concept with philosophical, critically analytical, practical and reflective aspects. The aim is to help the user to form a concept that is genuine and authentic for them, but that navigates through particular waystones to structure the concept formation. In this, they avoid the opposing pitfalls that accompany either a single, firm and exclusive concept, or a landscape of potentially infinite constructions, that may not be mutually intelligible or practically useable. Finally, the Tetrahedron seeks to facilitate a social justice concept that simultaneously has a present place for social work and the social worker, and helps illuminate where the profession can do more, or do better.

The intended outcome is to support an enabling common language for social justice in social work, where concepts can be organically formed, discussed, critiqued and improved by one another. A key step towards making this happen, will be use of the model in pre- and post-qualification social work education. Considerations about how this may be conducted, alongside a summary of the whole thesis, will be raised in the next, and final, chapter.

7. Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

Roll the Bones

7.1. Introduction

This chapter set outs the conclusions and recommendations of the thesis. It opens with a summary and recapitulation of the aims and rationale of the study, and the approach taken to data collection and analysis. The findings are reiterated, and the model proposed to move the situation forward. It then sets out the original contribution to knowledge of the study, which is threefold – the approach taken, the 'martini glass' nature of aspects of the findings, and the Social Justice Tetrahedron model proposed in the previous chapter. The plans for dissemination are set out, followed by a discussion of how the Tetrahedron, or at least the principles behind it, may be used in social work education, pre- and post-qualification. Recommendations for future research directions around social work practitioner conceptualisations of social justice are given, including exploring the subject with social work managers, and the present and future context of Covid-19 is considered**.** The chapter, and the thesis, conclude with some thoughts about the future of social justice as a concept in social work, and why we should be having more conversations about what it is and what it should mean in our profession.

7.2. Summary of thesis

This thesis has sought to explore how newly-qualified social workers in statutory social work practice conceptualise social justice. It has sought to do so, as far as possible, from a non-essentialist and non-presumptive standpoint, utilising individual semi-structured interviews and thematically analysing the responses.

Social justice is widely considered to be a core value of social work and is referenced or represented in international social work codes of ethics and practice, and in several quarters considered to be the/a mission of the profession. Adherence to the principles of

social justice is a requirement of social work practitioners and students in England, as set out in the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (BASW 2018) under which the last few cohorts of NQSWs have trained and been assessed in their first year in practice. Despite the centrality of social justice as a core idea in social work, there is a lack of coherence about what social justice means, how it should be defined, and what the pursuit or achievement of it looks like in social work practice (Olson et al 2013, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b, Gasker & Fischer 2014). This combination of centrality and uncertainty places social work in a situation of unsteady philosophical footing. It also means that practitioners are being governed by, held accountable to and, in the case of newer social workers, trained and assessed under a core concept that is far from specific.

A review of the research and opinion literature further confirmed the case for saying that the concept of social justice in social work is uncertain and contested, among social workers, social work students and scholarly opinion. It also suggested that if one were seeking to define a concept of social justice in social work, one would have to address not only questions of philosophical content, but also what the obligations of that social justice concept would be – from whom, to whom – and how the pursuit of social justice was envisaged, at what level – macro, micro, both or in between - and through what social apparatus. Saying that social justice is conceptualised in terms of, say, legal rights and relational fairness does not articulate what role, if any, might be played in such a concept by economic concerns, different forms of equality, the role of the state, and whether social justice can, by definition, be carried out at the individual level. Because of this conclusion, this thesis is reticent in assuming that, just because a participant said that for them social justice means equality, for example, that the rest of their social justice concept can be extrapolated from that assertion.

Because of this combination of central importance and conceptual uncertainty, the epistemological outlook that underpins the study is a combination of constructivism and

critical realism (Gergen 2015, Burr 2015, Fleetwood 2014, 2013, Archer et al 2013, Elder-Vass 2012, Houston 2001, 2010, Bhaskar 2008, Collier 1994), arguing that social justice is both a constructed concept (constructivism) and one that impacts and is impacted by events in the world (critical realism). Put bluntly, it starts from the position that it really matters what we think it is. At the moment we do not know, and so that also matters. Given this conceptual diversity and uncertainty, this thesis took an approach that was different to some of the research literature, remaining initially non-essentialist and non-presumptive regarding the concept of social justice and participants' stated conceptualisations of it. This approach was carried through the interview design and the analytical approach, which was based on Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis process.

7.3. Research questions and working answers

The following research questions were posed in this study:

- o RQ1. How do NQSWs define and conceptualise social justice?
- o RQ2. To what extent do NQSWs ascribe their perceptions of social justice to their social work education compared with other influences?
- o RQ3. What do NQSWs perceive and experience as facilitators and barriers to pursuing social justice in their day-to-day practice?
- o RQ4. How do NQSWs' understanding, experiences and operationalisation of social justice compare to those of experienced social workers?

7.3.1. Working answers

The NQSW participants in this study defined social justice in a range of ways, as did the experienced practitioners. Not only was there variation in the terms used in those definitions, there was also notable variation in what those terms were themselves considered to mean, and in the combinations of and relationships between those terms. While there was considerable variation of stated conceptualisation within and between NQSW and experienced participants, there was no aspect of conceptualisation that was

represented significantly more among one group than another – both were highly varied. Following analysis and discussion, the thesis concludes that the only conceptual umbrella under which all the definitions can be gathered is a very broad notion of entitlement; entitlement of someone to something, material or ephemeral, that is or may be barriered by various individual or social forces. It remains therefore a contested and diversely constructed concept.

The importance of personal experience in conceptualisation, combined with its inherent variety, is a possible explanation for this conceptual variability. The participants of this study generally, with some exceptions, identified social work education as an important contributor to their concept of social justice, but for the majority it acted as an addition to, catalyser of or activator of beliefs and concepts that they already held. The roots of these pre-existing ideas were variously identified by participants as personal and family experience, previous education and previous work, in a range of constellations and chronologies. For some participants, both NQSW and experienced, social work training was not a major factor in their conceptualisation of social justice, but these participants also pointed to personal experience in some form.

Participants were more cohesive and consistent in identifying the barriers and (rather fewer) facilitators of social justice in their practice experience. The barriers fit into two broad categories – those that prevented participants from acting against social injustice at a macro- or proactive level, and those that obstructed their efforts at the micro- or reactive level. There were no major differences in these answers between NQSWs and experienced practitioners, and the same was true for the facilitators of social justice that both groups identified. These could either be described as 'hard' and inflexible, such as the provisions of the law, or as 'soft' and not universally reliable, such as having supportive colleagues and managers, and access to non-statutory resources.

As already mentioned, there were no particular differences in the answers to the first three research questions from the NQSWs compared with the experienced practitioners. This suggests that if any, or all, of the following three working conclusions are accurate, they are accurate for practitioners, irrespective of the professional framework under which they were trained and assessed. The conclusions are:

- o that social workers define and conceptualise social justice in individual ways
- o that personal experience is the foundation of how they individually conceptualise social justice, with varying amounts and forms of input from social work education and training
- o that the experience of seeking to practice in line with any concept of social justice, for all their individual variation, is barriered and impeded by several key aspects of the present practice context

This is not insignificant; it suggests, at least, the possibility that incorporating social justice in the professional framework, as part of a distinct capability, has neither standardised or it, or made it easier to pursue in practice reality.

7.4. Contribution to knowledge

Korstjens and Moser (2018) say that when considering submissions for publication, journal editors often ask of an article whether it is new, true and relevant. The main contribution of this thesis to knowledge rests on three things. The first is the conceptual non-essentialist and individualist approach taken to the subject of NQSWs' concepts of social justice. To the best of my knowledge, this represents, at the time of writing, a new approach. The second is the juxtaposition of the findings that while social justice concepts were varied, social justice impediments were more consistent. If this finding resonates with other social workers, it is at least potentially 'true'. If it does not, then at least the initial claim of conceptual incoherence may be said to have truth to it. The third is the Social Justice Tetrahedron, which aims not only to be relevant, but useful.

7.4.1. The approach of the study

As explained in the summary of the research context, previous studies have tended to take an essentialist or pre-defined view of social justice in social work - explicitly or implicitly. Some are more open and less essentialist, but these do not generally use individual interviews. This study is to the best of my knowledge distinctive in combining

- o conceptual non-essentialism (via constructivism) and critical realism
- o criticality about conceptual inconsistency
- o remaining open to the possibility of the findings revealing either
    - o no neat resolution or straightforward definition, or
    - o multiple concepts that are contradictory or compatible, siloed or overlapping
- o semi-structured individual interviews
- o focus on members of some of the first qualifying cohorts trained under a novel capabilities framework

Starting from a position of near-total conceptual openness helped to mitigate against a pre-emptive constraining of the social justice definition, and therefore avoid constraint on the freedom of my participants to respond in the way they wanted. This methodological decision was rooted in a concern about both conceptual assumption and unjustified synonymy. Because of this conceptual openness, a certain amount of confidence can be had in the finding that a wide range of social justice conceptualisations is combined with a more consistent reporting of the barriers to pursuing them. It has, so to speak, revealed the commonality of the obstructions as experienced by participants – whatever your definition of social justice, it will potentially be affected by the same set of obstacles.

7.4.2. The juxtaposition of social justice concepts and practice experience

The findings themselves are part of the thesis' contribution to knowledge. In particular, the answers to research questions 1 and 3 taken together, paint a curious and concerning picture. The NQSW participants in this study, and their experienced counterparts, defined social justice in a range of ways. By contrast however, participants were more cohesive and consistent in identifying the barriers to (and rather fewer facilitators of) social justice in their practice experience. I have in conference presentations referred to this as the 'martini glass' effect; a traditional conical martini glass has a wide lip but truncates very quickly to a narrow stem. Similarly, the range of social justice concepts in my findings and the literature is wide and diverse, but these findings suggest that a small array of factors can blockade them all. Indeed, one would be tempted to conclude that the present practice context is characterised by forces at work that stand in the way of any concept of justice. This is all the more marked by the absence of major differences in these answers between NQSWs and experienced practitioners.

7.4.3. An inclusive and reflective potential way forward

The third contribution is the Social Justice Tetrahedron; a concept formation model that can be used, amended, borrowed from or constructively critiqued, to further an important conversation about social justice in social work. The model is intended as a step toward helping social workers articulate, reflect upon and temper working concepts of social justice that are genuine to them, and thereby to integrate the conversation back into practice. For opposing reasons, both very narrow, exclusive definitions and very broad, unclear and nebulous notions of social justice are unreflective of both the findings and literature. They are also largely unworkable and unhelpful in addressing the problems that participants identify in the practical pursuit of social justice. This is very possibly because of the role of experience in concept formation. In a way that could meet Smith's (2018) definition of analytical generalisability, the Tetrahedron is intended to be a model that serves as a stepping-stone to criticality and action, and that embraces, rather than

tolerates, the place of personal experience and individual differences in concept formation. It offers a framework for useful discussion of social justice in social work, pairing conceptual and experiential openness with the provision of basic common frames of reference, and that explicitly facilitates the addressing and discussion of

- o social justice-as-philosophy
- o the barriers to social justice achievement
- o the role of the social worker
- o the place of personal experience

The model has potential applications in teaching, placement learning, and throughout practice, all of which are discussed later in this chapter. However, a social worker, educator or scholar can dismiss the model entirely as a means of resolving the conceptual issue, while still not conceding the need for that resolution itself.

7.5. Contribution to other professions or fields

As well as contributing to social work knowledge and, hopefully, to practice, the ideas in this thesis, and particularly the principles behind the Social Justice Tetrahedron, may be of use to other practices and academic fields. Any discipline which deals in contestable concepts and/or has, at its heart, an explicitly ethical dimension could implement a version of the Tetrahedron in its teaching or practice. Examples include youth work, all branches of nursing, legal practice, education, sociology, social geography and political philosophy. It also has applications for inter-professional learning and working, which is a coherent academic discipline in its own right.

7.6. Dissemination of findings

Dissemination of the findings and conclusions of this thesis will likely occur on three fronts – academic papers, practitioner-focused development workshops, and use in social work education.

7.6.1. Publications

I have a working publication plan following the successful completion of this thesis, involving three or four articles that draw on one or more elements of my findings and discussion chapters. Each will address one of the points of contestation in the conceptualisation of social justice that have emerged in my findings. Initial plans include papers about:

- o the place and consistency of equality as a component of social justice (building on the work of Olson et al 2013, O'Brien 2011a, 2011b, Hugman 2008, Solas 2008)

- o social justice using law versus social justice in spite of law

- o neoliberal social justice as an articulated concept, and ways of opposing it

- o the 'economic wellbeing' part of Domain 4 of the original PCF, and actualising it through different philosophies of justice

- o Human Rights and Social Justice – hard contract or fuzzy concept (this will likely be carried out in collaboration with my colleague Maria-Ines Martinez-Herrero of Essex University, with whom I have written on social work ethics before (Martinez-Herrero and Nicholls 2019; Harms Smith et al 2019)

The following are also potential subjects for peer-reviewed articles

- o having largely avoided doing so in this thesis, a reflective piece in which I set out my own concept of social justice, using my own tools, including the Tetrahedron. The aim will be to offer a cohesive, but contestable concept of social justice, to facilitate reflection both in those who do and do not agree with it

- o an attempt to construct a concept of social justice operating at the meso-level, as a practical, but also philosophically coherent meeting point between macro-level social changes and micro-level reactive or individual practice

- an article concentrating on research question 2, in which I explain and report on the findings of experience as a social justice conceptualisation influence. This may involve collaboration with a colleague in psychology or education
- an article that reframes and consolidates chapter 6 into an accessible paper, setting out the Tetrahedron as a teaching and development tool

7.6.2. Professional development workshops

I also intend to create and facilitate workshops for teams of practitioners, in which they could co-construct a social justice concept, or a social justice conceptual spectrum, that encompasses their own viewpoints and that serves their particular professional remit (child safeguarding, mental health etc.). The aim would be a session that provides busy and put-upon practitioners with a genuine space in which they can question and discuss what social justice means for them, but also leaves them with something practical, which they can then reflect upon and evolve on their own as well as use for supervision.

Careful thought will have to be given to how workshops like this will avoid the dangers of focus groups, where either seniority or personality can lead to the domination of some voices by others. Having learned, as a consequence of contemporaneous social restrictions, virtual techniques for gaining in-the-moment anonymous contributions during teaching, I will likely do something similar to enable all participants to have a voice in the concept formation process.

7.6.3. Using the Tetrahedron in social work curricula: recommendations for social work education

Social work education, in and out of universities, should be more conscious of its role in concept formation, and can, and should, be a part of these conversations. Social work education was fairly consistently described as contributing to social justice concept formation, but not generally as an initiator. It added something to most participants'

constructs, and serves as an activator, catalyser or contextualiser of prior experience, but the details of the process vary between individuals. Social work education could, if it wished, seek to impose a particular view of social justice upon its students; take the experiences they have had in life up to the point of training, and guide them to frame those experiences in line with the profession's preferred concept. While it is certainly appropriate for social work educators to encourage and support students, pre- and post-qualification, to question and reflect on personal experience, and to present alternative ways of understanding it, to do that while seeking compliance with a narrow or exclusive justice concept could be harmful and restricting. If an institution's view of social justice is designed to perfectly fit practice reality, there is a risk of losing criticality. If conversely, it is a view of social justice that is completely unlike practice reality, the perceived separation between university teaching and practice experience, which some participants raised, may become further solidified.

It is the recommendation of this thesis therefore that social work education consider ways in which it could incorporate the basic elements of the Social Justice Tetrahedron into programmes of study, even if the full model is not used. It might be useful to think of the model as something to be started upon early in social work education and returned to at various points throughout training. Logical points for a three-year Bachelor's degree could be as follows:

- o the philosophical element discussed early in the first year as part of a module on social justice, social work values or ethics
- o the barriers element discussed as part of a module or session on social policy or social work contexts, midway through the first year, with reference back to the philosophical element
- o the social work role element discussed toward the end of the year as part of a module or session on professional identity, close practice skills or placement preparation, with reference back to the philosophical and barrier elements
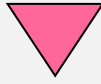
- the reflection element discussed at any of these points, in a module or session looking at reflection on values or where social work theory might be applied to one's own experience. It can also be discussed as part of individual or group tutorials

What is important here is that the order in which the elements are introduced is broadly maintained, so that students have space and time to consciously and unconsciously consider their initial answers, and allow for any changes or additions. In the second and third years, the model might be returned to, either as an informal discussion point or a formal task, at various points. It might have particular utility around placement, to be returned to on the build up to placement, and on recall days or the return from placement.

The model would also be useful during placement itself, including in written reflection or spoken reflective supervision with a practice educator. The most apposite use, if the student has already used the model once, might be to consider what has changed or been confirmed in their justice concept. Their experience, the contribution of which they have been asked to reflect upon, will now include social work practice, and may have either changed or confirmed the ideas they had about the other three elements. If the student has not used the model before, the practice educator can utilise it to support the student in conceptualising social justice in practice. If the practice educator has not used it before, the student can share it and demonstrate its usage.

The case for incorporating the provisions of the Tetrahedron into social work education would be strengthened if they could be aligned to the Professional Capabilities Framework, and its equivalents in other countries. Depending on breadth of interpretation, most aspects of social work can be arguably connected with most domains of the PCF. However, with narrower interpretations in mind, the domains of the PCF could align to the Tetrahedron as follows

Figure 24: Interplay between the Social justice Tetrahedron and the PCF

	Domains of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)	Elements of the Social Justice Tetrahedron			
1	Professionalism			X	
2	Values and ethics	X			X
3	Diversity and equalities	X			
4	Rights and justice	X	X		
5	Knowledge		X	X	X
6	Critical reflection and analysis		X	X	X
7	Skills and interventions			X	
8	Contexts and organisations		X	X	X
9	Professional leadership		X	X	

7.6.4. Social justice and Covid-19

Social justice, within and beyond social work, is an all the more acute concern in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the wide range of conceptual components affixed to social justice by participants and the literature, none are unaffected by the pandemic, or by national and international responses to it. The disproportionate impact on marginalised, minority and socio-economically disadvantaged populations is well-observed, as are the impacts on people with mental health conditions and substance use challenges, and anyone in an abusive home environment (whether those contexts predated the pandemic or not). This jars violently with the middle-class nature of the early official advice, such as using a second bathroom if symptomatic, or the implicit presumption that everyone can home-school or drive to a testing centre. After a decade of austerity and rising nativism, the UK has a government of the right providing Keynesian levels of financial support, albeit unevenly distributed, while being more authoritarian both

domestically and with respect to international matters, such as Brexit and refugees crossing the channel.

How we see social justice during and after the pandemic requires conversations about what we think social justice is, perhaps with even more attention to how it interacts with both our individual liberty and our common interconnectivity. For social work, it will be necessary to have conversations about the specific ways in which the pandemic highlights, causes, or adds to social injustice.

7.7. Research recommendations

Further research on this subject could be done in a range of directions. A simple first step would be to repeat this study with statutory social workers applying one or more variables. The results could be compared with those from this study to observe whether there are differences in the emergent themes and, if so, where they or any similarities are located. Variations from this study might include conducting it in a different part of the country, or in another country, conducting it with social workers in the voluntary sector or with members of multi-disciplinary teams, including, but not limited to social workers.

A high level of reflexivity on the part of the researcher will be needed if a version of the study is conducted in another area or another country. One might expect a different view of social justice, or the role of the social worker, if interviewing practitioners from, say, a richer part of the country, or a country with more conservative social laws. There might be differences, but that does not mean the geographic variable will be the reason for those differences.

Perhaps of greater interest, and with the potential for interesting implications for social work development, would be a rerun of this study with social work managers (including senior managers) and social work clients. Both sample groups would provide interesting

comparisons with this study's findings (if indeed they emerged as cohesive groups in terms of their opinions) and could further develop how the role of the statutory social worker is seen in respect of social justice pursuit. The latter inquiry might also indicate whether the Tetrahedron, or an adapted form thereof, has utility in helping clients and practitioners negotiate social justice concepts and meaning together as encouraged by Butler et al (2007) and Finn and Jacobsen (2003).

I would also be interested in conducting a piece of research in which the Tetrahedron is put out to social work practitioners, and their responses gathered for analysis. This idea has the potential to be conducted via an open-ended survey method, wherein participants provide their personal responses to each of the elements of the Tetrahedron, along with some basic demographic and professional role information.

A further piece of work could be one that looks at any correlation or link between conceptualisations of social justice and personal and professional experience to date. Such a study would look to generate hypotheses, which could then be further explored, about particular combinations of personal and professional experience, and conceptualisations of social justice. Is there, for example, any evidence to suggest a link between growing up in poverty (or feeling one has grown up in poverty) and a social justice concept that is heavily economically redistributive?

There is a gentle warning that accompanies this last idea. I have in this chapter, and elsewhere, argued against a single preferred and exclusive concept of social justice being imposed on the profession. If such a concept were to be imposed, however, it would mean that, to a greater or lesser extent, social workers and prospective social workers would need to comply with it and be seen to comply with it. If research was conducted that identified correlations between social justice conceptualisation and personal experience, the door might creep ajar to a social work application process that sought to

predict compliance with that concept based on a candidate's life experience to date. A social justice concept that precluded, say, self-described Marxists, or self-described non-Marxists, from being social workers, would be intolerant. An approach through which anyone predicted to be a Marxist or a non-Marxist was excluded would be deeply chilling. It may be that this is a concern at the outer edges of possibility, but as a potential consequence of one of the findings of this study, it should be explicitly rejected.

7.8. Implications of this thesis for social work's present and future

Social work would benefit from conversations – plural, indeed as many as possible - about what it believes social justice to be, firstly as a principle or set of principles, and then as actions and efforts. I, of course, would propose my model, or at least its basic principles, as a mechanism for doing this, but with or without the Tetrahedron, those conversations need to happen, not just at the level of the major social work bodies, but at the level of individual practitioners and aspiring practitioners.

Social work practice and education can consider possible options for how to make explicit connections between social justice concepts and daily practice. One appropriate venue in practice would be reflective supervision, which would require managers or senior workers to be engaged in discussion of social justice concepts, but there could easily be others. It is more than possible that, if using these ideas, two or more practitioners or a practitioner and their manager may not agree on how they conceptualise social justice. This need not be a concern, nor necessarily a difference from the present situation, except that the points of difference may be better articulated and understood, potentially resolving some of the issues raised by Hair (2015), Asquith and Cheers (2001) and Clark (2006).

In a scenario where two practitioners think very differently about what social justice is, or should be, some reflection and further discussion may be needed. That is, however no

different from a situation in which two practitioners have differences in how they analyse a case, a level of risk, a model of intervention or an assessment of capacity. Differences do occur in practice and should be articulated clearly and respectfully – the ideas in this thesis offer a way of doing so.

There are three particular benefits to such differences being openly articulated. The first is that one or more of the parties involved might come to see a case situation from a different perspective, which might lead to a better and more ethically considered outcome. The second is the inverse, where two practitioners who have different social justice concepts agree on a way forward in a case, strengthening the argument for that course of action. I have a communitarian-minded colleague for whom I am sometimes a libertarian foil – whenever we have worked on something together, our difference in perspective has usually led to a better outcome than either of us would have reached alone. The third benefit to open and articulate discussion, even involving very different social justice concepts, is the avoidance of a technocratic approach to social work practice and to social justice, where no ethical or values-led view prevails over proceduralism.

7.9. Concluding thoughts
Ceiling Unlimited/Ghost of a Chance

This thesis opened with the claim that social work does not have a clear, firm and cohesive concept of social justice. That claim, as a description of the present situation, has not changed at the end of the thesis, and has not necessarily been changed by the thesis. There is not enough evidence in either literature or participant responses for any particular rich and detailed concept to gain greater legitimacy over any other. It is also not just a case of choosing between a range of coherent concepts – there are too many moving parts.

As things stand, the situation for the profession is this; one of the long-standing principles underpinning social work lacks a definition. When a social worker wishes to defend or explain their actions, their professional judgements, their reflections or their own developmental progress or needs, they cannot refer to social justice to aid them except in a very general sense. As a result, social justice takes a peripheral back seat when compared to more clearly defined phenomena, such as legal duties and powers. Some potential components or conceptual attachments of social justice are partially represented in law – equalities, rights to make unwise decisions, for the time being human rights (Martinez-Herrero and Nicholls, 2019). Others are not. Because of the barriers to macro-level efforts that social workers describe, it is comfortably arguable that social justice, and any other incoherently defined philosophical concepts, also take a back seat to local authority mandates and policy, and potentially funding criteria and resource limitations. Because they are both closer and more firmly constructed than social justice, they are understandably in the foreground of practitioners' minds and daily realities. They are, to use the old adage, the crocodiles closest to the boat. It is easier to understand when, as a practitioner, you have difficulty following policy or law compared to identifying when you have not pursued the principles of social justice. It also comes with more tangible professional consequences.

It would be understandable if anyone who agreed with this analysis of the situation wanted to resolve it by codifying social justice into something firmer, against which a person or a piece of practice could be measured or graded. The conceptual case against this has been made in section 6.2, and is reinforced by Banks' (2014, 2012) discussion of the growth of punitive codification in social work. It is conceivable that any such codification, initially well-intended, could become a further force for tighter regulation of practice. This code could either be initially constructed, or subsequently amended, to align with a concept of social justice that suits a particular government, policy agenda, or view of social inequities – and there is no guarantee that this would align with any notion

of social work values. The very act of codification would also be a hurdle to criticality, and unintentionally disregard and disrespect individual experience and reflection on that experience.

This thesis argues that the way forward in dealing with this situation is more discussion of social justice in practice, and that the discussion, not just the term, needs to move from being extra, or as an adjunct, to theory or practice, and become an essential and central element of what it is to be in social work. The elephant – or elephants - still obscured, are waiting for us to step into the fog and create them.

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Appendix: Participant documents

Participant Information

What is the study about?

The study is about how newly qualified statutory social workers (in first year of post-qualifying practice) think about social justice, their experience of putting social justice principles into practise, and what they think has influenced their understanding and concept of social justice.

Why have I been asked?

You have been asked because you are a statutory social worker who is in your first year of post-qualification practice.

OR

You have been asked because you are an experienced social worker of at least five years post-qualifying experience working in a statutory team. This research is about the views of newly-qualified social workers, but your views are also sought for contrast.

What am I being asked to do? What will happen if I take part?

You are being asked to participate in an interview for 45-60 minutes. The interview will explore your thoughts on what social justice is, your experience of putting it into practice, and your thoughts about what has contributed to your views on social justice. You would also be asked to complete a short form for demographics monitoring, and be asked if a small amount of further contact following the interview is acceptable for follow-up of answers.

Your participation would mean you could be contributing to wider knowledge about professional values and practices, which could help the future development of the profession.

What happens if I do not want to participate?

Nothing. You are free to decline to participate, either at the start or at any time in the process.

What would happen if I agree and then change my mind?

You may withdraw your participation at any time and for any reason. You do not have to provide a reason. If you choose to withdraw, any and all data you have provided will be withdrawn from the study.

What are the disadvantages of taking part?

A small amount of your time – around an hour – would be needed for the interview take place.

How will the data be collected?

Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Field notes will be written up within an hour of the interview taking place. Arrangements will be made for providing feedback to interviewees to verify the accuracy and fair representation of their views.

Will my answers be kept confidential?

Confidentiality will be maintained except in circumstances in which a participant discloses illegal or dangerous practice by themselves or someone else, or gives specific information that suggests they or someone else is at risk. Confidentiality will only be broken in the circumstances explained above.

If you discuss aspects of particular cases in answer to interview questions, then please do not disclose names, locations or other key identifying details of those clients involved with the cases. In the case of you discussing casework in your answers, those answers will not be linked to you specifically. All quotations and paraphrasing taken from the transcriptions will be identified as the words or sentiments of 'one participant', not even linking them to the interviewee number.

Will what is said be anonymised?

All responses will be completely anonymised. More detail can be found in a leaflet which the interviewer can provide to you.

What will happen to the data that is gathered?

Data management and storage will be in line with Northumbria University policy and procedures. A leaflet containing more detailed information is available from your interviewer.

A fuller explanation of ethical compliance regarding storage, confidentiality and anonymity is available in leaflet form for any participant who wishes to read it.

What will happen to the results of the study? How will the research be disseminated?

You will be able to look at the transcript of your answers if you wish – you will be informed when this is available. The results of the research will be published in the final thesis, as well as being disseminated through academic conferences and journal articles in peer-reviewed publications. All dissemination in any of these formats will adhere to the outline above regarding confidentiality and anonymity.

What categories of personal data will be collected and processed in this study?

Participant's names and the nature and type social work teams in which they work will be taken in the course of seeking informed consent for participation. Aspects of participants' daily work are likely to be discussed in interview. The potentially wide-ranging nature of the interview and subject means that special categories of personal data may also be collected if they are brought up by the participant as part of the answers and then further expanded upon at the invitation of the interviewer. This includes 'sensitive' personal data, e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, health information or family background or circumstances. This information is not directly sought in and of itself, but may inform or be part of the answers that participants choose to give.

What is the legal basis for processing personal data?

The legal basis for processing the personal data required for the purposes of this study is that the research is being conducted in the public interest, and the processing of this data is necessary for scientific and historical research purposes.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

- To be given clear information about how their data will be processed
- A right of access to a copy of the information comprised in their personal data (to do so individuals should submit a Subject Access Request);
- A right in certain circumstances to have inaccurate personal data rectified;
- A right to object to decisions being taken by automated means.
- To request data deletion, or for data processing to cease.
- To request an electronic copy of their data.

Participants should be aware that if they are dissatisfied with the University's processing of personal data, they have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. For more information see the ICO website. https://ico.org.uk/

Who do I contact if I want to ask more questions about the study?

You can contact me, my principal supervisor, or the departmental Research Director if you have a question or a concern

- Jack Nicholls (PhD student) jack.c.nicholls@northumbria.ac.uk
- Dr Lucy Grimshaw (Principal Supervisor) lucy.grimshaw@northumbria.ac.uk
- Dr Nick Neave (Research Ethics Director) nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk
- Duncan James (Northumbria University Data Protection Officer) dp.officer@northumbria.ac.uk.

Who do I contact if there is a problem or I wish to make a complaint?

- Dr Nick Neave (Research Ethics Director) nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk
- Duncan James (Northumbria University Data Protection Officer) dp.officer@northumbria.ac.uk.

Who is Organizing and Funding the Study?

Northumbria University

Who has reviewed this study?

The Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Northumbria University have reviewed the study in order to safeguard your interests, and have granted approval to conduct the study.

CONSENT FOR TAKING PART IN A STUDY WHICH MIGHT CAUSE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

(Highlighted sections were amended as appropriate for the participant's own authority)

Project Title: **How do Newly-Qualified social workers conceptualise social justice?**

Principal Investigator: **Jack Nicholls**

please tick or initial
where applicable

I have carefully read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.	☐
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers.	☐
I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason for withdrawing, and without prejudice.	☐
I agree to take part in this study.	☐

I understand that by taking part in this study I may be exposed to situations that may generate some psychological distress that may become apparent during and/or after the study has finished. I accept the small risk of experiencing psychological distress as part of this research

It is possible that while taking part in this interview you may have recalled distressing situations which may leave you emotionally upset. If this is the case then you should seek counselling. The following sources may be helpful. ☐

- Employee services/ Occupational Health/ Human Resources : XXXX XXXXXXX
- Local Mental Health/Counselling Support: XXXX XXXXXXX
- Samartians: 116 123

What categories of personal data will be collected and processed in this study?

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•   Dr Nick Neave (Research Ethics Director) nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk

•   Duncan James (Northumbria University Data Protection Officer) dp.officer@northumbria.ac.uk.

Signature of participant... Date.....………………..

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)...………………………..

Signature of Parent / Guardian in the case of a minor

....

Signature of researcher... Date.....………………..

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)...……………………….

northumbria
UNIVERSITY NEWCASTLE

FOR USE WHEN PHOTOGRAPHS/VIDEOS/TAPE RECORDINGS WILL BE TAKEN

Project title: How do Newly-Qualified social workers conceptualise social justice?

Principal Investigator: Jack Nicholls

I hereby confirm that I give consent for the following recordings to be made:

Recording	Purpose	Consent
e.g. facial photograph		**N/A**
e.g. video of bodily movement		**N/A**
e.g. voice recordings	Transcription and analysis	

Clause A: I understand that other individuals may be exposed to the recording(s) and be asked to provide ratings/judgments. The outcome of such ratings/judgments will not be conveyed to me. My name or other personal information will never be associated with the recording(s).

Tick or initial the box to indicate your consent to Clause A ☐

Clause B: I understand that the recording(s) may also be used for teaching/research purposes and may be presented to students/researchers in an educational/research context. My name or other personal information will never be associated with the recording(s).

Tick or initial the box to indicate your consent to Clause B ☐

Clause C: I understand that the recording(s) may be published in an appropriate journal/textbook or on an appropriate Northumbria University webpage, **which would automatically mean that the recordings would potentially be available worldwide**. My name or other personal information will never be associated with the recording(s). I understand that I have the right to withdraw consent at any time prior to publication, but that once the recording(s) are in the public domain there may be no opportunity for the effective withdrawal of consent

Tick or initial the box to indicate your consent to Clause C ☐

Signature of participant.. Date....…………….…..

Signature of Parent / Guardian in the case of a minor

.... Date....………………..

Signature of researcher... Date.....………………..

What categories of personal data will be collected and processed in this study?

Participant's names and the nature and type social work teams in which they work will be taken in the course of seeking informed consent for participation. Aspects of participants' daily work are likely to be discussed in interview. The potentially wide-ranging nature of the interview and subject means that special categories of personal data may also be collected if they are brought up by the participant as part of the answers and then further expanded upon at the invitation of the interviewer. This includes 'sensitive' personal data, e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, health information or family background or circumstances. This information is not directly sought in and of itself, but may inform or be part of the answers that participants choose to give.

What is the legal basis for processing personal data?

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Participant debrief sheet

<table>
<tr><td>Participant code:</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF

Name of Researcher: Jack Nicholls
Name of Supervisor: Dr Lucy Grimshaw (Primary), Dr Sarah Lonbay (Secondary)

Project Title: How do Newly-Qualified social workers conceptualise social justice?

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1. What was the purpose of the project?

The study is about how newly qualified statutory social workers (in first year of post-qualifying practice) think about social justice, their experience of putting their social justice principles into practise, and what they think has influenced their understanding and concept of social justice.

---

2. How will I find out about the results?

You will be able to look at the transcript of your answers if you wish – you will be informed when this is available. The results of the research will be published in the final thesis, as well as being disseminated through academic conferences and journal articles in peer-reviewed publications. All dissemination in any of these formats will adhere to the confidentiality and anonymity guidelines described in your introductory sheet.

---

3. Have I been deceived in any way during the project?

No; the aims and objectives of the study have been explained, as have your options for withdrawal at any time. The project has received ethical approval, and you have been given an opportunity to ask questions. You may of course contact me or my supervisor with any further questions at any time.

---

4. If I change my mind and wish to withdraw the information I have provided, how do I do this?

You may contact the researcher via jack.c.nicholls@northumbria.ac.uk who will ensure that any information you have provided is withdrawn from the study. No reason needs to be given, although if there is a specific reason to do with the study it would be helpful to understand how it could be improved. However this is not a necessity, and if no reason is volunteered, none will be asked for.

The data collected in this study may also be published in scientific journals or presented at conferences. Information and data gathered during this research study will only be available to the research team identified in the information sheet. Should the research be presented or published in any form, all data will be anonymous (i.e. your personal information or data will not be identifiable).

All information and data gathered during this research will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act and will be destroyed 12 months following the conclusion of the study. If the research is published in a scientific journal it may be kept for longer before being destroyed. During that time the data may be used by members of the research team only for purposes

appropriate to the research question, but at no point will your personal information or data be revealed. Insurance companies and employers will not be given any individual's personal information, nor any data provided by them, and nor will we allow access to the police, security services, social services, relatives or lawyers, unless forced to do so by the courts.

What categories of personal data are being collected and processed in this study?
Participant's names and the nature and type social work teams in which they work will be taken in the course of seeking informed consent for participation. Aspects of participants' daily work are likely to be discussed in interview. The potentially wide-ranging nature of the interview and subject means that special categories of personal data may also be collected if they are brought up by the participant as part of the answers and then further expanded upon at the invitation of the interviewer. This includes 'sensitive' personal data, e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, health information or family background or circumstances. This information is not directly sought in and of itself, but may inform or be part of the answers that participants choose to give.

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• Dr Nick Neave (Research Ethics Director) nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk
• Duncan James (Northumbria University Data Protection Officer) dp.officer@northumbria.ac.uk.

If you wish to receive feedback about the findings of this research study then please contact the researcher at **jack.c.nicholls@northumbria.ac.uk**

This study and its protocol have received full ethical approval from Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee. If you require confirmation of this, or if you have any concerns or worries concerning this research, or if you wish to register a complaint, please contact the Chair of this Committee (Dr Nick Neave: nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk), stating the title of the research project and the name of the researcher: