

Reflective Practice



Reflective practice via the lens of the life career and paradox: a contemplation of being and becoming a social worker .

Journal:	<i>Reflective Practice</i>
Manuscript ID	CREP-2019-0104.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Paper
Keywords:	Reflective Practice, social work, paradox, career, Reflection

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10 Anonymus

11 Reflective Practice

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13 Key words: reflective practice, social work, paradox, career.
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17 **Reflective practice via the lens of the life career and paradox: a contemplation of**
18 **being and becoming a social worker**
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21 Abstract

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23 *Reflective practice constitutes an important aspect of social work enactment, with*
24 *a range of theory available to the practitioner, e.g. Schön (1983) and Timmins*
25 *(2015). This paper continues this heritage with a theory of reflection informed via*
26 *continental philosophy. The theory advocated here considers the life career of the*
27 *practitioner via the duality of being and becoming, providing a critical lens upon*
28 *retrospective enactment illuminating paradoxical moments. Such moments*
29 *provide diachronic and nuanced insights into enactment across a range of*
30 *interconnected strands of the life career, allowing the practitioner to consider*
31 *important emergent themes across career articulation and thus action within and*
32 *outside the vista of paid employment. This paper provides a case illustration to*
33 *demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens, advocating future research*
34 *endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and practice.*
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39 **Introduction**

40 Social work as a profession involves important decisions and actions that influences
41 people's lives, where the evaluation of the 'quality' of outcome of such provision is difficult
42 to judge, bringing forth subjective interpretation in conjunction to previously inscribed
43 notions of 'best practice'. Being a social worker is a lived experience, one that provides
44 an important contribution toward the life career. Career within this paper is
45 operationalised via Goffman's definition of career as 'any social strand in a person's life'
46 (1961: 127), significant activity traced via reflexive articulation that connects to a broader
47 sense of life narrativisation (Author, 2017, 183). The strand of social work is one that
48 interconnects and comes into tension with other enacted strands - e.g. family, leisure,
49 housing - occurring within a social world, where practice benefits from acknowledging un-
50 decidability, that there is an art to practice, a practice that cannot follow a set formulae or
51 procedure (Parton and O'Bryne 2000, Payne, 2016). There is invariably a longevity to
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10 being/becoming a social worker, one that will provide articulation, narrative(s), where a
11 diachronic analysis is required to enhance meaning and understanding of enactment at
12 any given duration. This paper therefore reviews and outlines important parameters of
13 the literature relating to being/becoming a social worker, how this relates to professional
14 practice, the context of delivery and the part that reflection plays to benefit such practice
15 a practice inherently full of contradictions and complexity. The paper will then provide a
16 critical analysis of such literature suggesting it provides a narrow perspective upon
17 reflection, concentrating too heavily upon the individual, rarely acknowledging context,
18 temporality and multiplicity of the life career. The paper asserts how the conceptualisation
19 of the life career can aid practitioners to consider how many facets of their career
20 interrelate and may be placed in tension, becoming particularly useful when considering
21 the relationship between 'personal' and 'professional' values. The paper highlights its use
22 of the duality of being and becoming to explore career (see Author, 2017) to expose
23 moments of paradox, which the paper asserts are useful moments to open and consider
24 important emergent themes that provide a tension across career articulation. Such an
25 approach allows enactment to be considered within and outside the vista of paid
26 employment, moving reflection toward a broader and more critical lens to aid career
27 development. This paper provides a case illustration to demonstrate the penetrative nature
28 of such a lens to advocate future research endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and
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35 Professional practice

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37 Social Work is a profession, where profession - rooted within the realms of the clergy,
38 medicine and accounting (Clarke and Newman and Clarke, 1997) - provides a
39 legitimisation of expertise, symbolisation that one is more skilled with a broader knowledge
40 base than a 'layperson'; due to a professional having to undertake a lengthy process of
41 licensed and inaugurated training and/or education. Profession provides an identificatory
42 label, one that can communicate expertise quickly to another as well as a sense of self-
43 esteem. The symbolism of 'profession' is one that provides a relational power with other,
44 both other professionals within the same, as well as, different fields and the layperson,
45 influencing the distribution of rewards, capital and esteem (May and Buck, 1998; Kreber,
46 2019). Such status therefore enables, as well as constrains, the professional as they are
47 required to follow normative and regulative processes, rules and policy, thus providing a
48 tension between practice as an art, sensitive to its context, with an acknowledgement of
49 previous experiences and 'intuition'; as well as a science adhering to espoused 'scientific'
50 objective entrenched forms of 'best' previously ascribed practice (Parker and Bradley,
51 2003: 4; Doel and Shadlow, 2017, xxiv). Social Work requires an ability to be a reflective
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10 professional, to come to know one's unfolding values and how this influences practice.
11 With many social work practitioners having to fulfil the requirement of a higher education
12 (HE) degree or post graduate qualification, connecting with the widening of participation
13 of HE, there has been an influx of non-traditional graduates eagerly looking to fill newly
14 calibrated 'professional' roles within a post-industrialised society, where many face a
15 challenge to previous value bases and where social work pedagogy may provoke a
16 disorientation of such values and sense of identity **and where practice is likely to provoke**
17 **complexity, contradiction and paradoxical notions of 'best practice' where care can become**
18 **control and vice-versa** (Scanlon, 2011, Kosberg, 1973, Cournoyer, 2016). Given such
19 parameters it becomes important for the practitioner to have not only an ability to reflect
20 – to consider action – but also reflexivity – to consider how aspects of identity – that which
21 can at times be fluid as well as concrete – may adapt and change as well as acknowledging
22 aspects of continuity. Therefore, the professional social worker is to consider the interplay
23 of being and becoming and the way this traces upon a sense of self-narrativisation (see
24 Author, 2017).

25 26 27 28 29 **The duality of being and becoming**

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31 The life career is constituted by a range of interconnecting strands. Given the multiplicity
32 of such conceptualisation it can be difficult to frame reflection upon career action.
33 Therefore, this paper advocates framing such reflection via notions of duality, what Author
34 (2017:187) describes as a 'conceptualisation of reality that provides a paradoxical
35 relationship between opposing yet entwining entities'. Being and becoming, provides a
36 useful focus for reflection, one not afraid to dive into ambiguity and paradox. Therefore,
37 to contemplate being and becoming, one is to consider objective and subjective
38 dimensions of 'reality', to intimately connect with philosophical reflection from a range of
39 perspectives. For example, Sartre and existentialism focuses on being, as does Heidegger,
40 and has an application in many areas of health and social care (Thompson and Pascal 2012)
41 as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) or even back to the pre-Socratics of debates
42 between Parmenides and Heraclitus. Being and becoming, as one of the framing
43 orientations of this discussion, requires an engagement with Heidegger where in *Being*
44 *and Time* (Heidegger 1962, Caputo 1986, 1993) Heidegger addresses 'the question of
45 being' which he believes philosophers have generally failed to do, focusing on beings as
46 entities (these are 'ontical' questions about the properties of beings, not the ontological
47 questions of their Being). Being, for Heidegger, is understood as 'being-in-the-world' as
48 an engaged purposeful agent, not just spatially located, but immersed in a world of
49 meaning. This world is not just a collection of things 'present-to-hand' but is a world of
50 'equipment' or 'gear' (*Zeug*) of things 'ready-to-hand' (*zuhanden*) that are involved in our
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purposeful projects. For the professional, training and education is to become proficient in the use of 'ready-to-hand' things, techniques, equipment and gear of the professions. Dasein is 'in' a 'relational totality' of 'significance'. This relational totality is what gives things their significance by their relationship to our 'concerns' or 'care' (*Sorge*). For professionals, their relationship of care and concern to situated 'things' or equipment, gear or the 'ready-to-hand', rather than the 'present-to-hand'. Much discussion about professionals has been caught in the present-to-hand rather than concern over the ready-to-hand [and the scope and foundations of an ethical life \(Reid 2019\)](#).

Scanlon (2011) [and Goh \(2019\)](#) suggests 'becoming' is the most useful defining concept [or metaphor](#) for a new professional class who understand that their working lives are open-ended, lifelong process of learning. The 'ongoingness' of professional development means individual professional identities are constructed throughout one's professional lives rather than an isolated, rugged, individualistic traditional professional. This process of becoming is the ongoing journeying of professionalism that is multi-layered and demands engagement and change from the individual. Becoming has the connotation of flattering dress and elegance. However, philosophically, 'becoming' is flux and change, with no arrival or departure point to becoming a professional, rather a constant process of becoming. This can uncouple the professional from secure reference points, but it is in the fluidity of movement that change and becoming occurs. This discussion is located in the movement of philosophers, symbolic interactionists, existentialist and humanists and how these resources contribute to the understanding of the becoming as a professional journey. Such a journey of 'being'/'becoming' a social worker will critically engage with the issues that reflective professionals encounter and give air to tensions along the way, [tensions evoked via the complex nature of working within the social world](#). For example, 'atrocious stories' are the sorts of account that are common in ethnographic literature on the work of professions (Stimson and Webb 1975; [Dingwall, 2018](#)). Atrocious stories are the devices whereby users of professional services retrospectively interpret their encounters with professions, negotiate the norms of behaviour, understand the rules of engagement, and redress imbalances of power in professional relationships. These stories are dramatic narratives, drawing on shared understanding of the world, casting the teller or user of services as hero and right, against incompetence and dereliction of others ([Dingwall 2001, 688](#)). Through these stories social structures and power relations are rendered rational and comprehensible. The rise of narrative approaches has become significant in professions where meanings and safety have become watchwords in social work and health and social care practice.

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10 It is worth considering that there is a recursive relationship between theory and practice,
11 where theory can inform practice as well as there being 'theories of social practices'
12 (Reckwitz 2002), that which indicates the 'turn to practices' in social theory, tying to an
13 interest in both the 'everyday' and the 'life-world' or the lived experience of professional
14 practice, a further consideration of the complex nodal interactions that occur for the
15 contemporary professional (Reckwitz 2002; Bryson et al, 2015). With a lived experience
16 focus, vantage point or perspective, the mythology of managerialist cultural constructs
17 dissipates and the actions, thoughts and feelings of professionals comes into focus. This
18 is the corporeality and everyday life of becoming/being a professional. Reckwitz (2002:
19 249) asserts that 'practice theory does not place the social in mental qualities, nor
20 discourse, nor in interaction but in practices'. This adds to the canon of practice theories
21 by changing the location of practice against earlier theorists (such as Bourdieu, Butler,
22 Foucault, Garfinkel, Giddens, Latour, Schatzki). It also adds a significant element to
23 professional practice by locating it in the practice itself rather than with reference to
24 imposed or guiding constraints on what professional practice should be according to
25 competences or tick box performance measures.

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29 Reckwitz (2002: 225) suggests that 'for practice theory bodily and mental patterns are
30 necessary components of practices and are thus social'. The tacit dimension of unknown
31 bodily and mental activities and the rule-governed nature of practice provides a richer
32 picture of practice including an ontology of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty 2002), taking place
33 within a context. At this juncture the paper moves toward a reflection upon reflection, to
34 place its contribution, that reflection can be aided by the life career and duality framework
35 concentrating on moments of paradox.

36 37 38 39 **Reflection**

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41 The history of reflection has seminal roots in Dewey (1933), Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983).
42 The art of reflection spans many fields, for example Mackintosh (1998) suggests the 80s
43 saw the emergence of reflection for career development. Schön (1983) concerned with
44 professional development of knowledge and skills makes the distinction between reflection
45 *in* and *on* action in a process of ongoing continuous learning, and reflection as immediate
46 (in) or by looking back across practice (on) (Timmins 2015: 75). Reflection-in-action is
47 the core of 'professional artistry' rather than 'technical-rationality' - where evidence-based
48 practice values, quantitative rather than qualitative methods, areas established as protocol
49 rather than intuitive practice. Schön's work has therefore become part of the 'canon' in
50 teaching and learning across a spectrum of professional practices. However Schön's work
51 is not without its critics. Eraut (2004) criticises the lack of precision and clarity, Boud and
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Walker (1998) argue the context of reflection is ignored, Usher et al (1997) criticises the unreflective methodology, and Smyth (1989) criticises the theoretical and apolitical nature of his work. Greenwood (1993) requires more reflection-before-action and Moon (1999) suggests reflection-in-action is unachievable. As Ghaye (2000: 7) suggests 'maybe reflective practices offer us a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos' and Collin et al (2013) summarise such critiques to encapsulate the theoretical, practical and methodological e.g. 'Lack of clarity and consensus on the concept of reflective practice, particularly its relationship with action and emotion'.—This paper considers whether uncertainty, or chaos and feelings of uncertainty can only make sense via a contemplation of order and vice-versa, linking back to the being and becoming duality mentioned earlier, where being provides a concreteness, knowledge, whilst becoming provides startlement and uncomfoting (see Author, 2017).

One continuity provided by reflective practice theory is that it is understood as the process of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice. Jarvis (1995) agues this involves examining assumptions in everyday practice and adopting a critical attitude of self-awareness, and in the case of this paper assumptions in regard to career (see Author, 2016). The pressures on busy professionals to individually neglect a contextual and situated focus on reflection is a warning this paper wishes to heed. To provide a critical engagement in reflexivity, one that considers social positionality, the self in relation to others and vice-versa, and evoking a close look at paradox to be revealing moments of career enactment and articulation, therefore questioning reflection as a catch-all concept that provides a decontextualized and abstract analysis. Critical reflection takes a wider and contextualised look at the situation within which reflection takes place drawing upon the philosophical tradition of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, providing a substantive analysis of personal beliefs, how these fit within social settings and how these social settings influence and affect situations (Fook and Askeland 2006) where power differences are a necessary component of reflection (Fook, 2015; Brookfield, 1995). Critical reflection extends the reflective project to include assumption hunting (Brookfield 1995), taken for granted and common-sense and power dynamics exercised in reflective situations. As such, critical reflection is both a theory and a process (Gardner 2014) with a deeper look at the underpinning reasons why situations occur and consideration of all the elements that contributes to reflection.

To critically reflect means engaging with diachronic readings, acknowledging that reflection is both *a posteriori*, after the event, recollection; or *a priori*, before the event, anticipation. Such readings need to consider the risks of over and under preparation which may evoke

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assumption and anxiety. Therefore, along the journey toward being/becoming a social worker one is likely to experience a clash of value structures between the personal and the professional, **evoking contradiction and paradox within the mind of the practitioner, both neophyte and the experienced**. This occurs via duration of experience, peppered with fateful moments where the paradoxical interplay between being and becoming manifest within consciousness (see Author, 2017). Our reflective engagement is to re-imagine the existing world and propose and explore alternative mental landscape of thoughts, ideas and practice. As such, reflective disclosure becomes a condition for social justice, a social justice that may well be out of reach.

Methodology – Case-study

The paper now will move toward providing a case study to illustrate the use of reflective theory espoused above. The case study is a participant in a longitudinal research project which utilised a duality framework to read career articulation, focusing on the transition from undergraduate study to up to 3 years post-graduation of a small selected sample (see Author, 2019). Although reflective practice was not the sole focus of the research project the participant in question – who is now a fully qualified social worker – provides excellent insights into her career articulation that focuses on her being/becoming a social worker. The illustration provides great insight into the parameters of reflection highlighted above, including reflections that account for the tension experienced being/becoming a social worker, where there was a conflict between personal and professional value structures, **inherent contradiction prevalent within social work**. The longitudinal study started with a review of a worksheet written by the participants as an undergraduate student, a worksheet that reflects upon career enactment both retrospectively and anticipatorily, informed via social theory. The researcher then deconstructively read such a worksheet focusing on the duality of being and becoming to reveal a prominent paradoxical tension found throughout the longitudinal research project – in the case of the participant being revealed here; 'Protection as Vulnerability'. The participants were then revisited 2 years and 3 years after graduation where they engaged in 2 semi-structured interviews, which covers a period where the participant was undertaking a social work Masters Programme. What unfolds is the penetrative nature of reading career via notions of paradox, how this reveals many important aspects of the participant's journey to become/be a social worker, which clearly influence future enactment.

Participant J is a white working-class female in her mid-twenties. She is a hard-working individual who has consistently across the longitudinal study spoken of the importance caregiving to her career enactment. Participant J experienced the divorce of her birth parents within childhood, resulting in her living with her mother, whom she considers

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10 having had a tough life spending many years bringing her up on her own. Participant J has
11 a half-sister, who is of dual heritage and who has learning difficulties, Participant J feels
12 very protective of her younger half-sister. Participant J speaks of how she gains from
13 enacting care, how care is looked upon as an aspired gift, yet, at the same time, can
14 acknowledge how this seeks a return within an emotional economy of care. Such an
15 economy, for Participant J, makes her feel vulnerable when providing protection via care,
16 to others. The providing of inadequate protection may hurt her as well as the receiver of
17 care, hence providing the overarching paradox identified in the project, one validated by
18 the participant. The reflections below illustrate how an exploration of such an overarching
19 paradox allows other paradoxes to come into play, where the participant acknowledges an
20 eagerness to explore such paradoxes, providing her with a useful career analytic,
21 illustrating the penetrative and utility of paradox as an analytical lens or motif.
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26 Reflections

27 Participant J, has consistently across the study, articulated a position upon career as paid
28 work. This is evident in her worksheet as an undergraduate.
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31 I applied for an undergraduate degree in children's nursing as I felt this career was
32 very suitable to my characteristics... I continued gaining work experience in the
33 NHS and this is the precise time my ontological security was threatened after I had
34 experienced a prominent fateful moment (Giddens, 1991) I was assigned to work
35 with oncology patients which began pleasantly, however after several months of
36 becoming friends with a patient, I witnessed her condition deteriorate rapidly. I had
37 been with her at her time of death and this was extremely emotional. I felt as
38 though I had not been able to help her, something I have found confidence in when
39 referring to my identity, questioning myself and my emotional resilience. I could
40 not continue working and understood that a career in nursing was not appropriate
41 for me and decided to apply for a youth studies degree that offered me many other
42 possible career paths.
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46 This event challenges Participant J's perception of career, one where the enactment of
47 care becomes questioned and where protection, so vital a motivator, ends with a negative
48 return, one that makes Participant J vulnerable as the act of protection is seen to have
49 failed. The deconstructive reading once shared with the participant in the first semi-
50 structured interview provides a challenge to the participant, a questioning of the
51 endeavour of care and protection from a differing perspective, how the giving of care
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10 provides an emotional economy, how validation comes from care, a sense of purpose, and
11 a taking as well as a giving.
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14 I thought it was really useful [the deconstructive reading] ... the caring as a
15 strength and vulnerabilities and the paradox of that, that I thought was really good,
16 as I think it reflects what it means for me to do it [care for others], it does validate
17 me as a person if I help others... I think it does highlight that you need to feel
18 worthy ... yeah when I read it, it sort of made sense it was cary that, that is really
19 true, but you wouldn't sort of go to someone and say, well oh, selfishly, you know
20 I am helping you out because it makes me feel better, cause really it should always
21 be like that person, and what you are doing for them, but it does make you, you
22 know, you are doing something to make yourself feel better, I suppose.
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27 Care is therefore wished upon as a gift, where the participant in some way *gives* herself
28 over to the care receiver, where they are put first. However, Participant J has to
29 acknowledge how there is always a return that is anticipated, a need for reassurance and
30 validation that comes from the thank you or gratitude that comes back into play in the
31 emotional economy of care announced. The emotional economy of care, via the paradox
32 exposed, becomes manifest in consciousness to the participant, where discussion evokes
33 an unfolding of further connecting paradoxes, in particular how her work experiences as a
34 social worker provide the paradox of 'care as control' and 'control as care'
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38 ... it [the controlling aspect of service users] sort of attacks what I am used to, so
39 my brain sort of goes, 'oh my god this person doesn't like you, you're not doing
40 what this person wants, you're going against what they think is good for them,
41 you're not helping them out now, you're not getting that feeling of you are helping
42 them' because they are blatantly sort of going 'what are you doing to me?' But you
43 sort of have to realise that that is eventually for them, so I have gotten used to
44 that idea, but it has sort of sent me into melt down a couple of times if I have had
45 to say 'look I am really sorry but, you're not doing what's best for your child', 'we
46 are going to have to remove your child at the moment for a court order' it sort of
47 all goes into melt down, the control sort of takes over, and sometime, it has to,
48 you have got no choice! It's not nice to do the control bit, it is necessary sometimes,
49 I have to get used to that.
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10 'Care' for Participant J is focused upon as a means of gaining a quick positive emotional
11 return, however there are times when this is not deemed appropriate by the service user,
12 and therefore a sense of controlling someone is presented in consciousness as being in
13 the best interest of the care receiver, however, such an enactment feels alien to intended
14 enactment, an enactment that seeks verification via positive regard. Control at times
15 becomes enacted in the best interest of the service user, though they may not see this at
16 this time and it is hoped that they may be able at some later date. Within the second semi-
17 structured interview (3 years-after-graduation) further paradoxes unfold when revisiting
18 the overarching paradox of protection as vulnerability. What is of note is that the
19 participant had taken on-board the paradoxes explored in previous interview and came
20 prepared to the interview with her observations of other paradoxes that had become
21 manifest within consciousness. A fateful moment, which had occurred between interviews,
22 provides an impetus to acknowledge such paradoxes, in particular how 'helping provides
23 a sense of helplessness'. The fateful moment involved the participant's younger half-sister
24 whom had experienced a period of mental distress culminating in the writing of a couple
25 of suicide notes, found initially by the participant's mother.
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30 ... my sister had stopped eating, my mum ... found a different bunch of suicide
31 notes, there was one for me and my mother and one for her friends at school ...
32 my mum started to blame herself as she had depression in the past, I had sort of
33 had to become the parent as them two, to me, had become crumbling bricks... she
34 is only 15 and my mum has always been this steady rock and I thought what do I
35 do now I am the one that has got to sort this out and the paradox that I found
36 which is what I was thinking about is that I found that I was the helper but I found
37 that I felt really helpless.
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42 The event appears to throw the participant into uncharted territory, forcing a
43 reconfiguration of the relationship between the participant and her mother, a change in
44 power dynamics that is viewed to have disorientated the participant at first, a position
45 loaded with meanings of finitude, forced by her sister's actions, providing a threat toward
46 the act of protection again, to be made vulnerable, yet this time perceived as 'helping
47 providing a sense of helplessness'. Both interviews reveal subjective value structures of
48 the participant and how experiences shape such structures. In the first interview this is
49 particularly manifest due to the Master's course providing a focus upon reflective practice.
50 What becomes apparent is how such reflection provides a tension for Participant J, how
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10 the course is pushing for certain codes of values that at first challenge the participant's
11 'personal' set of values and sense of 'authenticity'.
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14 When your personal and professional values start to conflict you start worrying
15 about where you are going to get lost in being as you are now ... when is that point
16 gonna be where I have got to forget what my judgements are and what my instincts
17 are? Are they gonna get swallowed up ... that sort of taught me that meshing my
18 professional and personal values together so it is sort of continuous being and
19 becoming, because it is forever evolving I think. I was a bit worried that being a
20 social worker I would have to lose some parts of myself but it just sort of means it
21 has got to be adapted differently.
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26 The duality of being/becoming, as well as self/other, is salient in such a reflection, where
27 the participant contemplates how the self is a moving projection and that a deep-rooted
28 sense of self - values - are adaptable and context dependent constituted by experiences
29 with other, including the other within self. This is further explored in the second interview
30 where another two further paradoxes emerge, a challenge to dichotomous logic, where
31 certainty can only be evoked via a sense of uncertainty and how one has to become
32 comfortable with such uncomfortable.
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36 ... professionalism and guidelines are a nice safety net for you, telling you what to
37 do, it really is not like that when you get into it, it is very much like a mixture of
38 everything and if you don't get the balance right you really will mess up ... and the
39 welfare of the child that should be at the front of your mind, am I thinking of the
40 practice guidelines that is saying I should do it this way, and then your values, you
41 are like ' I am not treating a parent like an equal, valuing that they are an
42 independent person they have got a right to do this',, and there is no way you are
43 going to know what is the right thing to do, that is what I don't like as I would have
44 said before any of this [studying and working as a social worker] that I am a black
45 and white person with my values, with my judgement of saying that 'I did the right
46 thing', yet it is very grey ... I don't like not knowing I think that is why it is a benefit
47 for me to learn because I like to know, I like to be certain about things, or, I at
48 least like to have the information there to make a judgment. Social work is so grey
49 there is no black and white there is no black and white what so ever ... as long as
50 you are certain that you are uncertain then you will be fine, because if you think
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10 'yeah I know this I have done the right thing 100%' people will look at you and go
11 'hold on a second' ... yeah you have to be uncertain and be comfortable with being
12 uncertain.
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16 In the second interview opportunity was provided to consider how the participant has
17 taken on-board the researcher's deconstructive reading that occurred in the first.
18 Participant J relishes this opportunity and illustrates how she has utilised such knowledge
19 to help her to read her own career articulations and has also asserted her to suggest it
20 may have other utility
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24 ... paradox with my sister's situation, being a helper but feeling helpless ... that has
25 helped me understand what has happened and how that happens, I think if you
26 were ever going to use it in therapy it would be the best thing ever as it helps
27 people understand why they say what they do and why they feel that way, I think
28 it is necessary for research, academia, personal life, relationships, everything.... I
29 have really enjoyed it [the interview], it is good, it is therapeutic, cathartic, yeah I
30 have enjoyed it thank you
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32 33 34 **Discussion and conclusion**

35 The reflections above concentrate upon the enactment of care, via social work, a
36 **profession inherently filled with complexity and paradox**, providing a challenge to the
37 yearning for certainty. The enactment of care is perceived to be difficult, where there are
38 multiple perspectives to be read, where learning becomes a means of improving ones
39 reading of enactment, yet learning is acknowledged as only providing a certainty of
40 uncertainty, in-turn qualities to be able to feel comfortable with such uncomfortable
41 situations. This resonates with Kafka's (1992) notions of 'before the law', where the
42 participant, as practitioner, has to justify her enactment to a higher law, potentially herself,
43 her profession, policy, her own assigned gateway to universal 'Law' to justify why she has
44 done what she has done, how this relates to the tension and paradox of care as control,
45 personal values as professional values as well as linking to the prominent duality of being
46 and becoming - where there is an acknowledgment that protection becomes vulnerability
47 and vulnerability becomes protection.
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50 The authors have taken on-board the views of the participant, thus exposing the method
51 of reflection aided by the lens of the life career, framed via the duality of being and
52 becoming to evoke useful paradoxes, paradox as an analytical motif to aid reflective
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10 practice, **both retrospectively and anticipatorily**. The literature on reflective practice is
11 peppered with models that evoke the user to follow a set formula, generally following a
12 geometric symmetry, rarely, apart from aspects of critical reflection, taking into account
13 power relations, context and temporality. It also espouses how moments of confusion,
14 potentially of conceptual contradiction, startlement, are moments to focus reflection. This
15 paper continues along this line of logic, that such moments provide a useful focus on
16 reflection particularly if situated within the life career, where many interconnecting strands
17 are enacted, framed via the duality of being and becoming, thus evoking paradox. The
18 paper has highlighted that once reflected upon, prominent paradoxes can be found within
19 career articulation, paradoxes of an enduring nature, in the case study presented
20 'protection as vulnerability', **thus providing a diachronic analysis that can aid lifelong**
21 **practice**. Focusing upon this paradox allowed the participant to consider her personal
22 value structure and how this had become influenced by her newly acquired professional
23 values, how the self was lost, found, reconfigured and is reconfiguring. Such a journey
24 allowed the participant to question enactment critically, to acknowledge that her perceived
25 'gift' of care giving is part of an emotional economy seeking a return, that such a return
26 needs to be situated within a broader context, where policy, ethics and resources need to
27 be contemplated. This provokes the uncertainty of professional practice, how she is to
28 contemplate her own judgement against the back drop of professional values. Doing so
29 she becomes comfortable being uncomfortable, which for her appears to be an important
30 development.
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35 It is acknowledged here the limitations of this paper as it only concentrates upon 1 case
36 study that comes from a longitudinal project whose focus is not specifically upon reflective
37 practice. However, the authors feel this is a strength, how allowing space for individuals
38 to reflect broadly upon career and paradox has allowed powerful reflections to emerge.
39 Such reflections have clearly had an impact on the participant who eagerly takes on-board
40 learning from the research project, becomes a contributor of research yet at the same
41 time receives unplanned pedagogy. The authors feel that such an emergence is important
42 to share with the social work literature, with the anticipation that such learning could
43 inform social work research and pedagogy. **From a research perspective the authors assert**
44 **that the paradigm of the lifecareer, with its inevitable emerging paradoxes, could provoke**
45 **further research to consider their anticipated endurance across the lifecourse of a range**
46 **practitioners.** **From an interconnecting pedagogical perspective is how** ~~What becomes~~
47 ~~apparent from a HE pedagogical perspective is that~~ many contemporary courses across
48 the academy are charged with an employability input. The argument here is that the
49 approach espoused above is one that can be in concert with employability pedagogy, yet,
50 importantly, via a critical lens that also connects with the main home study of the student,
51 in this case social work.
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11 Reflective Practice

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13 Key words: reflective practice, social work, paradox, career.
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17 **Reflective practice via the lens of the life career and paradox: a contemplation of**
18 **being and becoming a social worker**
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21 Abstract

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23 *Reflective practice constitutes an important aspect of social work enactment, with*
24 *a range of theory available to the practitioner, e.g. Schön (1983) and Timmins*
25 *(2015). This paper continues this heritage with a theory of reflection informed via*
26 *continental philosophy. The theory advocated here considers the life career of the*
27 *practitioner via the duality of being and becoming, providing a critical lens upon*
28 *retrospective enactment illuminating paradoxical moments. Such moments*
29 *provide diachronic and nuanced insights into enactment across a range of*
30 *interconnected strands of the life career, allowing the practitioner to consider*
31 *important emergent themes across career articulation and thus action within and*
32 *outside the vista of paid employment. This paper provides a case illustration to*
33 *demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens, advocating future research*
34 *endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and practice.*
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39 **Introduction**

40 Social work as a profession – involves important decisions and actions that influences
41 people's lives, where the evaluation of the 'quality' of outcome of such provision is difficult
42 to judge, bringing forth subjective interpretation in conjunction to previously inscribed
43 notions of 'best practice'. Being a social worker is a lived experience, one that provides
44 an important contribution toward the life career. Career within this paper is
45 operationalised via Goffman's definition of career as 'any social strand in a person's life'
46 (1961: 127), significant activity traced via reflexive articulation that connects to a broader
47 sense of life narrativisation (Author, 2017, 183). The strand of social work is one that
48 interconnects and comes into tension with other enacted strands - e.g. family, leisure,
49 housing - occurring within a social world, where practice benefits from acknowledging un-
50 decidability, that there is an art to practice, a practice that cannot follow a set formulae or
51 procedure (Parton and O'Bryne 2000, Payne, 2016). There is invariably a longevity to
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being/becoming a social worker, one that will provide articulation, narrative(s), where a diachronic analysis is required to enhance meaning and understanding of enactment at any given duration. This paper therefore reviews and outlines important parameters of the literature relating to being/becoming a social worker, how this relates to professional practice, the context of delivery and the part that reflection plays to benefit such practice a practice inherently full of contradictions and complexity. The paper will then provide a critical analysis of such literature suggesting it provides a narrow perspective upon reflection, concentrating too heavily upon the individual, rarely acknowledging context, temporality and multiplicity of the life career. The paper asserts how the conceptualisation of the life career can aid practitioners to consider how many facets of their career interrelate and may be placed in tension, becoming particularly useful when considering the relationship between 'personal' and 'professional' values. The paper highlights its use of the duality of being and becoming to explore career (see Author, 2017) to expose moments of paradox, which the paper asserts are useful moments to open and consider important emergent themes that provide a tension across career articulation. Such an approach allows enactment to be considered within and outside the vista of paid employment, moving reflection toward a broader and more critical lens to aid career development. This paper provides a case illustration to demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens to advocate future research endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and practice

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Professional practice

Social Work is a profession, where profession - rooted within the realms of the clergy, medicine and accounting (Clarke and Newman and Clarke, 1997) - provides a legitimisation of expertise, symbolisation that one is more skilled with a broader knowledge base than a 'layperson'; due to a professional having to undertake a lengthy process of licensed and inaugurated training and/or education. Profession provides an identificatory label, one that can communicate expertise quickly to another as well as a sense of self-esteem. The symbolism of 'profession' is one that provides a relational power with other, both other professionals within the same, as well as, different fields and the layperson, influencing the distribution of rewards, capital and esteem (May and Buck, 1998; Kreber, 2019). Such status therefore enables, as well as constrains, the professional as they are required to follow normative and regulative processes, rules and policy, thus providing a tension between practice as an art, sensitive to its context, with an acknowledgement of previous experiences and 'intuition'; as well as a science adhering to espoused 'scientific' objective entrenched forms of 'best' previously ascribed practice (Parker and Bradley, 2003: 4; Doel and Shadlow, 2017, xxiv). Social Work requires an ability to be a reflective

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10 professional, to come to know one's unfolding values and how this influences practice.
11 With many social work practitioners having to fulfil the requirement of a higher education
12 (HE) degree or post graduate qualification, connecting with the widening of participation
13 of HE, there has been an influx of non-traditional graduates eagerly looking to fill newly
14 calibrated 'professional' roles within a post-industrialised society, where many face a
15 challenge to previous value bases and where social work pedagogy may provoke a
16 disorientation of such values and sense of identity **and where practice is likely to provoke**
17 **complexity, contradiction and paradoxical notions of 'best practice' where care can become**
18 **control and vice-versa** (Scanlon, 2011, Kosberg, 1973, Cournoyer, 2016). Given such
19 parameters it becomes important for the practitioner to have not only an ability to reflect
20 – to consider action – but also reflexivity – to consider how aspects of identity – that which
21 can at times be fluid as well as concrete – may adapt and change as well as acknowledging
22 aspects of continuity. Therefore, the professional social worker is to consider the interplay
23 of being and becoming and the way this traces upon a sense of self-narrativisation (see
24 Author, 2017).

25 26 27 28 29 **The duality of being and becoming**

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31 The life career is constituted by a range of interconnecting strands. Given the multiplicity
32 of such conceptualisation it can be difficult to frame reflection upon career action.
33 Therefore, this paper advocates framing such reflection via notions of duality, what Author
34 (2017:187) describes as a 'conceptualisation of reality that provides a paradoxical
35 relationship between opposing yet entwining entities'. Being and becoming, provides a
36 useful focus for reflection, one not afraid to dive into ambiguity and paradox. Therefore,
37 to contemplate being and becoming, one is to consider objective and subjective
38 dimensions of 'reality', to intimately connect with philosophical reflection from a range of
39 perspectives. For example, Sartre and existentialism focuses on being, as does Heidegger,
40 and has an application in many areas of health and social care (Thompson and Pascal 2012)
41 as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) or even back to the pre-Socratics of debates
42 between Parmenides and Heraclitus. Being and becoming, as one of the framing
43 orientations of this discussion, requires an engagement with Heidegger where in *Being*
44 *and Time* (Heidegger 1962, Caputo 1986, 1993) Heidegger addresses 'the question of
45 being' which he believes philosophers have generally failed to do, focusing on beings as
46 entities (these are 'ontical' questions about the properties of beings, not the ontological
47 questions of their Being). Being, for Heidegger, is understood as 'being-in-the-world' as
48 an engaged purposeful agent, not just spatially located, but immersed in a world of
49 meaning. This world is not just a collection of things 'present-to-hand' but is a world of
50 'equipment' or 'gear' (*Zeug*) of things 'ready-to-hand' (*zuhanden*) that are involved in our
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purposeful projects. For the professional, training and education is to become proficient in the use of 'ready-to-hand' things, techniques, equipment and gear of the professions. Dasein is 'in' a 'relational totality' of 'significance'. This relational totality is what gives things their significance by their relationship to our 'concerns' or 'care' (*Sorge*). For professionals, their relationship of care and concern to situated 'things' or equipment, gear or the 'ready-to-hand', rather than the 'present-to-hand'. Much discussion about professionals has been caught in the present-to-hand rather than concern over the ready-to-hand [and the scope and foundations of an ethical life \(Reid 2019\)](#).

Scanlon (2011) [and Goh \(2019\)](#) suggests 'becoming' is the most useful defining concept [or metaphor](#) for a new professional class who understand that their working lives are open-ended, lifelong process of learning. The 'ongoingness' of professional development means individual professional identities are constructed throughout one's professional lives rather than an isolated, rugged, individualistic traditional professional. This process of becoming is the ongoing journeying of professionalism that is multi-layered and demands engagement and change from the individual. Becoming has the connotation of flattering dress and elegance. However, philosophically, 'becoming' is flux and change, with no arrival or departure point to becoming a professional, rather a constant process of becoming. This can uncouple the professional from secure reference points, but it is in the fluidity of movement that change and becoming occurs. This discussion is located in the movement of philosophers, symbolic interactionists, existentialist and humanists and how these resources contribute to the understanding of the becoming as a professional journey. Such a journey of 'being'/'becoming' a social worker will critically engage with the issues that reflective professionals encounter and give air to tensions along the way, [tensions evoked via the complex nature of working within the social world](#). For example, 'atrocious stories' are the sorts of account that are common in ethnographic literature on the work of professions (Stimson and Webb 1975; [Dingwall, 2018](#)). Atrocious stories are the devices whereby users of professional services retrospectively interpret their encounters with professions, negotiate the norms of behaviour, understand the rules of engagement, and redress imbalances of power in professional relationships. These stories are dramatic narratives, drawing on shared understanding of the world, casting the teller or user of services as hero and right, against incompetence and dereliction of others ([Dingwall 2001, 688](#)). Through these stories social structures and power relations are rendered rational and comprehensible. The rise of narrative approaches has become significant in professions where meanings and safety have become watchwords in social work and health and social care practice.

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10 It is worth considering that there is a recursive relationship between theory and practice,
11 where theory can inform practice as well as there being 'theories of social practices'
12 ([Reckwitz 2002](#)), that which indicates the 'turn to practices' in social theory, tying to an
13 interest in both the 'everyday' and the 'life-world' or the lived experience of professional
14 practice, [a further consideration of the complex nodal interactions that occur for the](#)
15 [contemporary professional \(Reckwitz 2002; Bryson et al, 2015\)](#). With a lived experience
16 focus, vantage point or perspective, the mythology of managerialist cultural constructs
17 dissipates and the actions, thoughts and feelings of professionals comes into focus. This
18 is the corporeality and everyday life of becoming/being a professional. Reckwitz (2002:
19 249) asserts that 'practice theory does not place the social in mental qualities, nor
20 discourse, nor in interaction but in practices'. This adds to the canon of practice theories
21 by changing the location of practice against earlier theorists (such as Bourdieu, Butler,
22 Foucault, Garfinkel, Giddens, Latour, Schatzki). It also adds a significant element to
23 professional practice by locating it in the practice itself rather than with reference to
24 imposed or guiding constraints on what professional practice should be according to
25 competences or tick box performance measures.

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29 Reckwitz (2002: 225) suggests that 'for practice theory bodily and mental patterns are
30 necessary components of practices and are thus social'. The tacit dimension of unknown
31 bodily and mental activities and the rule-governed nature of practice provides a richer
32 picture of practice including an ontology of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty 2002), taking place
33 within a context. At this juncture the paper moves toward a reflection upon reflection, to
34 place its contribution, that reflection can be aided by the life career and duality framework
35 concentrating on moments of paradox.

36 37 38 39 **Reflection**

40
41 The history of reflection has seminal roots in Dewey (1933), Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983).
42 The art of reflection spans many fields, for example Mackintosh (1998) suggests the 80s
43 saw the emergence of reflection for career development. Schön (1983) concerned with
44 professional development of knowledge and skills makes the distinction between reflection
45 *in* and *on* action in a process of ongoing continuous learning, and reflection as immediate
46 (in) or by looking back across practice (on) (Timmins 2015: 75). Reflection-in-action is
47 the core of 'professional artistry' rather than 'technical-rationality' - where evidence-based
48 practice values, quantitative rather than qualitative methods, [areas](#) established [as](#) protocol
49 rather than intuitive practice. Schön's work has therefore become part of the 'canon' in
50 teaching and learning across a spectrum of professional practices. However Schön's work
51 is not without its critics. Eraut (2004) criticises the lack of precision and clarity, Boud and
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Walker (1998) argue the context of reflection is ignored, Usher et al (1997) criticises the unreflective methodology, and Smyth (1989) criticises the theoretical and apolitical nature of his work. Greenwood (1993) requires more reflection-before-action and Moon (1999) suggests reflection-in-action is unachievable. As Ghaye (2000: 7) suggests 'maybe reflective practices offer us a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos' and Collin et al (2013) summarise such critiques to encapsulate the theoretical, practical and methodological e.g. 'Lack of clarity and consensus on the concept of reflective practice, particularly its relationship with action and emotion'.—This paper considers whether uncertainty, or chaos and feelings of uncertainty can only make sense via a contemplation of order and vice-versa, linking back to the being and becoming duality mentioned earlier, where being provides a concreteness, knowledge, whilst becoming provides startlement and uncomfoting (see Author, 2017).

One continuity provided by reflective practice theory is that it is understood as the process of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice. Jarvis (1995) agues this involves examining assumptions in everyday practice and adopting a critical attitude of self-awareness, and in the case of this paper assumptions in regard to career (see Author, 2016). The pressures on busy professionals to individually neglect a contextual and situated focus on reflection is a warning this paper wishes to heed. To provide a critical engagement in reflexivity, one that considers social positionality, the self in relation to others and vice-versa, and evoking a close look at paradox to be revealing moments of career enactment and articulation, therefore questioning reflection as a catch-all concept that provides a decontextualized and abstract analysis. Critical reflection takes a wider and contextualised look at the situation within which reflection takes place drawing upon the philosophical tradition of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, providing a substantive analysis of personal beliefs, how these fit within social settings and how these social settings influence and affect situations (Fook and Askeland 2006) where power differences are a necessary component of reflection (Fook, 2015; Brookfield, 1995). Critical reflection extends the reflective project to include assumption hunting (Brookfield 1995), taken for granted and common-sense and power dynamics exercised in reflective situations. As such, critical reflection is both a theory and a process (Gardner 2014) with a deeper look at the underpinning reasons why situations occur and consideration of all the elements that contributes to reflection.

To critically reflect means engaging with diachronic readings, acknowledging that reflection is both *a posteriori*, after the event, recollection; or *a priori*, before the event, anticipation. Such readings need to consider the risks of over and under preparation which may evoke

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assumption and anxiety. Therefore, along the journey toward being/becoming a social worker one is likely to experience a clash of value structures between the personal and the professional, **evoking contradiction and paradox within the mind of the practitioner, both neophyte and the experienced**. This occurs via duration of experience, peppered with fateful moments where the paradoxical interplay between being and becoming manifest within consciousness (see Author, 2017). Our reflective engagement is to re-imagine the existing world and propose and explore alternative mental landscape of thoughts, ideas and practice. As such, reflective disclosure becomes a condition for social justice, a social justice that may well be out of reach.

Methodology – Case-study

The paper now will move toward providing a case study to illustrate the use of reflective theory espoused above. The case study is a participant in a longitudinal research project which utilised a duality framework to read career articulation, focusing on the transition from undergraduate study to up to 3 years post-graduation of a small selected sample (see Author, 2019). Although reflective practice was not the sole focus of the research project the participant in question – who is now a fully qualified social worker – provides excellent insights into her career articulation that focuses on her being/becoming a social worker. The illustration provides great insight into the parameters of reflection highlighted above, including reflections that account for the tension experienced being/becoming a social worker, where there was a conflict between personal and professional value structures, **inherent contradiction prevalent within social work**. The longitudinal study started with a review of a worksheet written by the participants as an undergraduate student, a worksheet that reflects upon career enactment both retrospectively and anticipatorily, informed via social theory. The researcher then deconstructively read such a worksheet focusing on the duality of being and becoming to reveal a prominent paradoxical tension found throughout the longitudinal research project – in the case of the participant being revealed here; 'Protection as Vulnerability'. The participants were then revisited 2 years and 3 years after graduation where they engaged in 2 semi-structured interviews, which covers a period where the participant was undertaking a social work Masters Programme. What unfolds is the penetrative nature of reading career via notions of paradox, how this reveals many important aspects of the participant's journey to become/be a social worker, which clearly influence future enactment.

Participant J is a white working-class female in her mid-twenties. She is a hard-working individual who has consistently across the longitudinal study spoken of the importance caregiving to her career enactment. Participant J experienced the divorce of her birth parents within childhood, resulting in her living with her mother, whom she considers

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10 having had a tough life spending many years bringing her up on her own. Participant J has
11 a half-sister, who is of dual heritage and who has learning difficulties, Participant J feels
12 very protective of her younger half-sister. Participant J speaks of how she gains from
13 enacting care, how care is looked upon as an aspired gift, yet, at the same time, can
14 acknowledge how this seeks a return within an emotional economy of care. Such an
15 economy, for Participant J, makes her feel vulnerable when providing protection via care,
16 to others. The providing of inadequate protection may hurt her as well as the receiver of
17 care, hence providing the overarching paradox identified in the project, one validated by
18 the participant. The reflections below illustrate how an exploration of such an overarching
19 paradox allows other paradoxes to come into play, where the participant acknowledges an
20 eagerness to explore such paradoxes, providing her with a useful career analytic,
21 illustrating the penetrative and utility of paradox as an analytical lens or motif.
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26 **Reflections**

27 Participant J, has consistently across the study, articulated a position upon career as paid
28 work. This is evident in her worksheet as an undergraduate.
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31 I applied for an undergraduate degree in children's nursing as I felt this career was
32 very suitable to my characteristics... I continued gaining work experience in the
33 NHS and this is the precise time my ontological security was threatened after I had
34 experienced a prominent fateful moment (Giddens, 1991) I was assigned to work
35 with oncology patients which began pleasantly, however after several months of
36 becoming friends with a patient, I witnessed her condition deteriorate rapidly. I had
37 been with her at her time of death and this was extremely emotional. I felt as
38 though I had not been able to help her, something I have found confidence in when
39 referring to my identity, questioning myself and my emotional resilience. I could
40 not continue working and understood that a career in nursing was not appropriate
41 for me and decided to apply for a youth studies degree that offered me many other
42 possible career paths.
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46 This event challenges Participant J's perception of career, one where the enactment of
47 care becomes questioned and where protection, so vital a motivator, ends with a negative
48 return, one that makes Participant J vulnerable as the act of protection is seen to have
49 failed. The deconstructive reading once shared with the participant in the first semi-
50 structured interview provides a challenge to the participant, a questioning of the
51 endeavour of care and protection from a differing perspective, how the giving of care
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10 provides an emotional economy, how validation comes from care, a sense of purpose, and
11 a taking as well as a giving.
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14 I thought it was really useful [the deconstructive reading] ... the caring as a
15 strength and vulnerabilities and the paradox of that, that I thought was really good,
16 as I think it reflects what it means for me to do it [care for others], it does validate
17 me as a person if I help others... I think it does highlight that you need to feel
18 worthy ... yeah when I read it, it sort of made sense it was cary that, that is really
19 true, but you wouldn't sort of go to someone and say, well oh, selfishly, you know
20 I am helping you out because it makes me feel better, cause really it should always
21 be like that person, and what you are doing for them, but it does make you, you
22 know, you are doing something to make yourself feel better, I suppose.
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27 Care is therefore wished upon as a gift, where the participant in some way *gives* herself
28 over to the care receiver, where they are put first. However, Participant J has to
29 acknowledge how there is always a return that is anticipated, a need for reassurance and
30 validation that comes from the thank you or gratitude that comes back into play in the
31 emotional economy of care announced. The emotional economy of care, via the paradox
32 exposed, becomes manifest in consciousness to the participant, where discussion evokes
33 an unfolding of further connecting paradoxes, in particular how her work experiences as a
34 social worker provide the paradox of 'care as control' and 'control as care'
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38 ... it [the controlling aspect of service users] sort of attacks what I am used to, so
39 my brain sort of goes, 'oh my god this person doesn't like you, you're not doing
40 what this person wants, you're going against what they think is good for them,
41 you're not helping them out now, you're not getting that feeling of you are helping
42 them' because they are blatantly sort of going 'what are you doing to me?' But you
43 sort of have to realise that that is eventually for them, so I have gotten used to
44 that idea, but it has sort of sent me into melt down a couple of times if I have had
45 to say 'look I am really sorry but, you're not doing what's best for your child', 'we
46 are going to have to remove your child at the moment for a court order' it sort of
47 all goes into melt down, the control sort of takes over, and sometime, it has to,
48 you have got no choice! It's not nice to do the control bit, it is necessary sometimes,
49 I have to get used to that.
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10 'Care' for Participant J is focused upon as a means of gaining a quick positive emotional
11 return, however there are times when this is not deemed appropriate by the service user,
12 and therefore a sense of controlling someone is presented in consciousness as being in
13 the best interest of the care receiver, however, such an enactment feels alien to intended
14 enactment, an enactment that seeks verification via positive regard. Control at times
15 becomes enacted in the best interest of the service user, though they may not see this at
16 this time and it is hoped that they may be able at some later date. Within the second semi-
17 structured interview (3 years-after-graduation) further paradoxes unfold when revisiting
18 the overarching paradox of protection as vulnerability. What is of note is that the
19 participant had taken on-board the paradoxes explored in previous interview and came
20 prepared to the interview with her observations of other paradoxes that had become
21 manifest within consciousness. A fateful moment, which had occurred between interviews,
22 provides an impetus to acknowledge such paradoxes, in particular how 'helping provides
23 a sense of helplessness'. The fateful moment involved the participant's younger half-sister
24 whom had experienced a period of mental distress culminating in the writing of a couple
25 of suicide notes, found initially by the participant's mother.
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30 ... my sister had stopped eating, my mum ... found a different bunch of suicide
31 notes, there was one for me and my mother and one for her friends at school ...
32 my mum started to blame herself as she had depression in the past, I had sort of
33 had to become the parent as them two, to me, had become crumbling bricks... she
34 is only 15 and my mum has always been this steady rock and I thought what do I
35 do now I am the one that has got to sort this out and the paradox that I found
36 which is what I was thinking about is that I found that I was the helper but I found
37 that I felt really helpless.
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42 The event appears to throw the participant into uncharted territory, forcing a
43 reconfiguration of the relationship between the participant and her mother, a change in
44 power dynamics that is viewed to have disorientated the participant at first, a position
45 loaded with meanings of finitude, forced by her sister's actions, providing a threat toward
46 the act of protection again, to be made vulnerable, yet this time perceived as 'helping
47 providing a sense of helplessness'. Both interviews reveal subjective value structures of
48 the participant and how experiences shape such structures. In the first interview this is
49 particularly manifest due to the Master's course providing a focus upon reflective practice.
50 What becomes apparent is how such reflection provides a tension for Participant J, how
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10 the course is pushing for certain codes of values that at first challenge the participant's
11 'personal' set of values and sense of 'authenticity'.
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14 When your personal and professional values start to conflict you start worrying
15 about where you are going to get lost in being as you are now ... when is that point
16 gonna be where I have got to forget what my judgements are and what my instincts
17 are? Are they gonna get swallowed up ... that sort of taught me that meshing my
18 professional and personal values together so it is sort of continuous being and
19 becoming, because it is forever evolving I think. I was a bit worried that being a
20 social worker I would have to lose some parts of myself but it just sort of means it
21 has got to be adapted differently.
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26 The duality of being/becoming, as well as self/other, is salient in such a reflection, where
27 the participant contemplates how the self is a moving projection and that a deep-rooted
28 sense of self - values - are adaptable and context dependent constituted by experiences
29 with other, including the other within self. This is further explored in the second interview
30 where another two further paradoxes emerge, a challenge to dichotomous logic, where
31 certainty can only be evoked via a sense of uncertainty and how one has to become
32 comfortable with such uncomfortable.
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36 ... professionalism and guidelines are a nice safety net for you, telling you what to
37 do, it really is not like that when you get into it, it is very much like a mixture of
38 everything and if you don't get the balance right you really will mess up ... and the
39 welfare of the child that should be at the front of your mind, am I thinking of the
40 practice guidelines that is saying I should do it this way, and then your values, you
41 are like ' I am not treating a parent like an equal, valuing that they are an
42 independent person they have got a right to do this', and there is no way you are
43 going to know what is the right thing to do, that is what I don't like as I would have
44 said before any of this [studying and working as a social worker] that I am a black
45 and white person with my values, with my judgement of saying that 'I did the right
46 thing', yet it is very grey ... I don't like not knowing I think that is why it is a benefit
47 for me to learn because I like to know, I like to be certain about things, or, I at
48 least like to have the information there to make a judgment. Social work is so grey
49 there is no black and white there is no black and white what so ever ... as long as
50 you are certain that you are uncertain then you will be fine, because if you think
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10 'yeah I know this I have done the right thing 100%' people will look at you and go
11 'hold on a second' ... yeah you have to be uncertain and be comfortable with being
12 uncertain.
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16 In the second interview opportunity was provided to consider how the participant has
17 taken on-board the researcher's deconstructive reading that occurred in the first.
18 Participant J relishes this opportunity and illustrates how she has utilised such knowledge
19 to help her to read her own career articulations and has also asserted her to suggest it
20 may have other utility
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23 ... paradox with my sister's situation, being a helper but feeling helpless ... that has
24 helped me understand what has happened and how that happens, I think if you
25 were ever going to use it in therapy it would be the best thing ever as it helps
26 people understand why they say what they do and why they feel that way, I think
27 it is necessary for research, academia, personal life, relationships, everything.... I
28 have really enjoyed it [the interview], it is good, it is therapeutic, cathartic, yeah I
29 have enjoyed it thank you
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34 Discussion and conclusion

35 The reflections above concentrate upon the enactment of care, via social work, a
36 profession inherently filled with complexity and paradox, providing a challenge to the
37 yearning for certainty. The enactment of care is perceived to be difficult, where there are
38 multiple perspectives to be read, where learning becomes a means of improving ones
39 reading of enactment, yet learning is acknowledged as only providing a certainty of
40 uncertainty, in-turn qualities to be able to feel comfortable with such uncomfortable
41 situations. This resonates with Kafka's (1992) notions of 'before the law', where the
42 participant, as practitioner, has to justify her enactment to a higher law, potentially herself,
43 her profession, policy, her own assigned gateway to universal 'Law' to justify why she has
44 done what she has done, how this relates to the tension and paradox of care as control,
45 personal values as professional values as well as linking to the prominent duality of being
46 and becoming - where there is an acknowledgment that protection becomes vulnerability
47 and vulnerability becomes protection.
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50 The authors have taken on-board the views of the participant, thus exposing the method
51 of reflection aided by the lens of the life career, framed via the duality of being and
52 becoming to evoke useful paradoxes, paradox as an analytical motif to aid reflective
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10 practice, **both retrospectively and anticipatorily**. The literature on reflective practice is
11 peppered with models that evoke the user to follow a set formula, generally following a
12 geometric symmetry, rarely, apart from aspects of critical reflection, taking into account
13 power relations, context and temporality. It also espouses how moments of confusion,
14 potentially of conceptual contradiction, startlement, are moments to focus reflection. This
15 paper continues along this line of logic, that such moments provide a useful focus on
16 reflection particularly if situated within the life career, where many interconnecting strands
17 are enacted, framed via the duality of being and becoming, thus evoking paradox. The
18 paper has highlighted that once reflected upon, prominent paradoxes can be found within
19 career articulation, paradoxes of an enduring nature, in the case study presented
20 'protection as vulnerability', **thus providing a diachronic analysis that can aid lifelong**
21 **practice**. Focusing upon this paradox allowed the participant to consider her personal
22 value structure and how this had become influenced by her newly acquired professional
23 values, how the self was lost, found, reconfigured and is reconfiguring. Such a journey
24 allowed the participant to question enactment critically, to acknowledge that her perceived
25 'gift' of care giving is part of an emotional economy seeking a return, that such a return
26 needs to be situated within a broader context, where policy, ethics and resources need to
27 be contemplated. This provokes the uncertainty of professional practice, how she is to
28 contemplate her own judgement against the back drop of professional values. Doing so
29 she becomes comfortable being uncomfortable, which for her appears to be an important
30 development.
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35 It is acknowledged here the limitations of this paper as it only concentrates upon 1 case
36 study that comes from a longitudinal project whose focus is not specifically upon reflective
37 practice. However, the authors feel this is a strength, how allowing space for individuals
38 to reflect broadly upon career and paradox has allowed powerful reflections to emerge.
39 Such reflections have clearly had an impact on the participant who eagerly takes on-board
40 learning from the research project, becomes a contributor of research yet at the same
41 time receives unplanned pedagogy. The authors feel that such an emergence is important
42 to share with the social work literature, with the anticipation that such learning could
43 inform social work research and pedagogy. **From a research perspective the authors assert**
44 **that the paradigm of the lifecareer, with its inevitable emerging paradoxes, could provoke**
45 **further research to consider their anticipated endurance across the lifecourse of a range**
46 **practitioners.** **From an interconnecting pedagogical perspective is how**
47 **What becomes**
48 **apparent from a HE pedagogical perspective is that** many contemporary courses across
49 the academy are charged with an employability input. The argument here is that the
50 approach espoused above is one that can be in concert with employability pedagogy, yet,
51 importantly, via a critical lens that also connects with the main home study of the student,
52 in this case social work.
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For Peer Review Only

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5 Reflective Practice

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7 Key words: reflective practice, social work, paradox, career.
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12 **Reflective practice via the lens of the life career and paradox: a contemplation of**
13 **being and becoming a social worker**
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18 Abstract

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20 *Reflective practice constitutes an important aspect of social work enactment, with*
21 *a range of theory available to the practitioner, e.g. Schön (1983) and Timmins*
22 *(2015). This paper continues this heritage with a theory of reflection informed via*
23 *continental philosophy. The theory advocated here considers the life career of the*
24 *practitioner via the duality of being and becoming, providing a critical lens upon*
25 *retrospective enactment illuminating paradoxical moments. Such moments*
26 *provide diachronic and nuanced insights into enactment across a range of*
27 *interconnected strands of the life career, allowing the practitioner to consider*
28 *important emergent themes across career articulation and thus action within and*
29 *outside the vista of paid employment. This paper provides a case illustration to*
30 *demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens, advocating future research*
31 *endeavours to inform social work pedagogy and practice.*
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41 **Introduction**

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43 Social work involves important decisions and actions that influences people's lives. Being
44 a social worker is a lived experience, one that provides an important contribution toward
45 the life career. Career within this paper is operationalised via Goffman's definition of
46 career as 'any social strand in a person's life' (1961: 127), significant activity traced via
47 reflexive articulation that connects to a broader sense of life narrativisation (Author, 2017,
48 183). The strand of social work is one that interconnects and comes into tension with
49 other enacted strands - e.g. family, leisure, housing - occurring within a social world,
50 where practice benefits from acknowledging un-decidability, that there is an art to practice,
51 a practice that cannot follow a set formulae or procedure (Parton and O'Bryne 2000).
52 There is invariably a longevity to being/becoming a social worker, one that will provide
53 articulation, narrative(s), where a diachronic analysis is required to enhance meaning and
54 understanding of enactment at any given duration. This paper therefore reviews and
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3 outlines important parameters of the literature relating to being/becoming a social worker,
4 how this relates to professional practice, the context of delivery and the part that reflection
5 plays to benefit such practice. The paper will then provide a critical analysis of such
6 literature suggesting it provides a narrow perspective upon reflection, concentrating too
7 heavily upon the individual, rarely acknowledging context, temporality and multiplicity of
8 the life career. The paper asserts how the conceptualisation of the life career can aid
9 practitioners to consider how many facets of their career interrelate and may be placed in
10 tension, becoming particularly useful when considering the relationship between 'personal'
11 and 'professional' values. The paper highlights its use of the duality of being and becoming
12 to explore career (see Author, 2017) to expose moments of paradox, which the paper
13 asserts are useful moments to open and consider important emergent themes that provide
14 a tension across career articulation. Such an approach allows enactment to be considered
15 within and outside the vista of paid employment, moving reflection toward a broader and
16 more critical lens to aid career development. This paper provides a case illustration to
17 demonstrate the penetrative nature of such a lens to advocate future research endeavours
18 to inform social work pedagogy and practice
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30 **Professional practice**

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32 Social Work is a profession, where profession - rooted within the realms of the clergy,
33 medicine and accounting (Clarke and Newman, 1997) – provides a legitimisation of
34 expertise, symbolisation that one is more skilled with a broader knowledge base than a
35 'layperson'; due to a professional having to undertaken a lengthy process of licensed and
36 inaugurated training and/or education. Profession provides an identificatory label, one
37 that can communicate expertise quickly to another as well as a sense of self-esteem. The
38 symbolism of 'profession' is one that provides a relational power with other, both other
39 professionals within the same, as well as, different fields and the layperson, influencing
40 the distribution of rewards, capital and esteem (May and Buck, 1998). Such status
41 therefore enables, as well as constrains, the professional as they are required to follow
42 normative and regulative processes, rules and policy, thus providing a tension between
43 practice as an art, sensitive to its context, with an acknowledgement of previous
44 experiences and 'intuition'; as well as a science adhering to espoused 'scientific' objective
45 entrenched forms of 'best' previously ascribed practice (Parker and Bradley, 2003: 4).
46 Social Work requires an ability to be a reflective professional, to come to know one's
47 unfolding values and how this influences practice. With many social work practitioners
48 having to fulfil the requirement of a higher education (HE) degree or post graduate
49 qualification, connecting with the widening of participation of HE, there has been an influx
50 of non-traditional graduates eagerly looking to fill newly calibrated 'professional' roles
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3 within a post-industrialised society, where many face a challenge to previous value bases
4 and where social work pedagogy may provoke a disorientation of such values and sense
5 of identity (Scalon, 2011). Given such parameters it becomes important for the
6 practitioner to have not only an ability to reflect – to consider action – but also reflexivity
7 – to consider how aspects of identity – that which can at times be fluid as well as concrete
8 – may adapt and change as well as acknowledging aspects of continuity. Therefore, the
9 professional social worker is to consider the interplay of being and becoming and the way
10 this traces upon a sense of self-narrativisation (see Author, 2017).
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18 **The duality of being and becoming**

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20 The life career is constituted by a range of interconnecting strands. Given the multiplicity
21 of such conceptualisation it can be difficult to frame reflection upon career action.
22 Therefore, this paper advocates framing such reflection via notions of duality, what Author
23 (2017:187) describes as a 'conceptualisation of reality that provides a paradoxical
24 relationship between opposing yet entwining entities'. Being and becoming, provides a
25 useful focus for reflection, one not afraid to dive into ambiguity and paradox. Therefore,
26 to contemplate being and becoming, one is to consider objective and subjective
27 dimensions of 'reality', to intimately connect with philosophical reflection from a range of
28 perspectives. For example, Sartre and existentialism focuses on being, as does Heidegger,
29 and has an application in many areas of health and social care (Thompson and Pascal 2012)
30 as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) or even back to the pre-Socratics of debates
31 between Parmenides and Heraclitus. Being and becoming, as one of the framing
32 orientations of this discussion, requires an engagement with Heidegger where in *Being
33 and Time* (Heidegger 1962) Heidegger addresses 'the question of being' which he believes
34 philosophers have generally failed to do, focusing on beings as entities (these are 'ontical'
35 questions about the properties of beings, not the ontological questions of their Being).
36 Being, for Heidegger, is understood as 'being-in-the-world' as an engaged purposeful
37 agent, not just spatially located, but immersed in a world of meaning. This world is not
38 just a collection of things 'present-to-hand' but is a world of 'equipment' or 'gear' (*Zeug*)
39 of things 'ready-to-hand' (*zuhanden*) that are involved in our purposeful projects. For the
40 professional, training and education is to become proficient in the use of 'ready-to-hand'
41 things, techniques, equipment and gear of the professions. Dasein is 'in' a 'relational
42 totality' of 'significance'. This relational totality is what gives things their significance by
43 their relationship to our 'concerns' or 'care' (*Sorge*). For professionals, their relationship
44 of care and concern to situated 'things' or equipment, gear or the 'ready-to-hand', rather
45 than the 'present-to-hand'. Much discussion about professionals has been caught in the
46 present-to-hand rather than concern over the ready-to-hand.
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3 Scanlon (2011) suggests 'becoming' is the most useful defining concept for a new
4 professional class who understand that their working lives are open-ended, lifelong process
5 of learning. The 'ongoingness' of professional development means individual professional
6 identities are constructed throughout one's professional lives rather than an isolated,
7 rugged, individualistic traditional professional. This process of becoming is the ongoing
8 journeying of professionalism that is multi-layered and demands engagement and change
9 from the individual. Becoming has the connotation of flattering dress and elegance.
10 However, philosophically, 'becoming' is flux and change, with no arrival or departure point
11 to becoming a professional, rather a constant process of becoming. This can uncouple the
12 professional from secure reference points, but it is in the fluidity of movement that change
13 and becoming occurs. This discussion is located in the movement of philosophers,
14 symbolic interactionists, existentialist and humanists and how these resources contribute
15 to the understanding of the becoming as a professional journey. Such a journey of
16 'being'/'becoming' a social worker will critically engage with the issues that reflective
17 professionals encounter and give air to tensions along the way. For example, 'atrocious
18 stories' are the sorts of account that are common in ethnographic literature on the work
19 of professions (Stimson and Webb 1975). Atrocious stories are the devices whereby users
20 of professional services retrospectively interpret their encounters with professions,
21 negotiate the norms of behaviour, understand the rules of engagement, and redress
22 imbalances of power in professional relationships. These stories are dramatic narratives,
23 drawing on shared understanding of the world, casting the teller or user of services as
24 hero and right, against incompetence and dereliction of others (Dingwall 2008). Through
25 these stories social structures and power relations are rendered rational and
26 comprehensible. The rise of narrative approaches has become significant in professions
27 where meanings and safety have become watchwords in social work and health and social
28 care practice.

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46 It is worth considering that there is a recursive relationship between theory and practice,
47 where theory can inform practice as well as there being 'theories of social practices'
48 (Reckwitz 2002), that which indicates the 'turn to practices' in social theory, tying to an
49 interest in both the 'everyday' and the 'life-world' or the lived experience of professional
50 practice. With a lived experience focus, vantage point or perspective, the mythology of
51 managerialist cultural constructs dissipates and the actions, thoughts and feelings of
52 professionals comes into focus. This is the corporeality and everyday life of
53 becoming/being a professional. Reckwitz (2002: 249) asserts that 'practice theory does
54 not place the social in mental qualities, nor discourse, nor in interaction but in practices'.
55 This adds to the canon of practice theories by changing the location of practice against
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3 earlier theorists (such as Bourdieu, Butler, Foucault, Garfinkel, Giddens, Latour, Schatzki).
4 It also adds a significant element to professional practice by locating it in the practice itself
5 rather than with reference to imposed or guiding constraints on what professional practice
6 should be according to competences or tick box performance measures.
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10 Reckwitz (2002: 225) suggests that 'for practice theory bodily and mental patterns are
11 necessary components of practices and are thus social'. The tacit dimension of unknown
12 bodily and mental activities and the rule-governed nature of practice provides a richer
13 picture of practice including an ontology of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty 2002), taking place
14 within a context. At this juncture the paper moves toward a reflection upon reflection, to
15 place its contribution, that reflection can be aided by the life career and duality framework
16 concentrating on moments of paradox.
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23 **Reflection**

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25 The history of reflection has seminal roots in Dewey (1933), Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983).
26 The art of reflection spans many fields, for example Mackintosh (1998) suggests the 80s
27 saw the emergence of reflection for career development. Schön (1983) concerned with
28 professional development of knowledge and skills makes the distinction between reflection
29 *in* and *on* action in a process of ongoing continuous learning, and reflection as immediate
30 (in) or by looking back across practice (on) (Timmins 2015: 75). Reflection-in-action is
31 the core of 'professional artistry' rather than 'technical-rationality' - where evidence-based
32 practice values quantitative rather than qualitative methods as established protocol rather
33 than intuitive practice. Schön's work has therefore become part of the 'canon' in teaching
34 and learning across a spectrum of professional practices. However Schön's work is not
35 without its critics. Eraut (2004) criticises the lack of precision and clarity, Boud and Walker
36 (1998) argue the context of reflection is ignored, Usher et al (1997) criticises the
37 unreflective methodology, and Smyth (1989) criticises the theoretical and apolitical nature
38 of his work. Greenwood (1993) requires more reflection-before-action and Moon (1999)
39 suggests reflection-in-action is unachievable. As Ghaye (2000: 7) suggests 'maybe
40 reflective practices offer us a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our
41 workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and
42 chaos'. This paper considers whether uncertainty, or chaos can only make sense via a
43 contemplation of order and vice-versa, linking back to the being and becoming duality
44 mentioned earlier, where being provides a concreteness, knowledge, whilst becoming
45 provides startlement and uncomfoting (see Author, 2017).
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58 One continuity provided by reflective practice theory is that it is understood as the process
59 of learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice.
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3 Jarvis (1995) argues this involves examining assumptions in everyday practice and
4 adopting a critical attitude of self-awareness, and in the case of this paper assumptions in
5 regard to career (see Author, 2016). The pressures on busy professionals to individually
6 neglect a contextual and situated focus on reflection is a warning this paper wishes to heed.
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8 To provide a critical engagement in reflexivity, one that considers social positionality, the
9 self in relation to others and vice-versa, and evoking a close look at paradox to be revealing
10 moments of career enactment and articulation, therefore questioning reflection as a catch-
11 all concept that provides a decontextualized and abstract analysis. Critical reflection takes
12 a wider and contextualised look at the situation within which reflection takes place drawing
13 upon the philosophical tradition of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, providing a
14 substantive analysis of personal beliefs, how these fit within social settings and how these
15 social settings influence and affect situations (Fook and Askeland 2006) where power
16 differences are a necessary component of reflection (Fook, 2015; Brookfield, 1995).
17 Critical reflection extends the reflective project to include assumption hunting (Brookfield
18 1995), taken for granted and common-sense and power dynamics exercised in reflective
19 situations. As such, critical reflection is both a theory and a process (Gardner 2014) with
20 a deeper look at the underpinning reasons why situations occur and consideration of all
21 the elements that contributes to reflection.
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34 To critically reflect means engaging with diachronic readings, acknowledging that reflection
35 is both *a posteriori*, after the event, recollection; or *a priori*, before the event, anticipation.
36 Such readings need to consider the risks of over and under preparation which may evoke
37 assumption and anxiety. Therefore, along the journey toward being/becoming a social
38 worker one is likely to experience a clash of value structures between the personal and
39 the professional. This occurs via duration of experience, peppered with fateful moments
40 where the paradoxical interplay between being and becoming manifest within
41 consciousness (see Author, 2017). Our reflective engagement is to re-imagine the existing
42 world and propose and explore alternative mental landscape of thoughts, ideas and
43 practice. As such, reflective disclosure becomes a condition for social justice, a social
44 justice that may well be out of reach.
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52 **Methodology – Case-study**

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54 The paper now will move toward providing a case study to illustrate the use of reflective
55 theory espoused above. The case study is a participant in a longitudinal research project
56 which utilised a duality framework to read career articulation, focusing on the transition
57 from undergraduate study to up to 3 years post-graduation of a small selected sample
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3 (see Author, 2019). Although reflective practice was not the sole focus of the research
4 project the participant in question – who is now a fully qualified social worker – provides
5 excellent insights into her career articulation that focuses on her being/becoming a social
6 worker. The illustration provides great insight into the parameters of reflection highlighted
7 above, including reflections that account for the tension experienced being/becoming a
8 social worker, where there was a conflict between personal and professional value
9 structures. The longitudinal study started with a review of a worksheet written by the
10 participants as an undergraduate student, a worksheet that reflects upon career
11 enactment both retrospectively and anticipatorily, informed via social theory. The
12 researcher then deconstructively read such a worksheet focusing on the duality of being
13 and becoming to reveal a prominent paradoxical tension found throughout the longitudinal
14 research project – in the case of the participant being revealed here; ‘Protection as
15 Vulnerability’. The participants were then revisited 2 years and 3 years after graduation where they
16 engaged in 2 semi-structured interviews, which covers a period where the participant was undertaking
17 a social work Masters Programme. What unfolds is the penetrative nature of reading career via
18 notions of paradox, how this reveals many important aspects of the participant’s journey to
19 become/be a social worker, which clearly influence future enactment.
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30 Participant J is a white working-class female in her mid-twenties. She is a hard-working individual who
31 has consistently across the longitudinal study spoken of the importance caregiving to her career
32 enactment. Participant J experienced the divorce of her birth parents within childhood, resulting in
33 her living with her mother, whom she considers having had a tough life spending many years bringing
34 her up on her own. Participant J has a half-sister, who is of dual heritage and who has learning
35 difficulties, Participant J feels very protective of her younger half-sister. Participant J speaks of how
36 she gains from enacting care, how care is looked upon as an aspired gift, yet, at the same time, can
37 acknowledge how this seeks a return within an emotional economy of care. Such an economy, for
38 Participant J, makes her feel vulnerable when providing protection via care, to others. The providing
39 of inadequate protection may hurt her as well as the receiver of care, hence providing the overarching
40 paradox identified in the project, one validated by the participant. The reflections below illustrate how
41 an exploration of such an overarching paradox allows other paradoxes to come into play, where the
42 participant acknowledges an eagerness to explore such paradoxes, providing her with a useful career
43 analytic, illustrating the penetrative and utility of paradox as an analytical lens or motif.
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57 Reflections

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3 Participant J, has consistently across the study, articulated a position upon career as paid work. This is
4 evident in her worksheet as an undergraduate.
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7 I applied for an undergraduate degree in children's nursing as I felt this career was very
8 suitable to my characteristics... I continued gaining work experience in the NHS and this is the
9 precise time my ontological security was threatened after I had experienced a prominent
10 fateful moment (Giddens, 1991) I was assigned to work with oncology patients which began
11 pleasantly, however after several months of becoming friends with a patient, I witnessed her
12 condition deteriorate rapidly. I had been with her at her time of death and this was extremely
13 emotional. I felt as though I had not been able to help her, something I have found confidence
14 in when referring to my identity, questioning myself and my emotional resilience. I could not
15 continue working and understood that a career in nursing was not appropriate for me and
16 decided to apply for a youth studies degree that offered me many other possible career paths.
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27 This event challenges Participant J's perception of career, one where the enactment of care becomes
28 questioned and where protection, so vital a motivator, ends with a negative return, one that makes
29 Participant J vulnerable as the act of protection is seen to have failed. The deconstructive reading once
30 shared with the participant in the first semi-structured interview provides a challenge to the
31 participant, a questioning of the endeavour of care and protection from a differing perspective, how
32 the giving of care provides an emotional economy, how validation comes from care, a sense of
33 purpose, and a taking as well as a giving.
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42 I thought it was really useful [the deconstructive reading] ... the caring as a strength and
43 vulnerabilities and the paradox of that, that I thought was really good, as I think it reflects
44 what it means for me to do it [care for others], it does validate me as a person if I help others...
45 I think it does highlight that you need to feel worthy ... yeah when I read it, it sort of made
46 sense it was cary that, that is really true, but you wouldn't sort of go to someone and say,
47 well oh, selfishly, you know I am helping you out because it makes me feel better, cause really
48 it should always be like that person, and what you are doing for them, but it does make you,
49 you know, you are doing something to make yourself feel better, I suppose.
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58 Care is therefore wished upon as a gift, where the participant in some way *gives* herself over to the
59 care receiver, where they are put first. However, Participant J has to acknowledge how there is always
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3 a return that is anticipated, a need for reassurance and validation that comes from the thank you or
4 gratitude that comes back into play in the emotional economy of care announced. The emotional
5 economy of care, via the paradox exposed, becomes manifest in consciousness to the participant,
6 where discussion evokes an unfolding of further connecting paradoxes, in particular how her work
7 experiences as a social worker provide the paradox of 'care as control' and 'control as care'
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14 ... it [the controlling aspect of service users] sort of attacks what I am used to, so my brain sort
15 of goes, 'oh my god this person doesn't like you, you're not doing what this person wants,
16 you're going against what they think is good for them, you're not helping them out now,
17 you're not getting that feeling of you are helping them' because they are blatantly sort of
18 going 'what are you doing to me?' But you sort of have to realise that that is eventually for
19 them, so I have gotten used to that idea, but it has sort of sent me into melt down a couple of
20 times if I have had to say 'look I am really sorry but, you're not doing what's best for your
21 child', 'we are going to have to remove your child at the moment for a court order' it sort of
22 all goes into melt down, the control sort of takes over, and sometime, it has to, you have got
23 no choice! It's not nice to do the control bit, it is necessary sometimes, I have to get used to
24 that.
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36 'Care' for Participant J is focused upon as a means of gaining a quick positive emotional return,
37 however there are times when this is not deemed appropriate by the service user, and therefore a
38 sense of controlling someone is presented in consciousness as being in the best interest of the care
39 receiver, however, such an enactment feels alien to intended enactment, an enactment that seeks
40 verification via positive regard. Control at times becomes enacted in the best interest of the service
41 user, though they may not see this at this time and it is hoped that they may be able at some later
42 date. Within the second semi-structured interview (3 years-after-graduation) further paradoxes
43 unfold when revisiting the overarching paradox of protection as vulnerability. What is of note is that
44 the participant had taken on-board the paradoxes explored in previous interview and came prepared
45 to the interview with her observations of other paradoxes that had become manifest within
46 consciousness. A fateful moment, which had occurred between interviews, provides an impetus to
47 acknowledge such paradoxes, in particular how 'helping provides a sense of helplessness'. The fateful
48 moment involved the participant's younger half-sister whom had experienced a period of mental
49 distress culminating in the writing of a couple of suicide notes, found initially by the participant's
50 mother.
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5 ... my sister had stopped eating, my mum ... found a different bunch of suicide notes, there
6 was one for me and my mother and one for her friends at school ... my mum started to blame
7 herself as she had depression in the past, I had sort of had to become the parent as them two,
8 to me, had become crumbling bricks... she is only 15 and my mum has always been this steady
9 rock and I thought what do I do now I am the one that has got to sort this out and the paradox
10 that I found which is what I was thinking about is that I found that I was the helper but I found
11 that I felt really helpless.
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20 The event appears to throw the participant into uncharted territory, forcing a reconfiguration of the
21 relationship between the participant and her mother, a change in power dynamics that is viewed to
22 have disorientated the participant at first, a position loaded with meanings of finitude, forced by her
23 sister's actions, providing a threat toward the act of protection again, to be made vulnerable, yet this
24 time perceived as 'helping providing a sense of helplessness'. Both interviews reveal subjective value
25 structures of the participant and how experiences shape such structures. In the first interview this is
26 particularly manifest due to the Master's course providing a focus upon reflective practice. What
27 becomes apparent is how such reflection provides a tension for Participant J, how the course is
28 pushing for certain codes of values that at first challenge the participant's 'personal' set of values and
29 sense of 'authenticity'.
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40 When your personal and professional values start to conflict you start worrying about where
41 you are going to get lost in being as you are now ... when is that point gonna be where I have
42 got to forget what my judgements are and what my instincts are? Are they gonna get
43 swallowed up ... that sort of taught me that meshing my professional and personal values
44 together so it is sort of continuous being and becoming, because it is forever evolving I think.
45 I was a bit worried that being a social worker I would have to lose some parts of myself but it
46 just sort of means it has got to be adapted differently.
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55 The duality of being/becoming, as well as self/other, is salient in such a reflection, where the
56 participant contemplates how the self is a moving projection and that a deep-rooted sense of self –
57 values - are adaptable and context dependent constituted by experiences with other, including the
58 other within self. This is further explored in the second interview where another two further
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3 paradoxes emerge, a challenge to dichotomous logic, where certainty can only be evoked via a sense
4 of uncertainty and how one has to become comfortable with such uncomfoting.
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10 ... professionalism and guidelines are a nice safety net for you, telling you what to do, it really
11 is not like that when you get into it, it is very much like a mixture of everything and if you don't
12 get the balance right you really will mess up ... and the welfare of the child that should be at
13 the front of your mind, am I thinking of the practice guidelines that is saying I should do it this
14 way, and then your values, you are like ' I am not treating a parent like an equal, valuing that
15 they are an independent person they have got a right to do this',, and there is no way you are
16 going to know what is the right thing to do, that is what I don't like as I would have said before
17 any of this [studying and working as a social worker] that I am a black and white person with
18 my values, with my judgement of saying that 'I did the right thing', yet it is very grey ... I don't
19 like not knowing I think that is why it is a benefit for me to learn because I like to know, I like
20 to be certain about things, or, I at least like to have the information there to make a judgment.
21 Social work is so grey there is no black and white there is no black and white what so ever ...
22 as long as you are certain that you are uncertain then you will be fine, because if you think
23 'yeah I know this I have done the right thing 100%' people will look at you and go 'hold on a
24 second' ... yeah you have to be uncertain and be comfortable with being uncertain.
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38 In the second interview opportunity was provided to consider how the participant has taken on-board
39 the researcher's deconstructive reading that occurred in the first. Participant J relishes this
40 opportunity and illustrates how she has utilised such knowledge to help her to read her own career
41 articulations and has also asserted her to suggest it may have other utility
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48 ... paradox with my sister's situation, being a helper but feeling helpless ... that has helped me
49 understand what has happened and how that happens, I think if you were ever going to use
50 it in therapy it would be the best thing ever as it helps people understand why they say what
51 they do and why they feel that way, I think it is necessary for research, academia, personal
52 life, relationships, everything.... I have really enjoyed it [the interview], it is good, it is
53 therapeutic, cathartic, yeah I have enjoyed it thank you
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Discussion and conclusion

The reflections above concentrate upon the enactment of care, via social work, providing a challenge to the yearning for certainty. The enactment of care is perceived to be difficult, where there are multiple perspectives to be read, where learning becomes a means of improving ones reading of enactment, yet learning is acknowledged as only providing a certainty of uncertainty, in-turn qualities to be able to feel comfortable with such uncomfortable situations. This resonates with Kafka's (1992) notions of 'before the law', where the participant, as practitioner, has to justify her enactment to a higher law, potentially herself, her profession, policy, her own assigned gateway to universal 'Law' to justify why she has done what she has done, how this relates to the tension and paradox of care as control, personal values as professional values as well as linking to the prominent duality of being and becoming - where there is an acknowledgment that protection becomes vulnerability and vulnerability becomes protection.

The authors have taken on-board the views of the participant, thus exposing the method of reflection aided by the lens of the life career, framed via the duality of being and becoming to evoke useful paradoxes, paradox as an analytical motif to aid reflective practice. The literature on reflective practice is peppered with models that evoke the user to follow a set formula, generally following a geometric symmetry, rarely, apart from aspects of critical reflection, taking into account power relations, context and temporality. It also espouses how moments of confusion, potentially of conceptual contradiction, startlement, are moments to focus reflection. This paper continues along this line of logic, that such moments provide a useful focus on reflection particularly if situated within the life career, where many interconnecting strands are enacted, framed via the duality of being and becoming, thus evoking paradox. The paper has highlighted that once reflected upon, prominent paradoxes can be found within career articulation, paradoxes of an enduring nature, in the case study presented 'protection as vulnerability'. Focusing upon this paradox allowed the participant to consider her personal value structure and how this had become influenced by her newly acquired professional values, how the self was lost, found, reconfigured and is reconfiguring. Such a journey allowed the participant to question enactment critically, to acknowledge that her perceived 'gift' of care giving is part of an emotional economy seeking a return, that such a return needs to be situated within a broader context, where policy, ethics and resources need to be contemplated. This provokes the uncertainty of professional practice, how she is to contemplate her own judgement against the back drop of professional values. Doing so she becomes comfortable being uncomfortable, which for her appears to be an important development.

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3 It is acknowledged here the limitations of this paper as it only concentrates upon 1 case
4 study that comes from a longitudinal project whose focus is not specifically upon reflective
5 practice. However, the authors feel this is a strength, how allowing space for individuals
6 to reflect broadly upon career and paradox has allowed powerful reflections to emerge.
7 Such reflections have clearly had an impact on the participant who eagerly takes on-board
8 learning from the research project, becomes a contributor of research yet at the same
9 time receives unplanned pedagogy. The authors feel that such an emergence is important
10 to share with the social work literature, with the anticipation that such learning could
11 inform social work research and pedagogy. What becomes apparent from a HE
12 pedagogical perspective is that many contemporary courses across the academy are
13 charged with an employability input. The argument here is that the approach espoused
14 above is one that can be in concert with employability pedagogy, yet, importantly, via a
15 critical lens that also connects with the main home study of the student, in this case social
16 work.
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