The self in social work

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

Context

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conceptions of the self

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The self in social work

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> 'Starting a professional doctorate, submitting an article define you and your worthiness within the [professional] community … [it] confirmed my role and identity'.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Social work education and experiential and reflective learning

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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