A Framework for Theory in Social Work

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Abstract

An important function of social work education is the exploration of assumptions.
The paper endeavours to assist the exploratory activity of practice teachers, stu-
dents and tutors in the face of an expanding and increasingly complex knowledge
base. It presents, first, a basic framework or cognitive map which helps to
organise many of the perspectives likely to be encountered on social work
courses. Building on this, the paper outlines four paradigms in social work,
characterising each in terms of its view of society, social problems and social work
aims. Finally, in a further illustration of the use of the framework, some represen-
tatives theories and paradigms are plotted onto the map.

Introduction

An important function of social work education at the qualifying level is, we
would argue, the exploration of assumptions: the assumptions which students and
others bring to practice; and the assumptions which are embedded in the theories
offered to practitioners. Responsibility for this function falls upon both tutors and
practice teachers. Such exploration should also be an objective of each student
embarking on qualifying training.

Our grounds for this position are twofold. First, we subscribe to the idea that
everyone perceives and orders his or her life on the basis of assumptions, often
deeply held, about the nature of human beings and of social life. These assump-
tions are not left at home when social workers come to work. On the contrary,
they are invoked by social workers' need to make sense of the distress they
encounter daily and by pressure to respond helpfully to this distress. Practice con-
fronts us with a task – the task of making sense. In making sense of situations we
impose ideas or constructs on those situations.[1] Thus, social workers' assump-
tions will shape both their perceptions of clients and their definitions of the
nature, sources and solutions of problems. There are no doubt limits to the degree
to which any of us can become aware of our assumptions, but we see it as one of
the tasks of social work education to pursue such awareness with students: hence,
the exploratory function.

Secondly, it has long been plain that there is no theoretical consensus in social
work. The absence of theoretical consensus disqualifies theoretical "training" or

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apprenticeship; instead the plurality of theories in contemporary social work and the conflicts between them necessitate "education" for students and, again, exploratory roles for the participants.[2] This sets a problematic agenda. The international growth of social science knowledge since the 1960's and 1970's has been reflected in great expansion of theoretical perspectives available to social work education. [3] The number, complexity and diffuseness of these perspectives and their variants have intensified a problem already familiar to social work educators: how to embody new material in the academic and practice curricula without either abandoning perspectives of established relevance or reducing new or existing materials to merely token levels.

Of course, this is not simply a technical and logistical issue to be solved by improved curriculum planning and longer courses, though each might help. It is also a question of the ideology and politics of social work education which define and mediate the shape and content of educational programmes. Nevertheless, there are very real questions of how we are to plan and organise material so that it becomes accessible, and how the theories and commonsense understandings employed by participants can be unravelled and made explicit.

Our own attempts to deal with these problems in teaching sociology to social work students at Chelsea College involved the use of "maps" developed first in organisational sociology. Our experience of this was reported in 1981 together with arguments for a theoretically informed sociology in social work education.[4] This mapping approach quickly established its value to us and to our students in exploring social theory and, later, in analysing case studies of practice. We became keen to investigate how it might be built more systematically into the wider academic and practice curriculum. It was at this point that, as part of Chelsea College's response to the Thatcher Government's education cuts, the department in which we taught was scheduled for closure. Circumstances since then have not permitted precisely the action-based development we had intended. Development has taken place, however, based upon our Chelsea experience, upon subsequent use of the material with social workers and other professional groups, and upon valuable comments from a range of colleagues. It is this further developed cognitive map or framework which will be discussed here. The aim is to assist the exploratory activity of practice teachers, tutors and students in the face of an expanding and increasingly complex knowledge base.

We hope to show that the framework in its two stages will accommodate many of the different perspectives likely to be encountered on social work courses or available to their planners.[5] A grasp of the framework should enable the practice teacher or tutor and student to ask pertinent questions about the student's practice and its relation to theory, even though the detail of a given theory or perspective under discussion is unfamiliar to one or the other. This does not mean that we are offering a substitute for particular theories; rather, a means of gaining access to them and to their potentialities and limitations. We shall present our material in three parts as follows:

1.   A Framework, Part I: Two Dimensions; Four Paradigms

This will set out, following Burrell and Morgan,[6] the basic dimensions of the framework and show how they can be used. We shall employ the term *paradigm* in the sense of a collection of theories and models having broadly the same theoretical and philosophical view of the world. Four paradigms will be identified. We define a *theory* as a systematic, explanatory account of the relationship between phenomena or events. A *model* is a description or construction of the elements of a phenomenon or social institution. Models, although descriptive, tend to contain implicit theoretical and philosophical assumptions.

2.   A Framework, Part II: Four Paradigms in Social Work

Building on Part 1, we shall identify in the social work and related literature four paradigms and characterise each one in terms of its view of society, social problems and social work aims (see Fig.3).

3.   Locating Theories in the Framework

The final section attempts a further illustration of the usefulness of the framework. We have plotted the positions of some representative theories and paradigms onto the map (see Fig. 4).

1.   A Framework, Part 1: Two Dimensions; Four Paradigms

When a social worker makes sense of a problem or issue he or she also makes certain assumptions. These root assumptions can be analysed. They also combine with other assumptions into 'packages' that constitute distinctive theoretical positions. Let us begin by building a picture of these assumptions. We can then look at the different packages they form.

Take two accounts of parental injury to a child. In one account the injury is attributed to a developmental defect in the personality of the father. Here a degree of determinism is implicit. The act arose from an internal, unconscious, psychopathological cause. In the other account the injury is explained with reference to a father who, finding his child persistently difficult, *chose* to strike him, causing injury. Here the account is voluntaristic, attributing choice and volition. These two positions may not be particularly earth-shattering or revelatory, yet *determinism* and *voluntarism* offer us two different *models of man* which have immediate implications for the apportionment of responsibility for an action. They also have implications for the questions that are asked about the event. In the voluntaristic account, the decision to strike the child is not in doubt but the questions arise, were the consequences for the child known in advance, was injury intended? Thus, these models of man, and the questions they generate have implications for social work action. In the first account, therapy might be recommended and possibly accompanied by separation of parent and child. In the second, there might be a recommendation for education of the parent on handling the child and on the susceptibility of children to injury, for prosecution of the

parent, for separation of parent and child or some combination of these measures.

Suppose now that the case is passed to a practice teacher and her student. They hold divergent views on the *nature of social reality*. The student takes a *realist* view. He accepts that parents who injure their children constitute an objective, psycho-social type in the population. The practice teacher takes a *nominalist* position. To her, reality is a social construction. Social problems are socially created phenomena. She does not deny that some children are seriously mistreated or that they should be protected. However, she points out that what are defined as child abuse and its causes are the products of the activities of a range of interested groups including her own agency. How abuse is defined (direct physical injury, failure to thrive, abandonment, emotional abuse) and the methods of detection, determine its extent.[7] Moreover, boundaries within a particular definition are themselves ill-defined. In the area of physical punishment, for example, striking a child may be defined as socially approved necessary discipline. It is not unknown for courts to endorse a parent's right to strike a child with a leather belt, and school-teachers are still permitted to cane pupils. Meanwhile, social and economic policies which deny children proper material and educational provision and future jobs are not defined as abuse. The definitions of abuse will shape views of its origins and of policies required to deal with it.

Both student and practice teacher agree that intervention is required. Their preferred approaches to the man reflect different views about the *forms of knowledge* one can obtain. The student takes a *positivist* approach to knowledge. Like the natural scientist, he will seek objective causes. He believes that by investigating the man's history he will be able to unearth the specific events that produced the deficits and distortion in the man's personality. Consistent with this, the student will seek to identify characteristics in the man and his situation that have been shown by some research to be associated with child abuse like lower socio-economic status, depression, post-conception marriage and youthful parenthood.[8] The causal explanations used by the student are quite independent of the father's own explanation. Whether or not the man recognises the relevance of psycho-social causes of his behaviour does not affect their validity.

The practice teacher takes an *anti-positivist* approach and relies for her understanding upon the father's account, that is upon the meaning to him of the event, the circumstances surrounding it, and its consequences. Unlike the student, she does not seek evidence of objective causal links which determine behaviour. Her perspective emphasises close contact with the father and an attempt to understand the everyday experience of his life.

To summarise, the two contrasting perspectives on this case represent different *philosophical* positions (see Fig. 1). It is less important to memorise the terminology, though it does offer a useful shorthand, than to grasp the assumptions it represents. On the one hand we have the *subjective* philosophy of the practice teacher (voluntarism, nominalism, anti-positivism). On the other we have the *objective* philosophy of the student (determinism, realism, positivism).[9]

Figure 1

Philosophical Positions

SUBJECTIVE _____ OBJECTIVE

Voluntarism	Determinism
Nominalism	Realism
Anti-positivism	Positivism
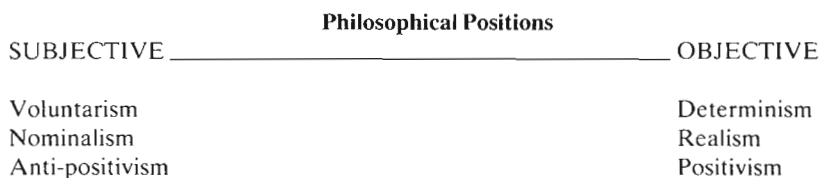
Let us now turn briefly to a second dimension. This involves alternative sets of assumptions about our society and the functions of institutions like the social services. At one end of this *theoretical* dimension are assumptions associated with theories of *radical change*. At the other, are assumptions associated with theories of *regulation*. Theories of Regulation assume that, for example, we live in a predominantly stable, integrated and cohesive society; that there is a consensus on rules and objectives; that behaviour should be regulated in accord with the prevailing social rules; that there exist social institutions to satisfy the needs of individuals and the social system (the family, education, welfare); and, finally, that integration and reintegration into society are prime objectives.
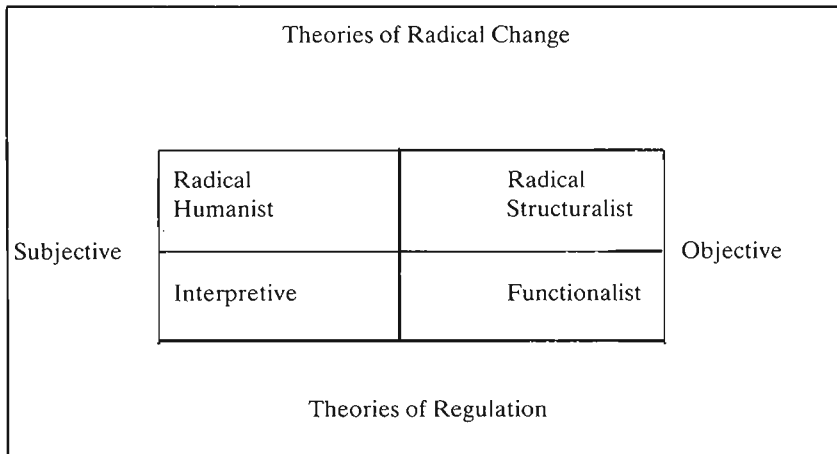
Views related to theories of Radical Change are: our society has an inherent tendency to instability and change; it contains inherent contradictions (for example between capital and labour); the ideas, rules and objectives of some groups dominate others; radical change of prevailing rules and structures is necessary; deprivation and alienation are widespread; emancipation is a prime objective.

The two dimensions (Subjective-Objective, Radical Change-Regulation) have been combined as horizontal and vertical axes by Burrell and Morgan to create a map of four paradigms (Fig. 2). We have defined a paradigm as a collection of theories and models sharing broadly the same world view. Thus, in the framework, approaches which combine an Objectivist stance with assumptions from the Regulation pole occupy the Functionalist paradigm. Those combining Subjectivist with Radical Change assumptions are Radical Humanist, and so on.

We can use this framework in a two-directional analysis. First we can take a given theory, or package of philosophical and theoretical assumptions as we might think of it, and 'unpack' it. Thus a student and tutor or practice teacher, or indeed a group in 'supervision' or tutorial, can explore the implications jointly of a theory which is familiar initially to only one of them. Secondly, we can take the assumptions contained in social work with a given case, locate them on the philosophical and theoretical dimensions, and reveal the paradigm within which the work is being done. This may improve access to compatible theories, that is theories that occupy the same paradigm. It will also suggest paradigms that are being neglected or rejected. Again, analysis and discussion become possible for all parties since they now have before them a common analytical base.

Plainly, the framework involves simplification and when applied, reveals anomalies which we have described in our earlier paper. Within these limitations, however, we can take a stage further its potential usefulness. We can attempt to characterise paradigms in social work.

Figure 2

Theories of Radical Change		
Radical Humanist	Radical Structuralist	
Interpretive	Functionalist	
Theories of Regulation		

Subjective ... Objective

(Reproduced from Gibson Burrell & Gareth Morgan *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*, London, Heinemann, 1979, p.22).

2.   A Framework, Part II: Four Paradigms in Social Work

In Figure 3 are four paradigms in social work: Radical Social Work, Marxist Social Work, Traditional Social Work and Interactionist Social Work. They are based on the two intersecting dimensions of Regulation-Radical Change and Subjectivism-Objectivism and they approximate the four paradigms described earlier (see Figure 2). The social work paradigms are elaborated by the introduction of three elements:
i)   core view of society
ii)   principal sources of social problems
iii)   social work aims

Each element is then expressed in terms consistent with the broad theoretical and philosophical characteristics of the paradigms. This has led to some unavoidable abbreviation of a complex body of knowledge and we shall comment on this later.

Radical Social Work

This paradigm blends humanism with a political critique. It is concerned with the relationship between human consciousness and potential, on the one hand, and

modern social institutions or 'superstructures' on the other. Many of the perspectives in the paradigm refer to capitalism as the foundation upon which these superstructures stand but it is a defining feature of the paradigm that, unlike Marxist Social Work, concepts of the economic base, class conflict and contradiction occupy a background position. In some analyses within the paradigm capitalism has little place, attention being devoted instead to the processes through which corporate enterprises and state bureaucracies transform individual human needs into demands for the goods and services which these institutions supply.[10] In others, patriarchy is accorded significance alongside capitalism as an oppressive force.[11] The shared concerns of the paradigm, however, are forms of domination, deprivation, alienation, radical change and emancipation.

From the stance of the paradigm, domination is seen to be articulated through the family, welfare, education and the workplace where the importance of order, authority and discipline are taught and reinforced in us all.[12] It is expressed in the subordination of women, the pursuit of technological efficiency and the creation of false needs.[13] It is sustained by the claims of institutions to rationality and the standing of science[14] and by the very language we learn to speak.[15] People's views of the world and their 'vocabulary of possibilities', that is, what they regard as possible for themselves and others, are thus shaped. Concepts of normal and abnormal behaviour, health and illness, sexual roles and conduct, human needs, education, work, family and community life are supplied by a range of institutions which act as "vehicles of cognitive domination"[16]. The result is a proliferation of distortions in social and economic life in which, for example, people come to confuse teaching with learning, medical treatment with health, conformity with maturity, marriage with adult fulfilment and employment with productive life.[17] They become trapped within a world of defined possibilities and constraints and, having accepted them, recreate and sustain them day by day by their own active participation.[18] Personal and communal fulfilment are frustrated; alienation prevails.

The paradigm embraces strands of feminism[19] and sexual liberation[20] and is informed by critiques of delinquency programmes,[21] education,[22] racism,[23] work,[24] the family,[25] the professions,[26] especially medicine and psychiatry,[27] and their professional ideologies.[28] It promotes a critical approach, discouraging the passive consumption of goods, ideas and services defined by others, and drawing attention to the power dimension in sexual, social, work and professional relationships. Definitions which categorise and constrain people are held to permeate our social institutions – like the stereotype of old age as a state of apolitical, asexual, dependent disengagement – and must be challenged at the personal and institutional levels.[29] At the same time, the perspectives of the (so-called) clients themselves must be paid careful attention.[30]

Mutual aid and self-discovery are encouraged in the paradigm;[31] professionalism and social distance between helper and helped are reduced to the minimum.[32] Co-operative, non-hierarchical forms of work, problem-solving and domestic life are fostered.[33] Social workers are encouraged to seek strength from tackling issues collectively as feminists have done. One way is the development through grassroots unionisation of a power base to challenge social deprivation

and oppressive public policies."[34] Diversity is celebrated [35] and critical attention is directed from deviants to the social control systems that deal with them.[36]

Social workers should resist becoming defined as either revolutionaries or reformists. The former leads to powerlessness as the establishment defines the worker as irrelevant or too dangerous to employ. The latter results in incorporation and excludes radicalism. Furthermore, the revolutionary feels compromised by working for short-term goals, while the reformist may find it difficult to do anything else. The alternative is to stay "unfinished",[37] to occupy the ambiguous ground which permits work on short-term humanitarian changes while retaining a vision of and commitment to long-term change.

Marxist Social Work

The core view of society in this paradigm is of fundamental conflict and contradiction arising from the capitalist economic base. Conflict is created by the exploitation of a work force which is obliged to sell its labour power (or capacity to work) but which receives in wages only part of the wealth or value it creates. Contradiction is rooted in the dependency of the employer on an exploited labour force whose attempts to improve wages and conditions threaten the surplus which profitability and new investment require. A powerful counter threat facing the work force is unemployment. The resulting picture of a capitalist class and a working class is complicated in the contemporary economy by the presence of large numbers of manual, clerical and professional personnel employed in commerce and state organisations and services. What is their class relationship to the other two? And what is their role in the capitalist economy?

The first question remains a subject of debate, [38] though some versions see all people who sell their labour power as part of the working class.[39] The second question is resolved with less dispute by reference to three processes necessary to capitalism: appropriation, realisation and reproduction.[40] There is no space to discuss the first two, but the third is especially relevant to employees of the state. The state's primary function is continually to "reproduce the conditions within which capitalist accumulation can take place."[41] It performs this through two key *reproductive* roles. The first is to ensure a relatively healthy, educated, mobile and disciplined labour force. The second is to promote attitudes to work, social responsibility, authority and the definition of roles which are compatible with capitalist relations and accumulation. Related to this is the task of securing in the population acquiescence to or support for the unequal structures of power, wealth and opportunity typical of capitalism.

These functions are served by a range of institutions which include the legal system and police, the mass media, the agencies of the welfare state and the family. In the paradigm these institutions are not usually seen as the passive tools of the ruling class, despite the view that the dominant factor in shaping state policies is the long-run interest of the ruling class.[42] With rare exceptions, [43] they are in fact attributed a degree of autonomy from capitalism.[44] Social work action, therefore, can reasonably hope to do more than merely reinforce the structures of capitalism and their associated social problems.

These problems arise from the markets in labour and land and from poor working conditions. They also stem from the exploitation of women who are being excluded from declining labour markets and channelled ever more firmly into domestic roles which are intended to carry the burden of social care from which the state is attempting progressively to withdraw.[45] Other problems are rooted in inadequate health care,[46] irrelevant, dead-end education,[47] racism,[48] unemployment and poverty among both waged and unwaged people. To the extent that there is a consensus, it is a managed one. Groups that fall outside the managed consensus have to be dealt with. The results are police operations in inner cities and against trade union pickets; media campaigns which denigrate recipients of state benefits as "scroungers" and strikers as "the enemy within"; and various forms of social and economic exclusion of law-breakers and other social deviants. All these "solutions" produce further problems and distress.

The scope of Marxist Social Work action is constrained by the dependency of social workers, like other workers, on their jobs: to threaten the state is to risk one's job.[49] Collectivist methods thus become both a theoretical and a practical necessity: theoretically because they express recognition of shared interest as state employees; practically because unity provides strength and resistance which isolated individuals dealing alone with a hostile state cannot muster. Collectivism includes trades unionism,[50] though there are criticisms within the paradigm of the centralised structures of some unions, their narrow concern with pay bargaining and of strike methods which damage the vulnerable working class (the clients). Collectivist methods also refer to the promotion of collective action among different working class groups.[51]

Marxist Social Work, in common with other paradigms, aims to relieve distress by assisting access to material aid and by providing psychological support. It has only recently begun to formulate a psychological theory and rejects theories that fail to recognise the material source or component of problems.[52] Problems of employees are examined for their source in working conditions or hierarchical, centralised structures; family problems are explored for their links with women's domestic dependency or the pressure on men to be dedicated, successful family breadwinners; school attendance problems are considered in terms of the preoccupation of the school system with control rather than education; problems of the elderly are related to the State's neglect of a group that makes little recognisable contribution to production and reproduction, and which is a drain upon capitalism, not a current or future resource.[53] Great emphasis is placed on promoting among clients and welfare colleagues these alternatives to conventional analysis of problems and upon employing them to transcend the occupational, racial and sexual divisions that separate the working class. One of the contradictions of the capitalist welfare state is that it finds itself employing personnel who are able to exploit its caring functions for the benefit of the working class while mounting a critique of the state's forms of control. A major aim is to work for progressive change, but day to day action is as likely to take the form of scepticism and resistance combined with tactical concessions.[54]

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Figure 3.

Paradigms in Social Work

	RADICAL SOCIAL WORK — Radical Change — MARXIST SOCIAL WORK	
CORE VIEW OF SOCIETY	Society is characterised by the political and ideological domination of its members by the socially legitimate institutions of the state, business corporations, the professions, bureaucracies, science, work and the family.	Society is characterised by fundamental conflicts and contradictions arising from capitalist economic structures which give disparate power, wealth and opportunity to different classes and determine broadly the form of social institutions and the state.
PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS	The order defined by these institutions devalues, discredits or invalidates alternatives. It affects human consciousness, relationships and potential, producing and perpetuating deprivation, alienation and the frustration of full personal and communal fulfilment.	The demands of production and the reproduction of the conditions for capital accumulation; the associated market in labour, unemployment and poverty, and exploitation in work and domestic life; markets in land, inequalities in education and health care; and the control, marginalisation and exclusion of groups falling outside the managed consensus.
SOCIAL WORK AIMS	Discourage passive consumption of goods, services and ideas defined and controlled by others; reveal and challenge "the political" in relationships; promote mutual aid and self-discovery; foster new personal, social, organisational and economic networks and celebrate and authenticate diversity; change social control systems not so-called deviants.	Relieve distress; raise awareness in oneself, clients and fellow workers of the structural sources of problems; promote solidarity across racial, sexual and occupational divisions; exploit caring functions to benefit clients but criticise forms of control; work for change and resist erosion of services.

Subjective ——————————————————————— Objective

CORE VIEW OF SOCIETY	Social life is meaningful and proceeds on the basis of the subjective interpretations of participants. Social structures, institutions, roles, identities and concepts of normality are socially created, sustained and changed by people through their interactions with one another.	Enduring societies, which may be analogous to biological systems, have evolved an integrated equilibrium founded on a broadly common value system, structures that sustain the functioning of the whole, and adaptibility to change.
PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS	Meanings and definitions that people give to their actions or identities are disrupted by events, or reinterpreted or so labelled by others that disorganised or deviant roles, identities and careers are created.	Personal misfortune; personal pathology; failed, incomplete or inappropriate socialisation; pathological or maladaptive responses to social and technical change producing dysfunctions in role performance or in the family, group sub-culture, community or organisation.
SOCIAL WORK AIMS	Explore the meanings of problems and events to all relevant parties; improve communication; counsel and help reconstruct identities; represent unheard or illexpressed versions; break-down and reframe accounts; identify, negotiate with or challenge key labellers; relabel, delabel and correct stereotypes; interrupt and divert deviant careers.	Assist, treat, counsel, educate, resocialise, reform or constrain to relieve distress, promote psychosocial health, protect others, maintain order and reinforce social values; foster people's use, and the functioning, of existing systems; promote reintegration and adaptive change of people and systems.

INTERACTIONIST SOCIAL WORK — Regulation — TRADITIONAL SOCIAL WORK

Traditional Social Work

The Traditional Social Work paradigm combines two preponderant influences: first, the major strands of positive (that is, objective) science from psychology and sociology and, secondly, a view of the broad economic and social order which treats this order either as unproblematic or as requiring, and susceptible to, reform through the parliamentary process. The paradigm allows that some social problems have structural roots but emphasises that many others arise from misfortune, human tragedy and personal inadequacy, adding that these will appear in any foreseeable society, capitalist or otherwise.

During the 1970's, drawing on general systems theory and social work's earlier and more implicit attachment to sociological functionalism,[55] the dominant metaphor of the paradigm became "the system",[56] sometimes a biological or ecological system.[57] Just as the cells and organs of the human body have developed and exist to maintain it, so, the paradigm broadly assumes, society has become differentiated into levels, structures and institutions that sustain the functioning of the whole.[58] The modern nuclear family and education system, for example, play central functions in transmitting the norms and values of society to the young and of preparing them to play the adult roles required by society. People become distributed at different hierarchical levels in social and organisational life according to their capacity to contribute, and are rewarded according to the social necessity and scarcity of their skills.[59]

Social work is part of this evolution of structures. It represents society's self-maintenance function in its care and control of those in need or trouble and in its promotion of unity and integration.[60] Trouble, or social deviance, tends to be treated as an objective category, a social fact. Society is also spoken of as a thing in itself which has needs and which can bestow on social workers and others the authority to act on its behalf.[61] In this consensual view, institutions like welfare are expressions of legitimate and democratic, if not always efficient, parliamentary process.[62] The overriding integrity of this process must be sustained by acceptance of governmental and parliamentary authority or by pressure for reform through established,[63] or newly articulated,[64] mechanisms of democracy. Meanwhile, the official will is equivalent to the societal will.

One element of the paradigm is behaviourism which applies principles from experimental psychology to the modification of observable problem behaviour.[65] It has an objectivist stance and, neglecting structure, implies assent to the status quo. Another element is psychoanalysis which seeks the cause of problems in the psychopathology of individuals and groups.[66] Its implicit medical model entails diagnosis and treatment with reference to an idea of healthy as opposed to pathological behaviour or relationships. These metaphors recur throughout the paradigm,[67] though frequently without any detailed theoretical account of psychoanalysis itself.

The 'psycho-social model' promotes psychoanalytic casework while attending to the environmental as well as the psychological roots of problems. In the event, the 'environment' side of the equation rapidly loses ground to the more clearly formulated analysis based in Freudian personality theory.[68] A subsequent version

of 'psycho-social intervention' blends concepts and techniques from behaviourism and post-Freudian ego-psychology.[69] The 'problem-solving model' has also drawn heavily on Freudian concepts and takes the level of functioning of the personality as the chief determinant of an individual's effectiveness in promoting his or her own well-being.[70] It has been elaborated into a consideration of role definitions, role expectations and role conflict.[71]

In the foregoing perspectives, and others developed from them, positivist (or objectivist) philosophies are combined with acceptance of structures like the family and established authority relations, and with attempts to reintegrate people into these structures.[72] In some formulations, psychoanalysis is joined with systems theory to understand and treat families or organisations.[73] Other perspectives take interactions between people and systems in the social environment as the defining focus of social work practice.[74]

Given the importance in the paradigm of socialisation and social roles, it follows that incomplete socialisation is defined as a source of problems. Thus failure to perform the roles of pupil, employer, spouse, parent or responsible, law-abiding citizen may be seen as the result of defects in the process of learning and internalising the necessary rules, values, skills and forms of conduct.[75] These inadequacies may be held to pass from one generation to the next [76] and even to characterise whole communities.[77] A variant analysis examines deviant behaviour as a result of socialisation into the rules and values of a deviant sub-culture.[78]

If undersocialisation and inappropriate socialisation can produce problems so, in certain circumstances, might successful socialisation. A society which successfully instils a desire for job success and material wealth when technological and economic change reduce jobs and available resources, is likely to face frustration, tension and deviance, in short "dysfunction"

Adaptation to change – physical, relation, social and material – is a recurrent theme in the paradigm.[79] These events are frequently understood by using concepts from psychoanalysis, psycho-social theory, role theory and crisis theory.[80] Technological change, specialisation and increasing complexity of organisations, especially government organisation, are linked to the frustration, confusion and anger of local populations.[81] There are echoes here of the Radical paradigm but the distinctive Traditional response attempts to create mechanisms for beneficial *participation* and for *adaptation* of existing structures.

The social work aims of the paradigm are to assist, treat, counsel, advise, resocialise, or constrain, [82] to relieve distress, promote social and psychological health, protect others, adjust expectations, foster integration, maintain order and reinforce social values. The effective use of available services is encouraged; inefficient services are criticised and improvements proposed.[83] However, social workers who are unable to resolve differences with their agencies by using all available channels, must accept the agency decisions or leave.[84] Material hardship is recognised, as is shortage in services and material aid. These may be accepted as a regrettable lack of available resources determined by uncontrollable economic factors operating upon a democratically elected government. Alter-

natively, they may be protested against personally or via a formal pressure group, either as individual injustice or dysfunction in the system.

Interactionist Social Work[85]

The multiple influences upon this paradigm are unified by their focus on the capacity of people to 'act' rather than simply to behave, and on their ability to attribute meaning to actions and situations. [86] Taking action involves defining the situation. Action is social in that it takes account of, that is *interprets*, what others say and do.[87] When people act together on the basis of a definition of the situation they are said to be socially constructing and sustaining that segment of reality.
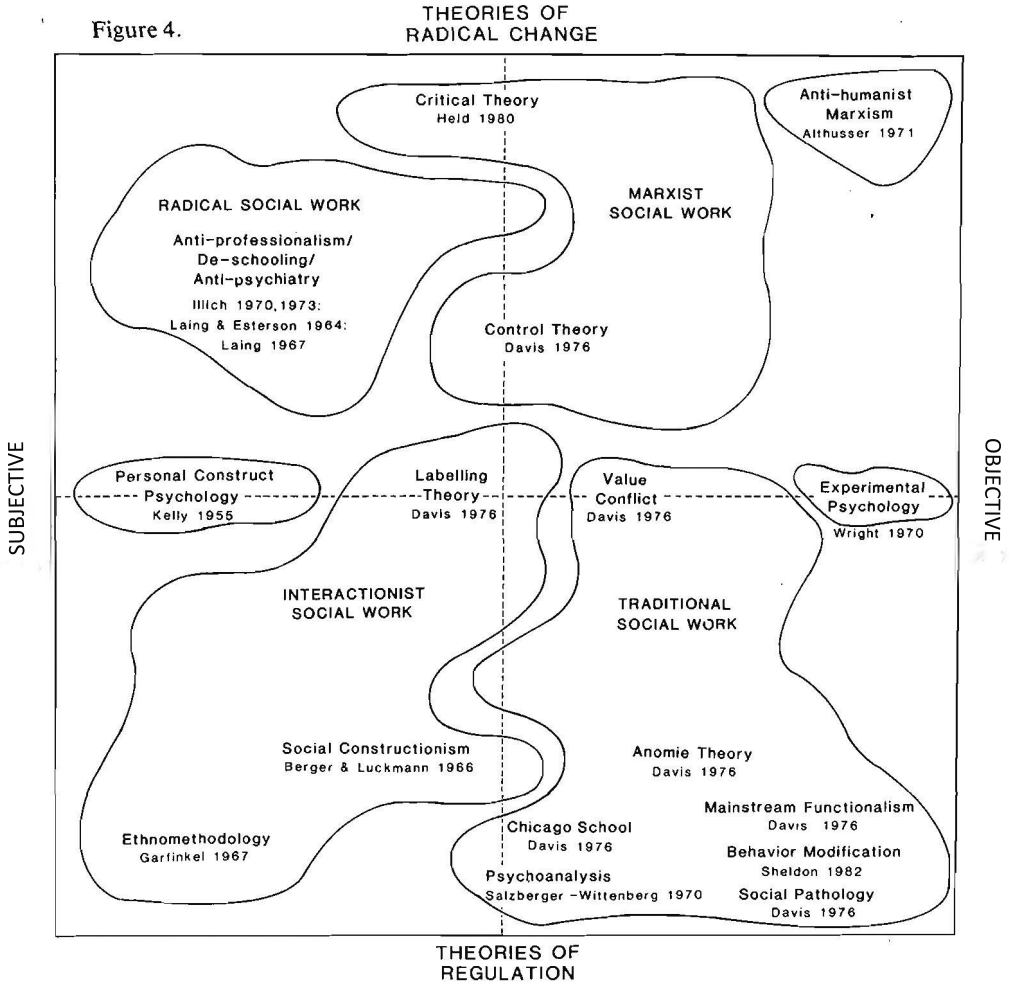
This process does not occur in a social vacuum. Each of us through our biographical situation draws on a *social* "stock of knowledge" to build a fund of *personal* knowledge which enables us to make sense of what others do[88]. In face to face relationships we, the participants, constantly revise and enlarge our knowledge of one another,[89] but our lives also involve us in a vast number of other relationships of varying degrees of distance and anonymity (with neighbours, public officials, political representatives). We engage in these relationships by using 'typifications'. These typifications enable us to sum up the type of person we are dealing with. They permit us to characterise and make sense of the actions, motives and intentions of the people involved and to shape our own actions. These people, like us, have repertoires of typifications in their personal stock of knowledge, though in neither case do typifications represent detailed scripts of how to act; social interaction always involves interpretation and a degree of unpredictability. However, if our respective typifications are reciprocal, interaction and the view of reality it embodies will be sustained. If this is repeated regularly elsewhere, the mutual expectations become institutionalised and the social roles take on an objective quality. This conceals the fact that they are actually being continuously confirmed in the actions of the people involved.[90] Society is thus a social construction, even though members may perceive it as objective reality. Meanings, however, are not only socially sustained, they are also socially changed. There exist "competing systems of interpretation".[91] Existing meanings can be disrupted and prevailing definitions challenged, but "he who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definition."[92]

The question of power has entered the analysis in this quotation and we might expect a theory of society to follow. However, while the subjectivist philosophy of science is clearly evident in work in this paradigm,[93] a theory of society is more hidden. Critiques of social structures and social agencies are often available to practitioners in the 'underdog sociology' of interactionism,[94] but are seldom fully developed in the studies themselves.

The paradigm rejects many of the theoretical assumptions of Functionalism, treating rules as problematic, objectives as negotiated, and order as socially constructed and subject to change.[95] Social service organisations, for example, should not be reified, that is they should not be treated as material things which might have needs or aims. They should be seen as arenas of intersecting interests

where social problems are defined, negotiated and processed by the people – staff, clients, politicians – who constitute them. [96] Analysis halts at this middle range, however, and the broad social and economic order is not usually treated as problematic. A broadly pluralist view which lends assent to theories of regulation seems implicit. [97]

Figure 4.

THEORIES OF
RADICAL CHANGE

Critical Theory
Held 1980

Anti–humanist
Marxism
Althusser 1971

RADICAL SOCIAL WORK

Anti-professionalism/
De-schooling/
Anti-psychiatry

Illich 1970,1973;
Laing & Esterson 1964;
Laing 1967

MARXIST
SOCIAL WORK

Control Theory
Davis 1976

SUBJECTIVE

Personal Construct
Psychology
Kelly 1955

Labelling
Theory
Davis 1976

Value
Conflict
Davis 1976

Experimental
Psychology
Wright 1970

OBJECTIVE

INTERACTIONIST
SOCIAL WORK

TRADITIONAL
SOCIAL WORK

Social Constructionism
Berger & Luckmann 1966

Anomie Theory
Davis 1976

Mainstream Functionalism
Davis 1976

Ethnomethodology
Garfinkel 1967

Chicago School
Davis 1976

Psychoanalysis
Salzberger –Wittenberg 1970

Behavior Modification
Sheldon 1982

Social Pathology
Davis 1976

THEORIES OF
REGULATION

The capacity of people to reflect upon and negotiate their way through social encounters is understood, in one major strand of the paradigm, as dependent upon a concept of self. [98] One's self-view and definition of one's personal world are based and sustained in certain sets of key relationships. [99] The loss or disruption of these relationships through bereavement, separation or other misfortune can have a serious impact on a person's taken-for-granted reality, producing disorientation and distress. [100]

The notion of a socially constructed self-identity is also significant in the interactionist approach to mental illness, mental handicap, crime, the use of hard drugs, child abuse and other social problems which are expressed collectively, of course, as 'deviance'. The approach concentrates on the process by which people are labelled as deviant, their reactions to the label, and the reactions of the label-ler and others. In this analysis, "social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance."[101]

Thus, mental illness is not a disease but a label attached to behaviour which vio-lates certain social or legal rules.[102] Admission to psychiatric hospital is not so much evidence of illness but of 'contingencies' which have led to this particular solution (i.e. admission) to rule breaking behaviour.[103] Social contol agencies and their staff (police, social workers, psychiatrists) are key gatekeepers in shaping who is defined as deviant and, along with the mass media, contribute to know-ledge (typifications) about deviant acts and people.[104] The actions of these 'moral entrepreneurs'[105] may have major implications for the labelled person's future social participation and self-image.[106] Labelling may propel the person into a deviant 'career'[107] in which a new master status like 'mental patient' or 'thief'[108] replaces that of plumber or doctor. He or she may as a consequence be treated as if generally deviant and be excluded from the family, social and work activities that have been part of normal life. This exclusion and the spoiled or stigmatised identity of labelled people[109] restrict their avenues of action and may channel them into the company of those most likely to supply acceptance, that is other deviants.[110] Once labelled, they will find others organising responses to them in terms of the label and be expected to respond accordingly.[111] Gradually, a com-plex social process produces a redefinition of self, a reorganisation of behaviour in accordance with the deviant identity.[112] Those who resist the process and attempt to 'pass' as non-deviant carry the anxiety of being found out. Others, labelled as potential deviants (for example, at risk of being a child abuser)[113] find that in order to have the label removed they must co-operate with social control agencies and thereby risk the stigma that mere association may bring.

The social work aims of the paradigm begin by exploring the meanings of the problem or event to the key participants, especially the labelled and labelling per-sons.[114] The pressures and influences on the rule enforcers in the control agencies are to be understood.[115] These influences include the ideologies and orientations of social workers, their assumptions and justifications for their actions, the techniques they use to control their work and make it more tolerable, and the negotiations they engage in with other professions and clients.[116] Differing expec-tations and problem definitions[117] should be clarified, communication improved, confusion reduced.[118] Clients' unheard or ill-expressed versions of problems should be represented. Key labellers should be identified; dubious, premature or harmful labels challenged; and problem definitions renegotiated.[119] Counselling and group methods should be considered, to provide support, relief of distress, help with the rediscovery of lost meaning and reconstruction of roles and iden-tities.[120] Attempts should be made to interrupt or divert deviant careers. Official documents which may perpetuate stereotypical imagery should be treated with great caution. Finally, clients and those close to them should be helped to prepare

for the impact of stigma[121] and attempts should be made to change the public image of stigmatised groups.[122]

Comments on the Paradigms

We have presented the paradigms without critiques, though criticism is not hard to find. After all, logically, a theory characteristic of one paradigm is vulnerable to accusations that it lacks some of the features of the others. This is part of the critical power of the framework. The critical interplay between the paradigms does not, however, arise simply from the way the framework is constructed. That is to say, we believe the paradigm framework actually characterises positions which social work teachers, students and practitioners take on, argue and defend. For example, the Traditional paradigm is criticised by Interactionists for its scientism, for its mistaken assumption that deviance exists objectively in a person and for its relegation of meaning.

The Radical Social Work paradigm approves the subjectivism of Interactionist Social Work but is dissatisfied with its lack of structural critique. Interactionism falls, frequently by default, into the regulatory stance of the Traditional paradigm. The Radical paradigm itself, according to the Marxist perspective, moves in the right direction but remains limited. Its subjectivist concerns and its focus on 'superstructures' lead to a failure to see the objective economic roots of institutions and social problems. Traditional Social Work on the other hand, says Marxism, is predicated on false assumptions of consensus and common interests, upon a mistakenly apolitical reading of social history, and upon an endorsement of the functional necessity of political and economic structures that, at worst, renders Traditionalists mere servants of power.

The Traditional paradigm attacks the social and moral relativism of Interactionism. Not all acts are the same, and there is widespread agreement that some must be controlled. Moreover, the micro-theory of the Interactionist paradigm gives no explanation of the structure and functions of our social institutions. The Marxist paradigm, admit most Traditionalists, does give such an explanation but attributes far too much significance to the economic base and to an outdated concept of class. Furthermore, say the Traditionalists, Marxist Social Work (and Radical Social Work) is over-politicised. Invoking the division of labour, some Traditionalists argue that therapists are properly concerned with therapy while others can get on with acting politically[123]. Radical and Marxist paradigms counter that no social work practice is politically neutral. All interventions are inherently political ..... and so on.

We noted earlier that the elaboration of the framework of social work paradigms has led to unavoidable abbreviation of a complex body of knowledge. One of our aims has been to offer a useful way of organising theoretical material already well-known to readers. A further aim is to introduce material to readers unfamiliar with a particular paradigm. With the latter aim in mind, we have tried not to load the paper with unexplained theoretical language. However, pressure on space has led us to rely more than we intended on technical shorthand to

express meanings that are difficult to convey economically in other ways. This seems less serious when it is remembered that we are striving to offer educational and analytical aids, not a self-contained substitute for other written sources or dialogue between students, tutors and practice teachers. As for the integrity of the material, condensed summaries can never do justice either to the range and subtlety of perspectives or to internal differences within a paradigm.[124] A more fundamental limitation lies in the conceptual structure of the framework which attempts to assimilate all varieties of theory to two dimensions (Radical Change-Regulation; Subjective-Objective) when other dimensions might more effectively capture the quality of a given perspective. It is essential therefore to note other classifications of perspectives in social work and related disciplines.[125]

We do not think of paradigms as necessarily mutually exclusive[126] and there are, for example, attempts at integrating subjectivism and radicalism that go beyond the Radical Humanist (Figure 2) and Radical Social Work Paradigms (Figure 3).[127] Nevertheless, the paradigms do hang together with a degree of logical weight that may make it difficult to occupy more than one at a time without some contradiction. This is why student and practice teacher or tutor can look at the elements of a particular social work paradigm and say to each other: "if you propose intervention x, does it imply that you view society as y and the source of the problem as z?" Each might then draw attention to paradigms not yet applied to the situation in hand or explore continuities in otherwise different paradigms.[128] At this point, we believe that participants have available the resources for broadly informed theoretical appraisal of their social work practice.

Our application of the original Burrell and Morgan framework gave us a means of organising and teaching complex material in a manageable way. A particular advantage was that, as an initial base for syllabus design, it offered us a more *inclusive* approach than other methods we had tried. Those methods, which organise a body of knowledge in a linear, incremental or chronological manner, tend to face the course planners with immediate questions of selection or *exclusion*. Similar decisions confronted us eventually, of course, and there is inherent exclusion by the framework itself of perspectives which exist outside its pre-given discourse. Nevertheless, it did enable us to supply students with our best available map of the territory. Thereafter, changes of direction, the relation of one point to others, and the omission and inclusion of particular destinations became visible to all concerned. It seems to us that the framework of social work paradigms has similar advantages and might prove correspondingly fruitful in curriculum design. Failing that, its potential remains as an analytical device in the examination and comparison of course content and of forms of social work practice. It is, moreover, a short step from asking *what* assumptions, policies and practices are being employed, to asking *why*? A whole range of critical exploration then opens up concerning the dominance and subordination of different forms of knowledge and practice in courses and agencies.

3.   Locating Theories in the Framework

Finally, in Figure 4 the positions of some representative theories or bodies of

knowledge used in social work, including the four social work paradigms, have been plotted onto the paradigm map. To approximate more closely the actual theoretical landscape we have shown the theoretical territories crossing the boundaries between regions. Seven of the positions have been identified as theoretical schools of deviance by Nanette Davis.[129] Other positions have been added to balance coverage and are referenced in widely available literature.[130]

Theorists vary in the extent to which they make explicit or otherwise reveal their theoretical and philosophical assumptions. Theorists also shift position over time. For these reasons alone, the plotted positions remain approximations. They reflect, at best, *emphasis* in the bodies of knowledge, and are open to argument. We have not provided notes on the theories or on our reasons for their location. Notes on the theories would be necessary if we intended to be the source of knowledge about them, but we do not. Available written sources [131] and course teachers make a far better job of this than we could manage here. As for the location of the theories on the map, we have applied the citeria already discussed in Sections 1 and 2 of this paper. We offer Fig. 4 as a further example of how the framework may be used: to plot the characteristics of theories and their approximate relation to one another. Our aim is not to convince readers that the plotted positions are unarguably correct, though we could defend them. We should rather be contradicted on the grounds of the reader's examination and knowledge of the work concerned. That would mean the framework was being used as an exploratory tool, that is, heuristically, as well as a map of a somewhat shifting theoretical landscape. If the framework in its different forms actually works, readers can seek, identify, dismantle, reassemble and reallocate theories and perspectives for themselves.[132] They will also identify perspectives which the paradigms do not satisfactorily encompass. The critical application of the framework reveals its strengths and limitations. It also leads, we think, to the major challenge for theory in social work: the elaboration of an approach which truly transcends the existing paradigms. We believe the best prospect of this is to be found in collaboration between social work educators and practitioners who share a commitment to theoretically aware practice. We hope this paper may contribute to that goal.

Notes and References

1.　Note that this social constructionist statement locates an element of our own philosophical position.
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