The ‘self’ and ‘use of self’ in social work: a contribution to the development of a coherent theoretical framework

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Abstract
This paper explores the ‘use of self’ in social work and what is meant when referring to the concept of a ‘self’. It begins by looking at infant psychological development and theories that attempt to explain how, as human beings, our unique self is formed and what factors play a part in this process. It considers whether experiences in infancy later shape who we are as people and professionals, and how we might come across to others. This first focus, which reflects a Western/Eurocentric perspective, explores three themes: the core, multiple, authentic, private, public, true and false features of the self; Bowlby’s concept of ‘internal working models’; and feminist writing on the gendered characteristics of the self. The paper then looks at coverage of the term use of self in selected social work publications some of which point to the absence of a coherent theoretical framework from which to teach, research and apply this subject in direct practice. It explores how this gap could be bridged by developing a conceptual framework that links the term use of self to the concept of internal working models; a gendered perspective; theories relating to nonverbal forms of communication; and the importance of self-awareness.

Keywords: use of self, feminism, self-awareness, internal working models, nonverbal communication

Introduction
Some social work publications on the subject ‘use of self’ sidestep what is meant by the term ‘self’ and how this ‘self’ comes into being. Yet without some understanding, it is not possible to identify which aspect of the ‘self’ is being referred to – or being ‘used’ – and why, or to develop a sound theoretical framework from which to understand and apply this subject in practice. To address this gap, this paper looks at theories relating to infant psychological development that describe how, as human beings, we come to acquire a ‘self’. It describes how we are shaped by the relationships we encounter in early infancy – and throughout the life span – and how these encounters lead to a ‘sense of self’ or a personal autobiographical history. The reason for concentrating on the development of the ‘self’ in infancy is to explore the extent to which early experiences influence who we are as people and professionals, and how our ‘use of self’ might come across to others. One way to understand how experiences become character-forming can be found in Bowlby’s conceptualisation of ‘internal working models’ which describes how relationship experiences inform the assumptions and expectations we make about ourselves, others, and the world we inhabit. An additional perspective on the character-forming nature of early experiences and social processes looks at the development of a ‘gendered self’ from a feminist perspective. (Supplementary material on the development of a ‘gendered’ self is can be found at the end of this paper. This addition will also be available in the BJSW online printed version). How these influential experiences come to represent ‘who we are’ can be found in the thoughts, feelings and behaviour, particularly in the nonverbal communication patterns that
we and others adopt. This paper suggests that linking the concept of internal working models with theories relating to nonverbal communication and the importance of self-awareness could provide a valuable contribution to any theoretical framework developed and the ‘use of self’ that we and others present.

The early development of the self
What is meant by the term ‘self’ is a subject that has attracted a range of different theories. They attempt to understand and explain how, as human beings, our unique self is formed or developed and what factors play a part in this process. Almost all contemporary writers in this field view human development in terms of genetic potential that is shaped by environmental experiences - environmental experiences that begin with the earliest infant-carer relationship and the quality of the contact or essential ‘bond’ that the infant establishes with the mother or primary caregivers. Without these early relationships, it is not possible for the self to come into being because, as Winnicott noted, ‘a baby cannot exist alone, but is essentially part of a relationship’ (1964, p. 88). This emphasis on relationships means that ‘our psychological development is thoroughly embedded in our social relationships’ (Howe, 1995, p. 16). This sociological perspective is evident in all human beings, including parents, and is represented in the internalisation of social systems, and the values and norms of society.

There is no agreement among authors writing in this field about when the ‘self’ or sense of self emerges in infancy, although several theories proliferate. One range of theories describe human development in terms of the ‘stages’ with some proposing that each stage should be completed, if not dismantled, before progressing to the next. Examples include: Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development; Piaget’s five stages of cognitive development; Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development; Freud’s six psychosexual stages of psychological development; Maslow’s eight stage hierarchy of needs; and Mahler’s three main stages in children’s development. The main difficulty with these conceptualisations is that they can fail to take full account of individual variations and the complex internal and external variables that lead to developmental stages or milestones being achieved. A different conceptualisation describes the development of the self not as distinct stages but as ‘sensitive periods of development’ (Sroufe, 1995, p. 158) or Bowlby’s ‘sensitive phases’. This describes human development in terms of patterns of behaviour, and the systems or ‘conditions, both internal and external to the organism, which govern the pattern’ (Bowlby, 1979, p. 30). The self that emerges is conceptualised by Bowlby in his ‘internal working models’, covered later. Stern also preferred a ‘phases’ perspective but one he conceptualised in terms of five ‘layers’ of which Stern considered the fifth ‘narrative self’ to be most important because narrations ‘become the official history of your life. They constitute your autobiography’ (Stern, 2000, p. xxiv). For these authors, it is the quality of adaptation and consistency in the infant-carer relationship and the way that reciprocal relationships are sustained by mutual participation that shape the ongoing development of the self and ‘ways-of-being-with-another’.

Attachment theory and the infant-carer relationship
Bowlby defined attachment theory as follows:

intimate attachments to other human beings are the hub around which a person’s life
revolves, not only when s/he is an infant or a toddler but throughout adolescence and the years of maturity as well and on to old age. (Bowlby, 1980, p. 442).

A key feature of this attachment process is the extent to which infants’ experiences of others come to shape their inner ‘representational’ world and how infants take in and store these experiences. It is the quality of this internalisation process that is central to the four attachment classifications: (1) secure attachment; (2) insecure attachment: avoidant; (3) insecure attachment: ambivalent; and (4) insecure: disorganised attachment. The original theories put forward by Bowlby and his colleagues have been advanced by several influential researchers to the point where, according to Schore, Bowlby’s work now occupies a dominant position in developmental psychology:

Bowlby’s attachment theory . . . represents the most successful integration of psychoanalysis and the biological sciences . . . His concepts now lie at the heart of developmental psychology, which is also currently intensively studying the long-enduring effects of early emotional development. (Schore, 2003b, p. 219)

For the self to emerge calls for a capacity for infants to build on their experiences with others because ‘we are wired neurologically to register our experience from moment to moment in our bodies and in our emotions’ (Gilligan and Richards, 2009, p. 195). For this registering to occur implies an innate ‘self-regulating organisation’ in infants but one where central importance is placed on the ‘caregiving system’ and the ‘caregiver’s synchronisation with the infant’ (Sroufe, 1995, p. 21). The psychoanalytically-oriented writers cited in this paper view the mother as central to an infant’s emotional development:

The child’s first relationship, the one with the mother, acts as a template, as it permanently moulds the individual’s capacities to enter into all later emotional relationships. These early experiences shape the development of a unique personality, its adaptive capacities as well as its vulnerabilities to and resistances against particular forms of future pathologies. Indeed, they profoundly influence the emergent organisation of an integrated system that is both stable and adaptable, and thereby the formation of the self (Schore, 1994, p. 3).

One reason put forward to support the unique position held by the mother is her biological tie to her infant during pregnancy but also in the weeks and months that follow. For example, breastfeeding mothers are known to produce milk at the sound of their infant crying. However, most authors acknowledge that caregivers can also provide an emotionally sensitive and responsive connection and a ‘secure base’ in ways that adapt to the developmental needs of the infant. What is important is the quality of the infant-caregiver relationship and caregiving system or ‘good-enough environment’ that is provided:

a good-enough environmental provision in the earliest phase enables the infant to begin to exist, to have experience, to build a personal ego, to ride instincts, and to meet with all the difficulties inherent in life. All this feels real to the infant who becomes able to have a self. (Winnicott, 1958, p. 304)

Two important changes, supported by research findings, are said to occur in these early phases of life that influence the development of other capacities. The first is the extent to which
infants, from an early age, are highly active in eliciting the kind of care and experience that they are seeking (Howe, 2008, p. 52). This early sense of ‘self-agency’ (Stern, 1985, p. 71), and motivation to evoke and shape the nurturing and responsive behaviour of others is thought to be a basis from which an ongoing sense of agency and self-confidence, and trust in others is established (Sroufe, 1995, p. 200). The second change relates to the ‘separation–individuation phase’ (Mahler et al., 1975) located at around six months of age. For some writers, this marks the point when an infant begins to establish a firm sense of separation and differentiation from the mother or caregiver and the development of a separate, ‘individuated’, unique self or personhood. Through the caregiver’s ability to set clear boundaries and to say ‘no’, the infant learns to recognise the reality of the situation and that others and the world are not within his or her control. The mother-caregiver’s task is to survive – to remain reliable, responsive, and to avoid retaliation when confronted with an infant’s wilful demands. This is thought to mark a sense of a shared reality and capacity to negotiate change. The ‘separation–individuation phase’, covered later, is considered to mark a point where a ‘gendered’ sense of self begins to emerge.

The core and adaptive features of the self
There are numerous ways that the concept of self has been described by different authors, such as: the authentic self (Rogers, 1961); core sense of self (Howe, 2008, p. 128); proto, core and autobiographical self (Damasio, 2000, p. 17); situated self (Frogett et al., 2015, p. 145); public and private self (Siegel, 2012, p. 211); true self/false self (Winnicott, 1965, p. 148), and so forth. A central focus within these terms is whether, as human beings, there is a part of our being that has more permanent, consistent and identifiable characteristics or whether no core exists and, instead, the self is made up of features that are ultimately fluid and totally adaptable. For example, Siegel, writing from the field of interpersonal neurobiology, has argued that studies in child development suggest that ‘the idea of a unitary, continuous “self” is actually an illusion our minds attempt to create’ (Siegel, 2012, p. 209). McNamee and Gergen, writing from a postmodern perspective, share the view that a ‘permanent self is merely an illusion that we cling to, a narrative developed in relation to others over time that we come to identify as who we are’ (1992, p. 209). These writers emphasise adaptive characteristics and the fact that human beings have ‘multiple and varied “selves”, which are needed to carry out the many and diverse activities of our lives’ (Siegel, 2012, p. 209).

A different argument states that there needs to be some aspect of our being that is capable of recognising and organising experiences, memories, events, thoughts and feelings in ways that demonstrate both the capacity for continuity and the capacity to adapt when required. This more continuous and constant aspect or ‘core self’ acts as home for subjective experience which Stern conceptualised as follows:

A sense of a core self would be ephemeral [fleeting] if there were no continuity of experience. . . . The infant capacity necessary for this form of continuity is memory (Stern, 1985, p. 90).

This ‘core’ sense of self, which includes the body’s capacity to remember experiences, links us to the past, present and future options. It enables us to recognise the more consistent characteristics and patterns of behaviour that are evident in statements such as “I’m not myself
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all others’ (Bowlby, 1969, p. 354). He emphasised the importance of self-esteem as a central feature of a person’s internal working model where a key feature is whether the individual feels ‘acceptable or unacceptable . . . in the eyes of his attachment figures’ (Bowlby, 1973, p. 203). This focus on self-esteem is taken up by Holmes who noted:

Looking at adverse experiences in childhood, those who, despite loss or difficulty, manage to maintain a sense of self-esteem do well. Self-esteem in turn rests on two main foundations: self-efficacy and good relationships. Good self-esteem means a child will be likely to cope . . . and the fact of coping will in itself enhance self-esteem (Holmes, 1993, p. 53).

Bowlby described the beliefs and expectations that are constructed in terms of attachment patterns which, without the input of others, will tend to persist relatively unchanged throughout life. Where these patterns involve negative features about the self and others, he noted that individuals can actively enlist the kind of negative reactions they have internalised and grown to expect. An example might be the person who rejects someone for fear of being rejected. ‘Such biased perceptions and expectations lead to various misconceived beliefs’ (Bowlby, 1979, pp. 141-2) about the self and other people. Bowlby noted that several internal working models could be created, with each having different features in terms of their source, importance and the extent to which the individual is consciously aware of their existence. He also noted that ‘inappropriate but persistent representational models often coexist with more appropriate ones’ (Bowlby, 1979, p. 142).

Bowlby’s emphasis on actual experiences as a ‘fair reflection of the types of experience he has had in his relationships with attachment figures’ (1973, p. 297) put him in conflict with his psychoanalytic contemporaries who placed considerable importance on fantasy but paid ‘scant attention, or absence of any attention, to the child’s real-life experience’ (Bowlby cited in Young and Figlio, 1986, p. 39). The ‘symbolic’ representations that form part of the internal model created can involve interactions that correspond to actual experiences but do not always describe a specific situation or accurate account when trying to identify the underlying ‘truth’ of an event. Hence the need for caution when trying to link cause and effect. These representations can be triggered by associations and perceptions that link to the senses, such as hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste (Schore, 1994, p. 312). However, they often involve distortions that are masked by conscious and unconscious defences (Trevithick, 2011), such as when children feel compelled to conceal abusing or neglectful experiences to protect their parents and/or themselves, or when parents succumb to ‘strong pressures towards forgetting and distorting, repressing and falsifying, exonerating one party and blaming another’ (Bowlby, 1979, p. 150).

Schore noted that Bowlby saw ‘uncovering and reassessment of early internalised working models [to be] the essential task of psychotherapy’ (2003b, p. 168). It describes a theoretical framework from which to analyse and work with the strengths that individuals have acquired and the difficulties that endure from the impact of formative experiences. More generally, it provides a basis from which to ‘understand how developmentally based, affective focused psychotherapy can alter early attachment patterns’ (Schore, 1994, p. 69). Bowlby believed that to achieve this change involved providing a ‘secure base’ and resisting the desire to blame so that greater understanding could be reached.
In recent years, attachment theory has become mainstream in social work teaching and training, largely promoted by the scholarship of Howe (1995; 2005) and others. However, the current focus on assessing where a child or parents are positioned in one of the four attachment categories may detract from looking at how we might work with the internal working models that children and adults demonstrate. What is needed is the opportunity to develop a more whole-person approach and systemic perspective on how different internal working models are being represented, triggered and reinforced by family dynamics and external factors. Family therapy, which Bowlby promoted in his work at the Tavistock Centre, can to be very important in this regard. Family Group Conferences also offer a wider systemic perspective on patterns of behaviour and family dynamics.

The sense of self as amenable to change
The position put forward, particularly from a psychosocial perspective, promotes the view that the capacities developed in infancy in a responsive, adaptable and nurturing ‘caregiving system’ (Sroufe, 1994, p. 3), ‘facilitating environment’ (Winnicott, 1965) or ‘secure base’ (Bowlby, 1979) constitute growth enhancing experiences that can be carried forward from infancy into adulthood. It suggests that if all goes well in this developmental process, the sense of self that an individual develops is likely to lead to the capacity to engage in meaningful, reciprocal and mutually satisfying relationships, based on a sense of agency, resilience, sense of worth, self-confidence and concern for others. However, this position can be criticised for being too simplistic and one that places too much emphasis on the role of parents, particularly mothers, at the expense of exploring other factors. Some individuals with seemingly ‘good enough’ beginnings can find themselves struggling in life whilst others, from a seemingly not ‘good enough’ beginning can appear to cope well and to flourish. It is not possible to know with confidence the impact that experiences can have on an individual. Not all experiences are remembered or their conscious or unconscious meaning and impact recognised by the individual or by others. Nor is sufficient emphasis placed on the importance of external factors that influence behaviour, such as the impact of social inequalities, disadvantage and deprivation.

Most authors cited in this paper believe that as human beings, we can grow and develop throughout the lifespan, and that nurturing and caring relationships play a key role within this process. It is a view that has been supported in recent years by the findings of neuroscience where research has identified the dominant influence that relationship experiences can have on the brain and brain functioning (Siegel, 2012, p. 33). In addition, research findings on the plasticity of brain structures describe the changes to the brain that can happen throughout the life span. These occur when synapses in the brain form connections that link neurons to one another. The synaptic connections become strengthened by repeated activation in ways that lead to increased brain functioning - ‘cells that fire together, wire together’ although the brain stays healthy through synaptic pruning which means that unused synapses can wither and die away – named the ‘use it or lose it’ principle (LeDoux, 2002, p. 79).

The gendered characteristics of the self
What is missing in this account is the point at which the ‘self’ comes into being assumes a gendered form, leading to the development of masculine and feminine characteristics. This more sociological appraisal is essential because ‘emotional development must be studied in concert with cognitive and social development . . . the individual functions as a totality, and no part can be understood in isolation’ (Sroufe, 1995, p. 8). A gender analysis attempts to understand the extent to which the terms masculine and feminine are socially constructed and to identify the socialisation processes - how this gendered sense of identity is assigned by others, or interpreted and taken up by individuals and within societies. For example, by about three or four years of age it is thought that a core gender identity between girls and boys has been established and that this includes an awareness and internalisation of differences and disparities in status, esteem, power and authority. This paper is focused primarily on infant development but gender differences in adolescence mark a second important period in young people’s sense of self and identity.

The influential analysis put forward by feminists on the gendered characteristics of the self that began in the 1970’s placed considerable focus on the role of mothers and ‘mothering’ (Chodorow, 1978) within society, and the role of patriarchal assumptions in children’s emotional development. This looked in some depth at the separation-individuation phase in infant development, and the link between patriarchal assumptions and expectations and the sense of identity, gender role and subordinate place in society taken up by women, particularly in the Western world but not exclusively. It examined the part played by wider social, economic and relational factors in the construction of the multiple identities within masculinity and femininity, and how these could be thought to shape the development of a ‘gendered’ sense of self. In her influential text Chodorow (1978) argued that the separation from mothers takes a different form for boys and girls. For girls it means remaining connected to the mother and the world of relationships whereas for boys it means separating from the mother and learning to be autonomous and independent, that is, to be ‘not-feminine, or not-womanly’ (Chodorow, 1989, p. 109). For Chodorow, ‘the sexual division of labour and women’s responsibility for child care are linked to and generate male dominance’ (1978, p. 214) – a situation that could be significantly altered by increasing men’s involvement in childrearing. (See online only ‘Supplementary material’ on the gendered characteristics of the self).

Drawing on the work of Chodorow, the research findings of Gilligan summarised men’s orientation as one that ‘protects separateness’ and women’s as being one that ‘sustains connectedness’ (1993):

> Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation (Gilligan, 1993, p. 9).

Do gender differences lead to different attributes and abilities in adulthood?
Gilligan summarised ‘men’s social orientation as positional while women’s as relational and personal (1993, p.16) but it is an open question as to whether men’s and women’s attributes or choices in later life can be attributed to the mother-child relationship and early socialisation process. Some evidence suggests that it does and in ways that could be important for social work. For example, some nonverbal communication research findings indicate that ‘females consistently outperform males on measures of nonverbal sensitivity’ and emotional recognition.
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(Thompson and Voyer, 2014, p. 1165). Similarly, some research suggests that on average women are better at picking up on empathic cues and ‘empathic opportunities’ than men (Howe, 2008, p. 19). In a similar vein, ‘Men also consistently score lower than women on interpersonal sensitivity – a broad concept involving accurate perception of others and related appropriate interpersonal interaction’ (Green, 2017, p. 781). Other studies suggest that in general women tend to use self-disclosure more than men (Hargie, 2011, p. 264). Finally, the fact that women dominate in the take up of occupations in the so-called ‘caring professions’ suggests an orientation toward the world of relationships. The reason for these differences are complex (Parker and Crabtree, 2014). Some life choices may be imprinted in early infancy but it is essential to consider other factors, particularly the extent to which the categories of masculine and feminine identities overlap and take different forms. Also, the complexities that surround trans, transgender and other fluid representations of gender/sexual identity warrant consideration.

Social work publications on the use of self
This section looks at how the term ‘use of self’ has been described in selected social work publications on this subject. At the outset, what is noticeable in these publications is a lack of consistency in the language used to describe the term, such as the intuitive use of self (England, 1986, p. 40); purposeful use of self (Ward, 2008, p. 67); professional use of self (Trevithick, 2012, p. 110), reflexive use of self (Froggett et al., 2015, p. 137), conscious and unconscious use of self (Schneider and Grady, 2014, p. 53), or simply the use of self (Howe, 2008, p. 159). A common theme covered in many of these publications is the personal learning acquired by practitioners and students on university training programmes, on placement and in practice. Publications written from a psychosocial perspective, where use of self has its roots, highlight the importance of concepts such as transference, countertransference and projective identification, and the significance of conscious (aware) and unconscious (unaware) elements in direct practice (Schneider and Grady, 2014). Others explore specific themes, such as the importance of a ‘holding environment as a facilitative structure for learning’ (Ward 2008), power inequalities between service users and social workers (Mandell 2008), and the impact of managerialism on social workers’ effectiveness and capacity to create meaningful relationships (Froggett et al., 2015; Trevithick, 2014).

These papers cover a range of important issues but most tend to sidestep what is meant by the term ‘self’ and how it comes into being, but with some notable exceptions (Mandell, 2008; Reupert, 2009). They also often fail to provide a clear account of what the term ‘use of self’ includes – thereby leaving the subject ill-defined. This lack of conceptual rigour has made it difficult to recognise, teach, assess and research the way in which practitioners and students are ‘using’ themselves - and how their specific knowledge, skills and values are being applied effectively and meaningfully in ways that meet agreed or desired outcomes. This gap that has been noted by Froggett et al. who call for the use of self to ‘become an object of research as well as clinical inquiry’ (2015, p. 135) - a view confirmed by others who cite the limited in-depth analysis on its application in direct practice (Reupert, 2007; Mandell, 2008).

A contribution to the development of a coherent theoretical framework

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In order to address this theoretical gap, it is important for a framework to be developed that can be applied and used creatively within social work. In this paper, I propose that three contributions could be significant to any framework developed: Bowlby's concept of internal working models; what we can learn from communication theory and practice, particularly nonverbal forms of communication; and the part played by self-awareness within this process. These contributions are described in more detail.

The self/use of self demonstrated in internal working models
Bowlby's concept of internal working models offers a whole-person conceptualisation of personality development and 'provides a basis for understanding how infant attachment patterns develop into adult personality patterns' (Hill, 2015, p. 87). Several models can be developed and become evident, thereby resisting the idea of a person's personality as something fixed or one-dimensional. Instead, it provides a view of people's thoughts, feelings and reactions in terms of a systemic perspective - their autobiographical history but also the importance of the context and external triggers that lead to certain reactions and behaviour patterns being demonstrated. Once these imprinted memories are triggered, they guide attention and activate prior experience in ways that lead to the playing out of embedded expectations and assumptions. This reminds us that in any two-person interaction, both individuals - the service user and social worker - are in effect triggering reactions in the other.

This perspective introduces a two-person focus to the current one-person orientation on practitioners' 'professional journey' and 'theoretical, practical and emotional learning' (Froggett et al. 2015, p.135). The learning acquired by practitioners is important but in any two-way encounter, there should be two people learning if a meaningful interaction is to occur - two 'selves' that are likely to reveal different 'core' and adaptable features in ways that have been 'shaped by personal history and psychological and emotional experiences' (Mandell, 2008, p. 237). To place the 'use of self' of service users alongside that of social workers highlights the importance of mutuality and reciprocity. It describes an 'interaction of two minds' (Stern, 2004, p. 156) - a belief that the mind of one person can be changed by the mind of another through being able to 'share common states, feelings, or experiences' (Benjamin 1995, p. 183). Howe describes this as the 'co-creation of experience':

The co-creation of experience, recognition and understanding is a 'sloppy' business, full of stumblings, reachings-out, steppings-back, gaucheness, false moves, poor turns-of-phrase, and occasional warmth, connection and sudden self-awareness. . . . . Practice is never text-book smooth. And yet in the human desire to be mind-read and to mind-read, however clumsily pursued, lies potential movement and psychological progress.
(Howe, 2008, p. 164)

This ability to 'mind-read' the thoughts, feelings and reactions of another person describes the ability to empathise and to 'attune' ourselves to a person’s inner world of sensations and to experience his or her emotional state and the ‘quality of feeling that is being shared’ (Stern 1985, p. 142). It is, as Howe suggests, a basis from which personal change can occur - for both parties. However, for emotions, feelings and nonverbal sensations to be given the importance they warrant calls for these to be viewed as evidence which, like ‘hard facts’, need to be tested against other forms of evidence in order to unravel the meaning being communicated and how this is being conveyed in the behaviour demonstrated.

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The self/use of self demonstrated in nonverbal forms of communication

The reference to nonverbal sensations introduces the importance of communication theory and practice, particularly nonverbal forms of communication. In this paper, the term nonverbal communication is defined as 'the transfer and exchange of messages in any and all modalities that do not involve words' (Matsumoto, et al., 2013, p. 4) which, depending on the research study, constitutes somewhere between 65% - 95% of the total message conveyed (Matsumoto, et al., 2013, p. 9). It is a subject that recognises the importance of the spoken word but also how speech can be enhanced or inhibited, whether intentionally or not, by other nonverbal dimensions that include 'facial expressions, vocal cues, gestures, body postures, interpersonal distance, touching, and gaze' (Matsumoto, et al., 2013, p. 6). These dimensions make it important for practitioners to be able to read and hypothesise about the nonverbal cues or messages being demonstrated and to do so in ways that avoid being simplistic or over-reading people's behaviour.

In direct practice, our use of self and internal working model is likely to be communicated in three forms, as conscious, nonconscious and unconscious behaviour. Conscious behaviour involves self-awareness and is covered below. Nonconscious behaviour describes the expanse of behaviour that lies 'at levels beneath conscious awareness' (Schore, 2003a, p. 67) yet capable of being brought into conscious awareness in response to, say, a well-constructed question. For example, an experienced and skilful driver can often drive between locations nonconsciously - with virtually no awareness of the journey unless asked to recall some details. The same nonconscious awareness can be seen in the practice wisdom demonstrated by a highly-skilled practitioner. Unconscious behaviour is more problematic because it lies beyond an individual’s awareness and 'there is no “direct route” by which we can access the unconscious mind' (Thiele, 2006, p. 285). However, an indirect but tentative route to unconscious influences can be found by paying attention to the nonverbal cues in behaviour - their 'affect, gesture, posture, voice, and facial expression' (Thiele, 2006, p. 285).

This last point highlights the broad range of behaviour involved in verbal and nonverbal forms of communication in direct practice that can be thought to include: (1) facial expression, particularly eye contact; (2) quality of voice, its tone, intensity, speed and pitch; (3) quality of speech and choice of words; (4) the gestures and body postures demonstrated; (5) dress, general appearance, clothing; and (6) the impact of specific actions, such as offers of practical help, lateness, touch, etc. These aspects that express our use of self in action will be explored in a later paper on this subject. Interestingly, the importance of nonverbal behaviour has gained some prominence in attachment theory (Hill, 2015, p. 85) and neuroscience because ‘nonverbal behaviour is a primary mode in which emotion is communicated’ (Siegel, 2012, p. 146). In the study of emotion, of significance is the message being communicated by eye contact and facial expression and the fact that we are ‘hard-wired to express emotion through the face’ (Siegal 2012, p. 176). It is what we communicate in our conscious, nonconscious and unconscious behaviour that can lead to difficulties if how we want to come across is not what others experience.

The self/use of self demonstrated in self-awareness

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The concept use of self highlights the importance of self-awareness. This describes the ability to recognize and name the emotions and feelings that make up who we are, which in turn enable us to be aware of and to ‘read’ the emotional state of others. To have a self involves an awareness of that fact. Kondrat describes the capacity for self-awareness as the ability ‘to name one’s perceptions, feelings, and nuances of behaviour’ (Kondrat, 1999, p. 452-3) which in effect describes the characteristics of an internal working model. Edwards and Bess make a similar link to internal working models where they state that self-awareness needs to inspire a ‘curious exploration of self’ of our ‘default characteristics’ in order for social workers to:

... engage in a systematic inventory of their personality traits and characteristic behaviours which come to them as naturally as breathing. They must be able to identify specifically how they act and what they say that is unique to themselves as persons in relation to other persons and that conveys the essence of their inner selves to their clients.
(Edwards and Bess, 1998, p. 97)

To know the default characteristics that make up our internal working models and our shortcomings as people and professionals calls for honesty and the ‘capacity to tell ourselves the truth’ (Trevithick, 2012, p. 111) which in turns calls for an emotionally safe place to be created (Ward, 2008) if further defensiveness is to be avoided. It also calls for us to be able to name the emotions we have experienced in the process of becoming who we are, for as Cassam notes, ‘substantial self-knowledge is knowledge of our own emotions’ (2014, p. 179). Said differently, if we have never experienced empathy, and the feelings and sensations it embodies, we are less likely to know whether, when and how to offer it when needed. In addition to being aware of our emotions, we also need to give them words by developing an emotional vocabulary which I consider to be a central feature of relationship-based practice (Trevithick, 2003). Cournoyer takes up this point by identifying a list of 885 ‘feeling words’ (2011, p. 495) designed to enhance ‘empathic reflection’, many of which indicate important cultural differences in relation to language. Different conventions or ‘display rules’ in specific cultures can allow or inhibit the expression of certain emotions.

**Conclusion**

This article has introduced and synthesised a range of theories to look at what we mean when referring to the ‘self’ and the term ‘use of self’. It has looked at theories on infant psychological development to consider the extent to which early experiences influence who we are as people and professionals, and how our ‘use of self’ might come across to others. This exploration includes an account of how the self has been conceptualised in terms of its core, multiple, authentic, private, public, true and false characteristics, Bowlby’s concept of ‘internal working models’ and what constitutes the gendered characteristics of the self. The paper then looks at how the use of self has been covered in selected social work publications. This reveals the need for greater analysis and a coherent theoretical framework to be developed that link and integrate the range of theories described above, including the importance of nonverbal forms of communication, and self-awareness in direct practice. These two last themes will be the focus of a later paper on the use of self which will also question whether it is possible for social workers to communicate an authentic, open and honest sense of self when hampered by the worst excesses of managerialism, neoliberalism’s operating system.

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Supplementary material
When submissions are over the length stipulated, the BJSW allows supplementary material to be included in the on-line version of the article published: this is included below.

The gendered characteristics of the self
The analysis put forward in the 1970’s by feminists writing on the gendered characteristics of the self placed considerable focus on the role of mothers and mothering, and the part played by patriarchy within this process. In this paper patriarchy describes:

a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. The use of the term social structure is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one (Walby, 1990, p. 20).

The term patriarchy is often used as a shorthand description of men’s oppression of women but this emphasis can fail to recognise the ideological and institutional structures that underpin gender inequality and oppression. It is therefore more helpful to view patriarchy as a much more pervasive and sinister system of domination and submission that ‘elevates some men over other men and all men over women’ (Gilligan and Richards, 2009, p. 22) and that also reveals a ‘systematic distortion or deformation of both men’s and women’s natures’ (Gilligan and Richards, 2009, p. 193). Chodorow, Gilligan and others have argued that in most male-dominated (patriarchal) cultures, masculine characteristics tend to be represented as the norm and something to be strived for. This results in higher status being given to the more masculine characteristics of separation, independence and autonomy as opposed to the more ‘deviant’ feminine characteristics of connection and interdependence.

Gilligan’s research also covered an analysis of ‘language of morality’ between men and women where she concluded that men’s moral decision-making is inclined to be based on abstract rules or principles, or ‘ethic of justice’, and women’s moral decision-making to favour relationships and the impact of different needs within their social realm, or ‘ethic of care’. Gilligan’s writing
on the ‘ethic of care’ has been influential and controversial, and has led to important debates on the meaning of the term ‘caring’ (Holland, 2010). However, this focus has tended to overshadow Gilligan’s work on the importance of language in the construction of the self. For Gilligan, silencing women’s voices and excluding or distorting their experiences has meant that there is ‘no language to describe the structuring of women’s sense of self’ (1993, p. 48) and little recognition given to the value women place on being connected to others (Gilligan, 1993, p. xiv). It calls for women’s different ‘voice’ to be recognised and valued – a plea that has relevance for all marginalised, discriminated and oppressed groups:

To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act. . . . by voice I mean something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self. . . . Speaking and listening are a form of psychic breathing. (Gilligan, 1993, p. xvi)

This coverage on the ‘gendered characteristics of the self’ suggests that any analysis of infant development needs to include how women and men, mothers and fathers, take up their gendered place in society. Further analysis on gender relations from a psychoanalytic, ‘relational’ and sociological perspective is still being pursued by feminist scholars, such as Benjamin (1998), Chodorow (2013), Flax (2013) and Gilligan (2009) – to name but a few.

References