Mediating the Complexities of Practice:

Practitioner Understandings of Technology in Contemporary Social Work

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Abstract

Social workers are asked to reconcile many contradictions concerning technology. Technology is contested in social work literature, with face to face models of practice dominating understandings. Agencies where social workers are employed in often foster problematic access and expectations regarding technology. And while technology is deeply embedded in our everyday personal lives, for social workers, professional contexts of practice present complex and challenging experiences with technology.

The research aims to explore contemporary social work understandings and practices under the influence of new and changing technologies. Through survey and 'technology walk through' interviews', this thesis documents social work practices, offering intricate and detailed accounts of 100 social workers from a range of Australian practice settings. Social workers explain the extent to which they use technology and how they understand the role of technology in, and from, their everyday practice. This research asks social workers for their definitions of technology, the impacts of technology on their personal and professional boundaries and their vision of the possibilities for technology in their practice.

This research finds that social workers relationships with technology are deeply driven by the expectations and practises of those with whom social workers engage. Technology is ubiquitous in contemporary practice, and their practice contexts actively drive social workers definitions of technology. However, social workers operationalise complex understandings of technology in their practice, with technology understood to be a tool for agency administration, record keeping, and outcomes and performance measurement, as well as a space for client engagement, advocacy, and interaction. Social workers often find themselves utilising technology without having clear boundaries, policies, professional access, knowledge or adequate training. This research finds that to address this gap, social workers apply their professional values and general client-centred practice theories to the area of technology, to mediate the complexities that practice presents.

This thesis makes several recommendations. It recommends that agencies take responsibility for the embedding of technology in practice, rather than relying on individual social workers. It argues that while clients of social workers advance professional practice with technology, their relationship in driving change within social work needs to be fully acknowledged, to advocate for further developments. It also recommends clarity from agencies, institutions and professional bodies regarding practice strategies with technology. This thesis presents a new definition of social work which integrates technology into the social world in which social workers navigate. In doing so, it offers an opportunity for social work to embed technology within theories of, and for contemporary social work practice.

Chapter 1: Introducing the Research Project: The significance of 'reflecting and rethinking'

"I thought my social work training prepared me to meet my clients 'where they are at'. This belief was truly tested when I managed a youth service. I found that our clients were asking for increased connection, specifically through online spaces. Clients wanted to discuss their goals via email, and they were asking to use their smart phones to photograph outcomes measurements they had completed[1]. Clients were asking to communicate through Facebook, and they wondered if they could use SMS to let the service know how they were going. One by one, I assessed these requests and the extent to which they were supported by the organisational policies and my professional code. One by one, I had found that these requests, which were driven by the recipients of the service I ran, created a need to forge new practice methodologies. To do this though, I faced new challenges. Constructing technology as a tool, as a social work manager I was challenged with, 'the tools are beyond your budget", and "IT can't support that request". Constructing technology as a space, I was confronted with, "we can't control the way the Brand is represented", and "what will you do if the client is at risk?" These challenges (and often-valid considerations) highlighted more than just my own gaps in knowledge and practice; I began to realise there were gaps in our collective knowledge, in micro, meso and at macro levels[2]. The gap between what clients ask for and what we deliver is a shortcoming that needs to be rectified."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal[3])

In this thesis, I explore contemporary social work practices under the influence of new and changing technologies. Mapping developments and changes in social work with technology over time, I explicate the transformations, drawing attention to social workers' understandings of the role of technology in their practice. I argue that 'social work' and 'technology' has been constructed as a rigid binary in social work literature, generating theoretical problems which are dissolved in practice by social workers who apply their skills and creativity in client centred problem solving to the issue of technology in practice. Investigating if and how social workers are embedding technologies into their everyday practices in various settings, in this thesis, I explore the impacts on social workers' conceptualisation of themselves as professionals. I look to how the professional intersects with the personal; identifying the ways social workers mediate boundaries, roles, identities and their own need for self-preservation both personally and professionally in the presence of technology. In this way, this thesis is not limited to being an inventory of technology in social work today but presents a fluid study of the complex and contradictory experiences of social work practitioners in contemporary Australian practice settings.

As a social worker examining social work practice, at the centre of this inquiry is a critical rethinking of my own social work. Acknowledging the development of my

[1] A formal process of case management review, attempting to measure success against client-driven goals.
[2] In general, social work terms, these are understood to be 'micro', at the individual level, 'meso', at the organisational level and 'macro', at the societal or policy level.
[3] I explain what this is, and the significance of its' inclusion in this chapter.

practice story, I offer critical reflection journal[4] excerpts throughout this thesis to ground my research in social work experience. Alongside these entries, I mobilise existing social work literature, broader discourses, and my unique research findings, to surface the possibilities of new social work practices which respond to dynamic practice environments inclusive of expansive ideas of technology.

In this introductory chapter I define social work, start to explain what I mean by technology[5], and set the scene of contemporary practice in Australia. I offer historical narratives of the development of social work as a profession to give background to the current debates surrounding the lack of professional status. I outline my methodology and approach and explain some of the methods I followed in responding to my research questions. I gesture the overarching arguments of my thesis, chapter by chapter, explaining the central questions and concerns.

Reflecting and rethinking

As I am concerned with reflection and rethinking in this thesis, I will explain the practical implications of this approach. Reflecting in this thesis involves looking to the past to understand the current nature of social work practice with technology. Rethinking in this thesis means that in light of these as well as my research findings of social work practices that intersect with technology, I will also explore unprecedented practice realities to reimagine social work practice we have yet to encounter. With a practice career of 17 years, this thesis contains many reflections of my own relationship *to* technology as a social worker [6]. I completed my formal social work training in the late 1990s and early 2000s with an intention to 'stay relevant' and 'real'. This idea of relevance and of being relevant has grounded my theories of practice and has indeed shaped my career trajectory in social work. I started my practice in local government community development and moved into the mental health, homelessness and youth sectors. I have gone from casework, assessment and counselling to managing staff and delivering services, social work research and education. This aim for relevance, however, has been challenging to maintain when it has come to the integration of technology in practice. Confronted by organisational constraints, processes uncharted by policy and my own lack of knowledge, I found that the last few years of my practice have centred on a story of 'wanting relevance', rather than 'being relevant'- particularly for the people I work with.

I found my previous social work roles to be somewhat professionally isolating. Often daily interactions were with clients, not with my peers. Many of these interactions also were behind closed doors, maintaining confidentiality for clients, but also creating a

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[4] I continue to offer further details on the way I have mobilised my journal in this chapter. I was inspired by the work of Jan Fook in structuring a way to rethink my practice.

[5] I will present a more refined definition in chapter 2.

[6] I am cognizant of my limited understanding of technology in my previous social work practice, so I have deliberately left this relationship as being 'to' not 'with'.

sense of not knowing what other social workers were doing. I recalled my field education experience where I spent time observing my social work supervisors; from them, I learned ways to operationalise social work knowledge with worth given to context. I wondered what other social workers were thinking about and 'doing' with technology in their practice? While I investigated and participated in other forms of professional development to bolster my knowledge about the role of technology in human services, such as short courses and conferences, I wished for direct learning from other social workers again. Fittingly, to regain a sense of relevance to my own social work practice, I embarked on this research and turned my conceptual focus from people with whom social workers work, to social workers themselves.

Defining Social Work – Past, Present, Future

Before I begin to detail the research project, I outline social work as the site for research from my perspective as a social work professional. To set parameters of what is shared understanding of social work, I refer to the current definition of what the social work profession is, as articulated by the professional body (of which I am a member) in the Australian context, the Australian Association of Social Workers[7]:

> "The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) currently adheres to the following draft definition of social work that is jointly endorsed by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of School of Social Work (IASSW): The social work profession facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing" (AASW, 2018).

Inherent to this definition of social work is the value for improving the individuals' circumstances, along with addressing broader injustices at a societal level. However, I share some of the concerns that Bolzan (2007) identified when she examined emerging social worker's understandings of what social workers actually do based on international definitions. Bolzan's (2007) view was that despite the growing sophistication of debates defining social work within changing political, social and cultural landscapes, simpler definitions were needed to explain the practical nature of what the work actually entails, particularly to new audiences. To this end, I include Bolzan's (2007) definition alongside the more recent Australian adaptation of the international definition, which both offer further details of practice:

[7] I offer whole definitions here in this introduction as I will refer to particular sections of these definitions throughout this thesis.

> "Social workers work with, or on behalf of individuals, groups and communities to identify, minimise, and ultimately remove disadvantage associated with social arrangements, both formal and informal[8]" (p.56)

and:

> "The social work profession in Australia is broad and diverse but consistent to all practice is a commitment to human rights and social justice. Social workers work with individuals, families, groups and communities in the context of their physical, social and cultural environments, their past and current experiences, and their cultural and belief systems. In all contexts, social workers maintain a dual focus on both assisting with and improving human wellbeing and identifying and addressing any external issues (known as system or structural issues) that may impact on wellbeing or may create inequality, injustice and discrimination. Social workers may undertake roles in casework, counselling, advocacy, community engagement and development and social action to address issues at both the personal and social level. Social workers also work in areas such as policy development, education and research particularly around issues of social justice, disadvantage and the marginalisation of people in their communities or in society" (AASW, 2018).

What becomes more evident in this chapter, particularly when outlining my research approach, is that practical definitions of social work are better suited to contextualising my research findings. These definitions allow social work to be expansive and transformative in its aspirations, and flexible in delivery. Practical definitions acknowledge the 'breadth and depth' of day to day experiences of social work practice, and as my research centres on social workers accounts of what these are in richer detail also allows an expansive view of what social workers do. These practical definitions also provide scope for the inclusion of technology as inherently social; implying that technology is an orientation to the world rather than limited to being merely a device or a physical object. In explaining the practical applications of technology throughout this thesis, I will outline what these ways of doing are, acknowledging the imbrication of technology with everyday life, and in the case of social workers, in everyday practice. I will expand upon the definition of social work in chapter 2 and 3 when examining the intersection of contemporary practice with technology.

The significance of history

The development of social work as a profession over time is not entirely evident in currently used definitions of social work. Temporality and change are inherent to social work though; the past impacts upon the present, which shapes what needs to change in the future. While I will not map the development of the accepted

[8] Natalie Bolzan (2007) explained these social arrangements as being formal rules, policies and regulations, with informal being culture, norms and attitudes. I will later extend this definition to consider technology as a social arrangement.

definitions of social work over time in this thesis, I will look instead to the development of technology, specifically digital technologies, and how this map onto social workers' understanding of the role of technology in practice. Drawing upon my practice framework throughout this thesis, valuing histories is of particular significance. When utilising practice theories such as the psychosocial (see Hollis, Perlman, Howe) or narrative (see White, Parton), I ask clients about the history of the current situation or story. Psychosocial theory suggests that revisiting history will give current insight and awareness into the 'problem'[9], to glean something useful for the present. Together using a psychosocial model, the client and I work towards self-awareness and self-knowledge to change the future. When using a narrative approach (see White, Parton) I work with clients to deconstruct the narratives of the past, to reframe history and re-story their lives. Together, we recognise and affirm narratives that honour capacities. In this way, I understand social work to be fluid when applying postmodern readings of psychoanalytic theories. For a sense of practice integrity, I use these principles in my research also in this pragmatic way: if acknowledged, past constructions of social work, and in particular relationships to technology, can be harnessed to shape the future of social work practice.

Professional Issues

Before charting what other social workers (in literature and my research) and I refer to when using the term technology, my rethinking of the relationship between social work and technology starts with the professionalisation of activities that define social work. I do so to contextualise the experiences of social workers that my research surfaced. Through my lived experience of being a social worker, I have come to realise that along with the title, came some 'baggage'. As I started reading historic social work texts, I became increasingly aware of commentary like "social work has a champagne pretension and a root beer performance" (Galstone, cited by Rapoport, 1960 p.62), at the foundation of my profession. I set about studying and becoming a social worker without any conscious knowledge of its' historical roots in 'good willed' charity work from a place of middle and upper-class privilege. I somewhat naively took social work to be an already established profession, or more specifically, I did not expect part of my role was to validate and advocate for my professional existence, as well as my knowledge and decision-making. Simply put, all I knew when I took up my social work studies was that I wanted to work with people, to improve lives.

The professionalisation of social work has a history of over a hundred years and while a detailed account is too vast to include within the parameters of this thesis, the continued debate on the need (or otherwise) of professionalisation is of particular relevance, with emerging social work practices with technology seeking professional

[9] Even though theories such as Bowlby's Attachment, have been reconsidered in light of newer understandings of neuroplasticity, the value of understanding the past is still relevant. Whether to reinforce or challenge, historical or early experiences are still considered foundational.

legitimacy and credibility. The debate extends beyond the historical foundations of social work and whether or not it is to be considered a 'profession', but in more recent Australian history includes aspects of regulation and standardisation such as registration, as well as the struggle to gain credibility, with competition from other professions and volunteers in human services.

Social work as 'lifestyle'

With the beginnings of the profession of social work formed in the late 1800s and early part of the 1900s in Great Britain, the United States and Europe, and steeped in volunteer, activism and charity work which "can be traced to ancient times" (van Heughten & Gibbs, 2015 p.11), it is plausible that social work can be viewed, as one social worker respondent to my research offered, 'a lifestyle', or at least a profession that deeply engages the personal. Duffy (2015) stated that the area of benevolence, activism, and charity, became 'work' for middle to upper class women of the late 20th century, whose gendered role of being the "moral guardians of the family, was linked to the role of moral guardians of the community" (Duffy, 2015 p.23). Social service work was deemed suitable for women from the upper classes, who did not necessarily need income from their labours but instead gained social recognition for herself, and her husband through caring for the community (Lawrence, 2016). Caring professions, such as that of social work are built upon gendered traditions, with qualities associated with the feminine, such as nurturing others, offering relationship, service and face-to-face interaction, constructed as fundamental to the identity of the profession (Trotter, 2015).

Creating expertise

While I will mention the genderisation of social work and the relationship to technology in subsequent chapters, it is not the only factor that needs attention. The emergence of social service as paid work was also reflective of the other industrial, technological and social shifts taking place at the time of the late 1800s and 1900s. With a call for expertise beyond personal altruism, social work began to occupy spaces where the personal was political. There was recognition that the structures affected the individual and that the individual needed empowerment through relational support. This called for specialised knowledge, expressed ideologies and specific sets of skills in order to achieve desired social and individual changes for those experiencing poverty, mental illness and other social ills. There was growing recognition that social problems such as unemployment, poverty, abandoned children, and homelessness could be attributed to failures of the government, rather than just of the individual (Lawrence, 2016). Kunzel (1993) outlined that it was also during this time scientific rationalism was gaining popularity, and charity volunteers began to adapt scientific reasoning to 'treat' social issues by forming organisations to promote this approach (Duffy, 2015). Stewart (1988) recounts, "the title 'social workers' evolved because of the unique social focus of the profession's diagnostic and interventive approaches" (p.20). However, this 'unique focus' was and remains relatively broad in scope. Silverstein (cited in Ehrenreich, 1985), acknowledged that

there can be tension in retaining such a broad focus. The author offered resolve by suggesting that "the locus of social work practice is neither in the 'inner psychological' nor in the 'outer reality' but in the crucial life space where inner and outer confront each other" (Silverstein, cited in Ehrenreich,1985 p.11).

In practical terms then, as included in the definition of what social workers offer (AASW, 2018), social work is broad; it includes casework and social policy, counselling and community development, and maintains both broad definition and wide applied scope. van Heughten and Gibbs (2015) look to historical narratives to account for the width of practice paradigms. The authors argue that there were divisions forged in the foundational years of the profession (the late 1800s and early 1900s) between the discipline of sociology and occupation of social work. These divisions have had lasting effects on the conceptualisation of both sociology and of social work as having separate domains; sociology on explaining society using empirical discourse, and social work on praxis. This is not to say that early Western social work did not aim to create theory (van Heughten & Gibbs, 2015). However, aims have centred on the application of ideas, research, and measured on value for practice.

Creating social workers

The tension does not only exist in practice but also in social work training. Initial training programs for social work started at one year, then two, with debate on whether the focus of training should be on the sharing of practice wisdom from the field or academic curriculum on social theory and policy reform (Austin, 1983). Before social work was taught in academic settings in the late 1800s, the locus of learning social work was primarily through mentoring relationships (Agllias et al., 2010), with more experienced social workers guiding new social workers through the skills, awareness, and knowledge needed to perform tasks. With the professionalisation of social work, what is described as a 'dual approach' (Agllias et al., 2010) developed, with academic and field education shaping the development of a social worker. In the current Australian context, social work training encompasses both these academic and practice traditions and is a four-year undergraduate degree or two-year postgraduate program at many universities. To be considered an accredited degree by the AASW, academic training needs to incorporate significant hours (1000 hours) of fieldwork and experience in the key contexts for practice, such as those that are client facing as well as policy development and research in a variety of non-government and government settings.

Professional status

Professionalisation of social work has consumed continued attention. In his account of the history of social work and social policy in the United States, Ehrenreich (1985) stated: "social work, perhaps more than any other major profession, has been obsessed with professional status" (p.14). In the Australian context, professionalisation of social work has also been an area of continued concern. Regulation, registration

and formal recognition and parity amongst other professions are at the forefront of debates. Registration to the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) remains voluntary, despite years of lobbying to government, and to this end, there are a number of roles and individuals who use the title of 'social worker' without complying with the training standard set by the AASW. The AASW, and indeed outgoing president, Dr Karen Healy, have written extensively about the impact voluntary registration has on professional identity of Australian social workers, outlining key external and internal factors that impact upon the professionalisation or 'deprofessionalisation' of social work (see the commentary of Healy as AASW President; Healy & Meagher, 2001, 2004). It is worth noting that the call for registration in other countries differs from Australian debates. While I do not want to focus on the ways they differ here, registration has partly developed in other countries as a response to protect the public[10].

Rather than acknowledging the current practice contexts, Healy & Meagher (2004) state that contemporary social work theory instead generates expectations about the nature in which social work can be enacted, and this "discourse represents social workers as powerful, middle-class professionals, akin in status to the traditional professions of medicine, law and engineering" (p.248). In contrast to this representation, an ethnographic study by Trotter (2015) on the performance of caring by social workers and nurse practitioners within a medical context, observed that "social worker knowledge about patients would often be trumped by not only the nurse practitioners but by aides, the nurse, or the occupational therapist. In an organisation where everyone had social interaction with patients - from clerks to aides - social worker knowledge was not accorded any particular status" (p.140). As outlined in the next chapter, social work discourse on technology frames the individual social worker as having the power to decide to use technology, rather than acknowledging the practice constraints, power, gender and class issues and institutional contexts.

Linking social worker status with technology

In understanding the relationship between social work and technology, the way in which social work engages more broadly as a profession within the practice of social and human services is critical. In embarking on this research project, I began seeking professional legitimacy and credibility for emerging practices using technology, now understanding that this environment potentially asks also for defence of my professional position. Added complexities exist within the practice realities of social

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[10] Formal registration processes in countries such as the United States of America or the United Kingdom, set regulations on who can call themselves a social worker. This means there is an integrity to the title 'social worker', with only those deemed as having the necessary qualifications being recognised by the formal body. This also enables the public to report or make complaints about social workers to the formal registration body, who can investigate such claims. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the formal registration body can subsequently de-register social workers, leaving them unable to be employed as a social worker in future.

work too, as outlined by my research, with restrictions at the organisational level, presenting limitations to the adoption of technology, and to the voice given to social workers advocating for changes to practice.

Baker et al. (2014), look to the history of the professionalisation of social work and reconsider that "western social work is inextricably linked to technological change" (p.469). Changes in society, such as urbanisation and the industrialisation of manufacturing are constructed as enabling the development of social work as a profession. Due to this historical relationship to societal change, Baker et al. (2014) argue that social workers are well positioned to address the social inequalities and vulnerability that current rapid changes in technology present in the informational age (Parton, 2009). Whilst technology adds a new dimension, the view that social work can play a pivotal role in assisting individuals and communities 'adapt' to rapid societal and cultural change is not, and as Rapoport (1960) summarised, "social work, operating in the vortex of social change, seeks to move, modify and to 'mop up' the residue of social change" (p.62). To challenge the reactive nature of 'adapting' though, as my research is further explained in subsequent chapters, creating structural and social change is more in keeping with the core principles of social work, even if it may be in working with one person at a time.

Technology

I will further explicate the term technology in chapters 2 and 3. Rather than starting where I have in those chapters by using definitions that are specific to social work experience[11], the broader constructions of technology outside of social work demonstrate how social work is subject to the influence of wider debates on technology. Social work can contribute to nuanced understandings of technology; however, social work is not isolated as a profession from broader social changes, developments or fears of technology. There is much written on the topic of what technology is, what technology can do and on what technology fails to do, and for the purposes of this thesis, I am selective in the definitions of technology I draw on in extending understandings as applicable to social work practice. To this end, in this thesis, I do not accept definitions of technology which are limited to binaries of the physical and the virtual, and the online versus the offline. I look to the work of contemporary Australian scholars in this area, such as Amanda Third, Deborah Lupton and Philippa Collin, where technology is experienced as expansive and multidimensional, mobilising and flexible.

I argue in this thesis that technology in social work is contextually redefined, as the meanings given to technology are dependent on the practical contexts in which

[11] I will outline definitions from social work literature and those that were created by social workers that participated in the research specifically in chapters 2 and 3 but continue to explore social workers' understandings of technology throughout.

technology is created, experienced or realised. In this way, the lines that I draw around the meaning of technology are purposefully unfixed. The definitions and understandings of technology I describe in this thesis exist to offer meaningful practical outcomes within the social work contexts of which they are constructed.

As my research observed social work as a practice concerning humanity, definitions of technology that I incorporate in this thesis centre on the human in close relation and connection to technology: how as humans we have developed mechanisms, processes and structures to create new ways of being and doing. More limiting then are other definitions that specify that scientific discovery alone develops technology as they fail to encompass the experience of every day manifestations of new ways of doing and being in the world. Although I outline in the next chapter there is value for evidence-based practice in social work, the everyday practice of social work presents valuable applied knowledge on ways of doing and being that are not always accounted for by scientific method. Here I explore the 'art' of technology; the art and craft of practice that lays inherent in the understandings of technology I present. I explore the concept of artfulness, and creativity in the practice of social work in the next chapter, where I question the constructions of technology in social work literature.

Transforming My Reflective Questions into Research(able) Questions

"Research is an area of my social work practice that I feel a particular tension. Bluntly, it takes time to do and in 'service-land', time feels so pressured. More than this though, research outcomes feed the need for something solid to hold onto, which feels like a paradox, given the dynamism of my day-to-day practice with people who constantly change. '50% of all young people do this, 90% of all young people do that'…it's so fixed in time with a scarcity of any real meaning, yet I know a lot of funders just want these 'sound bites'. I came across this quote that aptly names the tension: "we prefer our knowledge solid and like our data hard. It makes for a firm foundation, a secure place on which to stand. Knowledge as a process, a temporary state, is scary to many" (Eisner, cited in Leavy, 2009, p. 9). How can I reconcile the need for data to answer my questions from what is always-evolving social work practice?"

(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

My critical reflections on social work practice offer insights into the narrative of my research trajectory. As the site of my research is established in contemporary social work practice, I now describe my research project, firstly through outlining the research questions that structured my inquiry, and then by explaining the broader methodological considerations made.

This thesis explores the following questions:

1. How and to what extent do social workers use technology?
2. How and why do social workers account for and describe the 'use of self' in their use of technology?

3. How and why do social workers account for the distinctions between the 'personal' and 'professional' when using technology, especially in relation to concepts of self-care?

I asked these questions to investigate the place for technology in social work practice. I also wanted to better understand the significance of concepts such as use of self and self-care in constructing boundaries around professional and personal identities and how this shaped relationships with clients. Further, given the kinds of challenges I faced in embedding technology in my practice, I wanted to know how other social workers related to technology. With my background in mental health and working with young people, I knew that I wanted to take particular note of the experiences of other social workers in this field so I could learn from them[12], but I also wanted to include as many contexts of social work possible, to gauge the extent and application of technology as impacting the profession.

Practice as context-driven

One of the parameters for my research already evident is my focus on social workers. My research does not address professionals that work in social service settings who perform similar duties and functions as social workers do. As a social worker myself, I wanted to contribute to my profession using my social work knowledge and practice experience rather than generalise any findings across other disciplines, or to interrogate other disciplines with social work knowledge. As a self-regulated profession, research into social workers poses an opportunity for diversity of accounts, descriptions, and experiences, however, this distinction also suggests that it is professional identity alone that binds technology use. As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, the relationship between social work and technology is context-driven. Though social worker participants of this research cited professional identity as creating their relationship with technology, the context of their practice further determined the relationship.

Practice as object

As social work practice was the starting point and the destination for findings, I utilised a Practice Based Research (PBR) approach to my research (Dodd & Epstein, 2012). Practice is the "object" (Fawcett & Pockett, 2015 p.117) of my inquiry, and PBR framed the construction of the research design. Whilst Evidence Based Practice (EBP) within contemporary Australian social work discourse meets the social work professional obligation to base practice interventions on the best available empirical evidence (AASW, 2010), with preference given to studies which are randomised or controlled (Rubin & Babbie, 2011), the area of social work practice examined by this research project, as demonstrated by the review of literature on technology in social work in chapter 2, is not thoroughly 'charted'. As such, technology in Australian social

[12] The experiences of social worker participants and respondents engaged in young peoples' mental health will be used as a 'case study' in chapter 6.

work practice, in particular, required scoping and exploration of emerging practices. I mention EBP here in passing; though EBP in social work shapes dominant discourse in contemporary practice, I will investigate the significance and impact of EBP on the relationship with technology later in this thesis, as I chart existing practices surfaced from this research project.

Practice as pragmatic

In practising critical reflection as a social worker, I attempt to recognise the perspectives, approaches, theories and models that inform my practice (Fook, 2000; Fook & Gardner, 2013). As an eclectic practitioner, I use multiple perspectives, approaches and models in my practice, depending on context and with whom I am working with and for, so that I am of practical relevance. In rethinking practice in this thesis, I feel privileged in the ability to draw upon practice knowledge and the documented knowledge and experiences of generations of social workers and clients. In practice though, working with people tested the relevance of my social work knowledge on a daily basis. I questioned how social work practice theories could be generalised in ways that individual agency and difference become so understated. Were my theories so generalised that they were no longer of relevance to anyone I worked with? When I started this research project, I found a body of knowledge that posed similar questions about the relevance of theory to individual experience: pragmatism (Rorty, 1982). Pragmatism as an epistemology for social work has provided useful outcomes for people with whom social workers aim to serve (Lushin & Anastas, 2011). A pragmatic epistemology was fitting then for my research because of my discomfort formed in practice, and as the area of inquiry is an emerging one.

Pragmatism as a philosophical method (Dewey, cited in Browning & Myers, 1998), “aims to uncover practical knowledge” (Biesenthal, 2014 p.648), and constructs truth and meaning as relative. This approach also evaluates knowledge based on the value to practical application. Importantly, pragmatism destabilises the dualisms inherent to positivist epistemologies. This aspect was necessary for my research, as a binary opposition to humanity has limited understandings of technology in social work. Using a pragmatic perspective then, the relationships between technology and social work is be constructed as an “indeterminate situation” (Dewey, cited in Biesenthal, 2014). This thesis aims to see practice realities as experienced by social workers, in order to outline the relationships between social work - a profession aimed at identifying and solving problems concerned with people and social structures - and technology, often constructed as a source for practical outcomes. However, rather than positing what works in social work practice as necessarily right or as truth, the aim of this research is to see what is *in* practice. The aim is to understand how

technology is being formed by social workers through their daily experiences, at the nexus of what is both personal and professional[13].

The ontological approach I used to respond to my research questions come from post-positivist (Fawcett & Pockett, 2015) understandings of qualitative and quantitative mixed methods and, similar to my social work practice, are grounded by an eclectic framework. In order to obtain the data required to address my research questions, I utilised a mixed method design, where I was able to, as described by Fawcett & Pockett (2015), "combine the collection of quantitative data with a qualitatively orientated drilling down to explore meanings, perceptions and understandings so that the research question[s are] explored from a variety of angles" (p.81). Mixed methods created several opportunities for my research project. Firstly, it allowed for descriptive data and analysis required for this exploratory study. It helped 'set the scene' by providing both broad, and in-depth descriptions. Fitting to the emerging nature of technology in social work practice, utilising mixed methods provided useful data about new phenomena as well as emphasising the participant perspectives (David & Sutton, cited in Granholm, 2016). Secondly, data collected using both quantitative and qualitative means allowed further scope for the correlation and analysis of differences between specific groupings, as outlined in chapter 3. In all, this approach acknowledges the significance of context in social work, and as cited by Shaw & Gould (2001), "it is contextualised usefulness that social workers and managers need, and not 'decontextualised statistical power'" (Braithwaite, cited in Shaw & Gould, 2001 p.9).

Directing My Research Questions into the Social Work World

"It's like looking into a mirror of a mirror – asking social workers about their practice means looking at my own for me. Not just of my relationship with technology, but of the different practice contexts and my emerging identity as a practitioner researcher. This has started off as an uncomfortable space – namely due to how research has been set up in my practice. I don't see research as oppositional to practice, but the identity of a researcher has been. I remember a friend who I started my social work degree with. I completed with honours whilst working in the field and then continued. She went on straight into her honours, and then into her PhD thesis and then into academia – I was appalled! I remember arguing for the value of practice experience to her, without fully comprehending that this was her chosen practice experience. My concern now is how other social workers will see me – as a fellow social worker or as someone invading their space? Maybe both! In any case this raises other issues for me of being an insider. Whilst I won't be breaching ethical obligations by being an 'insider trader' through this process of research, I will certainly be drawing on what and who I know though." (Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Before I directed my research questions into the field, it became relevant to understand the ways technology is been understood in social work literature. In my 'rethinking' of practice, I recognise the role of historical debates on technology in

[13] I examine the idea of the personal and the professional further in chapter 4, when I explore the use of self in social work.

social work and human services literature. Some of the tensions that I have experienced in my own practice have been documented in the literature, but many are not. More recent considerations in social work literature highlight a gap of Australian accounts. There are other gaps too; much of the literature presents narrow social work contexts, with practice research offering limited descriptions of actual practice – what I am most interested in. Constructions of technology in social work literature are indeed contested. Through my historical review of the literature, which is presented in the following chapter, I map how core values of social work are often foregrounded to challenge any positive relationships between the profession and technology.

This thesis examines the relationships between social workers and technology, in the settings and contexts for social work practice in Australia, to address the gaps in the literature. Social workers are employed in government and non-government agencies, and increasingly they also work in their own private practices. Contexts of practice are broad and diverse, and in directing my research questions into the field, I aim to be inclusive of multiple situations of practice. As such, I construct technology as another context of social work.

The objectives of my research were:

- To survey current practices of Australian social workers concerning technology;
- To examine the types of technology that social workers identify as applicable to their practice and why;
- To identify possible themes between the various practice contexts that social workers are employed in;
- To explore the ways personal and professional relationships social workers may have with technology impact upon practice (this is noted as 'use of self' in this thesis); and
- To explore practitioner understandings of self-care in relation to the use of technology.

On being an 'insider'

Before outlining my methods in detail, I draw further attention to my role as an 'insider'[14]. As explained, one of the primary objectives of my research is to provide an account of the extent and application of technologies used by social workers in practice; what could also be called 'ordinary' work. As shared in my reflective account that leads this introductory chapter, I have 'insider knowledge' that working with or using technology in day to day practice may not necessarily be viewed as 'ordinary' work. My social work experience presents the advantage of sharing some common realities and professional language with potential research participants. However, as I will further explain in this thesis, social work remains contextual in

[14] As a social work practitioner, often having personal experience of practice in various settings.

definition and application, and as such, what is deemed to be 'ordinary' is not fixed across the profession. What I mean by this, for example, is that social workers in the palliative care context operationalise knowledge in different ways to social workers engaged in policy work. And there are differences too between practice settings. As a social worker engaging with young people, I operationalise knowledge specifically to the context I am in and cannot apply many aspects of the practice framework I had previously utilised in acute mental health. Sheafor & Horejsi (2006), extend this further, considering temporal issues, such as which phase or stage of change a social worker engages with a client, as well as organisational contexts, in defining frameworks for practice. Thus, each account I present in this thesis, contributes to a complex and fluid understanding of what every day social work practice looks and feels like.

Recruitment

Having 'insider knowledge' did assist me to access social workers for the research project using existing relationships with organisations generated by my practice. To recruit social workers, the research project was promoted through the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre (YWCRC), Reach.Out Pro and the AASW. The YWCRC and Reach.Out Pro was utilised, though I aimed to capture social work professionals more generally, I was particularly interested in my own area of practice - working with young people in the service context of mental health and wellbeing. The AASW formally promoted the research through their e-bulletin and website after the AASW National Research Committee granted approval. This meant that I accessed social workers from across the country, who were AASW members. To further capture practices close to my own, I contacted organisations that I had worked for and had relationships with to promote participation. This results in 100 social worker accounts included in this thesis. The participants of my research have a broad range of practice experience and are situated in various practice settings which I will detail in chapter 3[15].

Refocusing on practice

I step back to explain the process I undertook to direct my research. Armed with research questions with the aim of where I was directing them to and why I began to formulate ways in which to 'see' social work practice. To address my research objectives, it was necessary to garner in-depth understandings, which the close proximity of interviews with social workers could provide. While prioritising the need for detail, I also needed to provide a background for the relationship between technology and current social work practice from an Australian perspective. Large-scale samples would not address the research questions in a meaningful way, so mixed methodology, which combined a survey of 100 social workers and a smaller sample of interviews, were designed. A set target of 100 respondents to the survey

[15] I followed ethical processes approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee, and the approval number for this research project was H10991 as further explained in this chapter.

allowed for potential diversity of practice settings and social workers, and by assigning a non-representative sample, issues of certainty and accuracy related to size was not relevant. More importantly, the sample size of the survey enabled me to gather broader perceptions of technology from social workers, which I could use in interviews to further probe for more detailed descriptions of practice. Another factor I need to acknowledge here is the resource limitations of this research project being part of my PhD scholarship. While not a primary consideration, the nature of being a student of research impacted upon the context in which I constructed my view of social workers in practice.

There were two distinct stages of data collection and analysis, which I will outline in detail below:
Stage One - an online survey of 100 social workers and how they account for their technology use in professional and personal capacities[16]
Stage Two – technology 'walk through' interviews from a sample of 11 social workers who are using digital technology in their day-to-day practice[17]

Stage One - **survey of social workers and their use of technology**
I created a survey[18], to provide an overview of the kinds of technology that social workers identified as applicable to their current day to day practice, and secondly, to begin to explore the relationships between technology and practice as understood by social workers. The format of the survey was online, and while I acknowledge that this skewed the data towards those practitioners using technology, I also felt it was appropriate given this was my field of inquiry. To further explain, the survey was not administered in hard copy and, as such, did not capture the experiences of social workers who do not go online. However, the research questions were designed to explore the experiences of social workers who engage - albeit to varying degrees - with technology. The survey asked these social workers how they define and account for their use of technology and in order to gain deeper insights of the relationships between social workers and technology, I asked for practice stories, or 'case studies' from respondents, where technology was associated with effective or ineffective outcomes.

Before commencing the survey, potential respondents were provided with information about the research project, along with the Ethics approval number and information stipulated by the Western Sydney University' standard Human Research Ethics process[19]. Participation in the survey was deemed to be consent given by the respondent. Seventeen questions were formulated to measure and provide understandings of social workers relationships to and with technology, with an

[16] To clarify, the data via the survey is presented herein as from respondents.
[17] As above, data generated via interviews is presented herein as from participants.
[18] See Appendix for Survey Questions.
[19] E.g. how to lodge a complaint.

additional question seeking participants' indication of their willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview included as a recruitment strategy for Stage Two.

The first question of the survey was designed to qualify responses from professionals defined as 'social workers' by the voluntary registration and professional body that governs the practice in Australia, the AASW. The first question asked respondents if they were a 'social worker' as defined by the AASW[20], and if they answered yes, they were able to continue to access the remainder of the survey questions to create a purposeful sample. They did not however, require current AASW membership for participation, and their specific job title was not taken into any account. If they answered no, respondents were thanked for their time and were given the explanation that the research focused only on those human services workers defined as social workers by the professional body, and they were unable to respond to the rest of the question set.

With the exclusion of the sampling question 18, five of the 17 questions were closed ended with the remainder having a fixed matrix as well as open comments sections. The survey was created and administered through survey sharing software 'Survey Monkey' and the link was promoted through the agencies that I previously mentioned. As the promoting agencies used online platforms and were nation-wide, the potential survey respondents were not limited to a geographic location. The survey opened in April 2015 and closed in September 2015, with 112 respondents during that period. Twelve of the respondents were not defined as social workers by the AASW and disqualified from the remainder of the survey, leaving 100 social worker respondents. Ninety-four respondents completed the entire survey, with six partially completing the 18 questions. As much of the survey was completed by these six, I included their data in my analysis. Twenty-five respondents indicated in Question 18 that they were interested in either in being contacted for further participation in the research or that they would like additional information in order to consider this. The next phase of engagement with the convenience sample is explained in my Stage 2 description.

Stage Two - '***technology walk through' interviews with social workers***

Recruitment

With 25 of the eligible survey respondents indicating interest in further participation, ten asked for information and 15 pledged participation. This sample of social workers was sent detailed information[21], about the research process as well as consent forms[22], that were approved by the Western Sydney University Human Ethics Committee via email addresses they supplied. For those that supplied phone numbers instead of email addresses, I contacted them with information about the

[20] A link was given to the AASW website for the definition.
[21] See Appendix for Participant Information.
[22] See Appendix for Consent Forms.

research project and requested their email address in order to send them the consent forms and the indicative questions I would be using for interviews[23]. While 15 respondents had pledged participation, it resulted with eleven participating as they were able to volunteer their time within the time constraints of the research, were able to give full consent, and were responsive to emails, phone calls, and appointment requests. Formal consent was sought from both the individual social worker and the organisation in which they were based, as approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. This required the social worker participant to read and sign a consent form and have their employer read and sign off on their participation. Some social workers that indicated initial interest in participating in interviews were refused permission by their agency or organisation. For social worker participants who worked in more than one part-time role, I asked them to seek consent from the setting that they would comment. For social workers in private practice, the organisational clause for signed consent did not apply, as they were self-employed.

Geographic Diversity

The geographical locations of the social worker participants engaged in the 'technology walk through' interviews were based on interest from the social workers who opted to participate in the research. While I attempted to gain a mix of rural and urban perspectives in using nation-wide platforms to promote the research, only two of the eleven participants were located in a rural/remote setting. Two were based in metropolitan and outer suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria and the remaining seven were based in metropolitan and outer suburbs of Sydney, New South Wales.

Composing Interviews

The 'technology walk through' interviews were semi-structured, asking social worker participants to talk through and demonstrate examples of technology they used in their practice. As used in other Australian technology studies (Richardson & Third, 2009; Third et al., 2011), participants were asked to give me a 'walk through' or 'tour' of what they *did* with technology and during this demonstration, to explain to me the process as related to the context in which they usually did it. This allowed me to observe behaviours and listen to the social worker participant's descriptions of their work simultaneously. Each 'technology walk through' interview required me to tailor documentation of my observations and the participant's descriptions, as I will explain later in this chapter when I outline my data collection processes.

Though indicative questions were used to frame and focus discussion between the participant and myself, I maintained my pragmatic approach to ensure each interview was realised as a unique encounter. With each participant based in different practice contexts, their diversity aided my approach. Participants were working in adult mental health, disability, child protection, education, private

[23] See Appendix for the indicative questions and guidelines I used.

practice, child and adolescent mental health, advocacy, local government youth, youth homelessness casework, an emergency department and aged care settings. My indicative questions were used to guide and tailor each of the 'technology walk throughs' according to the social worker participant, service setting, context, environment and technology. I shared my indicative questions with participants prior, and in some cases I referred to them during the 'technology walk through', to ensure focus. I did not intend the indicative questions to be prescriptive with participants, rather I indicated that all of the questions may not be asked, nor in any particular order, and that they would initially be asked to show me what technology they use and to talk through how and why they use it. I explained that if needed, a prompting question would be asked to generate further examples from their practice.

Each of the 'technology walk through' interviews took between one and three and a half hours, with the social worker participant determining the amount of time they wished to allocate. During what I felt was a concluding comment, such as when social worker participants asked *"Is that enough?"*, or *"Do you have what you need?"*, I enquired whether they believed I had missed a particular area of their practice, or if they felt I had what I needed from them. This often-generated further data from social worker participants describing why they used technology in their practice.

To reiterate, clients of social work services were not the focus of this research, yet examples of their involvement and communication with the social worker participant were. I sought these examples, through asking the social worker participant about how they used a specific modality of technology with clients. I queried only general features, and no identifying details of clients were sought, discussed, viewed or noted in any of the interviews. Several considerations were established to maintain clear boundaries with social worker participants. In consultation with my supervisory panel, escalation guidelines were approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee[24], and used to inform my social work research practice[25].

[24] These Guidelines were as follows: *If practices by social work participants be deemed 'unethical' according to the AASW Code of Ethics (2010), I will first attempt to articulate the breach of ethical practice by creating an 'interrupted space' (Bolzan & Gale 2012): through discussing my perception and concerns with the research participant and then discussing possible outcomes. If I am unable to resolve this at the primary research relationship level, I will seek further advice from my social work supervisor, explaining the course of action already taken and potential outcomes using the Code of Ethics (2010), specifically 'Section 4. Ethical Decision Making' as a guide. I will discuss any breaches of ethical practice witnessed or implied with my primary and secondary supervisors within 24 hours of such cases. The exception being, as a mandatory reporter under Keep Them Safe policy (2010), I will refer issues related to unethical practices with young people and social work research participants directly to Family and Community Services for investigation. In the case that a mandatory report is made, I will inform my supervisory team immediately via telephone, email and WSU HREC.*

[25] There were no practices of social worker participants that required any escalation to the supervisory panel throughout the duration of the research.

Documenting

Seven of the 'technology walk-through' interviews were conducted face to face in the workplace of the social worker participant, two in a local cafe as chosen by the participants, as well as two via Skype. Of the seven social worker participants that were interviewed in their workplace, three were digitally recorded for audio. Eight social worker participants' interviews were summarised from field notes I had taken during the 'technology walk through' interviews. Four of the social worker participants 'technology walk through' interviews were supported by visual documentation, using photographic stills.

The distinctions between the documentation methods reflect the diversity of the social work participants' workplaces, and which of the mediums were negotiated to best suit the environment. Three social worker participants were recorded on audio and transcribed, as they had private offices or interview rooms where the 'technology walk-through' interviews took place. Four were located in open-plan office spaces, and audio recording of the interview was deemed inappropriate due to the confidentiality of the other workers being upheld, thus I took field notes. As the workplaces of two of the social worker participants were open for client access, the social worker participants chose a neutral location of a café where I took field notes. Skype 'technology walk through' interviews were conducted for two of the social worker participants, as they were geographically more challenging for me to arrange travel for, within the timeframes needed to complete the collection of data, and both the social worker participants had access to Skype technology within their home office spaces in their private or part-private practice. For these two participants, I took field notes. Four of the participants allowed me to take photographic stills of their technology examples.

All of the data (audio recordings, transcriptions, field notes, images) obtained through the 'technology walk through' interviews were digitally stored. Field notes, subsequent summaries from notes and transcriptions were de-identified (including the naming of particular agencies' software or factors that could highlight the identity of the social worker or agency in which they were employed). To identify the origin of any particular quote or account, each social worker participant was assigned an identifying number in my management of the data generated via interviews.

Not ordinarily seeking audience

"Even though as a social work service manager I was committed to contributing to research, I remember incidents where I was harsh to outside researchers who wanted to access my knowledge or that of our clients for their project. I put them through the ringer! At the time my rationale for this was because they didn't pass my 'social skills' assessment. They took too long to explain what they wanted to do, fumbled and frankly, I had such limited time, I needed to be discerning. Often, they used language that was, what I assessed, as inaccessible to clients. If they couldn't talk to me, how could they talk to a vulnerable young person? On reflection, I can see they might have been trying to convince the

'gatekeeper' of their knowledge and competency. What I needed was proof that they could hold the private space that I as a social worker can hold, whether that be my critical self-reflection of practice or client's personal stories."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

The professional culture created by social work core principles mean having work practices observed, shadowed, critically reflected upon and documented is familiar territory (Payne, 2014). However, this is often with a closed audience, or may only directly involve the social worker. Apart from students in practicum, colleagues, supervisors and service users, the private and confidential settings from which many social workers practice and the nature of the work that particularly direct client facing social workers engage in, limits opportunity for broader audience. This means even though I am a social worker, my role as practitioner researcher offers an audience to practices that may not be often voiced. I am not positioning myself as an early ethnographer entering 'exotic' cultures; however, as I explore in greater detail in this thesis, much of what surfaced in interviews was practice that may have been taken for granted. To explain, participants in all of the 'technology walk through' interviews asked whether I as the researcher *"wanted to know this",* as it seemed that they interpreted their behaviours related to technology personalised and idiosyncratic, rather than adaptive to structures or their professional identity, particularly when asked "how" they undertook a task. I was often posed with the questions, *"Is this what you want to know?", "Is this relevant"* and *"do you want to know this bit?"*. The social worker participants had generated their own ways of working and theorising for practice and by asking about relevance, they were acknowledging the remote audience of others, and, in some ways, I constructing me as an 'outsider'.

Supervision
In addition to accessing my doctoral supervision panel for issues related to the research, as part of my ongoing commitment to my social work learning, I utilised supervision with my social work supervisors specifically to critically reflect on my practice, drawing on the Code of Ethics (2010) and the relevant Practice Standards (2013). Three of my doctoral supervision panel members were social work trained over the period of my research. In addition to the AASW guidelines for supervision, I utilised tools designed to assess the use of self in practice, in an effort to assess my role, influence on and relationship to research participants and the research findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2008 p.17).

Analysing and presenting accounts
Analysis of the survey began on receipt of the first response. I began by reading through the open-text responses, which described recognisable challenges to my own in practice. I revisited social work literature accounting for similarities, differences and unique observations made by participants. As 'delicious' as these individual responses were, my analysis required the use of IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 22) as well

as Survey Monkey (Gold Plan) in creating descriptions of the social worker respondents and their stated relationship with technology. Using both platforms allowed for cross tabulations of variables such as practice contexts and years in practice, along with analysis of open text responses. The survey data itself allowed for a baseline against which observations and data from Stage Two social worker participants were further examined and contrasted.

Analysis of the participants' accounts proceeded with awareness that the technology 'walk throughs' could not encompass all aspects of a social worker's role over extended periods of time. After transcribing audio from interviews and summarising field notes, I reflected upon the narratives I had been given privy. Several participants offered practice strategies in detail that subsequently augmented my relationship to technology; they had given me descriptions on how to enhance the social work role in client relationships with technology. I also used Nvivo (10.2.1) to analyse the 'technology walk through' interview field notes, summaries and transcripts. After initial open descriptive coding, several themes and sub-themes were identified and then refined. I superimposed survey content analysis results with themes emerging from the interview data to establish parallels and divergences. I explore the surfacing narratives throughout this thesis, centring on past and current relationships where technology is embedded in day-to-day practice, where technology is seen as restraining the day-to-day and, interestingly, where relationships with technology are sought and longed. These themes were analysed in each data source and then used to compare and complement the data obtained from all of the 'technology walk through' interviews, as well as the survey.

During analysis, I began to reconcile social work practitioner reflexivity to that of my emerging identity as a social work researcher. Weber (cited in Gray, 2014) identified the potential dangers of reflexivity by researchers as being related to self, these being 'narcissism, self–righteousness, nihilism and arrogance'. I acknowledge the dangers presented by Weber (2003) where as a researcher I can view my work as particularly unique, become self-absorbed by own my needs for this research, see my reflexivity to be superior or become paralysed by the limitations of the research. While there are risks, the opportunities that reflexivity in research offers in knowledge development and integration is incredibly meaningful. Potential risks during my research were mitigated through writing in my reflective journal, sharing my constructions with my supervision panel for review, and more observable, by including my voice throughout this thesis. I make my role explicit in knowledge construction and interpretation. My role as a researcher reflects the social worker I aim to be, as transparent as possible and committed to process.

In presenting the research, each chapter of the thesis seeks to interrogate how participants understood technology and how they related to technology as social

workers. Excerpts from my reflective journal[26], are used to frame the discussion and are identified as such. All direct quotes from social worker survey respondents are identifiable in text through the use of quotation marks and italics. All transcript data and quotes from social worker participants from the 'technology walk through' interviews are also identifiable in text, through the use of quotation marks and italics. Images collected from 'technology walk throughs' have also been included in the presentation of findings. However, it is noted that this type of data was not obtained from all participants due to the potential that the social worker or their place of work being identified. The research is rooted in social work literature, and I draw heavily on social work knowledge to explain the findings. In this way, I argue that the findings have practice application, and while I draw on other relevant literature, through embedding the research outcomes in social work discourse, I demonstrate that the complexities and context of real-world practice are accounted for.

Chapter Descriptions

Following this introduction, in chapter 2, I parallel the development of social work with the transformation of technology over time. My aim in chapter 2 is to identify the dominant themes presented in social work literature to then set forth and question how these themes impact contemporary social work practice. I rethink how technology has been constructed in social work discourse in the last 30 years, which further grounds findings of my research and my own practice experiences. I provide a synopsis of the critical themes put forward by social work commentators and link these to broader debates. I argue that within historical understandings of technology in social work, social workers are often held accountable for limitations to the embedding of technology in practice, with their organisation context or practice setting rarely given the same level of responsibility.

The content in chapter 3 showcases the new data generated by my research. I chart how 100 social workers describe, define and account for their relationships with technology in their day-to-day practices. I include participant demographics and professional status in exploring the research questions. I argue that social workers are driven to embed technology in their practice, often in spite of their organisational mandate, due to their constructs of social work as being client centred.

[26] Encouraged by my initial supervisor, Professor Natalie Bolzan, I started keeping a journal – a nonconsequential 'mish mash' of my practice reflections and my research journey. Natalie told me to start by writing what I knew about, in an effort to ease the transition into my candidature. I wrote entries as frequently as I saw fit (often just before and after my fortnightly supervision sessions with her!), with some entries dated and other not. Many entries were kept on my computer and others in a handwritten diary. I was not going to include my critical reflections in the body of my thesis until encouraged by supervisor Associate Professor Amanda Third, who shared with me some of her research which used diary entries as a type of ethnographic data. My inclusion of selective excerpts is thus deliberate and constructed to align with the argument of my thesis.

As one of my key research questions centres on how professional and personal boundaries are negotiated by social workers in practice, in chapter 4 I introduce the notion of the 'use of self' as described in social work discourse and relate this concept to the relationships with technology described by participants. I include specific reference to ethical and practice guidelines, advocating for relationships with technology that incorporate broader considerations of social worker use of self. I argue that boundaries are not necessarily related to technology alone, with clear distinctions made in social work texts on the professional from the personal. However, I contend that technology offers further dimension to these aspects of self, often providing a permeable barrier in practice.

From there, in chapter 5, I then extend the idea of self in social work further to include the role of technology in the care and preservation of social workers. I explain the challenges and opportunities that technology offers and argue that along with new definitions of social work, technology necessitates new ways of understanding self-care.

In chapter 6, I provide a case focus on the relationship between technology and the social workers supporting the mental health of young people. I rethink this context of practice as it presents a designated role for technology in the relationship with social work before returning to the broader emerging practices of social workers generated by my research. I offer opportunities for development of practice theories, which consider technology as a context for social workers. I argue that through surfacing new theories of practice, social workers are meeting the changing needs of their clients and that of the changing workforce.

In my short closing conclusion, I reflect on the findings of most significance for me as a social worker and practitioner researcher, and retrace the significant findings, recommendations and arguments of this thesis.

In this introductory chapter, I have begun to explain my research project and the processes that have enabled exploration of the research questions. Social work has been defined, with a brief history of the development of the profession included, to contextualise the perspectives that will be detailed of research participants. Understandings of technology have been introduced, drawing on definitions which imbricate technology with everyday life. I have reflected on my practice and research experience and will continue to explain the significance of doing so through this thesis. In previewing the subsequent chapters, I have marked my argument, which rethinks the relationships between social work and technology as measured on its value and relevance in practice. I continue the process of rethinking, reviewing, reconsidering and reimagining throughout this thesis; deconstructing the past discourse technology in social work to offer depth to the findings of this research, before the potential relationships between social workers, social work and technology can be further realised.

Chapter 2. Technology in Social Work Literature: Reconnecting historical narratives with practice realities

"I recall a conversation with a client. I remember this to be a critical moment in my early training as a social work student. I started with 'rapport building' - but something felt incongruent and the client became growingly distressed and displayed signs of anger towards me. We (I think he was certainly the instigator) terminated the conversation. It's not until afterwards in debrief, my field educator told me that this particular client had a very negative history with social workers. I remember thinking, amongst other things; "We are always walking in on people's histories". The impacts of these histories vary, and invariably, change over time. But from that learning, I was able to actualise a new-found appreciation of what I was walking into – literally and metaphorically!
Now, I need to have a sense of integrity with my practice wisdom and embarking on this research project, I am growingly aware I actually know nothing of the history of technology in social work or the narratives history has generated. How does this collective history impact upon clients, my profession and me? What history have I been walking into?"
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

In this chapter, I take a historical perspective. I begin by outlining the transformations to technology over time, alongside developments in social work literature of practice with technology. My aim in this chapter is to identify the dominant themes presented in social work literature, before exploring how these themes impact understandings of technology in contemporary social work practice. I examine the core values inherent in social work, such as humanism and social justice, and the ways they frame constructions of technology. I then present several layered arguments in this chapter. Firstly, I argue that shifts in technology as a tool for information, to that of communication and connection, are shaping contemporary understandings of technology in social work. Secondly, I explain that the literature presents tensions between social work's aspirations and practice realities. Social workers are often held individually accountable for any limitations to the embedding of technology in practice, and their contexts of practice – organisations - rarely given the same level of responsibility. Lastly, I note that the preferences of those whom social workers aim to serve – clients, consumers, community[27] – are often missing from historical narratives. This is an important absence in historical readings, but not from my research presented in this thesis. Oversight for the preferences of cohorts with whom social workers practise potentially reinforces polarities in social worker and client relationships, and in the case of a profession claiming to be human-centred, is incongruous. I continue to offer my critical reflections throughout this chapter, this time including insights into how I negotiate newfound constructions of technology in social work. Importantly, this chapter sets a definition of technology for social work

[27] Cohorts with whom social workers practise. I am cognizant that constructions are context-driven, e.g. at some government services, those seeking assistance are referred to as 'customers', or in recovery-based services, 'consumers'. I often referred to people social workers serve with as 'clients' throughout this thesis, but leave this open to contextual readings.

and serves to provide historical context to the findings of my research, which I present in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Beginning a Story of Paradoxes and Binary Oppositions

I am not a historian, yet as a social worker, I have collected many histories and narratives, acknowledging that historical constructions of clients presenting issues, of community needs, and of perceptions of service development over time matter. As explained in the introductory chapter, many theories for practice used by social work, accept the value of both individual and collective histories. Cognisant of how narratives re-present in people's lives, and as accepted for example in psychodynamic theory, without thorough examination, these issues can continue to impact people in unwanted ways. Honouring past ideas, experiences and relationships documented by social work commentators, I aim to build upon the accounts previously recorded.

Described over three decades in social work literature, technology, as understood by the social work profession, has a history that can be traced. Early in the relationship, Marson (1997) argued that the then, shorter history between social work and the adoption of technology was a "history of paradoxes" (p.35). More recently, social work commentators even refer to it being "turbulent history" (Baker et al., 2014). I begin by distinguishing the field of social work as having a contentious relationship to the use and adoption of technology, evidenced by decades of social work literature on the topic. It does not make for light hearted reading. The narratives identified and explored in this chapter reflect this tension, with stories of technology in social work positing technology as both help and hindrance, with more emphasis on the latter. Early social work commentators, in particular, were critical of emerging technology and the potential impacts to social work, and often repeated and reinforced each other's message. The grander narratives formed then in early literature on technology in social work reflect a sense of fear and rejection of technology as it was. Yet these sentiments of then-current fears also oscillate with a sense of hope, with technology assumed to be of growing future relevance to the profession. How tensions are eased to a future where technology is widely accepted in social work is not as clearly mapped by early social work commentators though.

Citing many reasons to challenge uptake of technology, social work literature has linked core concepts related to the social work principles of valuing human interaction and the interpersonal, (Murphy & Pardeck,1992) as well as social justice (Steyaert & Gould, 2009; Watling & Crawford, 2010) to critique technology in practice. These dominant narratives, as I further explain in this chapter, are presented from humanist and social justice positions, and frame much of the discourse on technology in social work. Human interaction is privileged in literature on technology in social work, with face to face encounters assumed as the primary method for 'doing social work' - in building relationships, conducting assessments and providing

interventions. Social inequalities are reinforced within the discussion of an emerging 'digital divide', with disadvantage and exclusion of people associated with technology, thus becoming relevant as a social justice issue. Yet, as argued in this chapter, these core concepts are also cited elsewhere in literature as the reasons to advocate for the integration and embedding of technology into the social work profession, and into social workers' practice. It is through contrasting applications of social work core values that I respond to my research questions in this chapter.

However, broader tensions exist that I will begin explaining in this chapter, and this concerns the way knowledge is legitimised in social work, impacting how change itself is enacted in social work practice. The current context of social work commits to evidence-based practice. This means ways of working with clients need to be based on best current research available to ensure efficacy and ethical practice. Creativity and innovation in practice - terms often associated with technology - may not sit comfortably in this space where 'solid' evidence is sought. In earlier social work literature explored in this chapter, social work commentators highlighted lack of evidence on the positive role of technology in practice with clients. Some maintain the evidence base for technology in human services is still in its infancy. However, today there is a growing body of literature[28], within and outside of social work, which supports the use of technology in practice. To ease this tension, I explain how innovation and creativity are understood in social work first more broadly and argue that this influences the attitude towards technology in current social work practice.

Defining technology for social work

In presenting social work literature, I acknowledge that technology is understood in different ways in other, various fields. In social work literature, however, technology is vague in definition, being both broad and narrow, presented as both mechanisms and later applications, but often referred to as an aspect of practice not broader life. In reviewing the literature, I found no *accepted* definition of technology in social work[29]. Technology often includes the analogue and digital, with further broadening of definitional lines through adding any 'non-human' aspect of the social work relationship to sit outside of the client-worker duality, such as computer use, communications through such as telephone (both fixed line and mobile), email, fax, video conferencing, instant messaging, social media platforms, applications, motor vehicles, gaming and being 'online' via the World Wide Web, for example. Generally, too, the ways in which technology is defined or explored in social work literature reflect technologies of the day, risking stagnancy when technology has evolved past the time of publication. To this end, I have allowed definitions of technology to remain contextual to the literature I refer to, which may specify the boundaries.

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[28] I do not specifically examine this within this chapter, but I do refer to research 'evidence' specifically in chapter 6.

[29] I did not find any definition in historical narratives per se, however in a more recently submitted thesis which I examine in chapter 6, Granholm (2016) offers a definition of 'blended social work'.

However, the implied definitions of technology traced from social work literature often presents fixed and narrow interactions with technology. For the purposes of this thesis, I require an expansive definition, one that imbricates technology, not only with professional practice but also with everyday life[30].

Technology within this thesis is not limited to the mechanisms for communication and information which have proliferated in recent decades as digital media. While inclusive of "the internet and mobile technologies, digital networks and databases, digital contents and services, along with diverse other information and communication technologies [and] artificial intelligence, robotics, algorithms and 'big data' and the internet of things" (Livingstone, Lansdown & Third, 2017 p.8), technology is also allowed to be pre-digital, referring to predecessors such as the telephone and other forms of the created world. Technology does not sit in opposition to a 'natural' world, but rather created by us, enhances and shapes all forms of experiences. I use the term technology in this thesis to describe physical and virtual mechanisms in a multitude of forms, as well as to a series of social processes and relationships. I acknowledge that technology is not confined to the professional experience, however, the relationship between the professional and personal spaces that technology offers is made distinct in this thesis. In doing so, I highlight the relevance of technology in contemporary social work practice, without suggesting though that technology and social work, or the personal and the professional, or indeed the online and offline, are separate states of being in the world. They are all deeply imbricated.

Returning to the definitions of social work I offer in my introductory chapter, there is scope to further broaden Bolzan's practical explanation of social work to include technology expansively, which is more fitting with the mission of social work. Bolzan (2007) introduced the concept of social arrangements in her practice-orientated definition:

> "Social workers work with, or on behalf of individuals, groups and communities to identify, minimise, and ultimately remove disadvantage associated with social arrangements, both formal and informal[31]" (Bolzan, 2007 p.56).

Social arrangements, as Bolzan (2007) explained, are structures that impact upon people's lives. These can be formal, such as "rules, policies, or structures that are institutionalised in a society or its parts" (Bolzan, 2007 p.59), and informal, "circumstances [ascribed] to culture, norms of behaviour or relations, attitudes, and customs" (p.61). Belluomini (2013) argues, technology has become an area of both technical literacy and cultural competency, and thus social work's definition of technology can also be understood as a social arrangement, one that is both formal

[30] As I explore personal spaces of social workers in this thesis, I required a definition of technology which acknowledges the complexity of the relationships between the personal and professional.

[31] Social workers themselves are viewed as being part of social arrangements, not sitting outside of these.

and informal, structural and social. Technology can be both institutionalised, with rules and policies governing navigation and access, as well as culturally significant, creating norms and social expectations. Technology viewed as a social arrangement enables social work to interact differently, and thus offers further scope for the role of the social worker in practice. If the aim of social work is to address inequalities, as the accepted international definition of social work states, then a social reading of technology allows social workers to actively contribute in this space. And if human rights and social justice remain at the core of social work, then technology as a social arrangement allows social workers a distinct voice in not only identifying disadvantage but in driving social change. This definition I offer overarches my argument in this, and remaining chapters, with the significance of this definition becoming of further relevance when I outline the findings of my research with social work practitioners in the following chapters.

Early foundations

Tracing backwards from contemporary practice, I return to my initial search for the historical foundations of literature, to identify tensions within the profession of social work and technology. As computer and digital technologies began to impact social work practice the 1980s and 1990s, social work commentators initially paid particular attention to dilemmas, problems and difficulties associated with technology, with specific reference to computer technology, in practice. While there are also examples of more positive or 'visionary' readings of technology's impact on social work practice, a critical lens is more commonly found, reflecting growing emphasis on critical practice during that time, as well as to limited constructions of technology's potential in practice.

Early studies into the role of technology in social work also indicated that technology use was isolated, marking it a novel relationship. Social workers in direct facing roles were far less likely to have access to a computer than those working in policy and administrative roles (Hughes et al., 1999) however, this was not isolated to the field of social work, with other professions sharing this division of access to technology. Susskind & Susskind (2015) reiterated this point in their study of technology and the professions, such as law, clergy and health, and found that technology was limited in the field in the 1990s and early 2000s according to a number of factors impacting professions, such as role status, role requirements, availability of particular technology and fiscal concerns. Thus, initial profiling of social workers 'on line', highlighted that small proportions of social workers who were male, had a PhD level of education and worked within university settings were likely to use technology in their professional roles, in contrast to larger numbers of female social workers in direct client facing positions (Marlowe-Carr, 1997). In emphasising the isolated, gendered and stately nature of technology use, early literature reflected practice experience at the time, but it may have also contributed to sentiments of social work's imperviousness to technology. Since this profiling was conducted by Marlowe-Carr in 1997, technology has continued to evolve, namely with growing access to information through the

World Wide Web 2.0 and other forms of technology. Social work commentators have needed to bridge the 'technological lag' to rapidly account for shifts in practice.

It is no surprise early social work literature suggested resistance by social workers in the uptake of technology in the profession (Murphy & Pardeck, 1986, 1988, 1992). Similarly, it was logical given the availability of technology at the time, that the computer was the primary focus of these concerns – databases, word processing and the development of repositories of information about clients. Described as 'technophobia' and 'computerphobia' in social work literature, the labels suggest fear as the root of this resistance. These labels are not unique to social work however and were adopted by social work commentators from broader debates, in explaining low levels of technology use and negative attitudes towards technology by the profession. Evidently, in the 1980s and 1990s, a growing body of literature about fear and anxiety associated with technology, specifically computer use, was developing (Brosnan & Davidson, 1994; Jay, 1981; Rosen & Weil, 1990). Commonly linking anxiety and fear to computers, definitions of technophobia encompass the avoidance of technology, to the problematic use and negativity towards particular technology. In 1998, Brosnan, a psychologist, broadly concluded that a third of the world's population had some form of technophobia related to computers (Brosnan, 1998 p.11). Lupton (1995) explained what lay at the core of this phobia: "there is something potentially monstrous about computer technology, in its challenging of traditional boundaries" (p.106). She went on to explain, that in order to counteract fears and anxieties about computers, manufacturers began creating social interfaces, giving computers human features and characteristics, which the user could develop relationships with. Interestingly, these features then rendered technology as familiar, in that it was personified. While traditional interactions were challenged, computers also began to offer cues from social relationships. However, what is most relevant to social work from Lupton's (1995) ideas, is that technology did and still has the potential to challenge traditional boundaries, which include social boundaries as well as professional ones.

As I have argued, social work was not exempt from broader debates on technophobia, and the experiences of social workers from the 1990s were viewed with this particular theoretical lens. Critically though, some social work commentators questioned broader assumptions that social workers were not accepting, or were fearful of technology, but not all were able to explain what this meant regarding social work's framing of technology. Monnickendam and Eaglstein (1993) questioned the claim that social workers were not accepting of technology and counterargued that 'computerphobia' was not a factor. Similarly, Gandy and Tepperman (1990) found social workers didn't believe that technology negatively affected the professional relationship, nor did they fear that clients would be dehumanised or depersonalised because of it. Some social work commentators began to question the emphasis of responsibility on the individual social worker to accept technology in their practices, particularly when contexts were not factored in, such as the

organisations or the structures in which they were employed, which growingly in neoliberal practices, attempted to standardise the role of the social worker. Thus Monnickendam and Eaglstein (1993) found that the organisation's relationship with technology was a crucial factor in fostering technology use in social work practice. Humphries and Camilleri (2002) offered that investment into the training of social workers was effective in forming a positive relationship between social workers and technology, rather than intrinsic explanations about the social worker. Cwikel and Cnaan (1991) also looked at factors which inhibited technology in social work practice beyond the individual social worker and identified that equity and access to technology within the profession of social work was hugely problematic. These early counterarguments are significant to my thesis; they have been diluted over time, again returning to an over-emphasis on the individual social worker's agency. I expand this further when discussing the findings of my research in subsequent chapters however, the broader issue of new public management, with an over-emphasis on the ability of individual social workers remerges. Individual social workers have been essentially asked to not only drive social change for the people that they serve, but to also create fundamental changes to the relationship between the whole profession and technology, without full recognition of the multiple contexts of practice, or of the structural barriers social workers face.

Returning to the task of tracing the development of technology in social work literature, the emergence and proliferation of the Internet not only shifted the relationship between social workers and technology in the later part of the 1990s and 2000s but also started to allude to the social work client in discourse. The ability for clients to access information themselves, self-help or elicit contact with social workers using digital technology began to emerge in the discussion. Even before the organisational and public availability and popularity of social media, an emphasis on the social nature of technology began to emerge in social work literature. These developments were met with critical caution, however as social work commentators begun to evaluate newer technology. The often negatively presented impacts of technology to the social worker and client relationship, which feature throughout the literature in the1980s, the1990s and early 2000s, often accounts for the professional's use of technology alone. But as clients' relationships within an increasingly technological world emerge, there is a marked change in the literature of the potential role of technology in social work practice. This period from the very late 1990s to more current examples in literature mark a significant shift in the way technology is discussed in social work, reflecting broad sweeping changes in the forms of technology on offer. As Third et al. (2014b) note, "since the internet first emerged, the purposes for which users engage online have gradually transformed. Initially, users accessed the internet primarily for information seeking. Now, users engage primarily for communicative purposes" (p. 8). In social work literature, this presents as a broader conceptualisation of technology. Joining the dominant narrative of technology being solely a computer filled with administration tasks, taking the social worker away from the client, is an appreciation for newly

developing mechanisms for sociality and connection with clients. This is not only a 'game changer' more broadly, but also the space in which I come to practice social work. I will draw upon this account of the development of technology in social work literature throughout this thesis but will continue here to reconsider the literature on technology in ways that acknowledge the inherent values of the social work profession.

Core Values

The human touch

A number of arguments question the role of technology in social work practice, stemming from social work's humanist values. I outline some of these arguments from early social work literature on technology, in order to draw out implications of these narratives. Returning to the international definition of social work from my introductory chapter, social workers practice within human rights and social justice frameworks. There is ample space for humanist values in social work, as human relationships are the focus; whether directly in case work or indirectly in policy work, equity and wellbeing are the motivation for practice. With human relationships central to the profession then, the capacity for human connection and empathy are highly valued. The capacity to connect with clients and their situation is a highly desirable attribute for a social worker, along with personal rather than cognitive qualities such as honesty and integrity (Seipel et al., 2011). Positioning humanist values more literally, face to face relationships become dominant, leaving nuances various technologies offer to social work relationships with clients unexamined.

In an early piece, where the ethics of technology in practice were questioned, Cwikel & Cnaan (1991) explained, "time spent with a computer is time not spent with the client" (p.118). While the findings of my research and my practice experience challenge this response as they occur after this timeframe, Cwikel & Cnaan (1991) posited technology as a barrier to the relationship between client and the social worker, signalling also a time in which technology was understood to be a tool for information. However, there is little opening for technology to be viewed as a conduit (even without a concept for social media) within this narrative of the computer being in opposition to the client relationship. In the following chapter, I will further unpack this statement in light of my findings, but I note that there is a critical narrative ingrained here - namely, whether or not a social worker chooses technology over direct human interaction. Technology has changed since this early piece by Cwikel & Cnaan (1991), and indeed the sociality that technology offers is a more recent development. However, compartmentalisation of the relationship between social work and technology has continued. The issue of time raised by Cwikel & Cnaan's (1991) statement also needs further consideration. Time is presented with a need for choice, and thus an either/or paradigm is created. There is also an assumption that time spent with a client is an indicator of effective outcomes alone. However, in practice, time given to each client face to face will depend on multiple factors, such

as the context of service provision, the client's own needs and goals. Extensive periods of time spent with a client may not even be a contributing factor to an effective outcome, such as in the case of practice models with brief intervention phases.

Unpacking humanist values in early literature, Finnegan (1996) suggests correlation between what social workers value and the uptake of technology, stating that "the more social workers view the interpersonal relationship as the core function of social work practice, the more they will tend to view computer technology as dehumanising" (p.36). Finnegan (1996), presents a 'sliding scale' that opened space for such practice contexts where individual interpersonal relationships, such as in research or policy social work, are not a core aspect. There is also an opportunity for technology alongside core functions of social work, with the presented sliding scale. However, the nature of Finnegan's argument seems limited in scope; there is an element of personalising technology uptake again to individual values of each social worker, which seems an oversight of the overarching professional values and practice models.

Monnickendam and Eaglstein's (1993) study on social workers' attitudes toward technology found that 'computerphobia' was not a key factor in embedding technology in practice. An interesting clause, however, was that in therapeutic relationships between social workers and clients, "the computer is held at a long arm's length" (Monnickendam & Eaglstein, 1993 p. 419). In essence, rather than being feared, computer technology was denied access to or segregated from social work relationships with clients by the social worker. Finn (2006) also found that while social workers regularly employed technology such as email in their professional role, the majority of the 384 social workers surveyed believed that email use in the therapeutic relationship was both "unethical and ineffective" (p.1). Whilst Monnickendam and Eaglstein's (1993) study predates any ethical guidelines written by professional associations for social workers, in the case of Finn's (2006) study, the American professional body where the research was based had published practice guidelines on the ethical use of technology in social work the previous year (NASW 2005). Upon closer examination too, these studies reflect broadly held values of the profession, without keeping in balance the relevance of technology in the lives of people with whom social workers work.

Through citing these examples, I argue that there is a continued lack of consideration of clients' relationships with technology. Social work's preference for face to face contact with clients may deprioritise client preferences or needs. This seems incongruous to the broader principles, such as client self-determination or empowerment, of social work. In the case of Finn's (2006) study, would the social worker find it unethical to respond to an email sent by a client that prefers email to face to face contact? More importantly, the significance clients of social work services potentially have played in driving the need for technology uptake by the

profession is also diminished. Though my research focuses on social workers, their understanding of what clients of their services want is critical. I will explain this further in the next chapter when I share research participants' understandings of the relationship between their clients and technology in practice, in which use of technology in professional relationships are driven by what their clients expect of them.

Some studies into how social workers perceived computer use also indicated social workers believed that technology could improve the effectiveness and increase the capacity of their work (Marlowe-Carr, 1997; Pardeck, Umfress & Murphy, 1987). For example, early research by Parsloe (1989) found that computerisation of British social work changed the day to day behaviours of social workers, however, the potential impacts were projected as being potentially positive, with Parsloe (1989) concluding that technology could create a more transparent relationship between the social worker and client. Parsloe (1989) found that the introduction of computers in several government departments in Britain created new work processes for social workers to start keeping comprehensive electronic records of their interactions with clients. Parsloe (1989) constructed this as a positive shift, and one that she argued was more reflective of the theoretical ideals of record keeping in social work literature, the professional value of transparency and the legislation of the time. Comparing paper files to the computerised versions, Parlsoe (1989) concluded that electronic records were superior and that technology increased the potential for transparency and access to information for clients.

Almost a decade later, Sapey (1997) presented further complexity to Parsloe's (1989) argument. Sapey (1997) explained that technology itself was to be viewed as a text, as it had been presented as being at best positive, then value-free or neutral within the social work profession. Drawing on post structural thinking of Kelly (1992) and Levy (1994) (cited in Sapey, 1997), Sapey argued technology as a medium, albeit a value laden one for communication, suggesting that organisational and communication theory could offer other ways to understand technology in social work. The call for action was posted by Sapey (1997), as he observed technology changing the theories and practices of social work: "the use of technology changes the nature of the process of social work by restricting practitioners to data input and standardised analysis, then this is a matter of professional concern, not simply an organisational one" (p.805). Indeed, technology signals further professionalisation of social work. However, both Parsloe (1989) and Sapey (1997), contextualised technology as a tool for administration, and although reflecting some of the dominant themes of their day, continued to give technology a limited role in social work, which conflicts with the idea of spending time with clients.

Other social work commentators from that period seem to have attempted to broaden understanding of complexity inherent in the social work 'response' to technology in practice. In an early study by Lie (1997), the links between the social

work profession and attitudes to computer use were examined through interviews with social workers employed in child welfare and income support agencies. Lie (1997) considered how the genderisation of the profession could play a role in how attitudes are formed towards the use of technology, in this case, specifically computer use. She defined the social work profession as "highly feminised" (Lie,1997 p.125), through the understanding that it is a female dominated industry, but also because "they are furthermore a group of women who in many ways represent what we have come to define as feminine: they are women who have directed their life course towards a profession where care, communication, and close relationships are the catchwords" (p.125). In the contemporary Australian context, data continues to indicate similar gendered trends; that people employed in community services are predominately female and older than those employed in other industries (ABS, 2011). My research also indicated the genderisation of the profession, with 89 of the 100 social workers surveyed identifying as female[32]. However, Lie (1997) concluded that the gendered considerations towards the use of technology are too simplistic and that the gendered nature of the profession, ideology and training are all factors of relevance into how technology is embedded or otherwise, into day-to-day practice by social workers. Technology, and the processes that particular forms of technology promote, sit in tension with individually tailored and caring relationships that social work engagement promotes.

Beyond studies into attitudes, views and perceptions though, there are limited studies that examine social workers' behaviour or operationalisation of values in practice. Recently, the research of Rasanen (2015) is an exception. Rasanen (2015) presents ethnography into emergency social workers in Finland on how they navigate between the computer and the client. Rasanen (2015) analysed video recordings of interviews between emergency social workers and clients where social workers had to use a computer as part of their initial and one-off assessments of clients in crisis. Rasanen (2015) found that the computer was used as a resource for information, yet it also prescribed how the interaction needed to be sequenced, which presented limitations, particularly to how relevant information was collected as part of the computerised assessment and decision making with the client. While drawing no conclusions to whether the computer was effective or ineffective in supporting the interactions of emergency social workers and their clients, Rasanen (2015) stated that in order for the computer to not interrupt the processes of social work, the social worker required several skills, such as sharing process observations with clients in order for the client/worker relationship to stay central to the interaction. Lie (1997) had previously examined how technology could potentially prescribe processes for social workers: "[social workers navigate] between an ideal that tells them that human problems have no ordered sequence and no end, and a job that urges them to finish cases…once a case has been entered on the screen, an unorderly[33] story is neatly

[32] I did not attempt to balance this at recruitment as it reflects a female dominated industry.
[33] As taken from the original text.

ordered and seems almost completed. Thus, on the one hand the computer fits in perfectly as a means of completing cases, but on the other hand it does not make sense in relation to an understanding of human problems as open and never-ending process" (p.133). Rasanan (2015) acknowledges how this paradox presents tensions in social worker and client interactions, and additionally identifies skills that social workers employ to maintain centrality to the client.

Rather than viewing the social worker navigating between the computer and the client, more recent examples from social work literature make no distinction, reflecting further developments in available technology, specifically to social media. LaMendola (2010), revisits ideas from Levinas, Goffman, LaTour and Rettie, and brings to social work discourse the concept of presence, to create a relational understanding of interactions between the social worker, client and newly developing technology. LaMendola (2010) asks why the interpersonal relationships in social work need to be thought of exclusively within a physical environment and argues that it is one aspect of presence, the layer of social presence. This not confined to direct social work practice, where clients and social workers are physically present with each other, but rather transcends the mechanisms of such encounters, running parallel to the capacities enabled by social media. LaMendola (2010) extends the notion of social presence and states that the opportunity for interaction, or an encounter, is always between the social worker and the client. He argues that social work, and social workers, need to be in all spaces that humans inhabit, "create[ing] associations, whether online or offline" (LaMendola, 2010 p.117). Rather than presenting technology as a potential dehumanising force for social workers to be wary of, LaMendola (2010) advocates for technology as a medium for connection and presence between the social worker and client, and that it is social presence "is the carrier of relationships" (p.117), not the face to face encounter itself. This developing view problematises technology's previous construct as an administrative or informational tool in social work practice, as I will later outline in this chapter.

A critical agenda

Before further exploring the metaphor of technology as an administrative tool, which dominates early discussion on technology in social work, I examine another professional value which both challenges and supports technology in social work practice. Social justice, as a core principle, is understood to be fundamental (AASW, 2010) to social work definitions and is constructed as a value that differentiates social work from helping professions that solely focus on individuals as having personal issues. Social justice, presented in practice theories as integral to understanding social work ethics and practice and is explained by structural social work, critical social work and postmodern perspectives. By acknowledging and addressing structural forces that affect individual's lives, such as the distribution of resources and power, social workers are seen to uphold the principle of social justice. Social justice is referred to in the discourse on technology often as an attempt to challenge, and on

occasion to advocate, for the use of technology by social workers.

In a much-cited piece, Steyaert and Gould (2009) outlined the implications for social justice and examined social exclusion through digital technology. Through exploration of the concept of the 'digital divide', they drew out implications for social work practice. Steyaert and Gould (2009) argued that differential access and connection through technology has the potential to reinforce social inequality and further increase discrimination, vulnerability and risk, thus creating a technologically supported divide. This was presented as a critical concern to social work, as groups experiencing inequalities were more likely to come into contact with social workers. Steyaert and Gould (2009) drilled down to the content preferences of different socio-economic groups on the Internet and claimed "the digital divide is developing into a divide on who uses the Internet for what" (p.747). Watling and Crawford (2010) also included considerations to how technology challenged social participation within particular groups, such as those with disability and diverse need, to the social work discourse on the digital divide. They examined digital equity, exclusion and discrimination for people with disabilities, and related these to existing barrier models of disability, such as the medical model. While outlining barriers, Watling and Crawford (2010) stated that "digital participation can never be assumed" (p. 214). However, since these discussions on the 'digital divide' emerged, access to devices and the internet has changed. While it is still important for social workers to not assume technology access, proficiency or preference, the opposite is also true. In Australia for instance, internet affordability continues to improve, and there is growing uptake of new technologies by all age groups (ACMA, 2016). Some of the initial concerns on the segregation of different populations have morphed into more nuanced issues over time[34], and as technology is further integrated into the spaces of everyday life, the conceptualisation of a digital divide needs to continue to reflect this complexity.

The social worker as subject, specifically the attitudes of social workers towards technology as a social justice issue, has also been explored to a lesser extent in the literature. In a study by Kuilema (2012), social workers were randomly surveyed about their attitudes towards broadband access and advocacy. Kuilema (2012) draws on the work of Yu (2006), who argued that lack of access to broadband in particular, is a form of social exclusion and social injustice, as the infrastructures of technology impacts upon the use of devices, as well as the National Association of Social Workers in the United States (NASW), who have described broadband access as important as access to water (NASW, 2011 cited in Kuilema, 2012 p.3). Kuilema (2012) used several pre-existing and new measures in the survey of 186 social workers and found that it was the social workers' own political and personal characteristics that moderated attitude towards broadband advocacy, not their professional identity. Kuilema (2012), questioned whether this relationship is in part due to social work's "anti-

[34] I will outline young people as a population group in more detail in chapter six.

technology bias in practice" (p.300), and called for social workers to fully embrace technology in order to better serve their clients. The level of responsibility Kuilema (2012) places on the organisations in which social workers are employed however, is not made clear. If social work is to be understood as context driven, then the attitude of the workplace towards technology, not just the social worker or the profession of social work, requires examination.

Reamer (2013) highlighted the critical role that social workers can play in promoting technology access and use by citing the ethical obligations of social workers and the profession to meet the needs of vulnerable people. Reamer (2013) argued that it is the role of the social worker to increase opportunities for access to service provision for clients, and digital technology is one way this can be achieved. There are caveats though, and Reamer (2015) also outlines the ethical implications that social workers need to consider in applying technology in practice. The consequences of harm to the client and professional repercussions to the social worker are presented as very real possibilities when technology is used in practice. However, Reamer (2015) also presents clients of social workers as having the potential to make informed decisions about technology, rather than being simply recipients of services. He does this by outlining traditional ethical concepts in social work, such as informed consent, privacy and confidentiality and boundaries, and how these concepts can be understood in relationship to technology. In doing so, Reamer (2014, 2015) maintains the social work agenda for transparency and accountability to clients. Reamer (2013) also declares that it is the social work role to address needs in the community through technology, by stating that "denying services to people in need simply because the social worker is not comfortable with reputable digital and electronic technology is not consistent with social workers' ethical obligation to meet the needs of vulnerable people" (p.177). While the role of the social worker is clearer, again the responsibility of the organisations, or context of practice is not fully explored. Nor are ways in which social workers can address their own technological exclusion in professional settings, where their own access to technology is problematic. In this way, the social worker becomes empowered with knowledge on their role and their relationship with technology, but they are potentially disempowered, as that role as argued, is context driven and shaped by their professional setting.

Much discussion exists in social work discourse about the approach, attitude or acceptance by the individual social worker on the uptake and adoption of digital technology in their day to day work. Bullock and Colvin (2015) recently acknowledged this as a necessary call to action: "the role of the social worker is evolving, and social workers need to adjust to the changes in social work practice in the technology age (p.2). Bullock and Colvin (2015 p.2) assert that "technologically supported social work practice", requires an examination of the social worker themselves and their acceptance of technology, and they suggest increased acceptance and adoption of technology in social work practice with the utilisation of the Tam's (2010) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which they argue, offers

deeper understanding of the factors that impact technology integration. Missing, however, is the emphasis on the organisational context of the social worker, and the potential for client-led advocacy for technology adoption for social work practice.

Reliving/Relieving Tensions

"I recall many times in my training and work experience where I have heard social workers say, 'we need to work our way out of a job'. At first, I thought, yes, if there were no need for social workers then it would mean we have completed our mission to end social injustices and the suffering it entails. I also resonated with the non-attachment of the statement, thinking that ego holds no place in helping others. I also can see how this can be individually applied – working with someone in ways that does not foster dependence and promotes self-determination. But over time I have become more and more critical of this adage. Firstly, it sets me up to fail – at least in my lifetime or career. Ego has boundaries and I have learnt that this is needed in practice. Secondly, it holds social work in stasis, assuming that our mission hasn't changed over time. But thirdly, and more significantly for me, this adage presents the notion of a fitting solution for every problem. We just need to perfect the skill, crack the code and in some ways, like technology, aim to become an outdated relic."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

The international 'Journal for Technology in Human Services' was established in 1985 and through a dedicated space for the exploration of technology in the broader human services, begun to contribute to discourse on technology in social work. In a seminal piece, Stewart (1988) laid predictions on the nature of social work in a 'high tech era'. Predictions rather than practice tensions of the relationship with technology in social work appear less common in social work literature, thus Stewart's (1988) reading holds significance. Stewart (1988) outlined policy, social and technical requisites of transition from presumably no to low tech, to a new vision of the role of technology in 'reducing human suffering'. Stewart (1988) outlined tensions in practice realities yet anticipated a positive relationship between social work and technology. He spoke of the social worker in relation to technology by implicating the limitations of technology, stating that: "computer technology is still far from being able to replace practitioners, even in terms of performing routine tasks…This is particularly true of the profession of social work. The profession's distinctive person-in-environment diagnostic orientation requires that consideration be given to a multiplicity of psycho-social variables" (Stewart, 1988 p.17). This clarification, that technology is yet to replace social workers, is a curious one, holding an assumption that it is the ultimate aim of technology to supersede the need for practitioners. Did Stewart (1988) unwittingly posit the social worker as a form of technology in this early piece though? The person-in-environment distinction is reminiscent of technology described as a tool which I will further explore, but in this case, the social worker's proximity and responsibility in decision-making is a process that technology is also suggested to replace.

Stewart (1988) mapped out an important role though for social workers, which assumed mastery and knowledge of technology by social workers: "Their

responsibility is to focus on the human repercussions of the new technology, to apply these devices to improve the common wealth, and to mould social policy so that human suffering is reduced" (p.21). Stewart (1988) maintained a contrast between technology and humanity. Stewart (1988) called on social workers to "not lose their human touch, de-emphasise their relationships with clients, or reduce the complexity of human problems to fit the limitations of technology. Technology must be applied to fit the needs of clients, rather than vice versa" (p.19). Technology presented in this early piece is an external tool for social workers to use, to remain vigilant of, and to adapt their attitude towards accordingly. It is laden with the proposition that technology can dehumanise the social worker, if not even replace the social worker. This is not a unique fear, however, reflecting broader debates about technology and the impact to humanity (Lanier, 2011). Grey literature presents this idea to broader audience, with recent articles such as that by Juchau (2017) highlighting historical fears that have been associated with technology, "Socrates' cautioned that writing could 'create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories'. Swiss scientist Conrad Gessner predicted in 1565 that the printing press would lead to information overload" (Juchau, 2017). Surveying history, at the very least, reminds us that relationship with technology inherently raises fear of change, and in some ways, this normalises apprehension towards technology. However, there is often a thin line between normalising experiences and invalidating impacts, presenting a risk of complacency. Importantly though, it also raises deeper questions about how a profession which aspires to create individual and broader social changes, actually enacts and mobilises change within.

Technology as a Tool

"I'm reading outside of social work literature, connecting my questions to broader time and space to see how others have constructed technology. Social work however, in my mind, is driven by practice – that is, our ideals, ideas and ethics need to play out in the world. Fittingly, social work literature applying technology in practice often presents me with 'how to' and the 'do not's'. Yet I am overwhelmed with instruction. In truth, I feel like I am working through an Ikea furniture instruction manual. Perhaps fear of technology has translated into texts as an incessant need to control tools rather than explore them? To drive rather than create and reflect?"
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Technology presented as a tool is both a metaphor and description in social work literature and has featured in the literature I have reviewed so far in this chapter. Emphasising how technology supports face to face client/social worker relationships, technology as a tool is presented in social work literature as inferior to human interactions that a social worker can offer, keeping the relationship between the social worker and technology separate. The superior positioning of face to face interaction reflects the ways in which interpersonal relationships in social work literature are presented as the centre, or the "heart of social work" (Perlman, cited in Smith & Wingerson, 2006 p.23), and technology as a tool, perhaps, a potential obstacle.

The 'tool' metaphor is evident in other social work discourses, presented through discussions on applying social work knowledge to practice also. Practice theories are presented as tools to apply, often with instructions, and with case studies that illustrate the 'real world' process. Maidment (in Maidment & Egan, 2015) questions the neutrality of the toolkit approach to the application of theory and skills, stating that merely applying skills as tools in practice does not acknowledge the complexity of people's lives or the critical agenda of social work. Gray and Webb (2013), extend this further, by adding that conceptualising theories as tools in social work implies that "good social work simply has to fit the problem to the solution" (p.5). Combining theory and intervention models without a deeper appreciation for the, at times, contradictory perspectives they may represent, is said to create tensions and incongruence in practice. Flexibility in operationalising knowledge is thus more valued, particularly for example in client centred models. Client centred models and approaches potentially unsettle the social workers knowledge as they assume application of theory or skills to be flexibly shaped by clients' needs or strengths. Yet often models and interventions are still seen as applied as tools (Shaw, cited in Gray & Webb, 2013), emphasising the practical value of any knowledge validated in social work.

Contemporary social work literature often views technology as an extension of the social work skill set, as a tool of, and for practice. These tools form the social work 'toolkit'. With technology use in direct practice in particular described as a tool or instrument for potential connection and engagement with clients, social work literature also presents pragmatic arguments for how the professional skill set is 'translated' through technology. Social work services, processes and skills that were historically delivered face to face with individuals or groups, such as assessment, counselling, and referral are translated using technology as a new context for practice. To clarify, processes are first outlined in the face to face format, then explanation given to the adjustments needing to be made by the social worker to adapt their skills using technology. This emphasises the benchmark for practice as being face to face. It is also congruent to the profession's 'use' of theory; practice theories are offered with practice examples. Beddoe (in Maidment & Egan, 2015) explains how traditional face to face micro skills translate using technologies such as text, email and phone. She outlines guidelines and the 'do's and don'ts' when translating assessment and engagement skills using technology. Considerations on how social workers utilise tools, with whom and when is also given in more recent literature such as that by Mattison (2012). Mattison (2012) outlines how emotional and informational content between a social work and client relationship translate using text and email as tools for communication. She outlines how 'emotional bracketing' – using emoticons or bracketing the tone of the text - can more closely imitate the micro skills of face to face contact. However, other non-social work human services researchers have extended the argument for technology in practice by advocating for technology that simulates and/or replaces the face to face interactions between the worker and the client, without the need for face to face relationships to ever form

(Helgadottir, Menzies, Onslow, Packman & O'Brian, cited in Barak & Grohol, 2011). Importantly, I note that these researchers are from the field of psychology not social work, and I include their argument here to give some indication that there are different relationships with technology in other professions delivering human services.

The conceptualisation of technology as a tool in social work though presents other critical issues. The argument for technology as a neutral tool or mechanism requires further examination, as when technology is considered "socially meaningless; it becomes meaningful when it serves a significant cause" (Barak & Grohol, 2011 p.170); it may become unclear where the locus of responsibility is for a cause. Going back to earlier literature, Sapey (1997) had voiced concern, stating that when an uncritical understanding of technology as a tool is applied in social work, there is the risk of constructing technology as neutral and 'value free'. Presenting technology as a 'neutral' tool, according to Sapey (1997), doesn't account for other issues driving professional change such as managerialism in social work, broader political directives or value-based decision-making. Thus, he argues, a 'tool' approach to technology does not allow for a social reading of technology. Sapey's (1997) early concerns reflected a broader issue emerging in sociological debates of technological determinism. MacKenzie and Wajcman (1999) explored how technology was often presented as evolving independently of social needs or forces. They argue that this view has implications: "the view that technology just changes, either following science or of its own accord, promotes a passive attitude to technological change. It focuses our minds on how to *adapt* to technological change, not on how to *shape* it" (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999 p.5 italics in original). This is particularly true of early social work literature on technology. Resistance is presented as futile, with views such as those by Marson (1997): "social work and the entire social welfare system will not escape utilising the Internet any more than social workers were able to escape the use of the telephone" (p.44). Marson (1997) moves beyond adaptation, drawing on past inclusions of technology in social work practice of the telephone to emanate the powerlessness of social workers. But Marson was correct about the Internet. Interestingly, telephone technology appears less problematic in social work literature, with fewer articles exploring the divisiveness of this particular technology. I will explore the social work response to the telephone specifically in chapter four when I outline the use of self in social work practice theory and technology.

Technology Taking Over

"Did I time how long it took me to drive to the client? Did I count how many social issues versus personal issues were discussed with the client in a session? How long did we talk about housing and how many minutes did we talk about the Centrelink form? Can I categorise everything we spoke about? These are the questions I am finding myself asking no longer just after seeing a client – I am compartmentalising our interactions as we speak. As they cry I am finding myself not being truly present, actively listening or fully empathising as another system is being embodied. I know that some interactions are off the charts, not collected by the client data management system, sitting under an

'other' category. My worry is that even though I know that I value the reality of being with a client how hard is to have this extra dimension to our relationship? How do other social workers manage this? Perhaps if I learnt that this was part of the social work role, I would react with integrity – without the sense that I am not being true to the client in the moment."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Technology-driven practice, and the diminishing role of the social worker in decision making, is a concern raised in practice literature, linking technology in social work with determinism and reductionism in social work practice. Earlier warnings by Murphy and Pardeck (1992), in particular of computer technology having the potential to remove social work processes from social workers themselves, hold current relevance to practice experience, as the findings of my research later explore. While some interpretations highlight how technology can lead and limit decision making, technology-driven practice is a broader issue that changes the experience of the client/social worker relationship. Technology's place in social work practice though can be challenged when social workers aim to exclusively maintain traditional processes in interpersonal interactions with clients, as well as in their decision making. Social workers often use technology to support their decision making, but often rely on professional discretion to make decisions over the outcomes generated by technology. To illustrate, the role of interpersonal relationships in decision making was the subject of a study by Foster and Stiffman (2009) into a core activity of social workers; how they refer clients to services. Their findings suggest that social workers prefer to make relationship-based referrals over those suggested by technology, and found that "individual, organisational, and technological characteristics act together to facilitate or limit the adoption of technology" (Foster & Stiffman, 2009 p.121). Foster and Stiffman (2009) also suggest that processes that are embedded and normalised are difficult to reconceptualise by social workers, and the use of technology to assist in decision making is met with resistance. One aspect of the technology they examined in the study assisted in the assessment of clients. This function was not used at all by the 19 participants of the study, with one participant quoted as stating "'I thought that was just a little too cookie cutter…I didn't want to label the kids'" (Foster & Stiffman, 2009 p.117). When humanist principles and values are the core of the social worker's construction of the client, suggestions of standardising any area of practice, whether this is technology-led or worker-led, creates tensions.

Practitioner-led models of technology use, whereby social workers practice professional discretion in their adoption of decisions generated by technology, may be limited in opportunity or openly discouraged in some settings, as my research examines. However, the role of the social work profession in broader decision making about the creation of practice technology is a pertinent issue. More recently Baker et al. (2014) and Gillingham (2015) argue that a practice-based approach, rather than a technology-led approach needs to emerge and involve social workers adapting or creating technology. They argue that social workers can either directly, or in collaboration with technology developers, shape technology for social work, in order

to ensure relevance to both the social worker, context of practice and clients. Gillingham's (2015) research however, concludes that frontline social workers are currently ill equipped for this task without further professional development, leaving social workers responding to, rather than leading technology in social work practice.

Moving to the role of technology in shaping how social worker knowledge is shared, technology-driven processes have been challenged by the practitioner. Again, in a more recent study, the technology use of 4 554 caseworkers employed in human services organisations was examined. Jang (2014) found that when using technology, caseworkers shared explicit knowledge or information, rather than tacit knowledge, which as Matney, Maddox & Staggers (2013) argue, may be more useful when making decisions in case work. Whilst not exclusively examining social workers (case workers can include other professions), this study reiterates earlier ideas, such as those by key social work commentator in this area Nigel Parton, who argue that technology supports the shift in social work over past decades where the creating, sharing and monitoring of information supersedes the need to generate and share knowledge. Parton (1994, 2008) has tracked these changes in his commentary over several decades and argues that the social in social work has been replaced with the informational. Parton's argument broadens the definition of technology from that of electronic or digital device to include the car, standardised assessment procedures and the client/social worker relationship itself. Parton (2008) presents these all as tools that construct subjectivity of the client of social work. The tacit information gathered about a client within the professional relationship is however, hard to express. When a client engages with a social worker, the social worker uses self to form relationship. I will outline this further in chapter 4 when I explore social worker use of self and technology, however sharing tacit knowledge through technology consequently discloses the interpersonal aspects of the client/social worker relationship. Framed by the legal responsibilities of confidentiality and privacy, the problem of sharing the client/social worker relationship is not necessarily limited to technology. Technology here is seen as an invasion to privacy and in humanistic terms, challenges the sanctity of the client/social worker relationship.

The 'tool' metaphor has supported the call to test and build an evidence base for technology. Technology constructed as a tool fulfils the responsibility to respond to the call for evidence. There is a rationalist argument presented when technology is viewed as a neutral tool within frameworks that look to evidence in positivist terms. When technology is also conceptualised as a space, a social arrangement for social work practice, existing measures of evidence need reconsidering, along with how the profession makes sense of this evidence. Changing the ways in which technology is understood in social work from 'dehumanising tools' to habitable spaces, though helps to avoid some of the limitations the tool argument presents. Often the need for evidence on positive impacts of technology in social work practice is embedded in arguments that advocate for the maintenance of distance between technology and practice, and because of this, I now introduce the significance of evidence in social

work practice, which I will continue to explore later in this thesis when outlining the evidence-gathering of social workers respondents and participants.

The Call for Evidence

"Neoliberal individualism – simply 'blame the individual' social worker for not wanting or refusing to adapt to technology - rather than including an analysis of the structures embedding technology in social work is a little too similar for comfort. It feels too close to the experience of the client of social work services and their relationship to 'their problem'. Context is so valued in social work, eerily it seems that context is difficult to distinguish in the history I have unearthed. The place for technology in social work is also shaped by economic and political ideas. We can't ignore the growing need for evidence, proof, efficiency and control – or economic rationalism. It is important to acknowledge that social workers have in part an undesired relationship with technology. What I think is so important in the stories of the social work respondents I gathered was that whether they want to or not, technology holds a special place in recording evidence of outcomes. Whether clients know it or not, their achievements are being measured against what the organisation and social worker offers. I have mixed feelings towards this and but I think that is a good thing."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Innovation does not necessarily emerge alongside the evidence for efficacy. This may not be problematic in other sectors or professions and their relationship with technology, but in the case of social work, reassurance that technology, indeed any practice, will be of benefit and cause no harm to clients is explicitly required as social work ethics (Reamer, 2015). This forms the way in which evidence is generated and subsequently valued in social work discourses. However, the argument for evidence reaches more broadly than this. Featuring in social work discourse over the past decades, new public management discourse also began to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s (Peterse´n & Olsson, 2015) alongside the increased need for evidence-based practice, as well as the emerging literature on technology in practice.

The call for increased evidence in social work sits alongside the new public management debates for efficiency and value for money. It is also a borrowed construct. Adams et al. (cited in Seipel et al., 2011) note "evidence-based practice was borrowed from a medical model and may not always be appropriate for social work" (p.457). As understood in social work approaches emphasising humanist traditions, the uniqueness of the relationship between the social worker and client raises difficulties in standardising all areas of practice. This in turn, makes it challenging terrain to garner evidence from. However, new public management increases the value of practice where evidence of measurable outcomes is linked to social work that can be replicated.

Wallace and Pease (2011) explain how new public management was influenced by neoliberalism. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, who explained that neoliberalism "involves the dominance of individualism and the destruction of collectivism" (Bourdieu, cited in Wallace & Pease, 2011 p.133); the authors discussed the

implications to the social work profession, both at macro and micro practice levels, including structural considerations of the welfare state and the role that social workers play in delivering services. Unlike other commentators though who construct neoliberalism in social work as 'all consuming', Wallace and Pease (2011) outlined the space for social work's resistance to neoliberalism in practice, with social workers able to challenge neoliberalism through advocating for the socially just both at the individual and collective level.

'Evidence informed practice' straddles the tension between practice that is only informed by research and one that is based on individual social worker's field experience. This is where the social worker will standardise until the need to improvise or create practice tailored to the context and individual; however, the privilege given to evidence over creativity or practice experience is present. I will return to the debates on knowledge in social work in subsequent chapters but introduced in passing here, link the broader contexts which impact social work practice and the potential impact to the way technology is constructed in social work.

Finding Space for Creativity in Standardisation

"Resistance, avoidance, denial or neglect of technology in day to day social work practice turns out to be not as simple as I initially thought. My practice presented external barriers, but as I revisit past debates capsulated by literature, there seem to be limited internal supports available in social work discourse. The professional constructs of social work itself present tension when trying to introduce anything new to practice. I appreciate that we have come to this because of harm caused by past policies, practice theories. I recall reading Rossiter's practice story where she described the dominant theory of schizophrenia at a time, she was working in a family therapy context[35]. The theory in vogue assumed that 'bad' parenting caused schizophrenia. At the very least, the search for evidence debunked some of these theories. I look back at my past practice with a sense of apprehension. What other elements of current practice will we look back on in this way? I look to technology differently. I reflect that I haven't used technology to construct my clients in a limiting way as in the case of Rossiter's practice story – have I? How does technology construct the client as? Before I can really look at that, I keep coming back to this limited space for technology in my social work practice. When there was technology 'prohibition' I know it sparked my own creativity – I found novel spaces for technology in my practice, and the evidence came from clients with lived experience. Does the ways in which creativity is understood in social work impact upon embedding technology in practice?"
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

There is a preoccupation in social work literature with creativity on the part of the social worker. This call for creativity by social workers is, at times, both aspirational and fundamental to social work. Creativity is presented as a requirement for all levels of practice; in how social workers form relationships with clients, how they help reform policies and indeed, how they instigate social change. While the foundation for what constitutes evidence in evidence based social work is linked to positivist traditions in

[35] Rossiter (2010).

research, creativity in social work literature conversely is constructed and described in multiple subjective ways. Milner (2012) stated that creativity in social work is "sense making" with "empowerment require[ing] imagination, grace and the power of the spirit that lifts you beyond the ordinary sense of things" (p.65). 'Reflection in action' (Schon, 1983), identified as a key skill of the critical social worker, was argued by Jones (cited in Lie, 1997), as enacting creativity: "reflection-in-action requires openness, mutuality, receptivity, self-adjustment, on the spot creativity - qualities understood as the 'artistic'" (p.190). Creativity is also used to describe the process by which social workers form relationships and the range of emotions that social workers experience and express (Charles et al., cited in Lymbery & Butler, 2004). Creativity is called for, in literature, in order for social workers to approach each person they work alongside from a place of unknowing so that "openness and uncertainty is an opportunity for creative practice" (Adam et al., 2002 p.3).

Howe (1998) articulated creativity in practice as to how social workers impact clients' lives and how clients affect the social worker. As social workers use creativity to activate empathy and compassion when imagining what a client feels, thinks and experiences, what is subsequently learnt and experienced is suggested to mean that social workers cannot return to being the workers or people they once were. The language of creativity is used when describing the processes of social work, the outcomes for clients and practitioners and, in particular workers are artful in "the way theories are used in the amalgam of the practitioner's developmental space and client situation" (Harms & Connolly, cited in Milner, 2012 p.71). Macro, meso and micro practices, such as policy development, service modelling, as well as the construction of documentation such as 'case' files and reports are also linked to the concept. Significantly, how social workers 'use self', that is their personal identity and experiences in their professional capacities, which I will be focusing on later in this thesis, is also connected to the ability to create in practice.

With so many areas of social work constructed as either being creative or requiring creativity; that is, the ability for creative thinking and action by social workers, there is a sense that the literature suggests that creativity is an attribute that the profession values. However, there are some current and historical challenges to this view. More recently, studies into the desired personal and cognitive attributes for social workers suggested that creativity is not as critical or desired compared with being ethical, honest and respectful (Seipel et al., 2011). Creativity in practice is often, within the literature, set against rather than alongside the social work obligation for evidence-based practice, whilst still being positioned as central to innovation and change (Sawyer, 2012). With some suggestion that evidence-based practice allows for professional creativity (Aveyard & Sharp, 2013), much of the limited literature that questions the role of evidence-based practice in social work posits individual creativity in opposition.

This question of creativity in social work discourse can be linked to the positing of art

versus science/art and science debates, which are well documented in social work literature. Here, while presenting a limited scope, they have relevance in critically reviewing the ways in which creativity of the social worker is understood, and thus how social work manages change on broader levels. Earlier literature in social work has been described as an art and not a science (England, 1986), as the profession aspires to humanist traditions, not scientific ones (Goldstein, 1997). In a very early text describing creativity in social work, Rapoport (1968) outlined that creativity is fundamental to social work, in the ways the profession manages innovative and positive social change. She argued that the duality presented in viewing social work as an art and science challenged the need for purity and wholeness in the mission of social work. She aligned the social work identity alongside the artist in society through stating that both the artist and social worker can find the 'act of creation' as a "lonely and isolating process" (Rapoport, 1968 p.145). Rapoport's (1968) argument positioned the artist and the social worker in unfavourable terms however: "as an embodiment of society's conscience, social work serves often as an unwelcome reminder of society's failure" (p.146). Social workers and artists were placed together as 'truth tellers', with their creativity constructed to be, at times, undesirable. Bolzan (2007) later echoed this sentiment, with social workers often described as "the troublemakers that are the thorn in the side of administrators or management" (p.60), as they are called upon to create change which may challenge the status quo.

Rapoport's (1968) ideas were revisited by England (1986), who viewed the process of critique in social work as creative, and thus called for increased accountability for critical social work practices, through "the creation of public 'accounts' of social work, and then public criticism of those accounts – the equivalent, as it were, of art and critical debate about art" (p.127). This created immediate difficulties in the relationship with those engaged in social work services - issues of confidentiality, privacy and objectification are all raised as a counter argument to England's (1986) suggestions. More recently Goldstein (1997) and Gray and Webb (2008) also contribute to the art/science debate, advocating that the art of social work needed more emphasis in social work discourse. Healy (2008) questioned this position, however by acknowledging that "the challenge for the profession is to create a synthesis that develops new and constructive relationships between the scientific and the artistic in social work practice" (p.195). A more sympathetic relationship between evidence and innovation is also of significance when considering the place for technology in social work. Social work practises themselves present opportunities for new approaches to, and understandings of technology to be encountered, as I will outline in the next chapter.

While I acknowledge there are further tensions which impact upon the relationship between social work and technology, such as the issues of risk and responsibility, as well as fiscal concerns (Roosenboom, 1996), as intended for this chapter, I have canvassed the broader narratives from historical documents. Through exploring technology in social work literature, I have presented several ways

technology has been understood over time. These constructions have tailed technological developments and changes, echoing sentiments from broader society. The place for technology in social work has been constructed in tension with some of the core values of social work, such as its' humanist traditions. Technology in social work literature has often been constructed as antithetical to core social work concepts and processes, particularly to client work. Yet, in maintaining an unyielding humanist stance, as social work commentators, we remain outside of the dialogue to innovate technology, which can, in fact, include humanist core values. I have argued in this chapter, that the role of cohorts with whom social workers practise has largely been absent in literature. In moving forward, transforming social work can involve an advocacy role, instigating changes within the profession which do not rely on intrinsic characteristics of social workers themselves, but instead on clients' self-determination and choices. Acknowledging that technology is deeply imbricated in our lives, I have embedded technology within a practical definition of social work, constructing technology as another social arrangement which social workers navigate. However, as I explore in the next two chapters, social workers mobilise multiple conceptualisations of technology[36], often encountering contradictory framings in their practice.

[36] Personal and professional constructions.

Chapter 3. Social Work with Technology: Examining professionally mediated relationships

"It feels, as a practitioner, somewhat self-indulgent to ask 100 other social work practitioners what they do/feel/think about their relationship with technology. Beyond my research questions on technology, my own relationship with research now emerges. Day in and day out, the client, the social issues, the advocacy and the drive for change dominated the agenda. The organisational context shaped my focus. Research was left for others to say about my work, or for me to bend time in order to get to. A pile of texts, electronic files of journal articles and diary reminders (where I had allocated time) were scanned in passing, gleaning some snippet of an idea, to one day put into practice. This feeling of indulgence is related to my idea of having client-centred priorities. However, as I approach social workers about their practice, I now see that this process of research is part of being client centred – just as self-care can be understood to allow us to care for others – authentic research allows me to improve my own, and hopefully inform, others' practice. Authentic, as I respect others' knowledge with time and presence, and I know, there is much to learn from social workers who are just getting on with it."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Social work practice is incredibly diverse, with localised responses to broader shared issues. Technology, like social work, has directed or developed emergence of nuanced practice – localised and contextual responses to specific situations or needs. So far in this thesis, in presenting past and contemporary debate, I have mapped developments between technology and social work, acknowledging tensions stemming from the core concepts inherent to social work, such as the value of face to face contact, and the broader ideas of social justice. Reflective of ongoing social and technological development, I have outlined how social work understandings of technology have continued to change. However, as I explain in this chapter, there are new tensions presented in contemporary practice, affecting how social workers mobilise concepts of technology in their professional capacity. The following chapter outlines my research findings, offering contemporary Australian perspectives into the day to day intersection between social workers, technology and the people with whom social workers engage. I begin this chapter with introductory, demographic analysis of the social worker respondents to the online survey[37], as well as a description of the social worker respondents and participants[38], their practice area and years of experience. How social worker respondents defined technology, and the broader reasons for employing technology in their practice, are also canvassed. In presenting my research findings in this chapter, I examine social workers professional understandings of technology, arguing that social workers encounter contradictory framings in their practice. I explain how technology as a social arrangement can be experienced as a practice context in contemporary

[37] Although I lay out some of the broader findings here in this chapter, I intend these also to be a reference point throughout this thesis.
[38] I also note here that all social workers that participated in Stage Two of the research (the technology walk through interviews), were sampled from Stage One initial survey, thus their responses are also included in the broader analysis.

social work. Citing practice examples surfaced by my research, I argue that social workers are driven to embed technology in their professional capacities because of what they understand to be their clients' preferences. Often in spite of organisational mandates, social workers' personal constructs of their profession as 'client centred', requires them to engage with technology in uncharted ways, with organisations often asking that they manage the task of technology separately to their relationships with clients. While I explore the tensions between professional and personal boundaries surfaced by practice in the next chapter, in this chapter, I examine professionally mediated terrain. I also continue to offer critical reflections on my practice experience throughout the analysis as reflective journal excerpts in this chapter and highlight my voice as an emerging social work practitioner researcher. My development as a social work practitioner researcher inherently shapes my research project (Zuchowski, 2016), and by explaining my worldview through sharing critical reflections, I endeavour to allow this development to be viewed throughout the remaining chapters of my thesis.

The Social Workers

"I am a social worker with 13 years of direct practice with clients. I have worked in government and non-government organisations. I have also managed human services for several years as well as overseeing the operation of a whole division. I have supported the development of staff, managed teams and millions of dollars. I have successfully tendered and built service models. I have advocated for funding to many donors, foundations and corporates. For the last couple of years, I have run a private practice, consulting with stakeholders and reporting on evaluations and outcomes. I have supervised social work student placements for over 10 years and have taught students at university for the past four years.
I have worked with children, young people, adults and older adults. I have worked with individuals and families. I have worked with people who are culturally, linguistically, spiritually, physically, psychologically, sexually and gender diverse. I have worked with the help seekers and those that do not want me in their lives. I have worked alongside people facing many and varied challenges in their lives. I have witnessed liberation from pain and abuse and have seen recovery. I have also witnessed pain, abuse and death. I have attended hospitals, morgues and funerals – once I even went to two funerals in one day.
I have been advised to feel more, feel less, that it is 'just a job' and that our work never ends. I have attended and presented at conferences, training and professional development days as I have wanted to share and receive learning. I have dedicated time to committees, working parties, advisory boards and meetings because I have wanted to drive change and fairness. I am an AASW member, but I view social work as being more than a profession. I have experienced 'burn out' professionally and personally. I have embraced change, including technology, when it makes sense to the people that I work with.
This is my social work. I don't intend to gather this entire story from the social workers that respond to my call for research. But I do want to start by acknowledging, given my own diversity of practice, that the social workers that participate in this research also share this site. While I ask them about the relationship between technology and their practice, in their narration, this diverse backdrop of experience and knowledge resides. I aim to see their practice with technology as integral to the other threads of their narrative."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

The respondents of the technology survey reflect the diversity of practice contexts of the social work profession. With 100 social worker respondents to the survey, 89 identified as female, ten as male and one as transgender. Respondents presented a wide scope of years of experience in the field, from less than twelve months, eight percent (8%) to over 20 years at 21 percent (21%). The eight to twelve years and over 20 years of experience groups were the highest levels of experience to respond to the survey.

The table below (Table 1) outlines the field experience respectively:

Table 1: Number of years in the field as a Social Worker

Field Experience	Number of Respondents
Less than 12 months	8
Less than 2 years	4
2 to 5 years	16
8 to 12 years	25
12 to 15 years	8
15 to 20 years	18
Over 20 years	21
Total	100

Social workers came from a broad range of service settings and contexts. Respondents were able to include more than one service type or setting, thus many social workers listed more than one service type, setting or context they worked in. The most cited context of practice was health at 35 percent (35%), with the specialisation of mental health specified by 21 percent (21%) of the respondents. The broader context of social work based in the community was included by16 percent (16%) of respondents, and six percent (6%) identifying they worked in private practice. However, apart from the one percent (1%) who specified local government, 'government' as a descriptor was not included in the responses. Other practice settings, contexts and services that respondents included are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Practice Contexts/Settings

Other Practice Area Specified	Number of Responses in %
Education	14
Child Protection & Welfare	11
Counselling	9
Family	8
Hospital	5
Disability	4
Aged Care	3

Case Work	3
Youth	3
Early Intervention	2
Policy	1
Justice	1

The age groups with whom social worker respondents identified working ranged from 0-12 months to the over 65, with the majority identifying the 25 to 65 adult group as the primary age group they worked with. Table 3 outlines the ages of the client groups that social workers identified they primarily worked with:

Table 3: Age groups of clients

Age Group of Clients	Responses in %
0-12 years	25
12 to 18 years	30
18 to 25 years	22
25 to 65 years	34
65+ years	10
Other (please specify)	14
Total	100

Responses included as 'other', were most commonly 'families', and 'all ages'. There was one social worker that responded from a policy context and specified this in their response also when stating that they worked with 'adults'.

The sub-sample of social workers that participated in Stage Two of the research, the 'technology walk through' interviews, represented diverse service contexts and worked with a broad range of ages of clients. Specifically, they were based in adult mental health, disability, child protection, education, private practice, child and adolescent mental health, advocacy, local government youth service, youth homelessness casework service, emergency department of a hospital and aged care. They ranged from having less than two years' experience, to over 20 years, with the less than 12 months and '2 to 5 years' of experience groupings not represented. The following Table 4, outlines the social work participant's years of field practice:

Table 4: Sub-sample of social worker participants, years of practice

Years of Experience	Number of Social Work Participants
Less than 2	2
8-12	2
12-15	3

15-20	2
20 +	2

There were eight social worker participants in the sub-sample that identified as female and three males.

All of the 11 social worker participants stated that they used technology differently, depending on the professional role or personal space they inhabited. This poses an interesting question on what is considered personal or professional use which I explore in chapter 4. The social workers from this sub-sample did not necessarily have policy to direct their use but relied heavily upon a set of personal and professional values, thus not always embodying the professional in professional spaces. This finding will also be further explored in chapter 4 when I introduce the broader idea of 'use of self' in social work.

Relationship with technology

"My own relationship with technology as a social worker has been driven by the young people I worked with. Though technology has gained relevance to my practice having developed alongside my career. My first social work placement in a mental health service involved the successful application for funding one 1 computer for clients to use. The workers didn't have any. Fast forward ten years and I would be advocating for a program that offered mobile phones to young people facing homelessness."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Technology use was highly relevant to the respondents, with 98 percent (98%) of stating they had a relationship with technology in their professional capacity, and the remaining two percent (2%) stating that they did not. Seventy nine percent (79%) identified that their relationship with technology differentiated professionally and personally, with the remaining 21 percent (21%) reporting that there was no difference. When comparing the years of experience groupings, all identified there was a difference between how they used technology professionally from personal use, however the two to five (2-5) years of experience group had equal responses, with half stating they had no difference in how they used technology, and the other half stating that they did, with eight out of the 16 in total from that grouping.
Two percent (2%) of respondents identified they did not use technology in their professional capacity. Further analysis of their responses indicated that they did indeed use technology. However, there were limits to how they defined the experience. For example, one of the respondents highlighted that they considered different types of technology when responding to whether they used technology in their practice, and specifically when it was accessed:

"*I considered whether I use iPads, computers/ other 'app' devices with clients*".

With both of these respondents stating elsewhere in the survey that they used technology 'very frequently', there are a number of ways in which to interpret this

data. Firstly, there could have been an error in the way the respondents filled in the survey question. However, upon further analysis of the respondent's answers, it seems that when they used technology and who provided access played a role. More specifically, they stated that they did not use technology when with a client, but did so to record the interaction in electronic case notes, for statistical purposes and research. Both respondents offered 'positive' stories of technology use, and one also of 'negative' impact. They also explained that they used some of their own devices and that they did not necessarily have the policy to support its' use. In essence, the way in which these two particular respondents articulated their role of being 'professional' was more complex and presented the boundary of 'performance': whether it was behind the scenes or in front of a client. Returning to the adage presented by Cwikel and Cnaan (1991) in my previous chapter, that "time spent with a computer is not time spent with the client" (p.118), these respondents would add that, the social workers relationship with technology is significant when it is shared with a client.

While I consider this to be an arbitrary measure, the ability of the sampled group to recall positive or negative outcomes to clients from the use of technology can be used as a broader indicator of the experiences with technology in their practice. There were 79 stories of success[39], offered by respondents about the use of technology in their practice and less than half of respondents then offering 'negative' outcomes[40], with 33 stories of adverse outcomes from the use of technology in their practice. I will outline the outcomes described by respondents later in this chapter.

Defining Technology

With social work literature offering limited scope as to what technology is in social work, I asked social work respondents to define what they mean by 'technology'. I asked this question as the existing literature draws too narrow a focus upon one form of technology and does not explore others, thus not giving a broader picture of what kinds of technology are embedded into social work practice of the day. Much of the literature is also concerned with devices or software, and while opening up the definition can present issues of not being specific enough, the response to the broader question of how social workers define technology can be an indicator of what social workers encounter as technology on a day to day basis.

In contrast to an expansive definition of technology offered in my previous chapter, social worker respondents focused on the tool of technology as applied to practice, as had previous literature. With open text responses permitted, thematic analysis identified that the majority of the responses referred to the computer as technology

[39] Suggested definition of 'success' given in the survey was when there was a positive impact on a client's life.
[40] Suggested definition of 'negative' given in the survey was when a client experienced increased risk or challenges in their lives.

(48%). This was followed by email (29%), the internet (23%) and tablets and iPads (23%). Digital applications (18%), smart phones (15%), and being online (12%) were also cited. Less cited responses to the question of defining technology included social media (10%), recording outcomes and case notes (8%), websites (7%) and Facebook (6%). Social worker respondents thus defined technology as both devices and mechanisms.

When asked directly about specific technology in the form of devices and applications used in professional practice, respondents highlighted a significant amount of technology from the fixed responses[41]. The following table (Table 5) outlines the technology categories that I selected for inclusion in the survey, and the responses in both percentages and number of responses, as multiple answers were permitted:

Table 5: Technology examples in practice from fixed responses

Technology	**Number of Responses**
Computer (Desktop)	90.72% 88
Laptop	53.61% 52
Smartphone	68.04% 66
Mobile phone (with no Smartphone capacity)	38.14% 37
Landline	71.13% 69
Tablet	39.18% 38
Applications (Apps)	55.67% 54
Websites	91.75% 89
Email	97.94% 95
Electronic Case Notes	76.29% 74
Online Forums or Groups	42.27% 41
Skype or other Video Conferencing	35.05% 34
Social Media	35.05% 34

[41] The technology specified as part of the closed answer options were selected from the outcome of consultations I conducted as part of the project 'Tech Savvy and 'Appy: Using Technology to engage young people and promote wellbeing' for NSW Kids and Families (NSW Kids and Families, 2014). The link to this report is attached as an appendix.

Eight 'other' responses were given in the open text section, which included webinars for professional development, online meetings, workplace specific data collection software, online reporting, recording equipment and applications such as Yammer and calendars. While the technology categories and use in professional practice yielded a broader and higher rate of use from social worker respondents, they still identified technology as being both devices and mechanisms for professional processes. It is clear that email as an application and all forms of telecommunication devices (landline, mobile phone and smart phone) are the most commonly cited. As these forms of technology have been previously documented in social work literature, they are subject to constructions of how social work micro skills can be translated through these technological tools. I will explain this concept further later in this chapter.

There were higher numbers of responses for technology when social workers were prompted with fixed responses. Even those definitions that featured in open text responses, such as computers and email, were cited by more social workers when prompted. There may be several interpretations of this occurring. When unprompted, respondents may have recalled the last used (or in the case of the survey being administered on a computer, the technology that appeared in front of them) technology in their definition. Six respondents only specified one form of technology in their definition, with four of these, being the 'computer'. The other two respondents that included one form of technology in their description were text messaging (which is both refers to the device and the application) and electronic referrals.

Technology as a context

When technology is framed as a context of, and for practice, the definitional lines of technology's place in social work become broadened. In contrast to the technology definitions offered by respondents, which primarily describe devices and mechanisms, when social worker respondents were asked to describe the context of technology in their social work, they were inclusive of the relationships formed with whom they work. Technology understood in this expansive way, as formal structures and informal norms, allows the deeper appreciation for the context of the client and the social worker, and of the broader practice settings, such as the organisations or practice areas where social workers are employed. As a context of, and for practice, technology can be further understood as a social arrangement, as argued in my previous chapter, which requires social workers navigate with their specific skills and values.

When asked about the main reasons for technology in their professional practice, the most cited reason was for 'clients', with 33 percent (33%) of responses. Text analysis also included descriptions of activities performed, from communication, 28 percent (28%) and writing notes, nine percent (9%), to attitudes towards technology as a process, with 'efficiency' at 26 percent (26%) and 'convenience', four percent (4%). Thematic analysis presented further dimensions to the data, with 'ease', 'connection'

and ‘engagement’ emerging as descriptors related to clients.

When analysing the specific contexts of practice, the client grouping of ‘young people’ was cited as a reason for professional use of technology. When the theme of ‘clients’ was further analysed, the engagement and connection to young people as clients of social work services was most cited. Technology can be viewed as a context for social work practice with young people from these respondents, as it offers a space for social work to occur and a place for social workers to inhabit with clients. This is significant as it reflects research into technology use by client groups, with technology deemed highly relevant to young people in particular (see Burns, Metcalfe, Rickwood, Third & Collins for Australian research examples). It is also significant for me as it has been my primary practice to work with young people. I will give this area special attention in my chapter 6.

With the most commonly cited reason for using technology more generally being ‘clients’, further analysis of this response indicated that it was not only *for* clients, but also *with* clients. Social worker respondents reported that they researched, communicated intervention plans, conducted case reviews, kept case notes and records, maintained an agency profile on websites, made referrals and prepared for client interactions. They also outlined the ways in which they used technology with clients, such as communicating through email, text messaging, social media, as well as completing technology-based activities together such as when facilitating groups. Some saw that it was a *“crucial”* element to connection with clients, with social worker respondents expressing that that use of technology in practice was more *“congruent with their* [clients] *existing practices”,* that it was the *“client’s choice”,* and it was viewed as *“increase*[ing] *options for clients”.* There were also aspects of technology that couldn’t be ‘translated’, that is, that makes the context for practice unique, with some social worker respondents noting that:
“accessing groups of young people is made much easier through social media like Facebook”,
“[it’s]less confronting than working one on one with a worker”,
and that technology creates a different space in which to connect, as social workers *“can connect with rural and remote clients, those who are unwell and cannot come into the office”.*
In this way, when technology is defined as a context and space for practice there is a return to the humanist principles in social work, or going or ‘starting where the client is at’ (Mattison, 2012). Additionally, some social worker respondents outlined that technologically enabled a space for social work relationships to be enacted and recorded. One respondent articulated this in very practical terms:
“It’s the only space to get things done”.

“Is this finding – that social workers have a relationship to technology because of their understanding of what clients want and need – any surprise to me? No. This was my experience. For me as a social work practitioner, I strived to ensure engagement and relationship with clients. Whether that was face-to-

face, phone, email, Facebook, text – they were a means to stay connected in relationship. I didn't think one superior to another as long as I could fulfil this aim. Some channels suited different means; however, I wanted my clients to drive this. So, whilst email might not be considered therapeutic within some theoretical approaches like the face-to-face session, if my clients said they did, I held their view with high regard. This is my application of collaborative and strengths-based practice.

I remember we asked clients what they wanted in one of the services I worked at, and they said they wanted contact and engagement with their social worker through multiple platforms. This somewhat surprised me at the time. They said technology applications such as texting and social media were needed, but they still wanted and valued the option of face-to-face contact. Clients didn't think we needed replacement, but that connection needed enhancement through having multiple options. It could have been any other communication technology (posted letters, telegrams) – technology was seen as being supportive of the relationship in whatever forms. And it keeps coming back to this question for me – isn't increasing the options for choice that our clients have, part of what the role of social work is about?"
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Information as sustaining relationships
Parton (2009) argues that there has been a transformation in social work from the relational and narrative, to a renewed focus and regard for the gathering and trading of information, which has been further impacted by technology. While digitalisation of technology, as Parton (2009) outlines, is not the sole reason for the shift in the way social work knowledge is constructed, it has however, created a tension in the way information is regarded and problematises technology as a context for practice. Parton (2009) cites the work of Howe (1996), to argue that the creation, assessment and storing of information has become of primary concern, rather than the creation, maintenance and regard for relationship, as a site for social work. The creation of forms, systems and databases using technology, has for Parton (2009), shifted reliance and trust from the professional, to emphasis and confidence in systems. In this way, Parton (2009) implicates technology as conducive to this shift and this is particularly of relevance when technology is viewed as a tool; technology as 'information' may be all that there is room for within this understanding. While the people that social workers work with may share information using technology, it is also technology that allows for connection and relationship to be sustained.

Professional relationships that social workers foster require space, professional discretion and subjectivity, and within an informational reading of technology in social work, this space becomes limited. While there may have been a shift in the form of knowledge in social work exacerbated with the application of technology, as argued by Parton (2009), there may also be space for professional discretion, as De Witte, Declercq & Hermans (2016) argue. In a recent qualitative study by De Witte, Declercq & Hermans (2016) of child protection social workers, they found even when using technology that attempts to standardise information gathering and decision making, the individual agency of the professional can still be enacted. They found

that there was a preservation of relational approaches to social work knowledge, despite application of client information system technology. A form of 'street level bureaucracy' was found to be prevalent for social workers interviewed in De Witte, Declercq & Hermans' (2016) study, with social workers creating their own strategies when using a client record management system, in order for them to preserve a client focused approach. They understood 'street level bureaucrats' to be social workers who could assert power through making decisions at the local level. While these findings indicate that the shift as Parton (2009) outlined is being challenged, they also highlight that the relationship between the social worker and technology can form gaps between policy, practice and accountability (De Witte, Declercq & Hermans, 2016).

When technology is constructed as a context for social work practice then the practical day to day skills that are required also come into question. Research suggests that similar sets of skills are employed by the social worker across all forms of technology and that outcomes of interventions delivered in digital spaces can be comparable to face to face interactions (Barak & Grohol, 2011). Stofle and Chechele's (2004) research into different modalities, including face to face interventions or those offered by different technology of that time, suggest that similar skills are employed by the social worker across all. However, there are suggested practice considerations for the social worker, such as adjusting communication strategies (Mattison, 2012), increasing the competency of the social worker across technologies (Beddoe, in Maidment & Egan, 2015), and rethinking ethical obligations (Reamer, 2015). While I will further examine the micro skills employed and specific ethical considerations later in this thesis, adjustments to the skill set of the social worker are often conceptualised as being tools that the social worker can draw upon. As outlined in chapter 2, the tool description and metaphor can give social workers the impression that effective connection and intervention is only a matter of deciding upon the 'right tool'. While consideration into how connections are formed and intervention progressed is important, a pure tool approach risks reducing the complexity of such decision-making in action, as well as overlooking the broader relationships between social work and technology.

Online from an offline world

"We did the necessary groundwork for using social media at our service: we observed the service practices using technology with young people, surveyed young people asking them what they wanted then had young people develop ideas on how we could shape support offered to them through technology. We looked at the ethical issues, the risks and outlined ways we could mitigate these. However, in attempting to implement our plan, we discovered that the organisation was unsure as to how to proceed. With what we thought was the leading department saying we had met all the criteria to have a Facebook page, I recall much confusion and anger towards we were at a standstill. We had sign off and reassurances, but over 12 months of this 'lag', and my team and I were frustrated. I contacted IT and asked them if they knew anything about it. I remember their response was guileless as it was enlightening – their department did not allow for Facebook to set up in this way for the

organisation. It didn't matter who signed off on what elsewhere – it wasn't possible from their end as staff had access blocked on a higher level. We had addressed the social, but not the technical."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

With the majority of social work respondents identifying that they work within a client service setting, the privacy of clients, issues of confidentiality as well as duty of care, all frame the construct of technologically defined spaces. Technology raises unique ethical considerations and issues in social work practice (see Reamer). Data getting lost, and the potential for confidential client information being 'hacked' was cited by two respondents as a potential reason that their relationship with technology was limited. With digital security of government and other human services, in particular, gaining attention from broader media, this concern for confidentiality of personal client records is indeed current and ongoing.

The AASW's Practice Guidelines on the use of technology in social work practice (2013) works through ethical issues arising from the need for privacy and confidentiality that relate to technology in practice. Form phone, email and text, the Guidelines offer scenarios and ethically supported processes that social workers need to consider when utilising technology in their practice with clients. While I will offer richer description and discussion on the Guidelines (2013) later in this thesis, I mention them here, as participants interpreted them as being fear evoking rather than supportive of technology in practice. During 'technology walk through' interviews, none of the participants brought up the Guidelines (2013) themselves. I prompted participants with questions on whether they had reviewed the Guidelines (2013) and if so, how relevant they found them to be in their practice. While participants did not rule out the relevance of the scenarios presented in the Guidelines (2013), most questioned the tone of the document, with one participant stating that if they followed the Guidelines (2013) "*to the letter*" that they would not use technology at all in their practice. The tone of the Guidelines (2013) was interpreted as "*cautious*" and "*careful*". This tone was in contrast to some of the strategies that participants outlined in their practice with technology, which I interpreted as being well considered, but also innovative and solved true problems they faced in practice.

Social worker respondents identified that their relationship with technology was limited in their practice, most commonly due to the organisational constraints placed upon them. More specifically, when focusing on the mechanisms for the adoption of technology, the social worker respondents were able to identify clear limitations; lack of organisationally supported access to technology as a tool. Forty six percent (46%) stated that they were not provided with a smartphone, and 57 percent (57%) were not provided with a tablet. This is not an issue as such, except that other findings indicate that social workers need these technologies. Social worker respondents offered complexity with regards to the notion of access, as 38 percent (38%) identified that they used their personal smartphone and 20 percent (20%) identified that they used their personally owned tablet in their day to day practice. Constraints

also extended beyond the devices to the policy that supports their use. Twenty eight percent (28%) of social worker respondents stated that they had no social media policy in place, and 17 percent (17%) stated that they practised with no code of conduct for online behaviour.

Rather than citing individual factors about the social worker's attitude towards technology, social worker respondents cited that there was a relationship between the organisation by which they were employed and technology use, with social worker respondents stating:

"technology use is determined by the organisation", and *"any technology not used is because the workplace won't purchase it".*

Additionally, four survey respondents offered reasoning for such organisational decisions, reducing these to restraints of funding and lack of resources. However, another social worker respondent suggested that the 'main reason' for not using technology in their practice was due to:

"[a] lack of respect for the wisdom and knowledge of clinical staff who have repeatedly requested access to computer programs/apps and phones".

This experience raises further questions beyond the application of technology, marking the professional identity of the social worker and the limited role and power they may have or perceive they have in their organisation. This limited power in decision-making about necessary resources has further implications for the self-care and wellbeing of social workers, as I explore in chapter 5. In this way though, technology becomes a cause of stress for social workers, and drives an unrequited longing to practice in alignment with professional values, practice wisdom and a growing body of evidence.

Returning to this idea of technology constructed as a context for social work practice, it becomes further apparent that this context is not necessarily a visible one. Drawing on Scott's (2013) ideas about 'hidden' or 'shadowed' organisations, we can account for some of the possible tensions that social workers experience using technology as a space, such as in social media platforms. Scott (2013) proposes that many organisations do not want to be known to exist, or particularly of relevance to social work, organisations that are 'shadowed', whereby they "shield members, to safeguard clients or customers" (p.160). Use of technology, which requires a 'self' to create an online space, casts uncommon and unwanted light onto areas of practice that are bounded by privacy and confidentiality, duty of care and use of professional and personal self. Further, some organisations in which social workers are employed, have issues with their public standing or image of their 'brand'. The majority of respondents identified their service or practice context as being client focused, such as child protection and mental health, and these are contexts where stigma and discrimination affect clients and act as potential barriers for access. Additionally, they are also areas where social workers themselves experience misconceptions or stereotypes about their role (Legood et al., 2016), such as that of child protection, where the broader community might believe social workers only remove children

from families. Even with such issues potentially affecting social workers presence in social media spaces, 35 percent (35%) of social worker respondents stated that they used social media as part of their practice. However, access again, was complex, with 44 percent (44%) identifying that they had no social media site access supported through their employer or organisation, and 12 percent (12%) reporting that they use their own personal device and plan. The desire of the social worker however may not be to cast light onto shadow organisations in the community, but rather to connect with clients in spaces they inhabit, as one respondent noted:
"I would like to use technology more often in my work, particularly social media and online forums to engage and connect young people, however this is forbidden in my workplace".
This respondent did not directly address how this 'forbidden' area was then managed, however, from the other respondents who confirmed that they used their own technology or used technology without the support of organisational policy, explain in part perhaps how others navigate this issue.

Outcomes

"I asked myself the questions of positive and negative outcomes from my relationship with technology as I developed the survey - I had so many examples. But there were a few examples that didn't sit in either space comfortably. I wondered if that was the same for respondents? Finding out about a death of a client on social media – was it positive that we found out so we could provide support for others and the family, or negative due to the nature of the information? A miscommunication via email with a client problematic at the time, but later helped make our relationship stronger and brought about positive changes in their life? I decided that I needed to create an either/or distinction to help draw some lines in the stories of technology from social work practice, despite my reservations."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

There were 79 stories of success offered by respondents on the use of technology in their practice[42], and less than half of respondents then offering 'negative' outcomes[43], with 33 stories of negative outcomes from the use of technology in their practice. Eighty-four responses were collected for the question on positive impacts however, 5 respondents identified they had no examples. Sixty-eight respondents provided data for the question on negative impacts however, 35 stated they had "*none*" or "*no*" examples to offer[44].

Outcomes described were diverse and context driven, with respondents offering rich examples from practice; problem solving, service access and fostering the

[42] Suggested definition of 'success' given in the survey was when there was a positive impact on a client's life.
[43] Suggested definition of 'negative' given in the survey was when a client experienced increased risk or challenges in their lives.
[44] I set these two more-time intensive questions to be optional to respondents, thus any gaps in the data were due to skipping of the questions by some of the respondents.

collaborative relationship between the social worker and client, all themes emerging from the examples offered. Respondents provided details of micro practice from their chosen examples, with technology constructed as space for continued adjunct connection with clients, as well as an efficient mechanism for completion of tasks. Technology was seen as allowing communication between social workers and clients that would have not otherwise existed, or would have been more difficult to establish. The following example also makes a note of the organisational policy that supports positive outcomes, with technology a conduit for access to much needed service provision:

> *"Our clients can be transient, often lose possessions (i.e. phones) and not have money for credit. Having policy allowing us to utilise Facebook means we can get messages to clients who may be otherwise uncontactable. In one circumstance, we were able to contact a client to inform them of a housing offer that they would have otherwise forfeited by not getting/answering calls from HousingNSW".*

While the significance technology has in younger people's lives is better documented in literature, examples of positive outcomes involving clients from diverse age groups and lived experience were given, reflecting the broad areas of practice by respondents. One example highlights the ease of application of therapeutic techniques for greater impact:

"65yo man with chronic condition & pain. I asked him to send me a text, daily, to say a positive thing that happened. He tended to shift his focus slightly towards the positive. I would respond with encouragement. We did this for 6 weeks".

Another example offered by a respondent emphasises the diversity of abilities presented by clients as well as new engagement processes technology in practice can offer social workers:

> *"I have a client who is in her late 40s, early 50s who is profoundly deaf, doesn't like TTY. We SMS each other - this is the best set up for her, gives her the opportunity to initiate contact - it can lead to some confusing messages, but at least alerts me to when there is something to follow up".*

The role of the social worker is not diminished in these examples – the relationships are in fact extended, or broadened in scope. This expansion of relationships is not contained to the worker and client in the following example:

"50-year-old parent – I taught them how to do privacy settings on Facebook so they could teach their child".

The sharing of knowledge and skills related to technology had a profound impact on the broader system of the initial client.

Overarching the positive examples offered by respondents was that their stories aligned with core values and principles of social work. Increasing connection, engagement, choice, options and providing timely and appropriate access to resources, were all themes that emerged from the technology practice experiences

outlined. Individual client work, family work and advocacy all featured in the positive examples offered, indicating the broader implications of the relationship between technology and social work. While this result was mirrored in the examples of negative outcomes, these next respondents' stories of technology present nuanced challenges to social work practice.

The challenges to the security of data and connection featured as negative outcomes experienced by social worker respondents. While there was only one example of 'hacking' offered (a Facebook profile of a social worker accessed by clients), the unreliability or inappropriateness of connection through technology was a more common experience:

> "*Technology can be unreliable, especially in rural situations, such as Skype or access to websites (bandwidth and internet service issues - small download capacity, speed etc). I once was in the middle of a very sensitive conversation with an at-risk client when the Skype technology failed. I telephoned the client back, but that interruption negatively affected her and our relationship building*"; and
>
> "*Client 69yo woman with sexual abuse history: I negotiated appt time via text but wasn't clear about how she could ask for a different counsellor, so she saw me again (I'd seen her under Better Access with limited help). This limited her choice, reminiscent of others taking advantage of her in past. She is engaging, but it harmed a potentially helpful opportunity. I should have spoken by phone, directly*".

Interestingly in both these examples, the telephone offered scope for continued connection, rather than physical face to face interactions. However, as noted by the first respondent, the difference of visual presence to audio alone, abruptly impacted rapport. In the second example, the limitations of text communication to verbal communication were highlighted. Both these examples draw attention to the choices that social workers make in connecting with clients. The ability of social workers to limit choice, whether related to failures of technology, or failures on the part of the social worker to make explicit the client's preferred communication process, becomes significant in understanding technology as interpreted through the core values of the profession.

A more common story shared by social worker respondents was that experience with, and access to technology distanced the client and the social worker from each other. Social worker respondents identified that the power differential between professional and client was reinstated through relationships with technology:
"*Attempted to assist client to use technology in their own problem solving, especially the Internet. It backfired as the client felt overwhelmed by the technology and learning something so new*";
"*Some clients are overwhelmed by technology, and feel intimidated when I can access info so easily*".
Strengths based and empowerment approaches to social work are embedded into

Australian social work practice, and are highlighted as ethical approaches to working with people (AASW Code of Ethics, 2010). These non-expert approaches argue for social workers to be collaborators alongside clients, and as the social worker respondents' examples highlight, when the social worker's expertise with technology exceeds the clients, this problematised the social worker's role. While not explored with these particular respondents, the sharing of knowledge related explicitly to technology collaboratively with clients could be regarded in keeping with anti-oppressive or empowerment approaches.

Other respondents made the distinction between information and knowledge clearly in the examples they offered of negative outcomes from their practice. While technology presented opportunities for clients to access specific services or information, the social worker respondents outlined the need for discernment in relationship to technology from a client's perspective also:
"Over research from client from Internet access to a variety of websites and self diagnosing disorders impacting on treatment i.e. depression"; and
"Clients using online etherapies and no longer able to log into them any more".

I examined this issue more closely with some of the social worker participants who offered insight into a new role they played in client empowerment. This included conversations to discern usefulness of information and through increasing literacy or awareness in specific areas of help seeking or activities. Social work participants often constructed this as a social justice issue. This also meant however, for some social worker participants, that this was a parallel process of learning and engagement with technology that they did not previously encounter. I will explain this further in chapter 4 when I examine use of self. By acknowledging that client and social worker relationships with technology require an understanding that discernment is a process, social workers are presented with new ways of engagement with clients. This access to information differs from when a client gains a second opinion from a medical doctor or goes to the library in search of hard copy literature, because technology can offer access to information in ways not previously encountered. While inequalities of access to technology exist, the maintenance of such inequalities, as well as others related to information, is challenged by the social work core value of social justice in practice.

Gathering evidence of outcomes in and of the field

While my research project did not specifically aim to account for the ways in which social workers recorded the outcomes or outputs of their practice, it became apparent that technology had a clear role and relationship in how this occurred. The keeping of digital records of clients or services rendered was practiced in some form for 76 percent (76%) of survey respondents and all 11 social worker participants, however there was such variation of how this was undertaken by the social worker participant and organisation, that the intricacies that were observed and described were somewhat overwhelming for me. What is clearer though, is that while there may

be restraint placed upon the relationship with technology when social worker respondents request specific forms of technology deemed to have direct client impact, use of client records systems, statistical software and outcomes measurement tools are more commonplace. Social worker respondents, when asked about why they use technology more broadly in their practice, offered the distinction of record keeping in their responses:

"*The funding body requires an online data collection program to be used"*

"I am connected to a state-wide database and everything I do is recorded for legal purposes"

"An increasing amount of patient information and records is used electronically"

"No choice - we use online case notes, surveys and stats are all online"

Social workers are straddling multiple professional conceptualisations of technology in their everyday practices, and are often encountering different framings of technology as a tool, or as a context or setting. When social workers are not permitted to use technology to enhance client relationships, but instead are required to have technical competency to collect data for their organisation, tensions arise. There are further tensions too. When personal understandings and varied experiences of technology, as well as multiple personal constructs of professional purpose are also considered, other challenges are created, which I describe in the following chapter.

The experiences of the social worker participants in the 'technology walk through' interviews, drew attention to the micro processes that record keeping entails. Some of the social work participants entered what could be described as a 'timesheet', whereby they were required to account for their working hours using pre-defined codes for activities. For one of the social worker participants this was done both prior to the social worker participant actually seeing the client, thus it was used to plan allocation of resources, as well as after the client was seen, to reflect the 'real' work of social work services given. Yet, only one version was submitted as record of outputs and outcomes. I asked the social worker participant how they felt about this process:

"Recording and accounting for every minute is stressful…how do you record having a cup of tea or going to the bathroom?"

(SW in Disability Sector)

Asking for an answer to the question they posed, the response was that they would allocate a code for such activities, but under the broader term, of 'general administration'. In an effort to be transparent, accountable and in some ways, to keep the client of the service visible, some aspects of the social worker became invisible, such as some of their more basic personal physical needs. Furthermore, the reality of the workday as defined by the technology was limited to the standardised codes that were only relevant to the professional self. This social worker participant also identified that they did not use technology in their professional capacity when responding to the survey. As I had an opportunity to further explore their response, I asked for further clarification. As initially hypothesised, the social worker made a distinction between when and whose presence they used technology, adding

multiple dimensions to their identity as a social work professional.

Another social work participant from the 'technology walk through' interviews was required to digitally scan client names of clients they had seen and then match them to barcodes that described social work services rendered. This was done in 'real time'; at the time the client was actually seen by the social worker, throughout their rounds of the hospital wards. This intrigued me, as much of client interaction is documented non-synchronously, after the fact. The social worker participant also had a number of other categories that they could select from to reflect their broader role in the organisation. I was very 'aware' of the scanning device that the social worker participant was required to carry at all times, as it had a cord that could be worn around the neck (see Figure 1), and corresponding barcodes that described the care, activity or intervention offered by the social worker participant.

This device and the process are problematised when reflecting upon what is potentially missing from the barcodes. It was not just the social worker participant and their personal self that became less visible, but the 'use of self' as a professional also fell into shadow. Drawing on literature outside of social work discourse, Hochschild (2015), helps bring to the surface what is not accounted for, so this can become clearer: "along the way something else happened too. Encouraging a patient to eat, listening to a patient's story, making a joke, patting an arm— such acts lost importance. They were absent from the medical charts. And these days, 'if something isn't on the charts,' as one observer noted, 'it didn't happen'. Emotional labour became invisible" (p.xii). The categories did not account for what is known in health services as 'good bedside manner' (Person & Finch, 2009), the rapport building process, which creates a safe environment for engagement between health practitioners and patients. These barcoded categories did not particularly measure outcomes either, but instead the services rendered, or outputs of the agency. Quality of these outputs or activities sat outside the categorisations offered, as well as activities such as those offered by Hochschild (2015) as emotional labour. However, the space to account for emotional labour may not be limited by technology itself, but by broader guidelines into how social workers document social work processes. Documents that direct client facing social workers produce such as assessment reports, case notes and intervention plans have been sites for impartiality and objectivity, features of best practice social work documentation (AASW Ethics and Practice Guideline: Case Notes, 2016). A language capturing subjectivity of the social worker and the client relationship needed to have been pre-existing for translation; the barcode did not necessarily miss outcomes and outputs that were already unobserved.

The social worker participant in the inpatient hospital setting stated they used this scanner as they saw clients across different wards of the hospital. I asked how they enacted the scanning device and what relationship the technology had to the client:

Social Worker: *"It's just another thing to think about…when you are…. And I am not actually thinking of the time as I have to finish this to get to the next person, the stats instructor has said you, you do something but you don't do stop, because you click onto the next person and that automatically stops you, so you don't have, umm if I stopped and went to another part of the ward or another part of the hospital, there would be a five minute gap, umm and that looks a bit messy on the system but it makes it too fiddly, it would make it too fiddly and there's no stats for walking from place to place or stopping for a bathroom break. You would normally begin by, …ah scanning the barcode of …you don't do this in front of a client"*
Me: "Ok, so this is all, ok, so clients don't know you're doing this?"
Social Worker: *"If they say something I usually say, this is for stats"*
(SW in Health Sector)

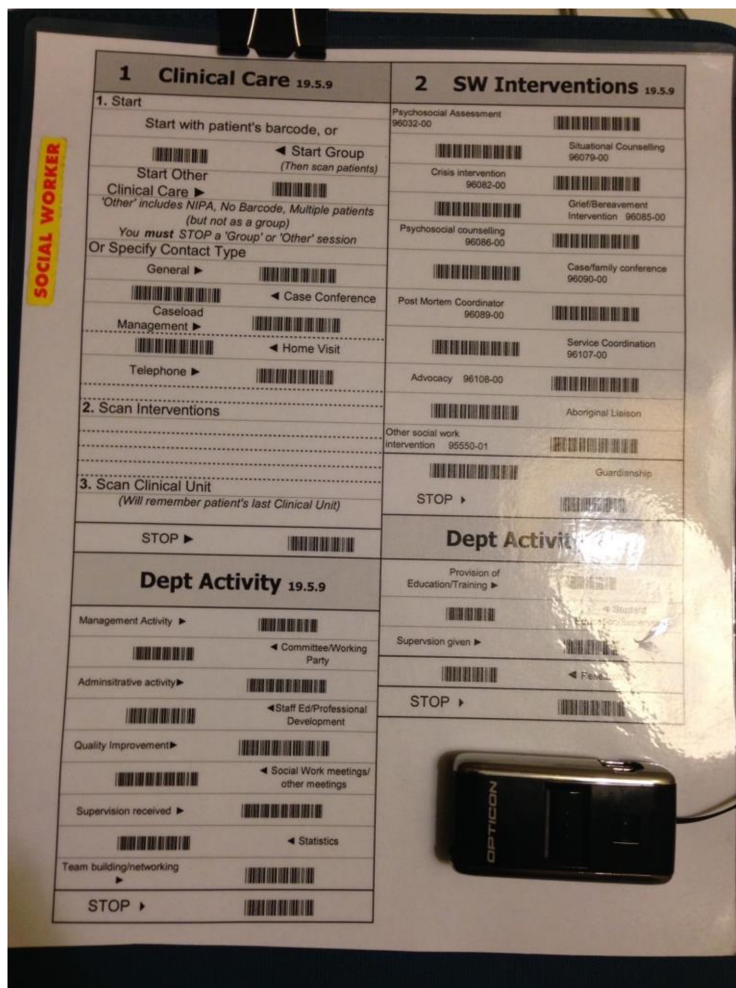

Figure 1: Scanning device and barcodes

The social worker participant used technology with the client when recording the interaction taking place however, this was not considered by them to be part of the direct relationship. This view is in contrast to the two survey respondents that regarded

that when they did not use technology with a client, then their professional use of technology didn't exist. A pressure exists then between what is seen as 'real' work, or more loosely put, the 'performance' of social work and what does not seek audience, acknowledgement of what can support the social worker, in order to be a professional. This unobserved area of practice often gains attention in social work supervision processes. I will explore this later in chapter 4 when I examine use of self in social work.

While the following experience was not commonplace from the respondents or participant's accounts, one social work participant described how the services they delivered were completely accounted for through technology. This was in fitting with how the organisation they worked for delivered services to clients, and this was only through technological supported spaces. The social worker participant did not have to add or change practices with clients to record particular outputs or outcomes related to clients, as in the other accounts offered however, the additional level of transparency was viewed to reduce the humanistic qualities of their work and replace this with a need for increased efficiency, *"they want us to be trained monkeys"*. Interestingly the social worker participant did not relate this to technology per se, but to the human drivers behind the practice model. With neoliberal drives for increased efficiency, the desired outcomes were imbued by the limitations of time – specifically the less time spent with the client the better. The social work participant was less concerned about accountability when comparing humanistically determined outcomes:

"I *don't care that 'big brother' is watching or listening in: I know I am doing a good job because the client sounds better and they tell me, thank you for being a real person"*

(SW in Income Support Sector)

Outcomes were being recorded by the organisation through service delivery without the direct input or explanation by the social worker participant. When I explored with the social worker participants whether their practice was different in other roles when they did not have the same relationship with and through technology, they responded that it was, but:

"if anything, it has made me use my social work skills through my voice – all those non-verbal's – I miss seeing people though, it is harder to know what is happening on the other end of the phone without all the other cues we are trained to use".

(SW in Income Support Sector)

This was reminiscent of another social work respondent's offering of negative consequences of technology in the client/social worker relationship:

> *"No risk to clients, but it takes an advanced clinician/practitioner to retain the art of engagement and assessment when all their work is gathered & retained via a laptop. How one shows empathy, listens attentively & responds to distress while doing the work with a laptop sitting between you and them".*

The social worker participant saw technology as a barrier to face to face interaction in forming the client/social worker relationship, however, this view was also held with acceptance as the aspired interaction could not exist, given the service model. The relationship with technology for this social work participant was complex but functional – technology allowed for service reach however it also inhibited the face to face connection that as a social worker they were trained to use and defined as social work.

"I have always seen the documentation of outcomes and outputs of my work as inherent to the role of social worker. I know that many of my colleagues have not shared this view and I understand why. I may have bought into the broader neo-liberal agenda of proving my worth and impact as a social worker – but I don't think this is the issue. As I reflect on both my experiences of documenting and measuring outcomes alongside those of social work respondents and participants I think an underlying concern is not that we are doing this, but what we are measuring and how we are doing so. Many measures don't seem to have the same value base as our profession. Measuring time spent with a client, how long it took to travel to their house, how much time we spoke about housing compared to other aspects of the conversation may highlight trends and tell us about the time involved, but not what I want to know overall about the impact of my support, albeit from my perspective. This then raises an issue more concerning for me on the ownership of outcomes. If I am indeed collaborating, the client also owns the outcomes of the intervention not the service that they came from, but so many times in my practice I have been confronted with this idea that the service owns outcomes, particularly if they are positive. I see this not as a polarisation, but a spectrum of ownership, responsibility and impact depending on practice context. But when working with young people I was often asked by management and external funders to present how we made a difference. I looked at the service-required outcomes of goals and outputs we were asked to document – these only told part of the story. Outcomes needed to be presented by clients too, but this side of social work was after the fact, hidden or seen as separate from the client. The social work respondents and participants accept technology in the collection of outcomes and there is space here for clients to be involved in this process - but only if we make this process explicit and collaborative – and dare I say, social."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

As suggested by the findings of my research, social workers state they seek technology because of their clients. It is not only direct-client facing social workers that shared this experience, with social worker respondents in diverse practice contexts outlining how technology supports their work in advocacy, community development and policy change. Social worker respondents also demonstrated a deep awareness and appreciation of the consequences of practice with technology, and critically evaluated the implications for the relationships that were formed with clients, or the community. The measures they were using were not arbitrary, and instead are based on the core values of social work, such as client self-determination and social justice. While technology presented distinct concerns in practice, social worker respondents offered equally distinct explanations for their decision making. Many social worker respondents were pragmatic about technology, yet disparities became evident in some of the social worker respondent

accounts between realities of, and their aspirations for practice. Some of these aspirations were formed, as in the example of the social worker participant whose practice was not physically facing clients, in the training and development of social workers. Other social workers had their aspirations formed through their practice, whereby they now long for new forms of connection, directed by and with whom they work.

The relationships between social work as a profession, social workers themselves and of technology in practice, requires ongoing critical engagement and exploration in future research. Current constructs of technology present limitations to the development of technology in social work practice. When understood as a social arrangement, technology can be experienced as a context of, and for social work practice. Multiple understandings of technology though are relevant to current social work practice. Yet, some of these understandings, such as those that dissociate technology from practices with clients, present multiple problems for social workers. Within their professional capacity, 88 percent (88%) of social work respondents stated that they use technology every day, and ten percent (10%) identified several times a week, making technology highly relevant in contemporary social work. Relevance, however, as outlined in the previous chapter, has been hotly contested, with social work commentators needing to argue technology will not violate the client/worker relationship. As I have canvassed in this chapter, social worker respondents can outline the many ways in which technology broadens, supports and enhances relationships in their practice with people. This means that it is no longer a case of social workers needing to accept technology in practice, as previous commentators have argued, but that social workers seek new, relevant ways in which to engage with their clients. Previously constructed barriers to embedding technology in social work practice can no longer be viewed as intrinsic, or personalised to the social worker necessarily. Many social worker respondents in my research utilised agency policy, some professional guidelines, but more generally, they relied on core values instead of practice theory, as this knowledge was more readily available to them. Garnered from the social work respondents who participated in this research is this: the client/social worker relationship continues to be their focus across practice areas, and it is of central significance to their understandings of technology, both professionally as outlined in this chapter, and personally, as I will further outline in the next two chapters.

Chapter 4. Mediating the Blurring Boundary of Self: The professional, the personal and technology

"I was in class today teaching students the skills of interviewing. Students were conducting role-plays of interviews using case studies, in ways they think emulates 'real world' practice. As I was giving feedback to one group, I referred to the reading for the week, which mentions 'use of self'. One student relayed this back to their group and me, "Ok, I see, as a social worker - be yourself". "Not quite," I responded, "be yourself, and use of self are a bit different". As I moved on to the next group and the finished up with the class, I remembered that use of self is indeed not a fixed term, and begun to deeply question the need for the distinction. Being a social worker is integral to my idea of self. I don't see this as unique to social work, but as a profession built on altruism, personal and professional values require something resembling a symbiotic relationship. How can I not 'use self', or as the student so succinctly stated, 'be myself'? The skills I have nurtured through my social work training serve me in other aspects of my living and vice versa – the professional aspects of my identity are interconnected to those that are more personal or not necessarily shared in my work environments. But social work, as I have practised, is relational, and indeed the social workers that participated in my research, described it in this way also, inclusive of diversities. I am now curious to understand how this relates again to technology, where on such platforms as social media, profiles are also deliberate acts of self, or in emails, communication is shared through the social worker's ability to express themselves in the written form. How can use of self be understood in relationship with technology?"
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

One of my key research questions centres on the ways professional and personal boundaries are negotiated by social workers in practice with technology. In the previous chapter, I examined the ways social workers mediate technology in their professional capacity. In this chapter, I look to my research for social workers' understandings of personal and professional boundaries with technology. To contextualise the personal in social work, I begin this chapter by outlining the core social work concept of 'use of self' from social work discourse. I argue that new technologies present new complexities for social work practice, and I explore the current relevance of the concept of 'use of self' in contemporary contexts for social work practice with technology. I include specific reference to ethical and practice guidelines, advocating for relationships with technology that incorporate broader considerations of social workers' use of self. I argue that boundaries are not necessarily related to technology alone, with clear distinctions made in social work texts on the professional from the personal. However, I contend technology offers further dimension to these aspects of self, providing a permeable barrier in practice. I continue to offer my reflections in this chapter, to demonstrate as I have attempted to in previous chapters, my voice as an emerging social work practitioner researcher, as well as my own use of self.

Social work practice is contextually and relationally driven and through this, continually evolving. In the previous chapters, I have identified several core values of social work manifest in decision-making around technology. From my research, social worker respondents aim for collaboration with clients and broader stakeholders when considering technology. Many social worker respondents explain that the nature of their relationships with technology are driven or shaped by their clients' needs or expressed wishes and thus, technology is relational. Others express this relationship as made necessary by the organisational or service context, with varying degrees of choice enacted by themselves as the practitioner. Unmet needs to embed technology in their social work practice was shared by several social worker respondents, along with a sense of moral distress when their requests to their employers for technology are refused. Many social worker respondents share various examples of practice where technology enabled positive outcomes for the people they work with. While there are also examples of negative outcomes, the broader message is that technology has a place in social work, even though conceptualisations of technology are often experienced as complex and contradictory in practice.

'Use of Self' as Defined in Social Work

"I remember first encountering this term 'use of self' when I was studying social work. I remember thinking that my lecturers were overcomplicating something that each of us had an intimacy with. It was all the 'others' that I was more concerned about developing awareness of at that stage. The ways in which we teach use of self now that I am a social work educator myself, might be at times, seem equally convoluted. The relational aspects of self in social work appear weakened in some understandings of how the social worker is in being with a client. I understand that students of social work, as well as practitioners already in practice, may want a sense of solidity when thinking about use of self in practice – so much depends on it. And with such clear lines of responsibility and boundary between the self and other in policy documents or practice guidelines, I see why some less fluid understandings of self have also been sustained in literature and in practice."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

The concept of 'self' in social work, professional, personal, and 'use of', is often referred to when attempting to understand the required skills and knowledge, as well as the boundaries of the professional relationships social workers form and enact in practice. A broad practical definition of use of self can be understood as the deliberate utilisation of inter-and intra-personal aspects of oneself to form relationships, enact empathy and ascertain boundaries with others within professional relationships (Hennessy, 2011). Bressi and Vaden (2017) state that use of self "encompasses a set of practitioner interventions which include Rogerian[45] person-centred concepts such as genuineness and transparency, self-disclosure of informational content regarding the worker's experiences, attributes, and identifications, as well as here-and-now self disclosures of the practitioner's emotional

[45] A humanistic approach to psychotherapy founded by Carl Rogers.

and cognitive processes during an interaction with a client" (Bressi & Vaden, 2017 p.35). Understandings of the concept of 'use of self' also include considerations into how communication is used by the social worker as well as content shared, whether framed by professional knowledge or personal experience.

Definitions of the use of self, privilege empathy as key to constructing a conduit between the self and other. It is a cognitive and emotional state that requires the social worker to access their thoughts and feelings in order to relate to the client. The capacity to demonstrate empathy is inherently required in social work, marking the humanistic foundations of the profession. Empathy is not presented without consideration for broader social work processes or the potential impacts to the social worker, as I will explore in the next chapter, yet the requirement for empathy in social work relationships is agreed. The adage of 'putting oneself in someone else's shoes', is often presented in literature and social work learning material as empathy. It is expected that empathy will manifest in positive rapport building in relationships, a sense of respect will build in relationships, and that the social workers' empathy will support a clients' sense of feeling understood.

Historically, the concept of use of self emerged as a development away from therapeutic positions where the practitioner aimed to be neutral in relationship with the client (Bressi & Vaden, 2017). Relational practice ideas within social work literature have necessitated a shift in the way use of self is conceptualised. In relationship-based social work, this concept of self is mutable, being "contingent on environment and context" (Ruch et al., 2010 p.52), and use of self is also seen as the foundation for relational insights, as "self-knowledge and self-awareness is the conduit through which client understanding develops" (O'Hara, 2006 p.46). Relationship-based models of practice stress to social workers importance of authenticity, real engagement and reflection-in-action, and encourages the social worker to embrace a sense of uncertainty and 'not knowing' in approaching the client. Unsettled social work practice, as outlined by Rossiter (2010), calls for empathy and ethics before knowledge, thus asking that social workers suspend their theoretical knowledge in forming relationships with clients. These postmodern ideas frame identities, and the relationships between client and social worker as fluid, with roles shifting. It is expected that the use of self of the social worker will develop, alongside the professional relationship between social worker and client.

The 'use' of self is often referred to as being a 'tool' for practice within literature (Butler et al., 2007), with interpersonal aspects of the social worker called upon in an effort to connect authentically with a client. Although generated from a psychological perspective, to illustrate the tool metaphor here, the following adage can also be found within social work discourses: 'The carpenter has a hammer, the surgeon has a scalpel, the therapist has the self' (Hayes & Gelso, 2001 p.1041). Yet despite the prevalence of the 'tool' metaphor, 'use of self' is not presented as having

neutrality in current social work literature, whereby the tool defines the problem[46]. Rather, drawing on psychoanalytic understandings amongst others, there is a strong emphasis on the consciousness and awareness of the social worker for deliberate action. The social worker is required to uncover issues of transference, counter-transference and co-transference within relationships formed when using self.

Many theoretical models of social work practice consider what use of self is for the social worker. Constituted as one part of the critically reflective approach to social work practice, the critical social worker requires the consistently aware use of self. Further, critical social work practice theories require engagement with self through reflectivity and reflexivity (see the work of Dominelli). Whilst these terms are often used interchangeably and often confusingly in social work literature (Adamowich et al., 2014), when examining the role of self for example in anti-oppressive and critical practice frameworks, the need to examine personal self in professional practice is presented as a necessary process in understanding and managing the impact of class, gender, race and culture of self in relation to other, in forming non-discriminatory relationships with clients. Here the use of self is not isolated, it is in relation to others that self is defined.

It is an area that seems to be understood however, it can also be viewed as an elusive concept in social work discourse. Research into the use of self in practice also demonstrates incongruence between how social workers construct their use of self in relation to broader social work practice theories (Knight, 2012). Despite the importance placed on self-awareness when using self of the social worker, England has argued that "the concept of 'the use of self' has a long-established place in social work thinking. It has, curiously, both a central and a marginal place" (p.40). More recently, Zubryski (2009) stated that this marginal space is inherently 'private' and individualised: "the intersection of the personal and professional self remains a private space in which social workers individually deal with the overlapping influences arising from their personal and professional worlds" (p.7). Others, such as Adamowich et al. (2014), contend that there is an apparent irony in social work practice theory, as though the need to critically evaluate one's 'use of self' is presented as necessary, the inclusion of 'use of self' in social work curriculum is "disappearing" (p.132). Whilst broader ideas and theories shape understandings of what the self is, many of this stem from modernist psychoanalytic and systems theories in literature (Bressi & Vaden 2017). Yet as social work researchers, Adamowich et al. (2014) conclude,

> "one thing comes across loud and clear for us: we need to critically reflect on our use of self, however we define that self. We cannot blame the Unconscious for our not knowing; nor can we blame external social structures of inequity for

[46] Abraham Maslow, the psychologist who defined the 'Hierarchy of Needs' noted, "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat every problem as if it were a nail" (Maslow, cited in Susskind and Susskind, 2015 p.42).

our oppressive practices. As reflective practitioners, we are called upon to be self-aware and take responsibility for our thoughts and actions" (p.132).

While definitions and descriptions of the use of self in social work literature attempt to demarcate the professional boundaries of the social worker, the personal is often left uncharted, even though personal engagement is inherently required. The professional relationship determines parameters of expected interactions between the client and the social worker, and this is where the definition of social work holds steadfast. In this way, use of self requires the social worker to navigate terrain, some of which is partially mapped and temporally fixed as the professional self. I now look further at what has been described as a 'false dichotomy' in social work (Shulman, 2012), around which I have so far skirted – the distinction between the personal and professional - to further explore the concept of use of self.

Self as both professional/personal

"And so, begins this journey of questioning – 'how much of self can I use with this client? How can I be fully conscious of all the things I am sharing about myself as a person (and professional) in all my actions? Are the professional aspects of my identity not being enacted when I share that I prefer my tea with soymilk and no sugar to my client? Can I talk about my lived experience of mental illness with my client?' Use of self requires you ask and respond to your questions – it requires pragmatism because it is about the practice of self. There might be mechanisms for responding to questions that emerge from practice, such as informally talking with colleagues or through supervision, but this becomes reflection and may not be readily applicable to the next encounter with and of self. Underlying these questions is a sense of the rigidity of self as personal and professional as a social worker. We ask social workers to see the multidimensional and dynamic nature of the people we work with, yet this is not as apparent in constructions of the social worker. The profession still attempts to define the self."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Rather than presenting the modernist dualism of separate selves engaged in social work practice, postmodern understandings of the professional and personal selves identify spaces and boundaries as being unfixed, subjective, positional, relational and negotiable (Rossiter, 2005). Social workers are seen to be subjective in practice and co-create multiple selves in relationship with clients. However, the professional self is still bounded. While expert-centric models of practice are challenged by postmodern ideas of the self and other, professional practice codes, practice standards, and organisation-based policies exist, creating fixed boundaries of what self in practice for social workers. These written documents define the role boundaries of social work, not only to social workers but also to people who encounter social work, by guiding the management of the professional and personal self in practice. Even before becoming a social worker, for those wishing to study the professional degree, several Australian universities have articulated personal inherent requirements. They

encompass several areas, such as behavioural stability[47], whereby students need to demonstrate their ability to personally fulfil emotional and behavioural expectations of a social worker. I am not arguing for the omission of such considerations as they serve to acknowledge the values of the profession as well as the vulnerability of people in situations that social workers encounter. I do however, draw attention to them as these documents highlight the ways in which the use of self can be fixed spatially and temporally.

In considering the implications of these understandings of the use of self with technology, I note that there is extensive literature examining the impacts of boundaries are how they are negotiated in face to face relationships with clients. The challenges that social workers are presented with when they share relationships with clients and technology is that these relationships are less familiar in social work texts. Scholarly literature on the use of technology in social work have begun to highlight the need for social workers to be more aware of the differences of online communication compared with face to face (Beddoe, 2015 in Maidment & Egan), in order to effectively manage professional and personal boundaries (Kimball & Kim, 2013; Reamer, 2013; Shapiro & Schulman, 1996), as well as potential risks when lack of physical cues create ambiguity of meaning (Kimball & Kim, 2013; Mattison, 2012; Midkiff & Wyatt, 2008).

In the Australian context, the Australian Association of Social Workers provides ethical and practice guidelines related to technology in practice (see Parts 1,2 & 3, 2016). Within these they reinstate the ethical boundaries of the social worker (AASW Code of Ethics, 2010) that "social workers, not their clients or former clients, are responsible for setting and maintaining clear and appropriate professional boundaries in all forms of communication, including face-to-face contact, written communication, telephone and online communications (including social networking, email, blogging and instant messaging)" (AASW, 2016). These professional boundaries, stemming from core concepts on the role of social workers, define expected behaviours with clients – with the acknowledgement that physical and technological spaces require boundaries. Thus, boundaries are what social workers 'do', and these boundaries define the difference between the personal and professional 'use of self'. Indeed, the assertion of such boundaries is what constitutes social workers as 'professional'.

However, there are noted tensions between what is currently included, what resides within practice experience, but that which is excluded from such guides. Though an American based social worker, Mattison (2012), stated that practitioners "are justified in being duly cautious of adopting online technologies into their practice until newer standards are added" (p.256), whilst other practitioners argue that existing codes and

[47] See 'Inherent Requirements for Social Work Undergraduate and Masters Qualifying Courses' at Australian Catholic University, Western Sydney, Flinders, Deakin, USyd, RMIT, to name a few tertiary institutions who utilise this framework.

standards already provide a strong foundation for ethically sound practice, whether that practice is through or with technology. A limitation that was identified by some of the social worker participants in my research about such guides is that they become fixed in time, while technology in their practice continues to develop. Though the AASW continue to provide updated practice guides (last update was 2016 and prior to that, in 2013), many mechanisms in practice during these periods have changed. For instance, one guide names Myspace as a technology, however popularity for such spaces has since dwindled, become defunct (in the case of Myspace), or not deemed as relevant as others.

The boundaries of self

While some studies have found that there are concerns amongst social workers on incorporating technology into their practice (Finn, 2006), others have identified that rather than being purely a substitute for face to face interaction, technology provides an extension of the relationships (Murdoch & Connor-Greene, cited in Mattison, 2012) between social workers and clients. If it is 'presence', as argued by LaMendola (2010), presented at the core of social work, then relationships are "not confined to face to face encounters but are necessarily relational" (p.108). He suggests that social workers have a responsibility to inhabit "spaces that where humans create associations, whether online or offline" (LaMendola, 2010 p.117), and thus social workers, by definition, are equipped to be in all spaces where "humans interact with their environments" (AASW, 2010 p.6). However, there is also an acknowledgement in social work literature that a number of micro skills do not necessarily 'translate' across spaces, and for social workers attempting to do so, such as when technology is viewed only to assist communication, opportunities for connection with clients can become limited. And there are also other implications which literature highlights as being of concern to both professional and personal use of self, as technology presents new ethical challenges, and gaps in knowledge and skills for social work (Anderson & Guyton, 2013; Ballantyne & LaMendola, 2010; Cwikel & Cnaan, 1991; Lie, 1997; Marlowecan, 1997; Reamer, 2013, 2015).

Earlier practice research by Gutheil and Simon (cited in Anderson & Guyton, 2013), suggests that technology creates ethical issues, of what they termed a 'slippery slope' when it comes to how boundaries of self are 'blurred' in professional relationships. From their research into the practices of psychologists, social workers and physicians, the authors suggest that developing professionals "could benefit from guidance when it comes to managing their personal life online" (Anderson & Guyton, 2013 p.116). Some studies have found that practitioners search for online information about their clients, which can pose other ethical and legal implications (Clinton, Silverman & Brendel, 2010; Dilillo & Gale, 2011, cited in Barak & Grohol, 2011), which face to face practice may not share. Other studies have focused on the differences between levels of self-disclosure on-and offline and have found that practitioners often provide information on social media profiles that they would not in the context of the face to face professional relationship with clients (Anderson & Guyton, 2013).

This raises implications for the professional relationships with clients, particularly in relation to psychodynamic understandings of use of self such as transference and countertransference (Reamer, 2013). However, technology alone does not blur or erode boundaries in practice; the literature suggests, whether it be intentional or unintentional disclosure, social workers themselves actively make decisions about what they share about their identities through their use of self. This view upholds the use of self as a conscious and deliberate action.

Highlighting the importance of negotiating professional boundaries when engaging the personal self is presented in emerging research. Kimball & Kim (2013) offer a model of use of self which sees the interrelatedness of personal, professional and virtual self. They identify several questions that social workers can use to guide their use of self in particular online spaces, in considering how they maintain professional boundaries in both professional and personal contexts (Kimball & Kim, 2013 p.187). They argue that social workers "need to be aware of the identities they create and maintain in the realm of social media because of ethical codes and policies" (Kimball & Kim, 2013 p.185). Kimball & Kim (2013) go further to suggest the notion of maintaining 'virtual boundaries', particularly in relation to the use of social media, with a clear understanding of how professional and personal connections intersect on a daily basis (p.186). This brings some ideas of real virtuality (Castells, 2011) into the discourse of technology in social work, with the inclusion of the technological 'use of self' as part of the practice reality. While this model relies on the consciousness of the social worker in making decisions about their use of self, it reflects broader expectations of professionals and technology. While Kimball and Kim's (2013) model offers awareness into a merged professional/personal self in relationship with technology, there is little temporal or spatial separation of the personal from the professional for social workers.

The significance that this lack of distinction between the professional and personal is felt when I describe, from my research, social worker participants' accounts of the intrusion of the professional self in this, and the next chapter. From sociological literature, use of self can be further understood as a form of emotional labour required by the social worker. Hochschild (1983) used this term in her ground-breaking research into the changing nature of professions, to describe how employees were increasingly expected to manage emotions as part of their job requirements. She argued that emotional labour is inherently expected in a growing number of professions and that employees are asked to modulate emotions as part of their paid role. Further to this, emotional labour which involves specific traits that are gendered, such as caring and selflessness as in the case of social work, can be understood as part of a gender performance. While Hochschild's (1983) study did not originally include social workers, she mentioned social work as a site for emotional labour. I recall the significance here in relation to the lack of any boundary between the professional and personal self in

relationship with technology, as there becomes an indistinguishable quality to the use of self. While Hochschild's (1983) ideas can be applied to many other aspects of social work practice, I draw on them here as they support understandings that some of the social worker respondents and participants in my research shared about their relationships with technology. Hochschild (2015) writes:

> "This kind of labour calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honour as deep and integral to our individuality. Beneath the difference between physical and emotional labour there lies a similarity in the possible cost of doing the work: the worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self-either the body or the margins of the soul-that is used to do the work. The factory boy's arm functioned like a piece of machinery used to produce wallpaper. His employer, regarding that arm as an instrument, claimed control over its speed and motions. In this situation, what was the relation between the boy's arm and his mind?" (p.7).

For the profession of social work, which asks for the continued consciousness of internal processes and subsequent external behaviour and communication, Hochschild's (2015) argument poses an interesting dimension. The estrangement of the personal self is further explored in the next chapter, where I examine care of the self in social work.

Boundaries in practice

Postmodern literature poses understandings on the boundaries of self as unfixed, blurred and deconstructed (Butler et al., 2007). The majority of survey respondents drew distinctions between the personal and the professional self in relation to technology, yet these boundaries were often individually negotiated. When asked if there was a difference in how they utilised technology professionally and personally, 80 percent (80%) of social worker respondents stated that there was. Several reasons for this emerged in the analysis, with the themes of 'purpose', 'audience', 'caution' and 'restriction' identified.

Social worker respondents cited that their 'clients' were the main reason for creating a differentiation between what practices are professional and others deemed to be personal. Just as the reason for having technology, so to the reason for distinguishing how it is utilised in the relationship. Respondents to the survey commented on technology as a tool and space in relation to what it could offer the clients with whom they work, straddling multiple conceptualisations of technology both professionally, as I have outlined in the previous chapter, and personally:
"Personally, is for my own sake, professionally it's for the sake of the clients", and;
"In my personal time I use social media to engage with friends/family and to share personal experiences. I also use technology for personal research and information such as locating social activities or researching recipes etc. My use of technology for work is focused on how to support young people and to remain engaged in the youth support sector".

The theme of 'audience' also emerged from the open text responses; this theme was twofold. Who became the audience when the social worker respondent engaged with technology, as well as which audience the social worker respondent became, were both considered when determining if they were using professional or personal self. For those social worker respondents who stated there was no difference between their professional or personal use, their relationship with audience offered accounts of integration and synthesis:
"It's very integrated".

Social work respondents made distinctions between clients, employers and personal contacts when they identified an expected audience for their use of technology. This, in turn, shaped how, why, when and what technology was used:
"Just as in my in-person professional and personal relationships I convey myself differently, so do I in emails, social networking etc", and;
"I use digital technology after seeing clients to report on outcomes, give a summary of my interventions. I do not use digital technology when I'm actually seeing clients. I also use digital technology prior to seeing clients to get information/history".
Acknowledging understandings of technology as deeply imbricated in everyday life, social workers seem to manage this blur through demarcation of audience, in order to maintain a sense of professionalism.

Social worker respondents stated they practised with caution, care and consideration when distinguishing between their personal and professional use of technology. In this way, technology diminished their use of self. The theme of 'caution' became apparent when social worker respondents outlined their approach to their decision-making. For some social work respondents, professional identities were constructed with a sense of omitting the personal, however more generally the descriptions offered about their approach to technology can be interpreted as critically reflective practice in social work, rather than a personal approach:
"When working, I take more time to construct a response. A few years ago, I was more candid in personal communication than I am now", and;

> *"I do not use Twitter for work related activities but for example I follow AASW on my personal account; it would show personal preferences/interests that I would tend to keep separate from work (e.g. political references, particular causes) I do not have a Facebook account (work or person) because it is too hard to separate out the person and the professional, and I limit personal information on Linkedin"*.

In the ways the social worker respondents outlined, the personal self was contained, reflecting a complex system of decision-making. This complexity was related also to the process in which the social worker respondent needed to navigate between distinct identities. Yet, for others, the sense of caution limited their professional relationship with technology altogether, for fear of being 'unprofessional':

"I do not use social media with my work for safety and professional reasons".

Lastly, the theme of 'restriction' emerged from the reasons offered by social worker respondents for using technology differently in their professional role from their personal life. There were a number of factors that imposed a sense of restriction; whether it was because of limitations imposed from their organisation, or due to limitations of the available technology, the personal self could also be restricted through technology, along with professional capacities:
"Use more technology personally as not all apps or tools are evidence based"
"I do a lot of research at home from websites that are banned at work"
"I use SMS and social media more so in my personal life and have access to greater resources in my personal life. At work, my access to technology is more limited and the computer systems/phones are often outdated"
"Firm boundaries on what information and views are shared online in a professional capacity", and;
"My use of technology at work is limited by the lack of utilisation within the agency".

Professional standing

As explored in chapter 2, social work literature on technology frames the individual social worker as having the power to decide to use technology, rather than acknowledging the practice constraints and institutional contexts. Thus, in understanding the relationship between social work and technology, the way in which social work engages more broadly as a profession within the practice of social and human services needs to be considered. As social workers seek professional legitimacy as I explained in chapter 1, and credibility for their emerging practices using technology, they do so within an environment where they are also potentially defending their profession. Further complexities exist within the practice realities of social work, whereby organisational restrictions and constraints present limitations to the adoption of technology, and to the voice given to social workers in order to advocate for any change of practices. Baker et al. (2014) argue that a practice-based approach, rather than a technology-led approach needs to be taken to embed technology into the profession of social work. This involves social workers adapting or creating technology either directly, or in collaboration with technology developers, in order to ensure relevance to both the social worker, area of practice and to clients. They look to the work of Castells on networks (cited by Baker et al., 2014), in an attempt to rethink the relationship between technology and social work, so as to account for the rapid social changes - both positive and potentially negative - which technology presents. Yet as others have observed, (Gillingham, 2015), this view does not assess the current capacity of social workers to do so.

Returning to the social worker respondents' accounts, some identified strategies that address gaps between the personal and professional use of self in relation to technology. While a considered use of self was demonstrated in the responses below, of concern are the restrictions placed on the professional social worker which may

limit the ways in which they can contribute to broader community conversations on social justice, as well as the disparity between personal practice and professional knowledge:

> *"Personally, I belong to and support non-profit and charitable agencies on social media and have an opinion of them and contribute to commentary and policy making. In my work place, we do not comment on other agencies, the government policies etc – we are comment neutral",* and;
> *"No social media professionally, no laptop or tablet at work, I am more innovative and free with personal technology – would recommend websites to friends but not to clients because I am worried about being held accountable for recommending things or it seeming 'unprofessional'. Wish I could use websites and apps more with clients and had more training about using technology in mental health work".*

In contrast, for others who stated there was a difference between their professional and personal relationship with technology, a small number identified that use of their professional self offered further capacity:

"My personal profile is not as active as my professional profile. In my personal time, I generally use Twitter and Facebook to keep updated on what's trending: whereas, with my professional use, I'm using such outputs to monitor outcomes achieved within project and across community".

Use of self through and with technology then, is a current social work practice. As 80 percent (80%) of social worker respondents and participants identified that their personal use of digital technology was broader and often less restrictive than their professional application, there is potentially more advanced personal use of self through technology that can be harnessed in practice. However, existing binary conceptualisations of the professional and personal mitigate against this in practice. Described in the accounts of social worker respondents', critical consideration was given to their use of language, meaning making, their audience and the boundaries they nurtured in the relationship with technology and clients. However, for 20 percent (20%) of social worker respondents, the distinction between the personal and professional did not hold significance. For some, this created a merged identity; a lack of distinction which presents challenges, namely to the construct of the professional self in social work:

"Social work is a lifestyle not a profession! I'm often looking at work related things outside of work hours - because they interest me"

Of the social worker respondents stating that they had no differentiation between the 'personal' and 'professional in their technology use, 17 identified as female and three of the 20 respondents identified as male. This was reflective of the broader numbers of respondents overall. Further analysis of the responses from the 20 percent (20%) indicated that they did not see themselves as being 'unprofessional', but occupying both professional and personal spaces with their own application of ethical consideration and discretion. These social workers challenged assumed dualisms

between the personal and professional in relationship to technology, through considered decision making and merged a common set of values between that which the profession upholds and promotes, and that of the social workers. However, as the literature suggests, this group of social worker respondents also risked the blurring of boundaries if they did not critically navigate between professional expectations and the personal self. Policy, practice guidelines and work procedures may be easier to draw upon for decision making in relation to use of technology within the professional context, as it is charted, and negotiated terrain (Reamer, 2013). Yet, some of these policies, guidelines and procedures can lack specificity, currency and pragmatism to the social worker respondent's practice realities (Mattison, 2012). I will now explore these documents from the social worker participants' perspectives.

When engaging with social work participants in the 'technology walk through' interviews on the knowledge they used to guide their considerations, nine of the eleven offered broader ethical understandings or policies that applied to their work more generally but applied them to technology using self discretion and reflexivity. Examples that social worker participants offered were agency-based policy, national legislation such as the Privacy Act, AASW Code of Ethics (2010), and use of supervision for critical reflection of self. Yet, the ways in which these were utilised varied greatly amongst the participant group. Furthermore, once prompted[48], two of the 11 social worker participants stated they viewed the AASW practice guidelines for use of technology (2013), however, they found these to be non-applicable to the realities of their particular practice complexities, or to the expectations of their clients:
"It [Practice Guidelines] doesn't respond to how people respond in the world any more".
(SW in Youth Service)

Sometimes this created vulnerability in the use of self of the social worker. Several social worker participants described being in social media spaces in ways that pushed the boundaries of their professional and personal identities. An example of this is when one of the social worker participants working with young people described their research into technological spaces that young people used such as dating applications. In viewing technology as a social arrangement, the social worker participant navigated a technical and cultural space they had not previously occupied, as they stated that given their relationship status (and age) they had never encountered these types of technology in their personal life. However, the social worker participant described how they created a fake dating profile to be able to understand the culture and environment that their clients were asking them about during interventions. By using the space as a testing ground, the social worker participant was able to see the potential privacy issues that a young person could face and not be aware of, which was also not accounted for in practice literature.

[48] As they begun to speak about the AASW, I asked specifically about the existing Guidelines.

This social worker participant intended to understand and empathise with their clients, adding that their relationship with technology allowed them the ability, skills and knowledge to do so. They also reinforced that their clients offered much in the way of experiences and wisdom, which in turn they shared with others. While there are potential ethical concerns that this example raises if the social worker participant had different intentions behind their strategy[49], it highlights the potential for social workers to bolster their digital competency through learning from their clients[50]. For strengths-based models of social work practice (Saleebey, 2006), this is well aligned. The strengths' perspective in social work acknowledges that all people have inbuilt capacities, promise and resources. Strengths-based models question the expert-centric relationships is social work, and re-position the client as the expert in their own lives. This can be extended to include technology in ways that can support individual social work relationships, as well as the ways in which people with whom social workers engage can actively contribute to the profession.

An Ever-Changing Profession

"Going back into contexts of practice which I had previously worked in for this research project felt a bit like going back to your primary school as an adult. I felt at odds with the environment that, say ten years ago, would have felt like a second home (almost!). All forms of technology – systems, communication, information, and devices – felt foreign in these places. The ones familiar to me were no doubt updated and have become familiar to new social workers. Yet some of the prevailing familiarities were aspects of the environment and culture, which I had worked so hard at the time to change. This finite resource of self that I have might not have been used so effectively after all. But it is time that has changed. When I attended to social work participants from practice environments that I have had previous experience in I felt mixed emotions. Some recounted similar battles within hierarchies, familiar injustices affecting clients, recognisable management structures, and the same peculiarities in colleagues I had encountered. It was a feeling of being one of the numbers, with experience presenting such vast meanings to each of us, yet so many similar themes. I think I see why research can be so important. It validates on a grander level, what as a social worker I did for many years – tell people, 'you are not alone in this'."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

When I looked to the relationship between technology and social work in chapter 2, I explored the introduction of specific forms of technology in social work practice. There I questioned the impact of communication technology. With technology presented in some literature as having the potential to replace social workers, I wondered if anyone feared that the social worker would be mistaken for such technology as the analogue telephone? The scant social work literature I could find on the telephone in social work[51], recounted early fears about the lack

[49] If they intended to use the site for themselves for example, or told their client.
[50]This example highlights that there is potential to utilise intergenerational strategies in the further training of social workers.
[51] I suspect that is related to the period of time when the landline telephone would have been introduced to social work. There could be a lack of records existing, publications or need for

of visual cues and rapport building (McCarty & Clancy, 2002). However, there was also strong emphasis on how social work skills could be operationalised into practice through adjustments rather than differentiation (Mallon & Houtstra, 2007; Rosenfield 2002). Schopler et al. (1998) offered a review of research into telephone technology spanning several decades. While challenges such as the lack of social salience and presence, and issues of confidentiality were presented, their research highlighted that the telephone was thoroughly embedded in social work practice through offering connection to diverse clients and allowing increased productivity for social workers. This seems to be in contrast to social work discourses on information technology that I explored in chapter 2 for instance.

Though I offered a brief account of the history of social work as a profession in my introductory chapter, I raise the issue of professionalisation here in connecting use of self to broader ideas on the impact of technology to professions. Susskind & Susskind (2015) argue that all professions should expect a trajectory of development in relationship with technology. They argue that professions begin with Industrialisation, then move to the digitisation of the profession. The profession then increases routinisation and commodification of the work or tasks involved, before shifting to disintermediation and demystification of the professional. Susskind and Susskind (2015) see technology as having the capacity to transform the current framework of professions into the post-profession, thus destabilizing any current concepts of use of self as a professional: "whatever terminology is preferred, we foresee that, in the end, the traditional professions will be dismantled, leaving most (but not all) professionals to be replaced by less expert people and high-performing systems" (p.303). There are a number of ideas that Susskind & Susskind (2015) offer, but their prediction for high-performing systems can be related to the following social worker respondent account:

> *"A new CEO and program manager tried to get me to not enter data into the client database. I disagreed and said it was how our reporting statistics were generated and provided to the funders. I was unable to convince the upper level managers that I was committed to not sabotaging the service by not fulfilling my role. The clients, members of the Stolen Generation, were denied services but no one in the funding department seemed to care or notice. Technology and reporting issues were not attended to. The CEO would not give clinical staff their mail with client records, so before resigning from the service I scanned any client documents I had received previously to a central location in case the boss kept the hard copies or they got 'lost'. It was a negative experience for me, but I made the most of the situation and it was positive in that important documents such as copies of birth certificates, witnessed documents etc were scanned as backup. This is a true and shocking story of*

evidence rather than a lack of attention given to technology in practice, which parallels the growing professionalisation of social work.

managerialism by people who have no idea of how to conduct a service to clients".

I have included their account in full, as I wanted to honour the experience they shared. This example confronts some assumptions about professionals in their relationship with technology and presents the complexities of practice. Firstly, from the example, there is an assumption that all professionals, such as those in the management of human services, are upholding what technology was developed for, while they are appointed as the experts. Secondly, the practice example highlights that technology can be a better serving system than services or the professionals that function the service themselves, especially when technology is constructed simply as a tool for information. In this example, the social worker created a subversive relationship with the organisation in order to rectify the situation, but as they stated, others had sabotaged the way in which technology was utilised. The social worker mobilised complex understandings of technology in this example, with technology being understood as a tool for data storage, a way of enforcing power and of documenting a metanarrative of the client. Lastly though, technology is not the only relationship that becomes obsolete. Technology becomes outdated, but social workers also resign from their posts for many reasons as the social worker respondent did in the example offered. It is another aspect of the use of self. Accessing key knowledge once this has occurred is problematic, even when there are succession planning or workforce sustainability strategies in place. Accessing information from high performing systems as Susskind & Susskind (2015) speculate, may prove less difficult. However, this presumes that the interface between technological systems and professionals are culturally aligned, and in the example offered by the social worker respondent, this is not currently or always the case.

One of the social worker participants worked solely through technological spaces. They did not have any face to face interaction with clients. They worked within an organisation that proclaimed to have a high-performing information and communication system that for which the social worker used a derogatory nickname for[52].We discussed what they believed clients thought of the system:

"*They don't care if I was a computer or a person, I know they need to get the [service], and at least they have less expectations of me…*

It's better when I've had it, or feeling burnt out, at least they don't need to see me like that".

(SW in Income Support Sector)

This raises a new dimension in the relationship between social workers' use of self and technology. While more recent literature and evidence suggests some clients prefer the anonymity of particular technology, or that technology can offer a sense of privacy and safety, technology can also provide a level of protection from some of the more negative aspects of the use of self, as offered by this social work

[52] I cannot name it here as I need to maintain anonymity for this participant.

participant. While the context of practice for this social work participant was through synchronous technology, other asynchronous spaces also offer protection from the negative impacts of use of self by professionals. Susskind and Susskind (2015) state that technology is often presented as incapable of producing feelings of being understood or empathised with, even though there are numerous examples where people choose technology over a professional when disclosing sensitive information or when asking for help.

The social worker participant highlighted that use of self in technological spaces changed the need for, and demonstration of empathy in the relationships formed with clients. The social worker participant account also raises assumptions that as a social worker they could demonstrate empathy competently and consistently. Their account emphasised that empathy, understood as a core skill in developing relationships in many direct facing social work models, is not always experienced in each of those relationships. While arguments that posit technology away from direct social work practice construct empathy as inherently demonstrated in human relationships, the relational nature raises possibilities empathy may not exist within them either. This then opens space for understanding social worker and client relationships formed with technology having the ability to adopt empathy in different ways. Empathy does not necessarily need to be understood as embodied and can be experienced on a spectrum. Technology offered the social worker and their clients, a safer space when empathetic feelings did not eventuate in the social worker. In this way, the social worker participant's use of self was transformed through their relationship with technology, and rather than viewing this as a destabilising experience under humanistic terms, it offered further room for use of self.

In my research, social worker respondents offer distinctive accounts of the use of self with technology, which challenge traditional humanist constructions. However, boundaries of self are not necessarily mandated by technology, with clear distinctions of the personal and the professional in the broader practice accounts of social workers. Yet, technology is often understood and mobilised in multiple ways, with social worker roles and identities also understood as being intricately fluid. In this chapter, I have explored how new technologies are presenting fresh complexities for social workers both professionally and personally, and have mapped the current relevance of the concept of 'use of self' in contemporary contexts for social work practice with technology. As a social worker, the 'use of self' draws upon multiple meanings for what 'self 'might relate to, and despite the vastness of what self can mean to individual social workers, within differing frameworks, knowledge bases, and practice contexts, use of self is still seen as a necessary bridge between theory and practice, and social worker and client. However foundational the concept may be, such as in anti-oppressive frameworks and critical practice, use of self is still argued as having a marginal place in social work literature on technology. The disparity between social work theories and practice realities, where social work itself has a marginal place as a profession, may also contribute to the complexities and tensions

therein. In addition, the marginalisation of the concept may also be accounted for through the construction of the 'caring professional' - caring and advocating for others' needs, in a climate of institutionalised changes, limited resources and gendered role expectations, placing further restrictions upon the social worker as a professional, the burden of which I explore in the next chapter on the care of the social worker. As argued in the previous chapters, much discussion exists in social work discourse about the approach, attitude or acceptance of the individual social worker in the uptake and adoption of technology in their everyday work, with assumptions constructed on their personal and professional agency. Issues of access, inequity and powerlessness are often shared experiences between clients and social workers and could present a space in which to reconceptualise relationships in practice. Use of self through technology adds further dimensions to contemporary social work practices, however, from the accounts of social worker respondents, social workers confront caution, restriction and limitations in their practice, marking technology as affectedly separate and contradictory to their personal understandings and experiences. Their personal self offers much in the way of available innovation, creativity and experience in relation to the role and use of technology, and social worker respondents demonstrate that they have potential benefits of multiple and multidimensional selves to draw upon in their practice. Fears of not being 'professional' enough, as described by social worker respondents who want to embed technology in their practice though, can be accounted by the historic shortage of social work practice theory on social work with technology, outdated guidelines, along with the perceived lack of evidence base. This is a rapidly changing area and an emerging area of social work literature. As the relationship with technology further develops and encompasses the broader lived experiences of social workers, it has potential to also be inclusive of the expertise of people with whom social workers engage.

Chapter 5. The Wellbeing of Social Workers: Connecting 'self-care' with understandings of technology

"Ok so I am 'self caring'…what does that mean today? In my past practice, it has meant booking out some time in the work day not to see clients, particularly ones that may trigger me who needed so much, wanted to kill me, trying to get supervision about the clients I felt I could do more for, diverting the phone to reception, having lunch away from my desk…
When I was a social work manager, it was a brave new world. Self-care meant something different – don't drown in work, or least don't let anyone see me when I was. Program emails to send at ungodly hours. Look after everyone else so they could care about the clients. Acknowledge their work. Screen my mobile in order to decide whether or not I needed to answer the call right away. In some ways I emphasised other people's efforts and work and the agenda for their self-care to bring a sense of balance to my own sense of self-worth, and what I had felt I lacked from my previous work environments – the message that in a world that everything can be replaced, your work is still important and special…
That elusive feeling of balance was not just to bring a sense of reconciliation of my experience into the present, but also dominates this idea of self-care. So, what dawns on me is that it is in my cells to give, professionally this manifests as social work research, supervision and teaching these days, and I am not brilliant at 'self-care' in the ways that I am told I need to be. I think part of my self-care really is about finding others that I share this affinity with and to look after each other instead. Is my self-care actually social too? Have I used technology as a platform for this type of model, have others?"
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

So far in this thesis, I have explored both professional and personal understandings of technology by social workers. In the previous chapter, I argued that the social work concept of the 'use of self', resides in a liminal space, and as considered in this chapter, when associated with technology, the care of the self is also neglected. Often referred to as 'self-care', social work discourse constructs the concept and practice of the care of the social worker self as a necessary skill, and commonly the professional and personal responsibility of the social worker. As social workers often work with people who are experiencing the effects and impacts of social injustices, trauma, poverty, abuse, and illness, there is an acknowledgment that this work can be cognitively, physically and emotionally demanding for social workers - as well as rewarding. The skill set for self-care encompasses a broad range of shared and personalised strategies, however the concept is often linked in literature to the negative effects experienced if one does not 'self-care' adequately, such as the ineffectiveness associated with 'burnout', 'compassion fatigue' and 'vicarious trauma', which I will explain in this chapter. The social worker is valued to the extent that they can demonstrate effectiveness. And while social workers need to be

effective[53], I highlight in this chapter, that the responsibility for the care of the social worker within the specific contexts of practice is seldom given as much attention. As a new context and setting for practice, and as a social arrangement, technology presents distinct challenges and opportunities for the self-care of the social worker. In this chapter, I outline understandings of self-care from social work literature alongside considerations for both the ways in which technology challenges, and offers novel methods for self-care. To map understandings of technology and self-care, I utilise an expanded definition of both technology as a social arrangement, and that of self-care as being beyond that of a skill, encompassing self-care as an inherent value for social work. Alongside these understandings, in this chapter, I also hold a relational view of the use of self in social work practice. Drawing on individual and contextual considerations described by social worker respondents and participants from my research, in this chapter, I outline new relationships that social workers have negotiated between personal and professional boundaries for their self-care, and the ways in which technology has created and shaped this process. I will continue to offer my critical reflections, drawing on past and present practice experiences throughout this chapter.

Shared Understandings

"I would not say I have been good at this social work self-care in the ways that I have read about. I can't seem to draw the same lines and distinctions as social work commentators make, 'my professional self', and 'my personal self' – these terms we use and I even teach – are not separate entities to me, nor do I seem to adhere to any plan devised by me to look after each with separate strategies[54]. If anything, I look at self-care plans as redundant. I don't understand how supervision can be solely constructed as self-care when social work necessitates critical reflection and continuous learning, and supervision gives me deep insights into other aspects of self. I know that it is not only defined in this way, but when I draw a table and allocate activities and time to professional and personal self-care then I am making some decisions about what purpose each activity will serve. The interconnectedness of who I am as a social worker, who I am as a person and what I strive to experience in the world doesn't reduce to professional (what I get paid for) and who I am (also what I get paid for when thinking about use of self). I see how other professions understand self-care, like in nursing and occupational therapy, there is much discussion about how their roles equip the self-care of others. Interestingly I can't seem to find self-care written about in professions where caring of people is not a construct used to explain the core function of the role (like in accountancy or engineering). In any case, my experience has been that social work works, in that my being a social worker, doing social work, is integral to my idea of self. So self-care encompasses self and other, as well as multiple facets of experience."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

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[53]This is connected to the value for service to others in social work, and specifically in direct facing roles, we are working with people experiencing many and varied challenges, and it is not their responsibility to look after their social workers as well.
[54] Commonly self-care plans are suggested as a strategy to increase individual self-care. Like a case plan with a client, or work plan with an employer, it is a form of goals setting or resolve for action. See https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html for examples.

There are definitions of self-care available in social work scholarly literature that either are unique to social work, or shared with other 'caring professions' such as psychology, nursing, teaching and counselling. Self-care is often constructed as a skill that social workers must learn and practice in order to function both professionally and personally. Shared understandings of self-care necessitate an interpretation of self, and as Zubrzycki (2009) observed, "texts are frustratingly narrow in their presentation of self in practice" (p.12). Self-care constructions are often based on traditional modernist definitions of self in social work, with a separation of the personal and professional (Bressi & Vaden, 2017). Understandings of self impact the extent to which self-care can become personalised or contextualised in meaning and practice. Steeped in metaphors and analogies, social work self-care understandings draw on intrapersonal capacity, psychoanalytic ideas of the self, and on broader social work knowledge. This use of metaphor in defining concepts, such as self-care though, is not isolated however, as Forte (1999) asserts: "social workers rely on metaphor to advance theory and to guide practice" (Forte, 1999 p.51).

Starting with metaphors, self-care has been equated to emergency or crisis responses with the following definition offered by Smyth (2015): "Just like you do on a plane, you need to put on your own oxygen mask first before trying to help others" (Smyth cited by University of Buffalo website), indicating that, contrary to research[55], social workers are unable to care for others if they do not look after themselves. It is not an uncommon construct, with researchers such as Grant et al. (2015) in their study on social work educators, discovering this parallel supposition: "they say 'if you've got to put on an oxygen mask, get your own secured first before you help anyone else with theirs'. I think you could apply that kind of logic to working in the caring professions. If you're not caring for yourself, you're not going to be able to care for other people" (p.2358). This view necessitates questions about what constitutes self-care. Metaphors, such as the oxygen raise concerns about waiting for obvious signs of imbalance or deprivation before action. O'Hara (2006) questions if there is a reluctance by workers to practise self-care because many strategies for self-care, particularly those that are informal or personal, are familiar: "Many of the strategies devised with their clients, to assist them in managing the stresses in their lives, would be relevant to the practitioner, yet for many of us there appears to be a reluctance to practice what we preach to our clients" (p.53). What does that mean for what we really think about the advice we give our clients? O'Hara (2006) concludes that it is a lack of awareness or complacency by emerging practitioners of consequences of not caring for the self adequately that could account for this reluctance. Yet this notion reinforces self-care as a remedy rather than a value.

The fundamental theme of 'life or death' is apparent in other self-care definitions too, however the links to the value of self, both professionally and personally also surface, such as in the following example: "Self-care is an essential social work survival skill.

[55] I will outline research on burnout in this chapter.

Self-care refers to activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to reduce stress and maintain and enhance our short- and longer-term health and wellbeing. Self-care is necessary for your effectiveness and success in honouring your professional and personal commitments" (University of Buffalo, 2015). In contrast to the adopted crisis model of self-care, whereby one uses self-care when the situation calls for evasive action, Moore et al. (2011) argue that self-care needs to be deliberate and ongoing, rather than episodic, in order to be effective. However, while self is accepted here as multidimensional, the value of the activity of self-care is inherently directed for service: "Self-care enhances well-being and involves purposeful and continuous efforts that are undertaken to ensure that all dimensions of the self receive the attention that is needed to make the person fit to assist others" (Moore et al., 2011 p.545).

The practices and activities for self-care, traditionally occupying two domains, are often presented as distinct: the professional or formal, and the personal or informal strategies. Lee and Miller (2013) offer this definition which differentiates these domains: "Personal self-care is defined as a process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote holistic health and well-being of the self, whereas professional self-care is understood as the process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote effective and appropriate use of self in the professional role within the context of sustaining holistic health and well-being" (p.98). Professional practices can include but are not limited to supervision, training, team debriefing and mentorship. While personal and informal social supports of the social worker have been less recognised in literature (Sanchez-Moreno et al., 2015), they are understood to include any strategy that is meaningful for the social worker which increases their sense of wellbeing, such as spiritual practice, maintaining social relationships, recreation and hobbies. Within this dualistic construct, the merit of each activity is judged on how useful it is at bringing balance and equilibrium between the personal and professional selves (Bressi & Vaden, 2017). Activities of daily living (sometimes referred to as 'boring self-care' in social media hashtags) are also promoted as self-care strategies to increase the social worker's capacity to care for others. Here eating a healthy meal, going for a walk, taking a bath or watching a movie are all suggested activities for personal self-care. Actions which negate self-care also need mention, such as those of excess alcohol or substance consumption, social isolation or overwork (not leaving time for personal self-care) or having too many caring obligations. Personal activities are highlighted as significant in restoring the social worker to their full capacity. While clients are not expected to contribute to the active self-care of social workers, I note that many organisations stipulate behavioural expectations of service seekers, such as agreeing to be respectful of agreed boundaries and being non-abusive during interactions. While this is not offered as self-care, such requests signal the suggested environment for many social work practices.

Self-care – a risk management approach?

Risk and deficits are commonly referred to in social work texts on self-care, and more

recently, the concept of resilience has also been introduced into this area of social work discourse. Numerous studies are dedicated to what social worker resilience is and ways to foster the increased capacity for the wellbeing of social workers (Adamson et al., 2014; Beddoe et al., 2014; Grant & Kinman, 2013; Yin, 2004). Before I outline the concept of resilience in the broader discussion of self-care, I will first explain the significance of risk as a concept as related to social work practice and self-care. O'Hara (in O'Hara and Pockett, 2011) suggests that unless we understand the risks of human services work, such as social work, then self-care is not fully appreciated as a preventative measure or adequately practised. Social work literature suggests that there are a number of negative outcomes avoided through the remedy of self-care and these are presented most commonly as being compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and burn out. Some of these terms require further distinction however, as while often interrelated, each account for varied experiences and are seen as a part of a spectrum (van Heugten, 2011).

Compassion fatigue describes a sense of emotional weariness towards empathising with others (Kapoulitsis & Corcoran, 2014), however, "workers are still able to empathise but begin to feel burdened and experience exhaustion at bearing the suffering of others" (van Heugten, 2011 p.20). Vicarious trauma, viewed as a secondary or indirect trauma, occurs as a result of listening to the trauma of abuse, violence and loss experienced by clients (van Heughten, 2011). Burnout is the extreme end of the spectrum and is defined as a response to "chronic work stress" (Sanchez-Moreno et al., 2015 p.2369). Of the three terms, burnout is not strictly confined to the caring professions, however as it often linked in social work literature to the ultimate failure to self-care. I will further explore the understandings of burnout as a practitioner and in academic texts.

Burnout is not a new concept when we think about the professions. The conceptual development of the term 'burnout' spans across the last four decades and has been formed by clinical and empirical research contributions (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Lloyd, King and Chenoweth, (2002) explain that the process of 'burning out' has three dimensions: a sense of emotional exhaustion and an inability to give of oneself, a process of depersonalisation whereby a social worker develop a cynical and negative attitude towards the people they work with, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, where the social worker views their work with little value or meaning. These experiences, more generally, are not unique or isolated to the profession of social work, with other people-orientated professions potential sites for burnout also.

Foundational texts on burnout (Farber, 1983; see Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1976) raised awareness and recognition of the commonality of specific experiences by professions and of volunteers (in the case of Freudenberger). Farber (1983) noted that while the experiences of burnout existed before the expression surfaced, particular social, economic and cultural factors have aligned to make the concept resonate.

Farber (1983) asserted that the professionalisation of human services created opportunities for increased fulfilment and clearer purpose from our professional lives, and inevitably for some of us, unmet expectations. Farber (1983) also believed that the breakdown of community, led people to need professional rather than informal supports, and thus the burden for human services greater. Yet, there are other issues related to 'self' that need to be considered here. Interestingly, Cherniss (cited in Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993 p.3) adds further depth to the expectations formed of and about professional roles. Cherniss (cited in Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993 p.3) proposed there are wide held beliefs that as human service professionals we always act with authority and competence with willing and responsive clients. He called this 'professional mystique' and believed it was reinforced in the education of human services professionals, where unrealistic expectations of day to day practice gather momentum.

Burning out

"I had a critical moment of learning from practice that my education could not have fully prepared me for, with the influence of 'professional mystique' in my burnout now apparent. Four years after graduating in social work (and my 5th in human services) I witnessed the suicide of my client. Up until that time, I kept feeling a tension though– why, with all that I knew and had given countless hours to, was I still feeling at the bottom of the 'pecking order'[56], and in many ways, ineffective as a social worker? How had I become part of the system that failed this client? I had to face the lived experience of a term we glossed over in my training. I had used 'burnout' to describe a number of professional states, sometimes in jest and other times with a profound sense of compassion. I have used it to judge others practice, 'they are showing signs of burnout!' as well to explain my own negativity towards my role, 'maybe I am just burned out'. In any case, the frequency and severity of the impacts of burnout, particularly as evidenced by empirical research, was not fully accounted for in my flippant remarks as I did not know much about burnout – other than you needed to avoid it at all costs. In lived reality, burnout hurt. It didn't impact just my professional self but my whole being in the world. No self-care strategy could avoid the situation I was in, yet equally, no understanding I previously had could account for the growth and development that my 'whole of self' burnout offered me. I was unsettled but from that I learnt that I needed to remain this way rather than fight against it. I also realised that burnout was not a solid state. It could, and did, happen again. It wasn't in acknowledgement of the risks of social work that I have found this soft spot, but because I have transcended them."

(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

If taking a risk management approach to self-care, we need to take stock of the actual risks, and in focusing on burnout experiences of social workers from research, then evidently some risks are empirically supported. Research such as that of Siebert (2005) for example, using a broad definition of burnout, found that burnout is a common experience; in a sample of 751 social workers about three-fourths reported having issues with burnout during their careers. Beyond prevalence, Kim, Ji & Kao's (2011) longitudinal study into the wellbeing of 406 social workers over a three year

[56] I was working in a mental health facility at the time.

period, highlights the ongoing costs of burnout on physical health. They found that social workers with higher initial levels of burnout later reported more physical health complaints. Moreover, higher initial levels of burnout led to a faster rate of deterioration in physical health over a one-year period. Studies into social workers experiencing burnout also suggest an increased risk of psychological distress, such as depression (Stanley, Manthorpe, & White, 2007).

Some of the limitations to research on burnout have included issues such as non-representative sampling, research designs using self-reporting and the variables focusing on professional factors alone. However, even with these considerations, Maslach and Schaufeli (1993) identified in their extensive research on burnout that it is an issue affecting many professions, and being a social worker evidently has risks to physical and emotional wellbeing. However, this approach correspondingly underlines the influence of the biomedical model in understanding self and self-care. Simply put, it is as if the professional self does the damage and the personal self needs to go into damage control. This stance simply compartmentalises self in social work and thus presents limitations to how we theorise self-care. As risk management models identify deficits, the consequences and risks of not practising self-care require emphasis. Inherently by using this approach in conceptualising self-care, less attention is given to the ways self-care is well practised. It also accentuates extreme examples of burnout, making good self-care low profile and harder to observe. The realities of practice and the shared experiences of social workers who have experienced negative consequences need not be silenced, however when self-care is constructed as an avoidant measure, an 'add on', or the last resort, a trajectory is set. While the consequences take centre stage, the discovery of good practice examples of self-care can be left for the social worker to muddle through, especially when the locus of responsibility is left with them, such as in neoliberal working environments, or when the concept of self is fragmented. Before I discern the lines of responsibility for self-care though, I offer a broader interpretation of burnout and self-care to include personal and social factors.

Stress, resilience and self-care

"I was marking a social work student's assessment which included a recording of them role playing an interview with a client. They were marked on their practice skills – attending, assessment and the beginning stages of intervention. Part of their assessment was meeting with me to watch the recording and reflecting and receiving feedback from me as the assessor. I noticed the student seemed so blunted in their affect – something that reminded me of when I worked in mental health settings with people in recovery from some form of schizophrenia. This was incongruent to how I experienced the student elsewhere, as they were often animated and open in classes. I inquired as to what was happening. The student stated that they were nervous about the recording as expected. But more so, they were scared of feeling what the client might be feeling. I asked why this was. They stated that they were scared of vicarious trauma, and this blunting of affect was perceived to avoid the risks. This raised many concerns for me as a social worker and as an educator and as a human being. The theoretical knowledge of the

apparent risks of social work was not only creating new risks but also inhibiting the growth of so much potential (personal and professional)."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

What makes some social workers able to withstand the competing pressures and stressors of the profession, and not fully experience the spectrum of imbalance associated with burnout, is questioned in more recent social work inquiry. This is often referred to in literature as 'resilience'. It is not my intention to pose resilience as self-care. The concept of resilience however, contributes to current constructions of self in social work and thus can be of relevance to understandings of social worker self-care. Given some research suggests that the average work 'life' of a direct practice social worker is around eight years (Curtis, Moriarty & Netten, 2009), resilience and longevity in the field is an important issue for the wellbeing of individuals (social workers and clients) and the profession.

Social work is accepted as being a demanding profession with common stressors (Collins, 2007; van Heughten, 2011). In van Heughten's (2011) research into social workers' experiences of stress, she outlined a broad range of stressors identified from her practice research. I relay these here as van Heughten's (2011) research offers insight into the practice realities of social work as straddling many competing demands: high workloads and administrative demands, role conflicts and a lack of clarity about the social work role, lack of status and remuneration and other rewards, value conflicts, inadequate resources to meet clients' needs, lack of control or job discretion, poor image or excessive public and political criticism, aggression from service users, team conflict and lack of supervisory and management support, physical work environments, and a lack of work-life balance. While many of these realities of social work are acknowledged in literature to be demanding, as a single factor, stress is not viewed as determining negative outcomes. However prolonged, chronic and unmanaged stress brought about by being a social worker is identified as significantly increasing the risk of burnout.

In social work, as in other fields, the concept of resilience is hotly contested. There are a number of perspectives represented in social work literature, with understandings that resilience can be an outcome, a process, a personal attribute or associated to environmental factors which contribute to the ability of an individual to overcome adversity (Adamson et al., 2014). Resilience, and how the concept is comprehended within the practice experience of social workers are reflective of broader debates, in particular of fixed and stable definitions or 'thicker' definitions that encompass process and outcome (Ungar, 2012). Early understandings of resilience focused on personality factors and cognitive abilities of individuals (Collins, 2007; Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015). McMurray's et al. (2008), research into social worker's conceptualisation of resilience found that social workers reflected these earlier definitions, and constructed resilience as a personal quality that one possessed. Grant & Kinman's (2013) study into social work students' ideas of what resilience

meant, also reflect more ‘intrinsic’ definitions.

Resilience has been more recently redefined in social work to include structural factors, such as the work environment, to acknowledge the broader practice contexts that social workers negotiate. Framing resilience as an individual characteristic inadequately captures lived experiences as dynamic or multidimensional, as argued by a participant in Grant et al. (2015) research of social work educators:

> “we shouldn’t speak about individual social workers not being emotionally resilient. Emotional resilience is also about the structures of support that may or not be in place for those individual social workers in their place of work, communities, families and friendship networks. I would favour a social model of resilience which locates resilience in these wider social and professional structures” (p.2357).

Acknowledging the broader contexts resilience is formed and reinforced within is more commonly negotiated in recent social work literature (Adamson et al., 2014; Beddoe et al., 2014), however lack of uniform understandings has created frustration for some (Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015). Contributing to the debate, Garrett (2015) suggests that resilience has become a keyword in social work discourses. He argues that it has become accepted uncritically in social work practice and theory. Garrett (2015) states that the popularity of ‘resilience’ as a concept in theory and as a measure in practice of the clients we work with, is part of a neo-liberal agenda – the emphasis on the individual’s adaptability to adversity without due acknowledgement and commitment to change structural inequalities that exist or contribute. In a study by Grant et al. (2015) of social work educators in England, there was agreement for the importance of what the authors termed ‘emotional curriculum’, to foster resilience and self-care. Agreement was shared amongst educators, and in light of such importance, an evidence based emotional curriculum was viewed as a risk mitigation strategy for emerging social workers: “A key task of social work education, therefore, is to raise awareness of these risks and help students develop ways of managing them effectively” (Grant et al., 2015 p. 2363). However, when the social work educators were asked who was responsible for fostering resilience in social work students, the students themselves were identified as the most accountable, with practicum educators, academic tutors and lecturers ranked in subsequent order (Grant et al., 2015 p.2359).

Even with broad definitions of resilience, Garrett (2015) raises dilemmas beyond the defining lines of the individual or the social understandings of resilience. The concept is extended to a more critical reading by Garrett (2015), into the values behind resilience language and into what he proposes are unexamined assumptions of what it means for one to be resilient within social work and policy discourses. Garrett (2015) argues that social work discourses use the word resilience in ways that suggest the concept is settled and accepted, rather than maintaining a critical lens which

interrogates the intentions, context and purpose of its' inclusion in social work discourse.

While Garrett (2015) deconstructs how resilience frames contemporary understandings of the people social workers work with, he does not particularly focus on how the concept has been applied to social workers themselves, even though parallels can be drawn. Garrett (2015) does open the way for resilience to be reimagined in social work discourse, however with this caveat:

> "We must be cautious that the concept of resilience is not used in public policy to withhold social supports or maintain inequities, based on the rationale that success or failure is determined by strengths or deficits within individuals and their families. It is not enough to bolster the resilience of at-risk children and families so that they can 'beat the odds'; we must also strive to *change the odds against them*" (Walsh in Seccombe, cited by Garrett, 2015 p.9 emphasis added by Garrett).

For social workers, this presents further challenges when the dual focus of social justice and direct support is applied to our professional and personal selves.

Of significance then, is that social work discourses on professional burnout and resilience, reflecting broader debates, have begun shifting in emphasis between personal attributes of social workers to the broader context of the profession. Patently, the potential for such adversity would not exist if I were in a different field, or as van Heugten (2011) contends, "organisational rather than personal factors are most central to protecting human services workers from stress overload" (van Heugten, 2011 p.44). The practical implications for self-care though need to be elucidated from these social work discourses. For example, in constructions of social worker self-care, when informal supports and personality factors are highlighted, the context of the professional and the responsibility of organisations for social worker self-care become obscured in the definition. Similarly, when structural and organisational factors are too narrowly focused upon, social workers can be disempowered of their individual agency, with the proposition of self-care becoming a somewhat futile remedy against the system. Interestingly, when looking for the professional bodies for guidance, the issue of self-care becomes obscure. Looking to international examples, Wilson's (2016) analysis of the National Association of Social Workers in the United States identified that there was no direct content on self-care in the ethical code of the profession. Similarly, the AASW, Code of Ethics (2010) omits content or value of self-care. Personal needs or issues of the social worker such as mental health and wellbeing is highlighted in Practice Guidelines as being the responsibility of the social worker to maintain and manage outside of professional relationships (Wilson, 2016). Similarly, in AASW documents, the onus of self-care is placed on the social worker to negotiate as part of the construct of service to others.

Sites for stress, burnout

"I have met many social work practitioners that see direct client facing roles as the only site for

potential burnout. Equally, I have had many discussions with social workers about the ways in which direct client facing roles offer the most personal rewards. Stress or 'sitting on the knife's edge' of burnout, seems to be the cost social workers are willing to pay for the privilege of sharing relationships with clients. But just because I currently don't see 'clients' as it were in my day-to-day work, I don't think I'm safer or experience fewer rewards. I still support students facing trauma, personal and social challenges, and the pressure to produce outcomes and outputs are still there. I still maintain the multiple foci of the individual, social, structural. It doesn't seem to matter what context I am in, the same sense of urgency is also demonstrated – whether that is in an urgent referral for housing or emails with labels of high importance, the working day is not often enough for the organisational goals to be met. One thing is clearer to me now with my experience though; I do not always share the goals of the organisation. I don't ask this if it were in opposition or at a point fixed in time, but at what point do I devote my energy to challenge the adversities themselves rather than be resilient to them? I feel that this question echoes the parallel processes of the social worker and client in addressing social and personal change. Perhaps the self-care that I can construct here is in acknowledging that there is indeed multiple selves and capacity to make choices."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Social work is often described as a personally rewarding profession (Collins, 2007; Rose, 2003). Numerous studies demonstrate an appreciation that frontline or client facing work is particularly intensive and a site for the burnout of social workers. However, less attention is given in social work discourse to other areas of practice[57] for social workers in research, education and policy. As a social worker that has contributed to all key practice areas of social work - direct client work, service development, policy development, research, field education and academia - I identify all of these contexts of practice as being 'social work'. However, I note that my experience is less chartered, or more appropriately, may lack broader research attention. As outlined in previous chapters, while social work is concerned with practical application and change at micro, meso and macro levels, and has strong connections between field and theory, practice areas for social workers can become specialised. However, this does not mean that practice areas are fixed, as described in chapter 3, where many of the social worker respondents accounted for engagement in multiple practice areas or had multiple foci. Social worker respondents who identified education and policy when describing their current practice area did not offer any specific insights into this issue of stress or burnout in these settings, however, other than more general concerns I have already outlined. Thus, this continues to be an area requiring further practice research.

More recently I came across the term 'pracademic' to describe, amongst a number of situations, the teaching/practice worlds I had straddled for some years. The term is

[57] These are all recognised by the AASW as being key practice areas for social work: direct practice, service management, organisational development and system change, policy, research and education and professional development (AASW, 2003).

not commonly cited[58], and I move outside of social work literature to explain that, "a pracademic is one who lives in two worlds— the world of professional practice and the world of academia—teaching and research" (Crow, 2010 p.54). In the social work context, this can manifest as it has in my experience, however the relationships between being a practitioner, a researcher and an educator can be, for lack of a better term, clunky. There is also added pressure to be authentic across all practice areas, as Chan & Ng (2004) assert:

> "As teachers, researchers and practitioners, we shall have to serve as role models for our students by practising what we preach. Thus, social work educators have to be competent in practice, effective in research utilisation, as well as innovative in teaching and learning. We have to create a reflective environment for students to develop an attitude of zero tolerance to injustice and exploitation" (p.315).

This is no easy feat, and perhaps for the pracademic there are new areas of 'mystique' to be differentiated.

Pracademia offers the temporal blending of identities, however the fluidity between practice areas is not particularly acknowledged in social work literature generally (Owens, 2017). Focusing on the academic and practice divide, Chan & Ng (2004) suggest that there is 'apathy and scepticism' amongst social work academics towards practitioners and that in return, social work practitioners are estranged from academia due to critique of practice experience. This view does not incorporate experiences of social workers that merge these identities or straddle multiple practice areas. This divide repeats other dualisms presented in social work literature such as the separation of theory from practice. Yet extensive and ongoing discourse has transformed this debate, creating new understandings such as praxis, this nexus between theory and practice. This is explained by Ife (2009) as significant to social work as "knowledge without action would be sterile, ungrounded and irrelevant, and action without knowledge is anti-intellectual, uniformed and usually dangerous" (p.160). I draw attention to this parable, not to dissect it, but to connect issues of separation as problematic to understanding the diversity of social work, alongside the intricacy of self-care across the practice areas.

Four social worker participants offered further insights into the multiplicity of practice areas they engaged in, and the relationship to the changing implications for self-care and technology. They engaged in direct practice, education, organisational development, private practice and research simultaneously, with three out of the four holding part time roles across these practice areas. Their relationships with technology were context driven to their practice areas, however, how they were able to carry out their tasks and duties and manage any client relationships across all roles more fluidly. There was an increased sense of being available due to their

[58] Searches provide limited articles, most outside of social work literature, referring to this term directly.

relationship with technology, as one organisation or practice context did not define it. They merged this and their social worker identities in ways that demonstrated the flexibility that technology presented. They utilised multiple platforms for their workspaces and all shared a distinct relationship with social media as embedded into their day to day practice. Self-care was performed in more fluid ways by these social worker participants, mirroring role identities, with technology constructed as being both professional and personal across their time. In this way, these particular social work participants did not differentiate whether they 'clocked on' or not, but saw their relationship with technology as malleable and importantly, directed at their own discretion.

Situating care of self with care for others

"I heard one student say to a fellow student: "you don't need to be a social worker; you need to see a social worker". This was not taken in jest. The student on hearing this view about their self-disclosure took this statement as an insult and became defensive. This incident that I saw in passing, has allowed me to reflect upon the issue of the boundaries that are employed as a social worker, as well as some of the assumptions about different states of being. No one seems to want to take on the archetype of the 'wounded healer'[59]. What happens when a social worker needs help with domestic violence, mental health, trauma, and protection of their children or the health or care of a family member? The boundaries of labels such as 'social worker' and 'client' are less rigid when a social worker is experiencing similar traumas, challenges and adversities with those that they work with. In a profession where boundaries and differentiation of duty are valued, blurring of boundaries of self in this way is clearly problematic. But with fluid constructions of social worker and client identity, boundaries can be traversed. As I reflect, I went home on a Friday afternoon after a day of crisis response to find out a family member had left a suicide note. Interestingly, I froze and did not remember what my on-the-job training would guide me to do. My 'insider' knowledge however had benefits, as I was able to call on expertise from my trusted colleagues to assist. I then went into action mode, without disassociation of my merged identities. Did I take this to formal supervision? I felt, as Yip (2016) would agree, that the call for critical reflection in a formal setting was just another point of stress. Alternatively, informal supports from my colleagues allowed me to process the parallel processes that were occurring. Ingram's (2013) study on the processing of emotions raised from practice supports my experience; Ingram (2013) found that social workers identified informal forums, such as their peers, to be of more value and support than formal forums of line supervision. Candidly, I know why…"
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Social work literature accepts that social workers require emotional awareness in order to empathise with, and be compassionate towards others. Returning to the concept of use of self in social work, intrapersonal skills such as self-awareness by the social worker is required for empathy to be enacted. Revisiting some of the concepts that I outlined in the previous chapter, as defined by Harms (2007), "empathy is the capacity to understand the feelings and experiences of another, without losing

[59] This term was coined by Carl Jung, and describes someone who has experienced their own adversities and healing journey to help others self actuate.

oneself in the process (cited in Maidment & Egan, 2009 p.90). Empathy does not require one to have lived experience in order to enact. Capacity for cognitive and emotional empathy are both required by the social worker, particularly in relational models of practice. This ability, along with appearing genuine and respectful in relationships is said to be fundamental to this kind of social work practice, and as Egan suggests (2016), develops as social workers gain deeper awareness of themselves.

Social work, as a values-based profession is contingent to ideas on individual altruism. Social workers operationalise this value as being "actively concerned with the welfare of others, and willing to give assistance to those in need of help" (Lord, 2007 cited in Sheppard & Charles, 2014 p.2060). The social work proposition understands helping to be at the heart of all matters. Schirmer & Michailakis (2015) explore this subject of helping, by positioning social work as part of a help system, which manages social inclusion/exclusion. They argue that "social work scholars assume that because there is too much injustice in the world, more help (understood as motivation, activation, empowerment, illumination, solidarity, equality) is needed to solve the problems" (Schirmer & Michailakis, 2015 p.579). Within this understanding, helping others is assumed to be what is required by the social worker, yet this need to help could also apply to the concept of social worker self-care.

Studies that explore role clarity though have found that professionals in care-based roles are less likely to seek help for mental health concerns or substance use (Seibert, 2003; Seibert & Seibert 2007). As social workers, we have 'insider' knowledge about the stigma associated with mental illness, substance use or legal issues for instance. Anti-oppressive frameworks support social workers to address stigma when advocating for others, but clearly self-disclosure has nuanced risks. van Heughten (2011) identifies other risks such as impaired professional identity and reputation. Stevens & Higgens (2002) suggest that reluctance to seek help could be linked to not wanting to burden others (Stevens & Higgins 2002). There are also temporal considerations of lived experiences of adversity by social workers. van Heughten's (2011) research into personal biographies of social workers found that personal history of child protection, domestic violence or mental health issues, for example, did not make the social worker any more vulnerable to burnout than a social worker without this experience. These issues can emerge during our careers also; being a social worker does not provide immunity to personal and social adversities.

Impacts of Technology

"I often feel pressured to have a professional social media profile. This would make sense given my interest and research in this area of social work practice. But I am the voice of doom and gloom when it comes to this area of my practice. I can't practice what I preach…even though what I preach is actually about contextual relevance. In research, having a Twitter, FB and an engaged Linked In account is relevant and some would argue, a necessary platform for information dissemination and connection.

However, I have a strong aversion to social media both personally and professionally. Personal gripes aside (I don't use the terms 'friend' and 'like' loosely – I prefer 'acquaintance' or 'love' - so social media offers me a diminished sense of authenticity), it's my past that I am scared will collide with my present. As someone who worked in statutory services, I have a strong sense of boundaries in place. I also have a group of people who don't like me, or the decisions I have made in their lives. I was also there at times of great sadness, pain and loss and some questioned why I could not 'save' their loved one. Although I am not at odds with this history, I do wish the outcomes were more positive, and I have a sense of forgiveness to others and myself in accepting my experience of social work practice. This means though that I am scared that one of my old clients or their family members will find me through social media. I don't think this is part of a messiah complex or thinking I have had more impact than I have. It is a reality that as a social worker, I have felt between a rock and a hard place often. Whether it is for questions, thank you or harassment, I need to move on. So, I trade in social platforms supported by technology for a sense of safety, real, informed or not– and this gesture is not only for myself but for my children too [it is difficult to read this back to myself]."
(Excerpt from my Reflective Journal)

Technology is understood in social work literature to add further complexity to issues of boundaries and client relationships. As outlined in my previous chapter on the use of self, spatial and temporal boundaries of relationships have needed reconsideration in relation to technology. Meier (2002) proposed that causes of social workers 'stress' included considerations for the integration of technology into the social work profession and presented an appreciation for the complexity experienced in day to day practice. While some of the terminologies are dated in the following excerpt from Meier (2002), it is an important study to recall here as it specifically examined stress as linked to technology:

> "the causes of the stress that social workers experienced were nested and interactive. Thus, in the context of role overload and role conflict, organisational dysfunction, and rapid institutional and technological change, social workers' personality characteristics and developmental histories could predispose some social workers to become disabled by stress" (p.210).

There were social worker respondents in my research who included considerations to technology as they identified the relationship a cause of organisational and boundary stress however, others also recounted how their relationship with technology offered solace and safety.

Having explored how self-care is understood in social work literature, I now look to social worker respondents and participants perceptions on how technology is perceived in relationship to self-care. Drawing upon the arguments I have shared in this chapter, I will outline the ways in which social worker respondents and participants contribute, challenge and advance current concepts of self-care. In relaying practice experiences, social worker participants spoke of self-care as being 'a given' priority, an assumed presence in their capacity as a social worker, however often this was aired with a sense of resistance to the organisations that they were working within. Their accounts included working with a need for self-care as well as

high workloads, missing staff, client needs, and a continuum of connection through digital means.

The relationship between technology and self-care that I offer from one of the social worker participants features several practice concerns which I will explore. The social work participant was based in a community mental health setting, and they described the technology they had access to as being *“ancient”* (example is Figure 2). This became a source of stress for them, with feelings expressed of inadequacy, from not meeting client expectations to disrespecting clients:

“I am not sure what I am expected to do with this thing? It’s embarrassing when clients have better phones than this”

(SW in Mental Health Sector)

They explained that they were so limited in how they could use the mobile phone, that they questioned the necessity of its’ existence.

Figure 2: Work phone used in mental health setting, 2015

I found this to be a curious statement. During the 'technology walk through' interview, the social worker participant had previously outlined how they were *"old school"* and *"not really excited"* by any technology being introduced into the organisation. However, it was with a sense of hopelessness that these sentiments were shared. This resonated with the accounts of other social worker participants, who expressed a sense of 'missing out' through the lack of relationships with technology in their professional capacity. This 'missing out' was coupled with concerns that their organisation was prioritising resources on technology to document the organisation's story rather than on ways technology could benefit the client's story. Feelings of inadequacy, of not meeting needs through limited resources permeated the narrative of some of the social worker participants, and this was sometimes fused to the idea that their experiences were exceptional. What they were describing could be understood, as a form of moral distress, whereby the social workers were feeling tensions between their practice agenda, professional values, needs of clients and that of the organisation. While this concept is borrowed from nursing and that it has flaws (Weinberg, 2009), it has been argued to be useful in understanding the impacts to self in the social work professional context. Fronek et al. (2017) explore multiple constructs of moral distress in their research on social workers to offer critical understandings of applying this term to social work practice. They outline how factors of professional ethics, morals, personal and professional values, organisational demands, structures and environment can contribute to social workers distress from the inability to act with a sense of integrity. Indeed, social worker respondents and participants who experienced technology as a 'forbidden relationship' (see chapter 3), or one where their professional knowledge was not respected, described this type of distress. A lack of power in redefining their relationship with technology in practice was understood to be an issue affecting them individually at times, however some respondents looked to broader structural, professional and political reasons. As explored in my previous chapter, there were also practice examples from social worker respondents that explain how they were able to work through moral distress in ways that incorporated their integrity to the mission of social work[60].

Returning to the social worker participant in the mental health setting, I asked about what they thought they were expected to do with the mobile phone in their professional capacity:
"It's for safety I guess…you don't sit at your desk all day…they [clients] don't come to you, we have to chase them"
(SW in Mental Health Sector)
Safety was used to mean the organisation knowing where the worker was located. This was offered with a sense of jest, but having worked within that practice context, I knew what the social worker participant was referring to – enacting schedules under

[60] I am deliberate in choosing not to state that they alleviate moral distress.

the Mental Health Act and managing Community Treatment Orders, thus working with involuntary clients in the community.

Further consideration of the context of practice for this social work participant highlighted the ways in which they mobilised the concept of self-care:
"*You have to protect yourself*"
(SW in Mental Health Sector)
This involved turning the work mobile phone off at the end of the working day, placing into a drawer at work and ensuring it was not taken home. Electronic communication such as email was also considered, with the social work participant outlining that they did not check emails nor did they arrange to have access to them once they left their work premises. Client files were kept on the work site due to organisational policy (these were physical paper files as well as some electronic forms printed out to be placed in the paper version of the file). The social worker participant was not referring to clients when talking about self-protection, but to the organisation, and what they felt was implicitly expected with the presence of technology. While this social work participant experienced a temporal and physical 'end of day', technology was perceived to enable the organisation to intrude into their personal space.

Technology for self-care
Seven social worker respondents noted they used technology specifically for their self-care, with applications cited by all 7, such as meditation apps, Facebook forums, and listening to music on Youtube. When asked about self-care strategies in relation to technology, the central theme from these social worker respondents was that they needed to limit and control technology in order to care for themselves. This related to the ways they used technology as a physical device and as a space they inhabited. Some social work participants referred to policy shaping how they controlled the intrusion of technology, however as previously outlined in chapter 3, many social work respondents identified that they had no policy in place that supported or guided their relationship with technology.

There were differences too, between whether or not social worker respondents considered self-care strategies with technology, and their years of practice in the field. In all years of experience, except for the 2 to 5-year group, the majority of social worker respondents identified self-care strategies. Those who had more than 8 years to over 20 years of field experience were more likely to have self-care strategies in place which addressed technology specifically than not. Interestingly, the group that showed exception was social work respondents with '2 to 5 years' of field experience. They were neither more nor less likely to describe self-care strategies that considered their relationship with technology. According to the literature though, this places this group in an interesting position, with studies by Kin, Ji & Kao (2011) and Maslach et al. (2001), outlining that early career social workers more likely to exhibit signs and symptoms of burnout. I will now outline some of the ways in which social worker

participants described their self-care in relationship with and to technology.

Self-care tactics: metaphysical boundaries

All of the social work participants who were issued with smart phones described specific behaviours towards the technology as an object, as well as a portal:
"When I take the phone home, I have nightmares about work, if it goes home it doesn't go in the bedroom even if it's switched off"
(SW in Child Protection Sector) and;
"I take the phone home, but I don't touch it"
(SW in Youth Service)

One social worker participant described metaphysical qualities for the technology given to her by the workplace, by stating that the *"phone has bad vibes"*. This took me to my early career in acute 24/7 mental health social work, where I would wear a pager on my pyjamas, hoping that it would not go off with a mental health emergency, but also hoping that if it did, I would wake up from my slumber. I am relieved that pagers seem no longer commonly 'a tool of the trade' as it were (none of the social work respondents included pagers as part of their definition of technology demonstrating change in the 'tools'), as I hold similar feelings, as described by this social worker participant, towards pagers. However, in recalling my time with a pager, I was either 'on call' or not. The mobile phone, as described by the participants push the relationship between the social worker and their employer, in ways the pager did not. The mobile phone is a non-fixed entity in comparison to the pager, which had a limited and specific function. To begin with, I did not have a personal pager, and this starkly contrasts to social worker respondent's capacity to have both personal and employer-given mobile phones. My only familiarity with the pager was professional and it did not necessitate a blurring of relationship that a mobile phone device can. Richardson and Third (2009) explain that mobile technology, such as the digital smart phone and the human body has a "somatic intimacy" (p.145), with the mobile phone becoming an embodied object in our everyday lives. They explain that the mobile phone has become a complex media interface, rather than just a tool for communication, such as with the pager. With technology as a setting for social work, multiple boundaries - physical boundaries, role boundaries - are challenged. Boundaries are commonly linked to relationships with clients, colleagues, and time, but it is in the descriptions offered by social worker respondents that boundaries are part of the relationship with technology also. It was difficult to ascertain from some responses to the survey if social worker respondents were referring only to work related technology, though, some social worker respondents described how technology mediated a boundary through the ways they distinguished professional and personal time.

One social worker participant who was issued with a smart phone spoke of an adjustment they made to the physical boundaries of its use. They shared an incident whereby they took the work phone home with them and forgot to turn it off in the

evening. The following example highlights an aspect of the way technology extends the relationship between the client and worker in unwanted ways:
Social Worker*: "I got a call from a parent at 8:30pm. I saw who the call was from and I didn't answer it…if I had answered it, I wouldn't have been able to do anything at that time, so I just thought the phone was supposed to be off anyway"*
Me: Does your agency say it needs to be turned off?
Social Worker: *"Well, no…they don't say anything really…other than it's a work phone for work purposes so I wouldn't make personal calls on it, but they don't say turn it off at a specific time. I have turned it on, on my way to work and a colleague rang and I think, I'll be there in 15 minutes, can't it wait til then?"*.
(SW in Child Protection Sector)

Self-care tactics: time as fluid
Another of the social worker participants, whose practice was within standard business hours, described how they sent emails when they experienced insomnia. However, they were mindful that sending emails at 3am would send a message of *"anti-self-care"*', so they would set Outlook to send out their emails at a more conventional time, such as 9am. They shared that when they hadn't been as mindful of the time sent, they were surprised to see people were responding to their emails at 2am! As I include this insight from my field notes, I wanted to be transparent and say that I have underlines and a 'sad face' all over this description by the social worker participant. My use of the emoticon signalled a particularly shameful reaction, as I had a similar strategy when working as a social work manager (not due to insomnia but workload capacity) that I had not so earnestly shared. The social work participant's story offered me redemption; this behaviour may have been acquired, and clearly, I was not alone. More broadly though, for the purpose of this research, this social worker participant outlined further considerations to the temporal qualities of technology as well as what could be observed by others as non-normative constructions of self-care. Interestingly when we explored the notion of what they termed 'anti self-care', their previous behaviour was self-adjusted due to raised concerns by colleagues and their direct line of management. They had been supportively questioned for the need of emails at those particular early hours and did believe the need for concern, as this was how they managed their insomnia in a way that was helpful to them.

Self-care tactics: admin days
Several of the social worker participants described the use of 'admin days' when I asked them about self-care. Each had a variation based on the context of service delivery, but generally what these admin days entailed was a reprise away from the face to face demands of their roles, into administrative duties. This involved technology as becoming a form of protection, as participants noted that technology offered the ability to work off-site. While none of the social worker participants who spoke about 'admin days' indicated that they needed more of these, they did however, find comfort in being able to have this space for their self-care. One social

worker participant described it in this way, *"I need that time to miss my clients!"*.

Self-care tactics: Skypervision

When exploring self-care with one of the social worker participants, they spoke about the positive role of supervision in their self-care. They worked in a statutory service and did not have social work specific supervision offered to them, rather they engaged in task or line management, which they constructed as being a lesser form of supervision. Broader debates on supervision in social work reflect these types of distinctions made by the social work participant. Some social work commentators have noted models of supervision have shifted from being educative to administrative (Harris, cited in Manthorpe et al., 2015). Others too have highlighted the increased focus of certain forms of supervision functioning to audit social work practice to manage potential risks (Beddoe, 2012). Noble and Irwin (2009) argued that supervision has moved from being an important strategy in developing social worker capacity for critical reflection, and instead is used by agencies to monitor social workers performance in their role. Noble and Irwin (2009) state that supervision has become an issue of management rather than professional development. In the case of this particular social work participant, they experienced a similar trajectory but found this to be unsatisfactory with regards to their ability to self-care.

With the separation of supervision into two forms – one provided by the agency of employment and the other arranged by them personally, I queried as to how the social worker participant then met their need for social work practice supervision. "*through Skypervision",* I was told. I had read about this term in American social work literature and had not heard Australian practitioners use this before. The social worker participant stated that they paid for their own supervision that was provided by a social worker in private practice. I asked how they had come to the arrangement of Skypervision. The social worker participant spoke of the stressors of their role – time constraints, no resources, involuntary clients and witnessing trauma almost on a daily basis. What technology offered them was a safe space in which to recount and reflect. And while it can be argued that supervision could offer this safety, it was the flexibility and the lack of physical space with the supervisor that the social worker participant sought. They described coming home, wearing their pyjama bottoms, and being in their own space to connect with their supervisor. It was their time and they felt that they were being efficient with what they experienced was a limited resource.

Connecting self-care with technology

"I remember the day that I really understood what self-care meant. So, it wasn't while I was studying social work. It wasn't even in the first few years of practice. It didn't really even sink in when I started managing staff. It was when I was reading a book to my son about what it meant to be kind. There was a section on being kind to others and how to be kind to oneself. I read the words deliberately…'kindness is something I can also give to myself. Being kind to myself means looking after my body. I look after it

by eating healthy food, exercising every day and getting lots of sleep!'[61] A light bulb moment. What the hell had I been thinking self-care was? I had given too much weight to this professional identity, with its thick veneer and after this, in the words of Foucault[62], I allowed the self to appear in my practice."
(Excerpt from my Reflective Journal)

I recount one social worker respondent's broader understanding of the impacts of technology on self-care. They presented an integrated view of self:
"I don't believe that you need self-care strategies with technology that are different to broader self-care strategies of exercise, sunshine, good air, diversity of activities, rest, good food, boundaries with other people, self-forgiveness and patience"
This construction offers capacity for self-care to be in the micro moments of the personal and the professional. Bressi & Vaden (2017) recently offered a relational definition of the concept of social worker self-care:

> *"Self-care is inclusive of agentic self-regulated activities that purposefully a.) bolster the ability to sit within, tolerate and understand the affective and identity dysregulation related to experiencing vulnerability and uncertainty in the social work relationship, and b.) make meaning of the ways workers' selves are changed from work with clients*" (p.37).

I draw on this definition as it indicates changing ideas on self-care in social work, as paradigms and practices have shifted to incorporate relationships with clients as a source of meaning. While I do not necessarily disagree with the social worker respondent's argument for no distinction to be made for activities for self-care, I do however argue that technology needs to be acknowledged as part of social worker self-care. Technology, such as the mobile phone, add further dimension to the continued professionalisation of social work as gendered and caring work.
When understood as a social arrangement, technology becomes deeply imbricated in our experiences, and the idea that technology does not warrant any particular attention concerning self-care becomes problematised. As some social worker participants outline, the connection to the workplace is hard to disrupt given there is a direct line between their employer or client, and themselves. Broader self-care strategies, such as exercise and sunshine address personal needs, however these do not manage the implications of employer expectations that social workers will be available for service outside of paid hours as 'caring and connected'[63].

In thinking about social worker self-care in this chapter, the place for technology in creating opportunities and potential problems for practice becomes more apparent. Self-care, as I have outlined in this chapter, has been limited in definition and in the attention, it has received. In social work literature, technology is

[61] This book is by Moroney, 2006, 'When I am Feeling Kind', Five Mile Press, Australia. I have read it to many students I have taught or supervised, hoping it will either reinforce what they already know, or turn on a light-bulb, as it did for me.
[62] Foucault, cited in Bressi & Vaden, 2017 p.36.
[63] On mobile technology, online or on the grid – I use connected here to say that the social worker is easily reached, whether or not the employer has provided devices (but it is further complicated if they have).

not always considered integral to the practice of self-care. When technology is understood as a tool, the strategy to 'switch off' is too simplistic, and does not take into account the cultural contexts for practice. When technology is understood as deeply imbricated in everyday life, social workers are able to negotiate boundaries in ways that account for complexities of everyday practice. As I have explained in this chapter, social worker respondents and participants surfaced areas of functional practice as they navigated the personal/professional nexus. However, despite this, I am left with a feeling of unease from social workers' narratives; while self-care was considered a 'given' and viewed as ordinary in the everyday, it was often used as a line of defence between the self and employer. Technology further complicates expectations of caring and giving of the social work profession. Whether messages are blatant or implicit, organisations expectations of social workers capacities are not always clear to social workers. The context of practice for many social workers, organisations, have the responsibility to foster environments for self-care by stating expectations of connection. There is further opportunity for social work knowledge to develop here. I now redraw my focus to a specific area of practice to surface new theories of social work with technology. From there I will conclude my thesis, reflecting on the findings of this research project as I look to the evolving relationships between social workers and technology.

Chapter 6. Social Work with Technology: Transformation in micro practices

"As I approach the end of my research project, gaps of knowledge are more evident. I see that social work practitioners have bridged this gap the best they can, utilising and adapting practice theories to stretch across, supporting their practises and relationship with technology. Some did this with the endorsement from their organisations, yet others were either on their own or felt alone in their quest to use technology as a context of practice. What to make of these stories? This part of my rethinking involves reconciling experiences that have been shared with me and by me, naming them as new understandings. But I can't deny the tension this presents me as a social worker who values pragmatism. I find a cheeky sense of solace from Maslach and Schaufeli's (1993) blunt statement: "people who are actually dealing with the problem tend to view theory building as intellectual game playing, with no practical payoff" (p.5), though I see how as a social worker I can develop and contribute to practice theory through the everyday interaction with 'the problem' within an evidence informed paradigm. In examining the relationships between social workers and technology, I bring the practical wisdom within the relationship to the fore. In this way, I acknowledge these relationships are very much alive and growing, and that evidence is coming from the bottom up."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

The relationships between technology and social work charted throughout this thesis require new conceptions of practice. In previous chapters I have outlined the ways social work respondents and participants account for technology in their practice, explaining how some of the narratives they shared, reiterated those from earlier social work literature on technology. Still, the ways that social worker respondents and participants construct technology in their practice offer novel developments of older narratives, disrupting fixed notions of self and outdated expert-centric relationships with clients. My research finds social worker respondents valuing the lived experience of clients, understanding that clients occupy physical and technological spaces. Despite the limitations presented by a lack of access to technology and policy, or of social work knowledge, social worker respondents are enriching relationships with clients through their often-complex relationships with technology. They create new relationships with clients and their employers, setting new boundaries of self and social work practice. In this last chapter, I return to the emerging micro practices of social workers. I present opportunities for the development of practice theories which deem technology in social work beyond simplistic dualisms, becoming further understood as a social arrangement. In this chapter, I understand micro practice to be the everyday ways in which social workers negotiate social arrangements and in doing so, create new understandings of technology in social work. I argue that through surfacing new theories of and for practice, social workers are meeting the changing needs of clients, and that of the changing workforce. I draw upon the practice of social workers working with young people in the mental health and wellbeing sector specifically, to illustrate examples of transformation in practice. To do this, I will explain and apply a model called SAMR [Substitution, Augmentation,

Modification, Redefinition] (Puentedura, 2006, 2015), which is primarily used in the education sector. This model helps assess the integration of technology in teaching practice, and adapted here, will support my interpretation of the shifting understandings of technology in social work. As in previous chapters, I offer my practice reflections to integrate my research into my social work practice.

Transcending the Gap

"I am grateful for the incredibly varied professional experience that I have. It has meant that I have been exposed to a broad range of approaches in many diverse practice areas and settings. As my attention is now drawn to higher education and pedagogies, I am privy to knowledge on teaching and learning. I am able to see the relevance of educational theories to not only social work more broadly, but also to the relationship with technology. On a micro-level, social workers are learning about the existence of new technology, often alongside the application in their practice. On meso levels, social workers are calling for more opportunities in the area of teaching on technology. In my work training and consulting NSW Health employees especially[64], I was overwhelmed by the request for more training – there was no resistance to learning! On a macro level then, I can see how borrowed theories from education can help social work bridge the current gap of understanding within the relationship between the profession and technology."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

To further explore the accounts of social work respondents who participated in my research, I now look to the educational model, SAMR (Puentedura 2006, 2015) in explaining the relationship between current social work practises and technology. The SAMR model is most commonly applied in the education sector, to assess and evaluate the ways technology is embedded into the learning experience. The acronym itself describes the relationships between the teaching and learning activity and how technology is constructed. The SAMR model asks educators to assess the extent of whether technology essentially enhances or transforms the learning experience. A scale is used where substituting and augmenting teaching activities with technology are viewed as enhancing learning, and where modifying and redefining teaching activities with technology are seen as transforming learning opportunities for students. Though technology is fundamentally a tool in learning within this model, critically applied, I use SAMR as a framework to further understand the practice accounts of social workers and assess the extent to which technology is integrated into the social work practices described. In using the SAMR model here however, I am not drawing upon the relationship between learning and teaching. Instead, I use the framework to assess the relationship between social work micro practices and technology. I will briefly explain the significance of utilising exemplars from education practice literature.

In reading a recent thesis in the area of technology in social work, Granholm (2016) borrows and adapts the concept of 'blended learning' from education (Garrison &

[64] See appendix.

Vaughan, 2008) to bring forth the amalgamated concept of 'blended social work' (Granholm, 2016). She argues that blended social work creates a continuum between face-to-face and online services with clients, and in the case of her research, with young people. Adopting Garrison & Vaughan's (cited by Granholm, 2016 p.60), blended learning ideas, where technology offers continued connection between teaching in the physical classroom environment and online spaces, Granholm (2016) states that social work services can be thought of in the same way – being a spectrum of offline and online encounters. Granholm (2016) extends this notion further though, explaining that as our lives are in a state of 'digital transfer', this blending of spaces is not in any way unfamiliar, particularly for young people participating in her research. Simply put, Granholm (2016) suggests online technology and offline practice methodologies have now become merged into a 'blended social work' practice. As defined by Granholm (2016):

> "Blended social work is…social work that thoughtfully integrates online and face to face practices by creatively considering the foundation of the practice and reorganising traditional contact, considering the needs and preconditions of the client. Blended social work promotes a practice-led and user centred approach to ICT (Information Communication Technology)" (p.60).

However, the relationship between technology, education and teaching differs to that of social work and technology. While similarities of how technology can permeate spaces can be argued across professions, context matters. Current conceptualisations on the role of the teaching practitioner permit student learning to be multidimensional – face to face, through texts or other forms of technology, thus the teaching profession's relationship with technology as a tool and space is perhaps more flexible and feasible. While the process of embedding technology in education deserves further examination elsewhere, I mention it here in passing to highlight that while Granholm (2016) adapts this knowledge to raise viable understandings of technology in social work, the role of the social worker needs continued attention. As I have discussed in this thesis, within the relationship of the profession of social work and technology, the role of the social worker is contested. While it is beyond the scope of my thesis to outline the role of the teacher and technology any deeper than I will in this chapter when I raise the SAMR model, it seems discourse on the role has further clarity. If adages on the current role of the teaching practitioner are understood to be less 'the sage on the stage' as in previous times, but 'the guide on the side', then the existence of these aphorisms might signal reconciled change. Yet Granholm's (2016) thesis presents connection with another practice profession that is familiar to me as a university lecturer, which inspired further adoption of an educational model in this chapter.

Social worker respondents and participants offered much in the way of substituted and augmented practices with technology. This was evident in the descriptions used where social workers remarked on their practices as being 'instead of' when

concerning technology. Here the micro practices of texting instead of calling, emailing instead of using letters and post, using online calendars instead of paper, all indicate that digital technology is enhancing social work practice. There is also an understanding that face to face practice and technology-mediated practices are useful when adjunct to each other:
"I have had ongoing email discussions with certain clients during times of high emotional stress for them, and it has been a very useful adjunct to my work. It has provided useful, flexible contact outside the normal office hours".

Others too, commented on the recording of social work practices, with the move away from paper and reflective case note taking and outcomes reporting, to digitalised versions of the activities:
"I often text to speech my client visits anonymously, then send to my notes file on my computer. I previously had to write them then write them again".
Yet some of these enhancements have created redefined means of connection, with the lines between what augments practice, to what transforms practice, being blurred:
"My use of SMS has improved client engagement. Clients rarely miss appointments and can respond without peers or parents being aware they are engaging with a worker. Use of SMS increases the client's privacy".

Other practices of enhancement, whereby social work respondents described technology in ways that enriched working with or connecting to clients, or in completing their tasks or role requirements, can also be found in the accounts offered. The following example highlights the practice space that technology provides, through creating ways that parallel the support they offer to clients:

> *"I have used apps such as Smiling Mind to assist young people to engage in calming meditation practices. On one particular occasion I used this app with a young person experiencing considerable anxiety before a Court hearing. The young person's use of this app noticeably reduced anxiety and enabled better engagement in the Court process and ultimately resulted in a good outcome".*

Another respondent outlined the multilayered ways that technology enhanced their practices with efficiency, increased transparency and connection. While a more extended extract, I include it in full to highlight the relationship that this social worker respondent reflects in their account. Technology is infused into all micro practices, described in ways that highlight the opportunities for the social worker, the client and the workplace. Here the social worker respondent outlines the harmonious and seamless relationship between technology and their social work practice:

> *"Being able to write case notes on a tablet/laptop immediately following a group or appointment. Using laptop/tablet/smart phone to research things with clients, such as recreation activities during appointments so the client can be part of the process instead of doing this in the office after the*

appointment. We have an online information platform for recording client details, case notes, etc. Being able to contact other worker, via mobile phone, when working out of the office. Being able to send text messages to clients (for some people this is more effective and useful than phone calls). Emails - incredibly helpful! Can send documents, be part of email lists, keep in contact with other workers. Can use smart phone to access emails when out of the office. Creativity: Using music and meditation aps during groups - Taking photos during groups - Taking photos of art work to upload onto our data base -Using aps as a method of engagement with clients, for example, movie making".

Again, the delineation between that which enhances, and that which transforms social work practice is notably fuzzy. This is not necessarily a shortcoming of the SAMR model, but indicative of the application to a practice such as social work, which is diverse in context. However, the model is contested in education literature as lacking in evidence (Green, 2014; Hamilton et al., 2016). Still, when conceptualising the transformative ways technology is understood in social work, other examples of micro practices make this line clearer. The inclusion of social media had redefined how technology is realised in social work, moving beyond technology as a tool, creating new environments for social work practice. However social media or social networking sites are also contested spaces for social work practice as previously outlined in chapter 3 of this thesis, with restriction and 'over bearing' cautiousness, particularly from organisations, immobilising micro practices. Yet these considerations are not without merit, and with regards to social media and social work practice, the transformative elements of practice present opportunities and concerns. Breaches of confidentiality, relationship boundaries and of role confusion have all been reported with social media use by social workers, which emphasise the need to rethink technology in relation to social work ethics (Cooner, 2013, 2014; see also Reamer).

Through using the SAMR model, the transformative examples of social media also reiterate the challenges that a technology-led approach surfaces. As I have previously mentioned in this thesis, social work commentators have more recently been arguing for a practice-led approach to technology (Baker et al., 2014; Hill & Shaw, 2011; Parrott & Madoc-Jones, 2008). Hill and Shaw (2011) align best practice with technology to be led by the social work practice itself, rather than by the processes or capabilities of specific technology. Baker et al. (2014) argue that practice-led approaches need to be taken to embed technology into the profession. They suggested that social workers adapt or create technology either directly or in collaboration with technology developers, to ensure relevance to the social worker, context of practice and to clients.

As shared by the social work respondents and participants offering their practice wisdom through this research, many practitioners are already transcending the gap or polarity between these approaches, by forging their own nuanced practices in situ

and in collaboration with clients. While social work commentators have argued for practice-led approaches to technology in broader systems, social work practitioners who were part of this research project created micro systems; adapting and creating their social work with technology on a smaller scale. They demonstrated their ability to critically evaluate the technology available to them, considered the practice context and client group and thus took a technology and practice approach, rather than waiting to create the 'perfect' system. However, this was not without risks. As explored in chapter 4 and 5, professional and personal boundaries needed to be perpetually negotiated in order for social workers to utilise understandings of technology in their own practice.

An unimagined 'neosocial' work

My social work training has prepared me in ways of thinking and doing and I think I should be able to go into any practice area – at least as a beginner – as context will shape my application of social work. Can I say this about technology though? When I graduated from social work, I can't recall even considering technology. We looked at social issues at the time (it was the late 90's and early 2000's), but any reference to technology was missed. Looking back, it would have been visionary to include critical thinking about the role of technology and new public management (we called it economic rationalism and managerialism in social work), computers and client records, mobile technology and connecting to clients. However, as I look to the current guidelines on essential core curriculum in social work (Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards, ASWEAS, 2012), technology does not make mention. Even in the area of mental health (Section 1), where broader research suggests the role technology plays in supporting young people's wellbeing, the ASWEAS guidelines do not specify that emerging social workers gain this knowledge as part of their training. So yes, it would have been visionary to include technology as a consideration in social work back in 1999! Internationally the National Association of Social Workers in the United States recently made significant changes to their Code of Ethics, by giving specific attention to technology and the ethical implications in practice (2017). My concern here is that if technology is not openly and specifically included in social work curriculum, then future relationships with technology in practice will be impacted. Whilst I was driven by a sense of being relevant as a social worker and my relationship with technology grew from this, it has not been an easy road, as my journal recounts. I am worried there are many missed opportunities – as a social work educator, am I sending out more social workers into the workforce who need to navigate technology for themselves? If part of this road was charted, can emerging social workers imagine new practices with technology that are yet to be created, rather than continuing a fight to adapt existing paradigms of practice? Context will shape my ways of thinking about technology but more so, my practice with technology requires theoretical foundations. I use this term in jest, but 'Social Work 2.0' requires technology to be transformative in social work as well. So far, we (and I am included in this we) have used past vantage points to assess the relationships. This adds to the technology time lag for practice and reinforces technology's separation from what social work is."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Social work literature, as I have canvased in previous chapters, has included continuing innovations in practice, such as Mattison's (2012) use of emoticons in therapeutic email, McAuliffe's (2003) use of email as a research space, Hickson's

(2012) exploration of blogging as critical reflection space, Cooner's (2017) training app for social workers on social media use and Reamer's (2014) ethical considerations for online supervision - all ways social workers have created new practices, made possible with technology. However, many, but not all, of the practices that I have outlined in this thesis such as digitalised case notes or emails to clients, look to technology to enrich, adapt or substitute current or known social work practice. Capacity for understanding social work, in ways that conceptualises technology as inherent in practice, is still yet to be fully realised.

In the short documentary 'Code Therapy'[65], O'Reilly and Pathak (2016) examine the changing conceptions of mental health recovery. The demonstration of technology in mental health recovery is not new or unique, and the documentary highlights a number of previously cited benefits of technology in mental health, not the least the transformative abilities of the technology of an online film in the area of promoting mental wellbeing itself. One of the key ideas presented in this documentary is that comparing online, virtual or technology based mental health services or treatment options to anything but themselves was ill informed. This position challenges technology-based services or treatment as presented as the 'other', but rather as integral, embedded and central to the sector. This position of comparing technology reinvigorates face to face 'versus' technology debates inherent in social works' relationship with technology that I feature throughout previous chapters of my thesis. Separation, or 'digital dualism' (Jurgenson, cited in Taylor, 2017) though, is now recognised as an unhelpful debate (Taylor, 2017). However, like technology in practice, this separatist debate has continued to develop over time. Such an example is Broadhurst and Mason's (2014) research on the importance of 'co-presence' in social work practice, advocating for social work to "reclaim its interactional expertise and foreground *embodied* ways of knowing" (p.5778 italics in original). The authors argue that face to face social work practice skills are being sidelined by technology mediated practices, which risks disengagement with, and capacity for authentic assessment of clients, particularly in the child protection sector. The concepts of co-presence and proximity are held as core to social work, and face to face interaction of the social worker with clients considered fundamentally as engagement. The space for face to face interaction in social work practices needs to continue to be valued – I have not argued against this stance – however, I raise this study as an example of how comparative debates of technology in social work continue to question and limit understandings of technology.

I have previously outlined in this thesis tensions where presenting social work as a profession has been problematic (Green, Gregory & Mason, 2006), along with social work's continued reference point of face to face practice as the only embodied way of being a social worker. These issues now necessitate reconsidering. Comparative arguments over the past decades have served the purpose for critical thinking of

[65] https://www.codetherapyfilm.com/

technology in practice, with the appropriateness of applications and mechanisms revaluated, ethical obligations recharted, and skills translated. However, similarly to the broader definition of social work introduced in chapter 1, a relationship with technology which allows flexibility of context to determine how social work is enacted is required. For social work to fulfil its aspirations now and in the future, new understandings of social work with technology are necessary. This requires an expansion of views and practices, where interpersonal interaction is not regarded as the only 'true' or embodied social work. New understandings of technology, as integral to the informal and formal social arrangements that social workers navigate to address social injustices and human suffering are required and, in order to transform understandings and practices of technology in social work practice, expansive conceptions of social work need also be reiterated.

However, the flexibility required to cultivate this integrated understanding of social work took me off guard when one of the social work participants outlined their relationship with technology in all their multiple roles, during one of the 'technology walk through' interviews. The social work participant outlined the clinical work they were involved in the youth mental health sector, as well as the research, policy and advocacy role they had, describing the fluidity of the roles, as well as the seamless quality of technology across the practice areas. I asked further about the direct client work, with the social worker participant explaining the assessment process across the multidisciplinary team, having one worker face to face with the client, while the other was channelled through secure video conferencing. The relationship the social worker participant had with technology was considered, reflexive and dynamic. They had shared considerable time with me (this 'technology walk through' interview was at the longer end of the spectrum outlined in chapter 1), and I had directed much of the discussion back to client work. I was taken aback when the social work participant stated that they really wanted to talk further about their advocacy and policy work. I had kept returning to the client-based work, prioritising and comparing this work, rather than remaining flexible to the full definition of social work, which includes many platforms and contexts. The social work participant then spoke about the role of technology in creating new forms of advocacy. Highlighting the opportunity for community, sharing of knowledge, developing awareness and campaigning for social issues, the social work participant was able to decipher a new role for the social worker in promoting social justice on a broader level, to new audiences. They spoke about how they had created online discussion groups and training in active citizenship, platforms created through technology. This prompted me to think about the emergence of the hashtag, which are phrases or words that follow the # symbol. Bruns and Burgess (2011) noted that hashtags have successfully been used to brand social advocacy (cited by Saxton et al., 2015) within mainstream discourses. At the conclusion of this 'technology walk through' interview, I reflected upon my own biases, acknowledging that the gaps of my own experience and perspectives impacted upon what I prioritised in the social worker participant's

account of practice. I now recognise this account offers fresh, integrated possibilities for understandings of social work with technology.

On the Smell of an Oily Rag

"Every job I have had as a social worker has involved some sort of resource scarcity – it's not a site of abundance, except for the problem solving! I can recall when young people at the service I worked at started using smart phones. I was at a service that supported predominately homeless young people at the time and begun noticing they had a different relationship with technology that I had. As I was trained in analogue photography, I had a bias and sentiment towards certain technology over others and found the thought of a mobile phone intrusive. Yet the young people I worked with really didn't. They were welcoming of group text messages, appointment reminders, and close proximity to their technology. This observation isn't anything new, nor is the understanding that young people experiencing homelessness prioritise technology over other needs [66]. Even in the pre-smart phone times, back in 2005 I was giving out mobile phones to young people who were homeless as part of a joint initiative with a telco, in an effort to keep them connected to service providers[67]. I remember a young person though who was offered a phone and free credit as part of this initiative refused the phone, as it was not a smart phone. Then another young person who accepted the phone and credit, but then pulled out their recently released smartphone and stated that they had no credit to make calls to service providers, but could use free WIFI. Much to their surprise however, they found many service providers did not have a Facebook page to send a message to, or an email account for them to use. So, the older mobile with credit would come in handy. I recall thinking, 'we are holding them back!', making them navigate archaic processes, rather than inviting them to connect and engage with us on their familiar territory. We didn't even have a live website! This is when I started asking questions about our relationship with technology. It was through a relationship, much like that of an absent friend or parent, with many challenges, limitations and unreciprocated expectations. Our service did not have funding or even given priority for technology to be viewed as a conduit. I found myself, using the ingenuity required when resources are limited, extending myself – justifying, advocating and stretching the boundaries, using my personal time and personally technology mediated spaces professionally."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

Social workers working with young people rely on psychological and sociological theories to support their work. They are informed by developmental theories, guiding age appropriate interventions, and sociological theories, such as generational theories, helping to understand influences of broader level societal changes. As I predominately worked with what is understood to be Generation Y and Millennials (Wyn & Woodman, 2006) at the time of my direct client facing practice with young people, I look to some of the understandings of the generations to make sense of some of my practice reflections and my research findings. Often referred to as 'digital natives', there are assumptions about post-Generation X's relationships with technology, namely they are all technology savvy and literate. However, what digital

[66] See the work of Humphries on mobile phone technology and young people experiencing homelessness.
[67] The program was called "Young People Connected", a project funded by Vodaphone.

literacy actually means is debatable and difficult to offer universal or fixed meanings (Ingerman & Collier-Reed, 2011). There are positive implications of some literature into Generation Y and Millennial's relationships with technology, such as how face to face relationships are often enriched with technology. However, there are also concerns about over-reliance on technology, increased distraction and 'addiction' to technology. This also impacts constructions of younger social workers, with some social work commentators going as far as questioning whether newly qualifying social workers are actually digitally native, or digitally naïve (Kirwan & McGuckin, 2014).

In many parts of this thesis, I have deliberately remained inclusive of various practice areas of social work and forms of technology, keeping parameters of definition wide-ranging until drill down has become necessary for coherence, or to remain honourable to the accounts offered by social worker respondents. I now look further at social work in the area of promoting mental health and wellbeing with young people, not only because this is, as mentioned, my significant practice area, but also as many of the social worker respondents in my research worked primarily with young people in the practice context of mental health.

It is widely accepted that technology is of particular relevance to young people. Technology use and technologically mediated spaces are familiar to young people. Smart phone ownership by 14 to 17 year old's in Australia is high at 87 percent (87%) (Deloitte, 2016) and the use of socially mediated spaces, such as Class Dojo or Google hangouts, in educational settings commonplace. The most embedded technology is the internet, most commonly used by young people for social networking, gaming and messaging (Blanchard, Hosie & Burns, 2013). With what appears to be such widespread availability, assumptions on how young people access and navigate technology are built (Watling & Rogers, 2012). These assumptions are essential for social workers to critically examine though, to uphold principles of fairness and social justice.

Rather than presenting assumptions however, the social work respondents and participants in my research drew upon their practice experience with young people in defining their own co-relationship with technology. Technology use, proficiency or access was a clear consideration in social worker accounts, with social worker respondents outlining the client-led relationship with technology, which the social worker fostered. While there was often a disparity in technology access between the young person as client and the social worker as professional, they did not report feeling threatened by the oftentimes richer relationships that young people had with technology, using it instead as a source of inspiration and guidance for practice. This did not occur without risks though, and as outlined in chapter 4, boundaries of self became blurred. There was however, no sense of concern about their social work with the young person being replaced by technology, as suggested by earlier narratives of technology's impact on social work practice.

Research is increasingly indicating that more and more young people are going to online spaces to retrieve mental health information (Gowan, 2013; Metcalf & Kauer, 2013) rather than approaching professionals. Technology offers more recent generations their preferences for anonymity, self-nominated access and reduced stigma (Campbell & Robards, 2013). In my research, social worker respondents and participants explained their nuanced role, helping young people access, navigate and evaluate information even with the acknowledgement that information was seemingly readily available. Gowan (2013) found that young people were accessing information related to their mental health for varying reasons that were unique to the online experience. In Gowan's (2013) study, young people actively searched for information on medication, diagnosis, treatment options, as well as access to services and supports online, because they stated they needed additional information after a face to face visit, for a sense of community, because they felt they had nowhere else to turn to, to prepare for a health visit or because it offered them anonymity (Gowan, 2013). Gowan (2013) also found that young people were going online to develop their mental health literacy in order to "challenge what they hear from a health care provider" (Gowan, 2013 p.108). Participants of the Gowan's (2013) study though also had concerns about the nature of online information such as feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of information and not always trusting of the quality of the information given. Gowan (2013) suggested that "it may be useful to teach young adults how to search effectively for health information online, and also how to evaluate the quality of that information once found" (p.108). The social work participants in my research recognised the significant role they played in developing client knowledge, seeing this as an opportunity for dialogue between young people and themselves.

Earlier in this thesis, I mentioned Parton's contribution to arguments of how technology has deduced the social work role into one that is primarily concerned with information. Parton's original argument was not intended to be applied to the following parable, though the concepts of information versus knowledge are relevant not only to social workers but also to young people as clients. In many of the accounts of social worker respondents it was clear that young people had access to information themselves and in forming a relationship with a social worker, applied information and established knowledge. Similarly, from my practice, I went from sharing information about services and recovery to young people, to later practice where they were informing me about potential programs, eligibility and lesser known side effects from medication – all information available to them via technology, rather than exclusively from the social work professional.

Personalising Professional Creativity

"Funny how we explain the ways we do things. For years my ex-partner would joke about the ways I ate eggs. I had a special way of separating yoke from whites and an order of how I would eat them. No one else in my immediate family liked eggs so I thought that this was just unique to me – my adaptation, not something behaviourally picked up. So, when I was reunited with a cousin who I had never met before

for a breakfast, my ex-partner witnessed something unexpected…my cousin and I ate our eggs using this same convoluted process! And interestingly we both explained our ways using a similar argument. Now, I am not trying to explain why this is so – nature/nurture, whatever, this is not my primary concern here. But what this experience has left me with is an appreciation for practices. There are plenty of ways to 'skin a cat', as the saying goes, but there are some that are more logical and reproducible. And in social work, practices that are socially just, considered and meet client need – and more recently in social work discourse, evidence based or informed. Many of the practice stories that were shared with me during this project reminded me of my egg story. Many of us are working with similar propositions, and we have come up with ways of doing that makes sense to us within time, space and place. Micro practices often don't come with evidence attached. The existence of critical best practice in social work propels us to share and test the 'egg stories' against values, accepted concepts and measures of effectiveness."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

To examine other micro practice examples, I now move to the broader experiences of social worker participants, working in and outside of the mental health service context, and those working with a wide-ranging age group. In sharing these examples, I look at how social workers have evaluated their practice, client needs, professional ethics and personal use of self. As a response to some of the constraints experienced in practice contexts, social worker participants outlined several ways in which they enacted personal creativity with their use of technology. The following example of adaptation from the 'technology walk through' interviews highlights how professional limitations can produce a space for the use of self. These adaptations, which attempt to substitute mediums of communication and engagement, also tell of social workers' ability to hold complex relationships with technology.

It struck me when two of the 11 social work participants, who both had the same style of older mobile phone issued by their workplace (different sectors and workplaces), also had the same nuanced micro-practice of texting clients. Analysis of both sets of field notes drew many overlapping descriptions. Both outlined that they used their personal smart phone to type out a text to a client, then they sent that message to the work mobile, and they would forward that message to the client from the work mobile, ensuring that none of their personal data (i.e. the social worker participant's personal mobile number) was sent to the client. Both presented this set of behaviours with the explanation that it was more efficient and it was *their* preferred operation. Driven by client expectations, these two social workers created this practice, to address a seemingly inefficient process with a more complicated one. While both these social worker participants acknowledged that they carefully navigated through their steps, the risk of disclosing personal information is apparent, given the considerations they needed to make.

I have not drawn upon systems theory before in this thesis, but it is a widely accepted theory for social work and raised here, this theory presents further depth to understanding such examples of micro practice. Mattaini and Huffmann-Gottschling

(2012) offer further thought into these micro practices through their presentation of broader ecosystems theory, as "eco-behavioural analysis can clarify the contextual challenges to be addressed" (p.20). In these examples, both these social worker participants presented their technology and delineated the personal from the institutional and in doing so, presented the solution to a professional challenge as a personal choice. These social worker participants also critically led their technology use with their practice considerations, and despite perceived shortcomings of technology, they demonstrated proficiency through knowing what these were and how it could impact their practice. Of concern though is the risk of personal information of the social worker being unintentionally and accidently disclosed, that client information is stored on personal devices and that overall an effectual system is being hidden through individual social worker's adaptations. By 'making things work', the inherent issues with resourcing and acknowledging client and staff needs, are being subjugated.

The next example of a micro practice came from the child protection context. The social work participant in this 'technology walk through' interview spent time talking about how they valued their personal mobile device. They spoke about how in many ways, technology was embodied and that they did not go anywhere without it. This account spoke to ideas that technology can be an embodied experience (Richardson & Third, 2009). However, having described this, the social worker participant then spoke about how they work with children, with the boundaries of what they previously stated was 'part of them' becoming separated:
Social worker: *"I put the phone on aircraft mode and then give it to a kid – I have games on there for them to play with. I ask about what they like to play… A lot of cases, the parent parents with TV or games, like "here you go play with my phone" cos they don't know how to play with their kids. That's why I don't like always doing it, but sometimes it takes hours to sort out where they are going to stay* [the placement of the child]"
Me: Which phone do you give the kids?
Social worker: *"My phone. I mean my personal one. I need the work one for calls"*
Me: Are you concerned that they will look at the rest of your phone? Photos…
Social worker: *"Nah, I am with them. They are good kids"*.
(SW in Child Protection Sector)
There is a common saying about 'giving' people – that they would cut off their right arm for you – and in the micro practice described, there is a sense of self-sacrifice within the context of their personal relationship with technology. As embodied phenomena, the social worker participant saw the mobile device to be an extension of them, and in this way, this micro practice became an example of use of self.

There were other relationships with technology that were not captured through the survey responses but were further explored with social worker participants as they accounted for technology in their practice. These were the more creative applications of technology such as through photography, filmmaking or connectivity

through specific social media, such as Instagram. Pinterest was also mentioned by two of the social worker participants as a way they arranged social work knowledge and inspiration for self-care. While these competencies were often described as personal interest, they were still integral to their role requirements of engaging with their client group, or as part of their responsibility for professional development and self-care. As relationships with technology are ubiquitous, the social workers offering to agencies and clients may be less recognised as their other professional skills.

Technology-led approaches have some merit in correcting practices that have omitted technology as a context for social work. As demonstrated in this chapter, the SAMR model can be utilised to reflect on existing micro practices, to further understand the role of technology in social work. However, to further advance this type of model's usefulness in social work, it would require further research. Social work practice in the area of young peoples' mental health and wellbeing serves to provide many examples of micro practices with technology that are client driven and which evidence transformation of the social work role. The unique relationship younger generations have with technology has prompted changes to the micro practices of social work. This is due in part to young people being clients of social workers, but also as newer generations of social workers enter the profession. However, as argued throughout this thesis, for social work to have continued relevance in contemporary contexts, there needs to be an expansion in the way technology is understood in social work. This shift requires the acceptance of technology as a context for social work, without looking to comparative arguments between technology versus face to face practice itself, but in viewing both as relational. More broadly too, the inclusion of technology in definitions of social work allows space for technology as a social arrangement in which social workers have a clear role to navigate. However, at this current time, as surfaced through my research, social workers often hold complex relationships with technology, putting into practice personal and professional understandings that provoke multiple tensions.

Conclusion. Afterword and Feeding Forward: Advancing social work

"Reflecting on the research 'journey' (how I dislike this overused word, yet I continue to return to it!), I am now positioned with greater knowledge on the relationships between technology and social work - or more simply put, 'I know stuff'. In concluding, I feel somewhat plagued by the beautifully wise words of de Botton (2016 p.125-126). Although written about the nature of human development, I can't help but apply it here, '…the progress of the human race is at every turn stymied by an ingrained resistance to being rushed to conclusions. We are held back by an inherent interest in re-exploring entire chapters in the back catalogue of our species' idiocies – and to wasting a good part of life finding out for ourselves what has been extensively and painfully charted by others'. Perhaps venturing forward always requires a bit of backtracking though. I hope that this research doesn't feel like I am just retracing what we already know to others. To me it feels like I have been able to surface 'what has been extensively charted by others'; by rethinking the past, I offer temporary resolve at the very least, to myself."
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

My research finds that in contemporary Australian settings, social workers relationships with technology are deeply driven by the expectations and practices by those with whom they engage. Technology is ubiquitous in contemporary practice, and their practice contexts actively drive social workers definitions of technology. However, social workers operationalise complex understandings of technology in their practice, with technology simultaneously understood to be a tool for agency administration, record keeping, and outcomes and performance measurement, as well as a space for client engagement, advocacy, and interaction. It is understood as a space and tool that problematises professional and personal boundaries, with social workers often finding themselves having no clear boundaries, policies, professional access, knowledge or adequate training concerning their professional use of technology. However, this research also finds that social workers are applying their broader professional values and general client-centred practice theories to the area of technology, to mediate the complexities that their practice presents. This thesis gives an account of the relationships between technology and social work from the perspective of social work practitioners, and in doing so, acknowledges the everyday opportunities and challenges that contemporary social work practice brings. In this short conclusion, I offer recommendations for future directions, a synthesis of my research findings, a retracing of my arguments, and reaffirmation of my expanded definition of social work with technology. I give thought to the areas of social work practice that my research did not directly examine, which I identify as potential areas for further investigation. I offer concluding critical reflections on my research as a social work researcher and look to the future of my social work practice in education.

I make several recommendations based on the findings of my research. I recommend that agencies take responsibility for embedding technology in organisational practice, rather than leaving the onus of responsibility on individual

social workers. While individual social workers share different attitudes towards technology, it is not their attitude alone that determines the extent to which technology is integrated into social work practice. While my research finds that clients of social workers advance professional practice with technology, the ways they drive change in social work needs to be further acknowledged to advocate for practice development. Social workers attribute changes to their practices with technology to their clients. Thus, clients have an influential role in shaping social work. Research on client's preferences needs to be foregrounded in the discussion on technology in social work practice. Clearer strategies from agencies, educational institutions and professional bodies need to be provided on boundaries with technology. These need to be 'living documents' which align with the rapid development of technology. A definition of social work, such as the one I have presented in this thesis, which is inclusive of technology needs to be adopted to give social workers practical and expansive understandings of the place for technology in social work. From there, practice models which consider technology as inherent to the task of social work need to be developed, tested and used. New models articulating the role of technology will advance practice in ways that maintain the relevance of social work to contemporary society.

Social workers attempt to reconcile many contradictions concerning technology in their everyday professional and personal lives, often requiring them to renegotiate their professional and personal boundaries. Technology is integral to everyday life; however social workers experience problematic access to technology. This limits the available conceptualisations of technology in social work, and thus restricts the development of technology in practice. To further technology in meaningful ways in social work practice, understandings of technology need to encapsulate the sociality that digital technology offers. Rather than experiencing technology as a tool for practice alone, advancing understandings of technology as a social arrangement allow social workers to critically navigate formal and informal structures and systems, enacting the social work role of seeking out the socially just. Attempts to 'keep technology out' of social work are not reflective of contemporary experiences of the everyday, or of current practices. Expanding upon Bolzan's (2007) practical definition of social work, in this thesis I have suggested that the inclusion of technology in understandings of social work give social workers a more explicit role, view the different modalities of social work as relational and hold the client at the centre of practice[68].

I now summarise the findings of my research on current social work practices and understandings of technology, which I have detailed in the previous chapters of my thesis on which my recommendations are made. I speak here to the research questions that shaped my exploration outlined in chapter 1. Broadly speaking in Australian social work, technology is across many practice areas from direct client

[68] I refer here to the face to face 'versus' technology debates.

facing roles, policy to education and fields, such as mental health, child protection and aged care. Depending on the context of practice, social work practitioners and commentators define technology in various ways. They describe tools for use and their mechanisms, as well as including definitions that explain processes such as connection through virtual spaces. Arguments in social work discourse, which see technology supporting new public management, are partially founded in examples from everyday practice - even if social workers did not have access to technology for client driven functions - most have technology reporting on outcomes. Not surprisingly then, social workers' personal relationships with technology are often richer and more wide-ranging than their professional ones. This richness impacts their professional practice in different ways. For some this has meant that they bring forth their personal relationships with technology into their professional role without keeping strict boundaries, blurring ethical obligations along the way. For others, the sense of the disparity between the personal and professional experiences of technology created resentment towards employing agencies, some describing moral distress for what they were not able to provide clients.

Importantly, social worker's relationships with technology are deeply driven by client expectations. Many social workers adapt their practice to fit in with what is of ease, preference or desired by clients where possible. Technology is seen to be a conduit for social work, social justice, access to service provision and advocacy. The importance of evidence-based practice is realised by social workers in their relationship with technology, especially when there are perceptions that the evidence base is lacking. Evidence informed approaches are more usual in practice then, with experience-based knowledge utilised in critically reflective ways by social workers. Yet, key to understanding the complexity of the relationship between social work and technology is that social workers do not always feel they are using technology with professional identity intact. Even when following core ethical concepts, the translation of these in the form of practice guidelines viewed as limited or perpetually out of date, social workers express doubt and confusion as to how technology is inherent to their professional role. While face to face social work holds its place for social workers and clients alike, the dominance of the face to face model of social work inhibits transformational and expanded understandings of technology in social work practice. In this way, it limits social work identity.

How social workers access technology has many unwritten expectations by organisations. There are policies in place for some, but for other social workers, the need to connect with clients is there, yet the parameters for connection are formally uncharted by organisations that they are based. This leaves some organisations and social workers in stasis; blocked access, lack of policy and training, and limited use. However, this ambiguity has created a diverse landscape. For some this has meant increasing risk through personally shaped practice with technology, and for others, it has meant disgruntled relationships with organisations and with technology. The tacit assumptions about technology in organisations problematises social worker self-care,

with new areas of concern emerging on the boundaries of time and availability for connection. These impact the professional sphere, as well as personal relationships with technology, both requiring the rethinking of boundaries and tacit assumptions. Social workers are experiencing gaps in knowledge in this area and are for the most part applying universal self-care strategies without full appreciation on the nature of their relationship with technology.

I have reiterated and retraced previous studies findings, or made explicit sentiments in existing literature. This has offered me, as a social work practitioner, a sense of redemption for my previously perceived practice failings. These are openly shared as reflective journal excerpts witnessing my development as malleable and transparent. I have gained research skills and confidence of my place as a practitioner researcher. Further, I have gained more profound insights into the nature of knowledge in social work. As critically reflective social workers, we are encouraged to recognise that what we currently know will fall short at different stages of our practice. The social work profession has a history of creating new ways of doing and being from a multitude of sources, such as from disciplines like psychology, sociology, or from cultural wisdom such as Indigenous ways of knowing. In the case of technology, two less acknowledged sources of knowledge can add further value to social work: clients of social work services and social workers themselves. I have previously explained the richer experiences of social workers with technology in their personal lives. Clients in particular though, hold a powerful place in how innovation is realised in social work, and in the case of technology, how transformational technology can be advocated. The reciprocity of these relationships in forming new knowledge, new practice is an area burgeoning for further research.

Very recently, I read an article on the knowledge gaps of social work practice with technology (Taylor, 2017). Arguing for a "pause" to address the lack of competence and literacy of social workers before forging new practice with technology, Taylor (2017) outlines ways in which social workers have eroded public trust in their roles, due to a lack of professionalism in their relationships with technology. Pausing, she argues will impact social work's preparedness for future technology, yet this may also inhibit ways we understand how technology is currently embedded in social work. There may be something about the nature of social work too inherent in this relationship with technology. Much of social work is problem solving, thus the problem needed to be in existence and identified to be solved. Social work is not necessarily pre-emptive or always preventative, in many circumstances, social work services present a solution or support for pre-existing circumstances. The practice areas social workers have forged were not created in a vacuum where new policy, programs and interventions are created without having some idea of what social work needs to address. So perhaps there is always going to be a time lag, unexpected consequences, a need for advocacy and flexibility, at the same time the argument for practice-led new technology for social work. There is an inherent reactivity in social work, so why should we be surprised that the relationship is any different when it

has come to technology? Perhaps there is room for acceptance and action here, rather than a pause.

In mentioning acceptance, there are limitations in this research, such as the scoping of social work and technology in broad terms. I maintained this stance throughout this project, as I believed it to be important in acknowledging the emerging quality of technology in social work, attempting to have some ability to see issues across the field. Conversely, I am also aware that social work is integrally context driven, and I have not paid specific attention to a particular practice area with extreme detail intact. In many ways, as outlined in my introduction, it was an attempt to find commonality with my social work colleagues, to locate the shared narratives. Due to the diversity of practice landscapes, further 'technology walk through interviews' could have been conducted to offer further saturation of data. Diversity of culture, language, location, and age are all further intersectional considerations that remain open for future exploration on the relationships between specific areas of social work and particular forms of technology. A theme that emerged from the research that I have not given attention to here in this thesis is the environmental concerns that social worker respondents stated technology eased. The opportunity to rethink the relationship between technology and ecologically aware social work is also available for future examination. However, this current iteration of my research lays my foundations with an appreciation of the past endeavours of social work commentators and a sense of clarity for future investment.

The Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) recently asked if a robot could perform various professional roles (Bryd et al., 10th August 2017). It was understood that only a small area of the social work role was seen to be susceptible to further automation areas (14%), which centred mostly on data collection for organisations, and on clients. We are apparently good at being human, faring well when compared to other professions, and the authors expressed an element of confidence in social workers ability to process decisions of practice without further technological enhancement. Specifically, the area of assessment and intervention were seen driven by the social worker, not by automation or technology, so these functions were still perceived as critical to the social worker role. I mention this study, not to particularly critique its findings, but to offer temporary solace to those who are concerned that the humanistic foundation for social work, in that it is for people and by people, remains. However, social work is dynamic – it's social, and it is essentially about doing - the meanings will be unfixed and will change over time. Technology shares this nature, but with further capacity to evolve and create change for broader audience. This is most reflected over the course of my research, whereby mobile technologies, practice experiences and the evidence of investment into these areas has grown. I had previously only read only limited articles on human services practitioners and technology – but they were still at least filtering through to my non-academic social work practice at the time. There have been shifts in thinking and practice in social work on technology since I set forth on this research in mid-2013.

There are many social work commentators in this field who continue to navigate ethical, regulatory and professional concerns critically (see McAuliffe; Dombo et al., 2014; Gillingham; Reamer; Schoch, for example), offering guidance for contemporary practice. The discussion throughout this thesis traces cyclical themes in debates but also tracks changes. It has been an honour to witness this development, just as in social work practice it is a privilege to see the positive changes that a client has created in their lives, the right resources allocated to address needs, or when social workers disrupt inhumane systems through advocating for what is socially just. These moments all bring professional satisfaction, as does the growth of my social work practice to include this research experience.

Finally, I wanted to conclude by integrating examples from my current practice. I tabled the AASW Practice Guidelines for the use of technology (parts 1, 2 & 3) which I have explored in this thesis, to social work post-graduate students in my teaching role recently. While most of them had not been aware of such guideline's existence, many were able to outline the ethical considerations to the case scenarios on client practices offered in the documents with ease, and there was a sense of uniformity across their responses. Yet the personal boundaries students described were more diverse, and the enhancing nature of technology in social work relationships with clients profoundly accepted. It was clear to them that cutting connection with technology, cut potential for relationships. As relational models of practice are valued in social work, technology needs to be included in our definition of relationships. However, the students' eagerness to be of service to others and the profession made me more acutely aware of the gaps that this research has highlighted, namely that social work self-care and boundaries need more specific reference to technology. Self-care as a social activity, not just as an individual responsibility, also has potential to be further investigated as a viable option for newly graduating social workers who are particularly familiar with technologically mediated social spaces for sharing. I note these limitations of this research at my conclusion for a reason – many of these became more apparent to me as I further progressed the topic and research journey. Like many researchers, I am left with further areas of enquiry, with more specific questions to answer. And through the process of conception to completion of this thesis project, I am better equipped to set forth and attempt to respond to them.

"I attended a graduating student presentation day recently, and one beautifully insightful student spoke about theories of grief and loss. Not turning to the usual Kubler-Ross model, the student instead outlined the Tonkin 'Growing Around' theory of loss. While this had nothing at all to do with technology, it serendipitously helped me see through the process of this research. The inner circle that the Tonkin model refers to the loss, and at times this thesis has been difficult, painful, exposing my limitations and gaps in knowledge as a returning 'mature aged' student. Tonkin's model explains that we never get over loss; we just grow around it with our other life activities. Working in education and private practice for the most part of this degree helped me to grow around any perceived losses of time, money and self-identity in completing this project. The next grief to grow around is the end of a project! Yet, I am a

social worker, and I know my work is not complete. Now working in social work education, I see the continued connection between my teaching of all social work processes such as assessment and intervention to emerging social workers of tomorrow, where technology is not only considered, but also entirely embedded. This is my new context for practice.
I started off this project with a story of wanting relevance in the immediacy of the present practice context, and I now see that to be relevant, I need to continue to be transformative. What does social work and technology look like in my practice now? I see it as part of the social world, in which I have a clear role as a social worker. It is an arrangement and structure which is part of the everyday. I conclude with the account of one of the social worker respondents: technology integrated social work has the capacity 'to enhance and facilitate communication, to advocate, to learn, to inform, to influence, to educate'. "
(Excerpt from Reflective Journal)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey questions

The survey requested that respondents considered the following questions as they related to their current social work practice:

1. Are you a social worker (as defined by the AASW - are you eligible for membership)? [A link to the AASW website was offered for respondents to check the definition if they were uncertain] [Yes/No]
2. How long have you been practicing in the field of social work (this can be in various roles whether they are client facing, research, policy or human services management)? [Less than 12 months/Less than 2 years/2 to 5 years/5 to 8 years/8 to 12 years/12 to 15 years/15 to 20 years/Over 20 years
3. What gender do you identify as? [Female/Male/Transgender]
4. What is the primary age group of the clients you currently work with? [0-12/12 to 18/18 to 25/25 to 65/65+/Other (open text)]
5. What kind of setting or service context do you primarily work in? [open text]
6. Do you use digital technology in your professional capacity? [Yes/No]
7. What did you consider to be 'digital technology' when responding to the previous question? [open text]
8. How often do you use digital technology for work? [Very frequently - every day/Often – several times a week/Sometimes – a few times a week or fortnight/Rarely – once a fortnight or month/N/A – technology is not supported at or by workplace
9. What kinds of technology do you use in your professional capacity? (multiple response option) [Computer (Desktop)/Laptop/Smartphone/Mobile phone (with no Smartphone capacity)/Landline/Tablet/Applications (Apps)/Websites/Email/Electronic Case Notes/Online Forums or Groups/Skype or other Video Conferencing/Social Media/Other (open text)
10. Do you or the organisational context that you work in, provide you with the following (names access to specific technology or policy: Smartphone/Social media policy/A code of conduct (for online behaviour)/A code of conduct (does not mention online behaviour/Access to social media sites/Tablet), in order to fulfil your professional duties? [My workplace provides this/My workplace does not provide this/I use or have created my own]
11. What do you think are the main reasons you use technology in your practice? [open text]
12. If you don't use technology in your practice, what do you think are the main reasons for this? [open text]
13. What kinds of digital technology do you use in your personal time? [Computer (Desktop)/Laptop/Smartphone/Mobile phone (with no Smartphone capacity)/Landline/Tablet/Applications (Apps)/Websites/Email/Electronic

Case Notes/Online Forums or Groups/Skype or other Video Conferencing/Social Media/Other (open text)

14. Are there any differences between how you use technology professionally and personally? Yes/No
15. Do you have any self-care strategies you use when it comes to using technology in your practice? Yes/No
16. Can you tell us of a time that you used digital technology in your work with a client that had a successful outcome? (Suggested definition of 'success' is when there was a positive impact on a client's life) [open text]
17. Can you tell us of a time that you used digital technology in your work with a client that had a negative outcome? (Suggested definition of 'negative' is when a client experienced increased risk or challenges in their lives) [open text]
18. Would you like to be contacted to participate in the next stage of this research project? [Maybe – I need more information/No, thanks/Yes, please]

Appendix 2: 'Technology walk through' interview guide

The following questions were used as a guide for the use with social work participants who were interviewed:

1. Can you guide me through some of the technology you use in your practice? As you guide me, please talk through how you use it and why you use it in your practice?
2. Can you show me what steps you use?
3. How often do you use this technology?
4. Why do you use this particular technology?
5. Is there something else you would prefer to be able to use?
6. What do you like about using this technology?
7. What do you think are the limitations of using this technology?
8. What do you think your clients think about you using this technology?
9. What do you think are the benefits of using this technology?
10. Is there anything that frustrates you about using this technology?
11. Would you use this technology at home? Why or why not?
12. What are the professional boundaries that you think you need when using this technology?
13. What do you think the attitude of using this technology is by your employer?
14. What do you think the attitude of using this technology is by your colleagues?
15. Is there any technology that you would like to see used in your practice?
16. Are there any technologies that you would not like to see used in your practice currently or in the future? Why or why not?

Appendix 3: Technology closed-ended options

The technology examples listed in the survey were based on the work I did for NSW Kids and Families as a consultant in 2014, which resulted in the report, as listed below.

Harris, S. & Robards, F. (2014). *Tech savvy and 'Appy: How health services can use technologies safely and effectively to promote young people's health and wellbeing*, NSW Kids and Families. Sydney

Full report available at:
http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/youth/Documents/Tech-Savvy-and-Appy-REPORT.pdf