

The social worker as the Good Samaritan: When my heart did the thinking

Ulrika Hansson Blomkvist¹ and Mats Niklasson²

Abstract: Professionally a social worker has to pay attention to both the society's values and to a client's personal values. However, a social worker's personal values are not the least of importance and can't be ignored. Where could a sharp line be drawn between professional and private values and acting? The problem of decision-making has been pondered over since ancient times when Socrates contended that 'everyone desires the good.' Could it then be that for some the profession becomes a calling? This paper uses a collaborative autoethnographic approach with the narrative told by the first author, a female Swedish social worker. The story is about her meeting with a male drug addict living on the streets of London and about the decision she made. As it turned out, her decision would have consequences far beyond her and his imagination. The Introduction was written by the second author in order to provide the scientific framework embedding the first author's story. Finally, the Discussion was written mutually as an interview.

Keywords: collaborative autoethnography; decision-making; drug addiction; homelessness; the other; the face; social work

1. Dedicated Social Worker

2. The Vestibularis Clinic, Center for Sensorimotor Research, Kalmar, Sweden and the School of Psychology, University of Bolton, Bolton, UK.

Address for correspondence: mn5ext@bolton.ac.uk

Date of first (online) publication: 13th December 2022

Introduction

According to its global definition (IFSW, 2014) social work is both an academic discipline and a practice-based profession aiming to promote development, social cohesion, and social change as well as liberation and empowerment of people. Essential for social work are principles of human rights and of social justice. Ivanauskienė, and Varžinskienė (2007) held that the most important competence for a social worker is to embrace humanitarian values especially connected to the worth of a person and to dignity. Professionally a social worker has to pay attention to both the society's values and to a client's personal values. However, a social worker's personal values are not the least of importance and can't be ignored. Where could a sharp line be drawn between professional and private values and acting? Could it even be that for some, the profession becomes a calling?

In the UK the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has published a code of ethics (BASW, 2014, p.5) in which human rights, social justice and professional integrity are stressed. Although the publication is intended for the profession it says, *'Everything that social workers do, whether as individual practitioners, managers, commissioners, policy makers or in other social work roles, is underpinned by the profession's ethics and values'*. Would it be possible to interpret *'in other social work roles'* as an opening for a recommendation of how to act also in the private sphere? In a recent publication Smeeton (2019) wrote that a social worker is informed by theories from social policy and politics as well as from biology and psychology and, *'We bring professional values to these, but do we bring ethics?'* One conclusion was to suggest that social work should benefit from a focus on 'ethical fluency' as opposed to keeping up with statistical understandings of policy and practice.

Both values and ethics are guidelines for how to act. Values are personal, influenced by, for example, upbringing and culture while ethics usually are connected to professional principles.

Usually, social workers are able to separate their personal and professional lives, although they might occasionally intersect in strange and unexpected ways (Reamer, 2009).

Life is not always predictable. A new and sudden situation might need a quick evaluation either logically or intuitively and in neither case the outcome is given, in a way similar to how Bergson (1911) described an 'act of creation'.

The problem of decision-making has been pondered over since ancient times when Socrates contended that 'everyone desires the good.' A concept discussed is the Greek 'akrasia', usually translated as a 'lack of self-control', which in turn 'refers to a mismatch between motivational forces, when someone chooses a particular action rather than another regarded as better' (Klevan & Grant, 2022, p. 23). Recently the Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman (2011) described two separate but complementary systems involved in decision-making. System 1 is regarded to be emotional, intuitive and fast while System 2 is more logic and slow. Although they

work together, we should rely on conclusions from System 2 in order to make the best decisions. This is in line with Greene's 'dual-process theory' of moral-decision making (2014) which says that rationality can't function independently of emotion. Although it is likely that emotions will continue to be important in peoples' decision-making, emotions ought to be put aside in situations where they otherwise could cause problems.

In everyday life we face opportunities to meet a stranger with just a friendly glance or some small talk. A short meeting which, unknown to most people, provides us with a huge mutual healthy impact (e.g., Sandstrom, 2014; Bzdok & Dunbar, 2020). However, for different reasons, many people in the Western world do not leave their comfort zone and seem to avoid contact with strangers (Keohane, 2021, pp. 154-165). This is the case, not the least when it comes to groups of people who are 'half shadows' i.e., we know that they exist but not why (Kirwan, 2018).

Such acting in general is contrary to the view held by the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas who meant that our obligation to and responsibility for 'the Other', who we meet daily in our face-to-face reality, are what it is fundamentally to be a human being. To encounter the face of 'the Other' is for Lévinas a challenge to one's own existence and an ethical experience (Downs, Gantt & Faulconer, 2012). Lévinas explained, 'Rather than an experience of the value of another, ethical experience is transcendent experience, access to a something - someone - exterior to myself' (Faulconer, 2005). '...the face of the Other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all. And me, whoever I may be, but as a 'first person,' I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call' (Lévinas, 1985, p. 89).

The narrative part of this paper is a story told by the first author, a female Swedish social worker and is about her meeting with a male drug addict living on the streets of London. It turned out that her decision to reach out for him would have consequences far beyond her and his imagination. She tells a story about the 'moral complexity of a human life', combining the bad and the good experiences in what Grant (Klevan & Grant, 2022, p. 54) has called 'antisyzygy'. The main purpose of this paper is to provide an autoethnographic account (Haynes, 2017) for decisions made when you *really see and embrace a stranger* and the braveness it takes to stand up for the consequences.

Method

This paper uses an autoethnographic approach (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011) in which the first author's story, the narrative, is told in five parts:

1. When I saw James for the first time.
2. A reunion in rain.

3. A stranger in paradise.
4. To the doctors.
5. Slowly accommodating James.
6. Bringing James over to Sweden.

We have composed this paper collaboratively (e.g., Hernandez, Chang and Ngunjiri, 2017). The Introduction was written by the second author in order to provide the scientific framework embedding the first author's story. Finally, the Discussion was written mutually as an interview.

Bochner (2012) stated that an autoethnographic approach aims at connecting parts within humanities with social sciences by telling a story pointing at an inquiry leading further towards 'acts of meaning'. Furthermore, he stipulated five characteristics. 1) The story is written in first person and 2) has its focus on one person over time. 3) The style is more like a novel or a biography than scientific. 4) The story often highlights details from private lives and emotional experiences, which makes it different from descriptions in traditional social science literature. 5) There is a fluency in the descriptive narrative rather than just mere snapshots.

An advantage with an autoethnographic approach is that the story, embedded in a scientific context, could be told in a 'native tongue', which is a reliable way to express one's 'being in the world' (Le Guin, 1989, pp. 147-160). Disadvantages are that the narrative account raises questions concerning generalisability, validity, and reliability. We are aware of these difficulties, but we have fulfilled Bochner's five characteristics as well as Megford's (2006) 'primary ethical standard' – 'the ethic of accountability'. Thereby we leave the questions to be assessed and judged by the readers themselves.

Results/narrative accounts

1. When I saw James for the first time

'So how can you tell me you're lonely
and say for you the sun don't shine.
Let me take you by the hand
and lead you through the streets of London.'
(Ralph McTell in Nicholls, 2014, p. 287)

'Spare some change, please!'

The words were travelling straight through the sound of the noisy traffic and hit me painfully like a sharp arrow. It was like I couldn't defend myself, like those heartbreakingly pleading words were meant just for me. The rain was pouring down

and I pulled my coat tighter around me trying to stay warm. My husband Johan and I had just left a nice restaurant in London's West End, and the city's harsh reality hit me like a ton of bricks. Although I usually love this urban environment, I suddenly got a strange feeling of being vulnerable and almost exposed. It was like I'd just had entered a no man's land and was captured in some sort of odd vacuum.

On one side I could see privileged people like myself who tried to seek shelter from the horrendous weather while zigzagging through the crowd, seemingly knowing exactly where to go. On the other side there were lots of vulnerable, broken, and resigned people, sprinkled like a string of pearls on the wet, filthy and cold pavement. I was caught in the middle, one step to the left and I could've have continued following the constant flow of fortunate people but like a magnet I found myself drawn to the right, towards the other world. The cruel world with the excluded and seemingly forgotten people with hands like sharp claws outstretched, asking me to spare some change and help them to survive.

Suddenly something caught the corner of my right eye. I stopped abruptly and took a few steps back. There, right next to me on the wet and filthy pavement, a pale and extremely thin man was sitting on a folded piece of cardboard without even wearing a jacket. One of his shoes had a big hole in it and where the sole was supposed to be, his bare, swollen, and discoloured toes were visible. He sat with his head bent forward and with his face resting in his dirty hands. In front of him was a small worn paper cup from 'Five Guys' containing only a couple of worthless copper coins. But it wasn't the lack of proper clothes, or the man's resigned gesture that caught my attention. It was his legs!

He had his wet tracksuit bottoms rolled up all the way to his knees, and what I then witnessed was something so horrendous that it was almost impossible for me to comprehend. The man's calves were completely covered in deep and festering wounds. They seemed to be severely infected and emitted some sort of fetid smell that was so far unfamiliar to me. Nevertheless, I immediately understood what it was. It was the stench of rotten flesh, decay, and pure death. The weak man slowly lifted his head and managed to turn his face towards me. I will never ever forget that look. In that specific moment everything seemed to be coming to a halt. As we, two strangers carefully and cautiously made contact for the very first time it was as if the man was there for me like I was there for him.

'What's your name?' I carefully asked.

'James, the man answered almost inaudibly, my name is James,' and then he slowly turned his head away from me once again.

I haven't got any logical answer for what happened next, because my decision was all but logical. Without giving it as much as a thought, my mind just urged me to save this guy. And the strange thing was that it felt completely natural that James's life was now my responsibility. Something strongly told me that without me, he wouldn't survive.

Before leaving James, we promised him to come back already the next day to

bring him some dry and warm clothes. When I asked him if there was anything in particular he needed, he turned his head away from me, and quietly said,

'If you could just get me some boxers, I would be very grateful.'

2. A reunion in rain

*'Oh, it's you guys, he said, sounding very surprised but also happy. You really came, even though the weather is s**t,'* he continued.

I can still picture James' pale, tired, face when we turned up early on the Sunday morning as promised. He even managed to give us a weak smile, which made me feel all warm, welcome and appreciated but at the same time it broke my heart. How could it even be possible for him to worry about the weather being a problem to us, when he knew that we had a nice and warm flat waiting for us. When we handed the new warm clothes over, he immediately put some warm socks on his wet and swollen feet.

On Tuesday the weather was still miserable, but even so, James greeted me with the biggest of smiles when I approached him outside the tube station. This was the third day in a row I visited him, and it was already about to become a habit, almost like a drug to me. This was something I just had to do to feel satisfied and content. Every morning after breakfast I got warmly dressed and headed off to central London.

Seeing James again, I realized that the horrendous ulcers hadn't improved the slightest, which made me extremely worried, and I was terrified that he might suffer from sepsis. If nothing was done immediately, I feared that he would be at risk of losing his legs, or even worse, his life. I had brought it up for discussion already last Sunday. James had become clearly anxious and stressed, but after talking things carefully through he had finally agreed on going to get them properly examined by a doctor. James was sitting next to me all quiet, almost like he was in some sort of parallel universe. He looked exhausted. I suddenly got a strong feeling of being invisible. Like you can observe everything that's going on around you, but no one can actually see you. In what other way could you explain or excuse that no one, not a single person, seemed to be paying any attention to James, who was clearly very ill?

To get his attention I stroked his arm gently and asked him if he had been to see a doctor? James gave me an embarrassed and nervous look and quickly replied, *'No, they weren't open.'*

He turned his head away from me once again and went quiet. The way he responded made me doubt whether he'd even made an attempt to go there. His shame and embarrassment seemed to be so intense, and the humiliation so strong that it suddenly filled up all the air around us.

James who had realised that my focus was on his legs suddenly looked genuinely worried about them himself. His friendly, but drowsy eyes, surrounded by remarkable dark black-purple circles, were now looking at the wounds as well. Not glancing as I'd seen him do on a few occasions before, but carefully and thoroughly examining them. It was as if he, for the very first time, understood how bad they really were. Like he was suddenly able to see them the way I did. I pointed at a filthy dressing, which was carelessly pressed onto one of the wounds, and asked if he'd done it himself. He nodded and told me that he'd had received some medical equipment from a stranger who had mercy on him.

We continued sitting there, side by side, in silence, and for a short moment I felt totally content and fulfilled. Like this was where I was meant to be, like this was from now on my home as well. Even though we were still strangers to each other it felt absolutely natural. *'I'm the one who's going to save him'*, I thought. It was as if I'd been waiting for this moment my entire life, but I didn't know yet, that my life was going to be changed forever.

3. A stranger in paradise.

I just knew that James' survival was now my responsibility, and remarkably enough, it didn't feel like a burden or even strange.

My responsibility for James needed me to act fast because obviously he hadn't got that ability himself anymore. Even though it hurt me tremendously to see him so vulnerable and exposed I couldn't help but thinking that his concerns and worries, together with my willingness to help and support, might motivate him enough to pay the doctor a visit before it was too late. I just needed him to understand how serious the situation was, even if it meant me being harsh to him. I therefore asked James if he knew where to get help.

'There's a place for homeless people just a few blocks away', he responded almost inaudibly, without even looking at me. *'They're open every morning in between 9:30 and 13:00, except for the weekends. It's first come, first served,'* he added and had now turned his face towards me again.

The fact that he actually provided me with the information gave me hope and I knew I had to get him there as soon as possible. *'Would you consider me taking you there tomorrow?'* I carefully asked.

No response. I gave him some time to process the question, but then my gut feeling told me that he'll manage me pushing him a bit further. Even though he looked a bit sceptical I could also sense some curiosity.

'You'll have to get off the streets,' I said quietly and almost to myself.

The thought of not just trying to help James survive, but also getting him off the streets permanently, made me feel next to euphoric. All I had to do was to figure out how. Since I wasn't that familiar with the Social Welfare System in the UK it might

be a bit of a challenge but definitely not impossible. To me nothing is impossible and never has been. That's how I was raised, without limitations.

James looked back at me all puzzled and I found it very difficult to interpret his expression. His quietness made me impatient and almost desperate to know what his answer was going to be. I knew for sure that I'm not only able to help and support him, but also capable of actually saving his life, if he'd just let me?

Before I made my way back to the train station, he'd given me a promise to follow me to the doctor's the following day. I would wake him up outside 'Five Guys', and together we'd make our way to the homeless daycentre.

4. It's now or never: Going to the doctor's.

The next morning, I found James peacefully sleeping, in his red ripped sleeping bag. I sat down next to him and quietly said, while stroking his arm,

'James, it's me, are you awake?'

James rapidly opened his eyes, and anxiously looked around.

'Don't worry, it's just me,' I said, giving him a reassuring smile, which seemed to make him relax.

He was just about to get out of the sleeping bag when he suddenly screamed out in panic and his whole face was twisted. *'My legs Ulrika, my legs! They're stuck, I can't get them out!'*

I could see that the pain was almost unbearable.

'Relax James,' I said trying to remain calm. *'Let me try to carefully release them.'*

James looked terrified at the mere thought of me trying to pull the infected wounds loose from the fabric, but even so, he gave me a silent nod of approval.

After a few minutes I managed to get him out, and by then James' face had turned into an ash grey colour. He turned towards the brick wall to get some support while standing up, but the moment he put his feet on the ground, he howled like an injured animal. The frightening sound made my blood freeze because that sound could just as well be coming from someone dying.

I had to fight hard to not being drawn into James' dreadful feelings of pain and helplessness. I don't think I've ever come close to experiencing anything like that before. At that moment it became totally clear to me, that I was now solely responsible for James' survival. He wasn't able do anything but trying to stand the pain.

'We can do this James,' I said reassuringly! *'We'll get you to the doctor, I promise!'*

I managed to pull him up standing, get his arms around my shoulders, and then slowly, step by step, we started to walk towards the homeless day centre. The place was already crowded when we arrived, and I could see broken, resigned and worn-out people everywhere around me.

'I'm James X, and I need to get my wounds looked into, please,' James said, leaning

exhaustedly towards the reception desk.

‘Ok,’ the grey-haired lady behind the desk answered. *‘You’ll be next, so it won’t take long.’*

She then turned to me and continued, *‘And you, are you his keyworker?’*

‘Yes, she’s my helper,’ James quickly replied.

‘Well, if she’s just someone you’ve found on the streets, she’s not welcome here,’ the lady said in a very unpleasant way, and looked at me superiorly.

‘She’s not someone from the streets,’ James said surprised by the unfriendly answer, *–‘She’s, my friend.’*

‘What would it look like if everyone brought random members of the public here,’ the grey-haired lady continued arrogantly, not even looking at us anymore.

James, who wasn’t only in pain, but also started to get really upset about the lady being so rude, now frustratingly once again replayed, *‘But she is not a member of the public!’*

The grey-haired lady now looked up, while James angrily continued. *‘She’s done more for me in the last few days than any of you ever will. She’s got a good heart and she’s good for me. She’s made me want to make something out of my life. And I need her.’*

He paused for a second to catch his breath and then clearly and firmly said, *‘I’m not going to let you insult her and speak to her as if she’s completely worthless. Do you understand that?!’*

For the very first time I could see the enormous power James possessed. The grey-haired lady now let out a loud and demonstrative sigh, and rudely told me that I could stay for today, but also made it very clear that I was not welcome in the future. We were then waiting and waiting to get seen, because James kept being put further and further back of the line, without any explanation at all. He was basically just harshly told, that if he wanted to use their services, he’d just have to wait. After constantly having to persuade James to not leave the building in anger, we were finally done after four long and painful hours. Even so, we left with James’ legs neatly wrapped in white bandages, and a new appointment already in two days.

5. Slowly accommodating James

Seeing James, a couple of hours daily, soon turned into full days. It became clear to me that life on the streets had started to wear on him, not only physically but also mentally. To help him de-stress I therefore suggested us doing daily walks in a nearby park. To start with they were no longer than 15 minutes, because the time spent away from the streets, of course meant less money in the pocket for James. During these walks he was mostly quiet, but always very polite and sweet to be around. The more time we spent together on the streets, at the doctor’s and on the bus and tube, the more we got to know each other. The walks in the park became longer, and we soon entered a point when James didn’t really want to go

back begging at all. Long gone were his shyness, and we found ourselves laughing and chatting away for hours. By then, I hadn't only become a massive part of James' life on the streets, but I was also fully accepted by the others living there. We were now doing everything together. Not only did I take him to different doctors and specialists three days a week, but I was also by his side when buying drugs in dark alleyways, and afterwards when he injected them. Always ready to use the Naloxone if he was to take an overdose. Added to that I spent endless hours in the cafe opposite his begging pitch, and I even slept on the streets.

The first time I asked James to come and visit us in Wimbledon, he was a bit reluctant, but he soon warmed to the idea. I remember asking him what his favourite meal was, and he said, steak and chips. When he finally came around, he was obviously quite nervous, and I could tell it was been a long time since he was last indoors. He soon relaxed, and after being served his much-loved meal, he peacefully fell asleep in the armchair.

James has told me that he was really surprised but also proud of the invitation, because usually he wasn't trusted anywhere. For me it was just the natural thing to do. James was my friend and asking a friend over for dinner is just normal, isn't it? Besides, James and I had made a promise always to be truthful to each other, so I hadn't got any reason for not trusting him. After that day he started to come around ours more regularly. We did all sorts of activities together, like playing tennis, board games, cooking, watching films and having picnics in the parks. I could see James slowly coming to life.

After having been fighting extremely hard for a long time, we finally managed to get James into one of very few homeless hostels for single men in West End. Unfortunately, most of the shelters are, not-only noisy, unsafe, and violent places, but also filled up with drugs. James, who'd by then, started to reduce his intake, found it exceptionally hard to cope, and there where nights so tough that he actually fled back to the streets.

At the end, the situation got almost unbearable for all of us, so James started to spend even more time at ours, until he'd finally moved in almost permanently. The more time he spent in 'our' world, the more miserable he became in 'his'. He started to hate the begging, which was of course still a must to fund the drugs. I could clearly see how miserable it made him, so I started to study his addiction and take notes on how much, when, and what he was using. It confirmed, what I already knew, that the more money he earned, the more he used. On a 'good day' he was injecting heroin up to 8 times, while on a 'bad', just 4. Simultaneously, I carefully paid attention to his withdrawals, and other patterns around his misuse, until I finally shared all the information I'd gathered with James.

James himself was totally unaware of his using patterns, and quite surprised by what I'd found out. I'd done some calculations as well, showing him the cost of his habit, and given him examples of what he could do for all the money instead. I asked him about his dreams and hopes, and what he wished for in the future,

and it all ended up in me presenting a plan to him.

The plan was basically for him to use as little as possible, without getting withdrawals, and whatever money that was then left, he'd put in a little jar, labelled 'James' jar'. Since it was made from glass, he could clearly see the money growing, while saving up for something precious. Something he really wanted and that was good for him, and he started with a bike. Using less also meant he didn't have to beg as much, which gave him more time to spend away from the West End. We started to have something we called 'Days out' weekly. During these days we did enjoyable activities together for almost a full day, like going to the Olympic Stadium up in Stratford.

Living with us and still using heroin was difficult for James. He didn't want to leave us having to go begging, when leading such a nice and normal life in Wimbledon. The situation made me come up with another plan, where he was doing full days begging just a few days a week, earning as much as he possibly could those days, to be able to take the other days off.

The money he put aside the days he was begging, was then used to support his drugs, the days he wasn't begging. James has never been given, or asked for, any money from us, but we have supported in all other imaginable ways. When I first met James, I decided straight away, never to give him any cash, which I also stuck to one hundred percent, I strongly believed that our friendship couldn't be built on the fact that it was generating money, because then the real motivation to change his behaviour, habits and lifestyle would've become secondary, and we had most definitely failed.

6. Bringing James to Sweden

The winter turned into spring and when the summer finally arrived, it was time for Johan and I to spend it in Sweden. Certainly, we couldn't leave, our beloved and now also clean, James behind, and when asking him to come along, he was thrilled. To be able to bring him we needed to apply for a passport, which was all but straight forward, especially since he hadn't got anyone who could verify his identity. When that was finally sorted, we started to run into problems due to his Methadone prescription, and his leg ulcers. Travelling when on opiate substitutes isn't easy. We needed, not only documents from his prescribing doctor to the customs, to avoid getting caught smuggling drugs, but also to find a qualified doctor in Sweden, who had the rights to prescribe the medicine while he was there. The last one took us months to sort out, and at one point we almost thought we were going to fail. We also needed to sign up for a GP in Sweden, where he could go and get his dressings changed every other day, and make sure he was covered by the UK doing so. Going to Sweden, also meant getting James on a plane for the very first time, which he really enjoyed. We all had an amazing time together, and my

family and friends immediately took James to their hearts.

When my dad sadly passed away in February 2020, I once again brought James with me to Sweden. Due to different circumstances, not at least the pandemic, we ended up staying until the summer, and that's when James one day almost beggingly said to me, *'Please, don't ever make me go back to the UK Ulrika. I love it here and it feels like this is now my home.'*

We discussed the matter from every possible angle, and to be honest I felt almost relieved about him wanting to stay. I'd been a bit worried about how to move forward once getting back to London again and trying to establish a good life for James in a small town in Sweden, just seemed so much easier. At the same time, I realised that we needed to take action immediately, if going to be successful. The UK was just about to leave the EU and if James was ever going to be able to live in Sweden permanently, we needed to get everything done before the 31st of December 2020, when the transition period ended. Because of Brexit coming up, the Swedish Migration Service was extremely busy with all the British applications. Added to that, James' first application was rejected, due to not having an approved Health Insurance. I read the EU Withdrawal Agreements and transition laws until my eyes were bleeding, and luckily the second application was successful. To fully become a part of the Swedish society and getting covered by the Social Swedish Insurance Agency was not only a challenge, but also a very slow process. Even so, I have to say, that the Swedish authorities have been great, when being in contact with them seeking information and advice. All of them, apart for the local Social Administration, which haven't done anything but given us a hard time.

James has always been fond of animals, and his family used to have pets when he was a child. As soon as I knew James was going to stay in Sweden, I got in contact with the local city farm, for him to volunteer there. The volunteer work turned into a success, and James is today a paid worker on the farm. He is not only an extremely hard- and reliable worker but also a highly appreciated colleague and friend.

James has now been clean for almost three and a half years and is back in contact with his lovely mum. He lives in his own little refurbished cottage in our garden, speaks a bit of Swedish, and is just about to start taking a driving license. James enjoys, appreciates, and loves his new healthy and active lifestyle, and not a single day goes by without him giving me a cuddle and thanking me for saving his life that cold October evening in 2018.

Discussion

The main purpose of this paper was to provide an autoethnographic account (Haynes, 2017) for decisions made when you *really see and embrace a stranger* and about the braveness it took to stand up for the consequences. In order for Ulrika to more thoroughly develop and explain her Narrative accounts the Discussion was arranged as an interview.

Is it your opinion that you crossed a boundary and left your professional role as a social worker when you engaged yourself in James?

Yes, most definitely. When working as a social worker in Sweden you've got very clear directives not to let your private life interfere with your professional work. You're supposed to keep your distance and not create relationships where you're getting too private, too close, or too engaged. However, I strongly believe, both in my role as a social worker and as a private person, in equality, and that we're all got the same value no matter what, and it hurts me immensely to understand that's not the case for most people.

Smeeton (2019) suggested that social work could benefit from a focus on 'ethical fluency'. What do you think?

I'm not at all convinced that a clear distinct discrepancy in between the social worker and their client is necessarily all good. It might create a Us vs Them mentality, if not careful, and that's definitely not a good outcome if you want to gain trust, help, and support someone vulnerable. I rather believe in working together in order to create substantial changes in someone's life. Not only using yourself as a tool, but also turning to other parties or professionals for help if needed. This way of thinking is applicable to the Holistic approach (BASW, 2021), where I believe that together as a team is always stronger than the individual parts separately. I rather believe in strong relationships to build trust, mutual giving and taking to show respect, being seen as equals to gain self-confidence and to share things with each other to make the relationship stay strong.

Can you explain why you made the decision to approach James?

The answer is quite simple to me. I saw someone, a homeless guy, a fellow human being, who was clearly fighting for his life. When witnessing something so horrendous, of course I will step in, take action, and do whatever it takes to support, assist and help him to survive. I did it because the way I see it, it's my obligation as a member of the society to act if someone needs my help, and that's also the main reason why I studied to become a social worker. My way of acting isn't firstly connected with my profession, but rather the other way around. It comes absolutely natural to me, and I've always helped and supported vulnerable people, already before I met James. Not to this extent, but I don't believe the effort necessarily has

to be that big to make a difference.

Can you explain how you made the decision to approach James?

Even though it might seem like I was acting intuitively only, that's not the case. Neither did I act with 'a lack of self-control'. I regard myself as a person who's always carrying my logical knowledge with me, and I'm therefore confident in that it'll guide me in the right direction whenever needed. That means, I can rely on my gut feelings when making quick decisions, because my knowledge is the main creator of that feeling. I would say that my logical and rational side, which is mainly represented by the knowledge I've got, is continuously in contact with my more emotional side, and the more I have to think things through, the more space it's given. But there is constantly some interaction going on between the two i.e., emotions and rationality. When referring to Kahneman (2011), I would regard myself as primarily a user of System 2, although I fully agree with Green's (2014) 'dual-process theory'.

Your answer reminds me of some lines from Van Morrison's 'I forgot that love existed' (Morrison, 2014, p. 122).

'If my heart could do the thinkin'
And my head begin to feel
Well, I'll look upon the world anew
And know what's truly real.'

Could these lines be a description of your way to make decisions?

Absolutely. That's well in line with my philosophy. In order to make wise decisions, neither the heart nor the brain can be superior to the other, but rather interact with each other, by constantly crossing each other's boundaries.

Retrospectively, how would you judge the consequences of your decision?

I think, to be able to do what I did, there are a few things that are vital to succeed. *Firstly*, you must have an extensive knowledge of how to relate, connect, and support vulnerable people, to make sure you know the massive responsibility you're taking on. You must be aware of their often complex and extensive needs and have the ability to address and analyse them. Letting someone down further down the road just because you didn't understand or think the task fully through first, is not an option. *Secondly*, your values are very important, and so is the purpose of helping someone. To be successful you have to fully believe and respect equality, worth and dignity of all people. You also need to be able to put yourself and your needs aside, and always work towards promoting the best interests of the individual and focus on their capacity and strength.

Thirdly, you must fully believe in what you're doing and not questioning whether you're going to succeed or not. Because if you do, you are most certainly going to apply these disbeliefs on the already vulnerable and exposed person you're there to support. You need to be extremely persistent and have faith in yourself and your

abilities to go all the way, and not the least important, you have to believe in and trust the person you're supporting.

How has meeting James affected your life?

Meeting James has affected my life tremendously, and nothing will ever go back to the way it was before that rainy October evening in 2018. I've been on call seven days a week, 24 hours a day, ever since, and the days we've spent apart are less than 10 altogether. I've had to put my own life and all my other relationships with friends and family mainly on hold, to instead make sure James's wellbeing was always my first and main priority. I have, and will continue taking full responsibility for my actions, and I'm prepared to carry on doing whatever it takes to help James create a healthy, rich, and fulfilling lifestyle. What we've archived together has also confirmed what I've always believed, namely that I'm capable of making a difference for someone willing to give me the chance.

Having read your story, it seems to me that your way of acting comes close to Lévinas' ethical experience.

For me helping and supporting disadvantaged people it's more of a calling, something I feel good about doing, and by getting an appropriate education as well, I'm even better equipped to do so. For me that's just common sense, and something I was taught to do already as a child. I believe in social inclusion in as many areas as possible, and therefore also in gently trying to move or transfer vulnerable individuals from their often destructive lifestyles and dysfunctional worlds into more functional ones. I also believe in letting them mix with and be a part of healthy and constructive 'realities' as much as possible. Somewhat in line with Smeeton (2019) I'm also not sure that being surrounded by people with the same problems, histories, and experiences, is the best platform to enrich lives and to reach full human potential. I rather think that being an active part of, and studying well-functioning people, in healthy environments, on a daily basis, is more favourable.

How would you like to summarize your experiences after meeting James?

I've grown stronger in my thoughts. How we treat and approach others are key to how to succeed in making positive life changes. I believe that equal respect, true understanding, and an honest intention to help, are all required in creating relationships strong enough to be able to liberate and empower people. Finally, in James I've found the most loyal, caring, and sweetest friend. The Persian poet Rumi (1207-1273) wrote,

'Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there.'

Consent from James

A verbal consent was given after he had read the narrative.

References

- BASW (2021) *The BASW Code of Ethics for Social Work*. Birmingham: BASW.
- Bergson, H. (1911) *Creative evolution*. London: Macmillan.
- Bochner, A.P. (2012) On First-Person Narrative Scholarship. Autoethnography as Acts of Meaning. *Narrative Inquiry*, 22, 1, 155-164
- Bzdok, D. and Dunbar, R. (2020) The neurobiology of social distance. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 24, 9, 717-733
- Downs, S.D., Gantt, E.E., and Faulconer, J.E. (2012) Levinas, meaning, and an ethical science of psychology: Scientific inquiry as rapture. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 32, 2, 69-85
- Ellis, C., Adams, T.E., and Bochner, A.P. (2011) Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical social research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 273-290
- Faulconer, J.E. (2005) Knowledge of the other. *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling and Health*, 7,1-2, 49-63
- Greene, J.D. (2014) *Moral tribes: Emotion, reason and the gap between us and them*. London: Atlantic Books
- Haynes, K. (2017) Autoethnography in accounting research. In *The Routledge companion to qualitative accounting research methods*. Abingdon: Routledge (pp. 215-230)
- Hernandez, K. A. C., Chang, H., and Ngunjiri, F. W. (2017) Collaborative autoethnography as multivocal, relational, and democratic research Opportunities, challenges, and aspirations. *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 32, 2, 251-254
- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). (2014) *Global definition of social work*. <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work>
- Ivanauskienė, V. and Varžinskienė, L. (2007) The expression of social workers professional values in practice. *Social Work*, 6, 1, 76-82
- Kahneman, D. (2011) *Thinking fast and slow*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
- Keohane, J. (2021) *The power of strangers*. London: Viking
- Kirwan, G. (2018) Editorial: 'In the half shadows': Research with hard to reach populations. *Social work & Social Sciences Review*, 19, 3, 3-6
- Klevan, T. and Grant, A. (2020) *An autoethnography of becoming a qualitative researcher. A dialogic view of academic development*. Oxon, UK: Routledge
- Lévinas, E. (1985) *Ethics and infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press
- Le Guin, U. K. (1989) *Dancing at the edge of the world: Thoughts on words, women, places*. New York, NY: Harper & Row

- Megford, K. (2006) Caught with a fake ID: Ethical questions about slippage in autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, 5, 853-864
- Morrison, V. (2014) *Lit up inside: Selected lyrics*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd
- Nicholls, J.A. (2014) *Theatre west four – so far as I can remember*. Volume 2, years ten to twenty. Northampton, UK: Paragon Publishing
- Reamer, F.G. (2009) Balancing our professional and personal lives. *Social Work Today*, 6, 3, 8
- Sandstrom, G.M and Dunn, E.W. (2014) Social interactions and well-being: The surprising power of weak ties. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40, 7, 910-922
- Smeeton, J. (2019) In search of social work's post risk paradigm. *Social work & Social Sciences Review*, 20, 3, 34-49