



UNIVERSITY OF  
LINCOLN

Diane Simpson, Senior Lecturer in Social Work  
Social work academics' subject positions:  
convergence and divergence  
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### The Research Project

- Doctoral study examining the experiences of social workers who became social work academics. Specific focus on:
  - Career pathways
  - Transition experiences
  - Engagement with academic identities
- Semi-structured interviews
- Today's presentation focuses upon academic identities



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### Sample

- 21 social work academics from 5 English universities all of whom remain registered social workers
- 15 women, 6 men
- Most (n = 16) described themselves as White British
- Most (n = 10) were aged 51 - 55



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### Foucauldian theoretical framework

- Subject positions (Foucault, 1989)
- Realities can be viewed and experienced from different perspectives
- Subject positions are culturally situated
- Discourses are central to subject positions
- Multiple identities and positions occur
- “Discursive practices” (O’Farrell, 2005: 79) define legitimised views of the world




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### Social work academics’ subject positions

- Dominant and default social work identity
- Identity synchronicity and continuity
- Guardians of the profession
- The resistant academic
- The spurious academic
- The disciplined academic
- Fledgling academics
- The comfortable academic
- The misfit
- The bridge
- The vulnerable academic
- The tightrope walker
- The lone academic




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### Functions of the subject positions

- Promote transitions
- Provide insight into daily experiences
- Retain professional social work identity
- Provide a platform for academic practice
- Demonstrate increasing understanding and engagement with academic practices
- Informs teaching of professional practice
- Promote readiness for practice discourses
- Identify developmental needs for academics
- Synchronise social work and academic identities
- Manage paradox, contention, resistance and antithetical identities
- Reflect structural influences on the academic role
- Communicate professional expectations and impose these on students




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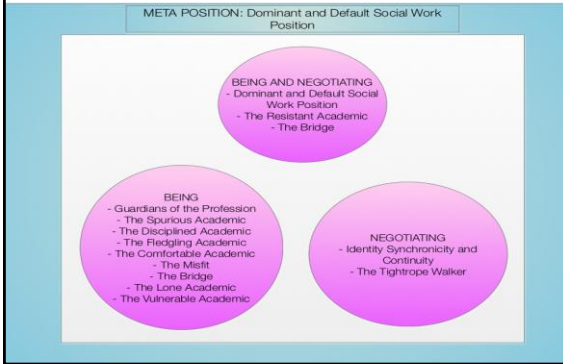
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**Functions of the positions: Being, becoming and negotiating**




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**Convergence and divergence**

**Convergence**

- Engagement with all aspects of academic practice
- Striving to meet institutional requirements
- Teaching excellence
- Feeling effective as academics

**Divergence**

- Rejection of academic identities and difficulties in defining self as an academic
- Resistance to certain types of research
- Feeling out of place within the academy
- Rejection of neoliberal academic practices (e.g. student satisfaction)
- Divergence with neoliberal social work practice




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**Reference list**

- Foucault, M. (1989) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- O'Farrell, C. (2005) *Michel Foucault*. London: Sage.




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