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Research article

# The development of social care work in Germany and the US: theorising the result of cultural understandings and policy responses to concepts of 'individualism' during the nineteenth century

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## Abstract

The now-emerging development of social pedagogy in the US continues to benefit greatly from better understanding how social pedagogy has evolved as a profession in countries where it is well established, such as Germany. The necessity for a unified definition of 'social pedagogy' appears to be desired increasingly by countries around the world in regard to social pedagogical theories and methods. Building such a definition requires an understanding of the development of the practices inherent in social care work as a whole, from which social pedagogy has emerged. This article proposes that the praxis and philosophies which formed social care work in Germany and the US, and which remains as *Sozialpädagogische Arbeit* (social pedagogical work) in Germany, had at one time in history experienced similar and complementary growth in the US. The article also explores concepts of 'individualism' as one area in which said philosophies began to diverge.

**Keywords** social pedagogy; social work; social care work; individualism; *Individualismus*; *Sozialpädagogische Arbeit*; *Sozial Arbeit*; *sozialarbeit*

## Introduction

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are known as times of major growth for social care policies. It was during this time that social work emerged as a viable profession for the rapidly changing societies of both the newly unified Germany and the fast-expanding America. Of notable difference, however, is the additional emergence of social pedagogy as a profession within Germany during this time.<sup>1</sup>

While often parallel in development during the late nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century, prior to the First World War, the practice and implementation of social care work seem to have quickly changed course. Germany has a long and well-documented history of social pedagogy, and theories of 'social care work' were philosophised long before the definition or institutionalisation of social pedagogy and/or social work (see, for example, Úcar, 2012). Germany developed the parallel and complementary professions of social work and social pedagogy, whereas social work developed alone in the US. I suggest that this divergence is in great part due to cultural, societal and linguistic differences. For this reason, in this article I explore the development of social care work as a result of cultural understandings and policy responses to 'individualism' as it stood during this time in history.

It is important to echo Hering and Münchmeier (2014) and note that historiography has been too frequently studied through a lens of politics or economic innovation, resulting in a limited view of the developments of the nineteenth century. In concordance with this, I have made a deliberate choice to engage in exploration on the influence of concepts and understandings of 'individualism' with regard to the ideas and development of social care work by critically examining the philosophies surrounding the formation of social care work while intentionally excluding a specifically economic perspective.

For the purpose of this article, the phrase 'social care work' is used to frame the undefined intersection between social work and social pedagogy, behavioural psychology and education. The aim of this article is to postulate that the varied developments and theories of social care work – to include social pedagogy, social work, welfare programmes, retirement care and more – are, in part, results of the extreme subjectivity of understandings of individualism in the hope that this exploration may offer an important insight into the development and trajectory of social care work within both nations and, hopefully, insight into the practices which subsequently developed in Germany as social pedagogy. The idea of conquest and self-reliance in an expanding America,<sup>2</sup> and of the citizen-individual in Germany, ultimately laid the grounds for the understanding and definition of what was meant by social care work or care for individual persons within a given society.

## National identities as precursors

This dichotomy of understanding regarding the concepts of 'individualism' and 'individuality' continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century as a topic of philosophical analysis and debate. The authors, thinkers, philosophers and learned individuals who discuss these concepts at length are certainly too many to acknowledge within the scope of this article.<sup>3</sup> Although, as Swart (1962) notes, "'individualism" made its first appearance in a French dictionary in 1836' (p. 79), Germans were, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, already world-famous 'for their love of freedom and non-conformism' (p. 88). This position of personal independence, individuality and lack of need for autocratic or invasive politics was found in many Western European nations and shared through German literature, which claimed that 'The German sense of independence ... went back to the love of freedom which the old Germanic tribes had demonstrated in their successful resistance against Roman domination and which after the Germanic invasion had permeated some medieval institutions, like the feudal system' (Swart, 1962, p. 88). A sense of German independence and philosophical exploration with regard to citizenship and social engagement meant that identity for individuals began to form as a result of, and precursor to, the later development of social care work, itself resulting from the rapidly shifting political states of the time.

Meanwhile, westward expansion had swept across the US, pushing the western frontier and producing an inevitable decoupling from hegemonic governmental and societal systems which influenced ideologies surrounding the development of social work that have persisted even to modern day. As Bazzi, Fiszbein and Gebresilas (2020) argued:

[Historian Frederick Jackson] Turner noted, the frontier was 'a form of society rather than an area.' Life in such a society was isolating in two ways. Low density meant isolation from other people within a given location. Proximity to the frontier line meant isolation from population centers to the east, and in most cases limited interaction with the federal government. With such isolation came a lack of social infrastructure, making frontier life rough and dangerous. However, isolation also implied relative resource abundance and thus favorable prospects for upward mobility. This attracted pioneering settlers in search of opportunity. (p. 5)

## The self-made man

National identities in the US were strongly influenced by this frontier culture and its subsequent identity, and the culture that arose on the frontier continues to 'have important political ramifications' (Bazzi et al., 2020, p. 2). In their study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, Bazzi et al. (2020) found that the counties found to have spent longer amounts of time on the 'American Frontier' continue to 'exhibit stronger and, in fact increasing support for the Republican Party between 2000 and 2016', which correlate directly to 'greater opposition not only to redistribution but also to social protection, minimum wages, gun control, and environmental protection', issues which 'resonate[s] with frontier culture, embracing opposition to the welfare state, a strong belief in effort versus luck in reward, the right to self-defense, and "manifest destiny"' (p. 2). Thus, while the development of a frontier culture was not inherently an intentional political push, the political effect of resultant cultural views still resonates in the US.

## Romanticism

Likewise, the idea of a German nation, or more precisely of a 'German people', was not initially a political topic, but a cultural one that was shaped by literary figures and philosophers. Especially notable were German leaders in Romantic thought: philosophers and authors such as Humboldt (1769–1859), Fichte (1762–1814), Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and others who 'were anti-systematic and championed a fusion between philosophy and literature' (Forster and Gjesdal, 2015, p. 2). The literature of the Enlightenment had already proclaimed the independence of peoples, and in German Romanticism and Classicism this idea was taken up and the cultural idea of a specifically 'German' people was conceived.

Yet Romanticism did not reject 'individualism' altogether, but only in as far as it was 'quantitative', 'rationalistic', 'optimistic', and 'democratic' (to use a number of adjectives used by later German writers to distinguish the Western European variety of individualism from their own), and cultivated it in its 'qualitative', 'irrationalistic', 'pessimistic', and 'aristocratic' form. The Romantic authors glorified genius and originality. (Swart, 1962, p. 82)

As is the case with many social movements of the nineteenth century, the influx of immigrants from Europe to the Americas during this time resulted in a constant exchange of cultures and cultural ideology. Rousseau's earlier ideas of the perfectibility of humanity, and the idea that autonomic voices were the most moralistic or progressive means of democratic governance, could be seen in Western Europe and North America.<sup>4</sup> However, the mechanisation of these ideas manifested very differently in German and US American<sup>5</sup> cultures almost immediately.

From the very beginning, 'individualism' [in Germany] was used to designate at least three highly dissimilar clusters of ideas: first, the idealistic doctrine with equalitarian implications of the rights of man, or what may be called political liberalism; secondly, the anti-statist, largely utilitarian doctrine of *laissez faire*, or economic liberalism; thirdly, the aristocratic cult of individuality, or Romantic individualism. (Swart, 1962, p. 77)

US Americans similarly internalised their own translations and connotative interpretations of the linguistic ideals prevalent during the French Revolution – *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – using concepts such as self-reliance, rather than individualism, as a means of encouraging citizens and settlers (frontiersmen) to work and develop the nation, irrespective of the lacking (and often non-existent) social structures for help.<sup>6</sup> This linguistic difference seems marginal at first, but ultimately it became an important point of differentiation in ideology with regard to social help and social care.

The change in the meaning of individualism from a term characterizing a society dominated by selfish interests to one denoting the ideal of the free individual and his development took place in Germanic, predominantly Protestant countries earlier than in France. The term was probably first used in the English as well as the German language in translations of Michel Chevalier's *Lettres sur l'Amérique du Nord* (1839 and 1837 respectively) ... In this book Chevalier, a former Saint-Simonian, made the statement, so widely repeated after him, that *the Americans, especially the Yankees, were individualistic par excellence, contrasting them to the much more sociably-minded French*. A similar statement about the individualistic nature of American society was made in an article in the *American and Democratic Review* of 1839, but, whereas Chevalier had used the term in its pejorative sense, as was common among French publicists of his time, the anonymous *American Democrat* outlined a philosophy of history according to which 'the course of civilization [was] the progress of man from a state of savage individualism to that of an individualism more elevated, moral, and refined.' He clearly stated that it was America's mission in the world to be the first to reach this goal in history. (Swart, 1962, p. 86, my emphasis)

## Defining individualism

As Nevitte and Cochrane (2006) note, 'different scholars use the term individualization to capture different concepts, while others label the same concepts with different terminology [and] "one can hardly think of a word heavier with misunderstanding than "individualization" has proven to have in the English-speaking countries"' (p. 204). It is therefore necessary to clarify the definition of individualism, even more so when we take into consideration that this analysis is intended not to compare 'English-speaking countries' with one another but to compare the US with Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, for the purpose of establishing a framework within the history of social care work, I begin with the application of Nevitte and Cochrane's (2006) definition: 'Individualization refers to the decoupling of human values from such traditional value-generating institutions as family, work, politics, and religion' (p. 204). To be clear, the assigned term 'individualism' is therefore, in this article, being used as a derivative of the word individualisation. When individualisation of a society occurs, individualism is the result, and the individual is, conceptually, bred from this morphosis. I feel this clarification is necessary as the moment of decoupling – religious, cultural and national – frequently appears to be an important factor in the development or evolution of social care work.

Decoupling from the permeating monarchical governmental systems can be seen throughout the literature of the time, both in Germany and the US. Where earlier forms of Romanticism in Germany heavily influenced the idea of *Volk* (the People) and individual rights and freedoms, Transcendentalism in the US began to give more prominent voice to the idea that individuals were 'pure' until corrupted by society. Transcendentalist thinkers believed that people were best when left to think and decide things for themselves, and that this was, in fact, the only path to a properly ideal community.

Ultimately, however, the final two decades of the nineteenth century are where the connotative understanding of the word began to shift between the countries. It was these later decades in which, 'in the United States ... "individualism" primarily came to celebrate capitalism and liberal democracy. It became a symbolic catchword of immense ideological significance expressing all that has at various times been implied in the philosophy of natural rights, the belief in free enterprise, and the American Dream' (Grant, 1986, p. 312). According to Swart (1962), 'German individualism in many ways reached its climax in the 1840's, when the Young Hegelians subjecting all political, social, and religious institutions to radical criticism, preached a complete emancipation of the individual amounting to a form of anarchism and nihilism unparalleled in its extremism by any other European country at that time' (p. 89).

This 'excessive individualism' (Swart, 1962, p. 89) gradually gave way to that of fostering a spirit of cultural renaissance seen as necessary for the revival of German pride and the unity of the post-war Bismarck era.

In Germany, the ideas of individual uniqueness (*Einzigkeit*) and self-realization – in sum, the Romantic notion of individuality – contributed to the cult of individual genius and were later transformed into an organic theory of national community. According to this view, state and society are not artificial constructs erected on the basis of a social contract but instead unique and self-sufficient cultural wholes ... In the United States, individualism became part of the core American ideology by the 19th century, incorporating the influences of New England Puritanism, Jeffersonianism, and the philosophy of natural rights. American individualism was universalist and idealist but acquired a harsher edge as it became infused with elements of social Darwinism (i.e., the survival of the fittest).<sup>7</sup> (Lukes, n.d., n.p.)

In fact, this 'harsher edge' of US individualism was noted by James Bryce (1888, quoted in Lukes, n.d.), British ambassador to the US, who defined Individualism in America as 'the love of enterprise and the pride in personal freedom' and stated that this ideology had 'been deemed by Americans not only their choicest but [their] peculiar and exclusive possession' (n.p.). Bryce was not alone in his observations and may have been influenced somewhat by the writings of De Tocqueville (1805–59) who 'considered the prevalent individualism as an undesirable consequence of the French Revolution and the spirit of democracy in general, a mentality, according to him, unknown to the French people of the *ancien régime*, when individuals were not yet isolated, but felt themselves an integral part of their society' (Swart, 1962, p. 80). In his *Democracy in America*, De Tocqueville (1955) notes that in the US, 'The division of fortunes has diminished the distance separating the poor from the rich, but in coming closer, they seem to have found new reasons for hating each other' and that society is endangered, as US Americans 'have abandoned what goods our former state could present without acquiring what useful things the current state could offer' (p. 191). This sentiment seems to perfectly reflect the importance placed on 'self-reliance' by later authors of 'the American novel'. De Tocqueville (1955, quoted in Grant, 1986) went on to say: 'individualism is of democratic origin and threatens to grow more equal' until Americans 'form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagin[ing] that their destiny is in their own hands.' Ultimately this habit could lead to a situation in which 'each man is forever thrown back upon himself alone, and there is danger he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart' (p. 311).

Despite these later-emerging negative views, 'as early as the 1840's and 1850's a small, but increasing number of authors in sympathy with the attacked ideas began to use the term in a favorable sense. Like many other words, "individualism" was introduced by its critics, but gradually adopted by its supporters' (Swart, 1962, p. 78). Transcendentalist writers began to take up the mantle of support for individuality and in the late 1800s Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) wrote:

The former generations acted under the belief that a shining social prosperity was the beatitude of man, and sacrificed uniformly the citizen to the state. The modern mind believed that the nation existed for the individual, for the guardianship and education of every man. This idea, roughly written in revolutions and national movements, in the mind of the philosopher had far more precision; the individual is the world. (Emerson, 1903, quoted in Watters, 1945, p. 33)

This view seems directly related to the German understanding of Individualism, which, according to Swart (1962), 'also left its impact on the Marxian utopia promising the free development of each as the condition of the free development of all, found its most daring and consistent form in Max Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1845)' (p. 89). However, while this excerpt may lead the reader to assume sympathies with German understandings of *Individualismus*, Emerson 'wagered his intellectual wealth' upon the attribution of 'unrestricted free will' to the 'self-reliant individualist' (Watters, 1945, p. 42). And while Herman Melville (1819–91), author of such works like the eminently popular *Moby Dick*, certainly shared a more favourable view of society, 'Melville himself reaffirms the general idea of the immanence of mankind in the individual' (Watters, 1945, p. 35).

The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) identified two types of individualism: the utilitarian egoism of the English sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820–1903),

who, according to Durkheim, reduced society to 'nothing more than a vast apparatus of production and exchange', and the rationalism of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1788), and the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789), which has as 'its primary dogma the autonomy of reason and as its primary rite the doctrine of free enquiry'. (Lukes, n.d., n.p.)

Thus, the idea of 'individualism' in America,

supplied the nation with a rationalization of its characteristic attitudes, behavior patterns, and aspirations. It endowed the past, the present, and the future with the perspective of unity and progress. It explained the peculiar social and political organization of the nation-unity in spite of heterogeneity – and it pointed toward an ideal of social organization in harmony with American experience. Above all, individualism expressed the universalism and idealism most characteristic of the national consciousness. This concept evolved in contradistinction to socialism, the universal and messianic character of which it shared. (Grant, 1986, p. 312)

US American individualism seems now to link more directly to an economic view while German *Individualismus* took a more socially conscious approach. This evolution meant that individualism in America began to relate most closely with Bernard Bosanquet's 'Moral Individualism'. Bosanquet (1848–1923) was a leader in the neo-Hegelian philosophical movement referred to previously and was heavily influenced by the works of both Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831).<sup>8</sup> Bosanquet's (1890) distinction between Moral and Social Individualism, and Moral and Social Socialism, offer an important review on understandings of individualism and their effect on modern social care work. Bosanquet postulates that when a community enacts socialist laws – when socialism is mechanised – Moral Individualism arises. Economic Socialism, then, is linked with Bosanquet's theory of Moral Individualism in that one must 'buy in' to the ideas and systems in order for any given system to work effectively. In *Aspects of the Social Problem*, compiled, edited and sent to publication by Bosanquet, contributing author C. S. Loch (1895) argues, 'Where cases of real hardship occur the remedy must be applied by individual charity, a virtue for which no system of compulsory relief can be, or ought to be a substitute' (p. 256). In essence, a person must be able to work and earn for themselves (caring for the Ego by establishing a relationship in regard to the earning of material objects), be trusted to work when able and be honest about their ability or inability to work, a position of self-support referred to as Moral Individualism. This Moral Individualism, or ability to earn for oneself, must be carried out while maintaining a relationship to the state (Social Individualism) and with the state (Moral Socialism) (Bosanquet, 1890).

This relationship, Moral and Social Individualism in relation to Moral Socialism, consequently requires that the state then offers financial or material support (Economic Socialism) in times of need for that which cannot be met by a person independently. Ultimately, a recurring theme in Bosanquet's writing was the belief that the greatest danger is to take away the ability of people to care for themselves. Although what Bosanquet meant in his writings about socialism have been debated hotly in economic, socialist, sociological and academic circles for now over a century (see Bosanquet, 1897, for his own reply), this singular belief, both stated and echoed frequently by Bosanquet, held – and continues to hold – massive influence on US American thought regarding social care work.

## Literature as cultural influences

One of the most illuminating means of exploring these nuances can be enacted through a brief exploration of the 'American novel' and German literature of the time. It is interesting to note that academic writers of late nineteenth and early twentieth century did not often write kindly of 'American Individualism' with concerns that, 'in early American fiction, the Enlightenment ideal of self-determination is sacrificed on the altar of social anxieties concerning individual freedom of choice' (Scheick, 2007, p. 370). It was through the dime-novel that the uniquely US American concept of 'rugged individualism' began to foment and take shape, and it was this ideology, I believe, that began to sow division in not only understandings of 'individualism' but also in the philosophy surrounding cultural shifts which began to determine the relationship between the individual and the community.

This is important because, as noted by Swart (1962), 'in the United States some of the first writers glorifying "individualism" were German immigrants, like Francis Lieber and Carl Schurz' (p. 88), whereas mid-century American authors in the US 'gave preference to the terms "self-reliance", "self-culture", "self-help", and "self-made man" to express their strong confidence in the power of the individual, and "individualism" did not come into current usage in the United States until the last two decades of the XIXth century' (pp. 86–7). Even then, 'the more favorable interpretation of the concept of individualism owed even more to German writers than to American or English thought on the subject' (Swart, 1962, p. 87).

Certainly, plenty has been written in English about the American novel, and a copious amount of writing and study on this topic surrounds theories of liberal individualism, rugged individualism and other such descriptions. These are seen as permeating the early literature from the US, whether as intentional attempts at rousing political upheaval or social change, or simply as a natural exhibition of the shifting culture of America of the time, as exhibited in the writings of US authors such as Grey, Longfellow, Tennyson, Melville and others. These authors, fully entrenched in 'transatlantic celebrity' (Morton, 2015), were read particularly widely throughout Europe and were often accused of fanciful writing (Glaser, 1859). In simplicity, the poems and novels of early literature in the US were authors' attempts to differentiate their works from those of their British counterparts and establish a distinct and recognisable 'American' voice in publication.

Germany experienced its own above-mentioned movement in Romance and Volk Literature, such as the works of Goethe, Büchner or Schiller, and Kleist's dramas using Greek subjects, romantic notions of ambition and exoticism, which offer a direct lineage from the *Sturm und Drang* era to the Romantic movement of literature (Bahr, Ryan and Jaeger, 2019). Similar to the US American desire for literature uniquely separate from the former influence of their British oppressors after the American Revolutionary War (American War of Independence), German authors and artists sought a unique cultural movement removed from the 'rationalism' of their French oppressors during the Napoleonic Wars. In fact, as Bahr et al. (2019) argue, 'the temper of the time demanded a concept of German national identity liberated from the tyranny of Rome and Paris, and it demanded a literature that would express this new national self-awareness' (n.p.). This sort of literature was initiated, in part, by Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), author of *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769* ['Journal of My Travels in the Year 1769'], which served as 'an allegory of a progress away from unthinking German provincialism to the kind of strongly individualistic rebellion that was to set the tone for his generation of German intellectuals and poets' (Bahr et al., 2019, n.p.). It was Herder who first conceived of the idea of *Volksseele* (the soul of the people), which came to illuminate Volk literature.

Here the comparative distinctions between the German view of individualism as a humanistic concept, and the understood economically defined Individualism of the US become more obvious. Additionally, it is through this dichotomy that one begins to see quite clearly how cultural understandings of individuality/*Individualität* may have had very direct effects on beliefs and ideology surrounding developments of social care work.

## The loyal subject and the last of the plainsmen

Analyses of two extremely popular works of fiction of the time, *The Last of the Plainsmen* written by US-born author Zane Grey (1872–1939), published in 1908 and popularised over a decade later (Grey, 2004), and *The Loyal Subject*<sup>9</sup> (*Der Untertan*), written by German-born author Heinrich Mann (1871–1950), first published in 1918, offers a more concise explanation of this dichotomy. *The Loyal Subject* is a satirical novel following the life of bourgeoisie German citizen Diedrich Hessling. Diedrich is portrayed initially as a young man somewhat trapped by societal expectations of his class. In desperate attempts to be seen as successful and worthy of his born social class, Diedrich joins a series of organisations such as fencing leagues, young military brotherhoods and the like, and engages in a variety of acts intended to boost his status among his peers. A consistent theme in Diedrich's younger self is that he would 'like to be nice' all the time (Mann, 2004, p. 27), but that this sort of behaviour would show too much 'sentimentality'. Sentimentality, it seems, is synonymous with 'care for another', or too much concern for immediate or close acquaintances, which divides the attention from the needs and requirements of the formal (bourgeoisie) society, therefore proving dangerous to an individual's social standing. One slip or misstep can result in years of lowered status, a fate, in Diedrich's eyes, possibly worse than death.



Heinrich Mann considered this refusal to engage in social connection in favour of contrived status within 'Society' to be a weakness, worthy of satire and derision.

Grosshut (1950) called Mann 'a man who read the future' and 'recognized the earliest symptoms of the spiritual process which made possible the development from Romanticism to Fascism in Germany ... About the year 1900, he tells us [in his essay 'Bekenntnis zum Uebernationalen'], thinkers began to lose their human sympathy' (p. 357). Grosshut says of *The Loyal Subject* that it is a book 'whose caustic social satire of the Hohenzollern era actually anticipated the final German catastrophe' (p. 357). '[Mann] realized that *the thing of primary importance is the individual and his consciousness of responsibility*' (p. 359, my emphasis). *The Loyal Subject* is generally now accepted as having been an important literary work that 'showed the untenable nature of social antagonisms in Germany' (Pelzer, 2017, p. 2).

Diedrich Hessling is a man ironically without irony; his inability to offer human sympathy is portrayed by Mann as his greatest weakness, whereas, in *The Last of the Plainsmen* by Zane Grey, this ability to pull away from society is considered admirable, with no ironic intent. To be self-sufficient, hard-willed and able to manage without close individuals and without the help of larger Society is lauded as a great strength. While Mann portrayed 'individualism' as a necessary but untenable objective, unless taken in the context of care for (and from) others, Grey offered rugged individualism as a primary goal of man.

Typical of the western genre, most of Grey's novels are set in the late nineteenth century, but their chronology actually extends from the 1850s to the 1930s. In choosing these settings, Grey contributed more than have most writers to the idea that the frontier West is both a historical and current reality, which explains why the temporal mythical West is not rigidly defined. Current ties of his name with western places indicate that the West he portrayed is perceived to be alive, which, in turn, has arguably affected the national psyche. (Blake, 1995, p. 210)

Grey's imagery promoted the idea of economic opportunity; his characters often 'strike gold' or are awarded great swathes of land which offer them a lifetime of comfort and success based on the supposed merit of their deeds and hard work. This is unsurprising when one takes into account that 'writing brought Zane Grey fame and wealth. *Publishers Weekly* proclaimed him the most popular author of fiction, 1919–26, and among the six best-selling authors between 1900 and the year 1924, when he enjoyed a princely annual income of nearly \$275,000.00' (Cox, 2006, p. 400). Additionally, Grey wrote at a time when the US was recovering from the Civil War, a short but bloody conflict which greatly shook the confidence of the sense of pride in unity used to build the cultural understanding of what it meant to be 'American'.

To a generation imbittered by war, disillusioned by peace, and searching desperately to regain a sense of normalcy in a world frighteningly abnormal, Zane Grey purposely and consciously offered a view of society which, beneath the blood and smoke, reaffirmed the traditional values seemingly jeopardized by European war and the swirling social currents of the 1920s. (Goble, 1973, p. 65)

Grey wrote to offer romance which he believed, Goble (1973) argued, was 'another name for idealism' as he 'labored to present to Americans a romantic world of "idealism": innocence and rugged virtue untainted by European war and the complexities of modern life' (p. 66).<sup>10</sup> Grey used the western frontier as a symbol of escapism and isolationism which provoked feelings of security in the status quo, a rejection of the progressivism of the East Coast. 'For Grey and his readers the West is the place with restorative powers, an escape from the banality and immorality of the older parts of the United States' (Blake, 1995, p. 214) – parts built and settled primarily by European immigrants and the continuing industrialisation of the East Coast. 'The West defines how Americans view their past, and this region, more than any other, is the source of American identity, pride, and cherished heroes' (Blake, 1995, p. 215). Isolationism was seen as the solution to, and a means of avoiding, international conflict. In essence, without neighbours, conflict becomes impossible. Thus, the 'American' western frontier became a symbol of peace and isolationism, "'And if this be isolationism", [Grey] seemed to say, "make the most of it!"' (Goble, 1973, p. 74).

## The social question

Arguably – as either due to, or as a reaction to, these literary influences – the social question in the US and *die soziale Frage* in Germany both merged and split during this time, becoming at once a question of economic success and a question of how educational systems (through formal institutions) and pedagogical theories (applied in both informal or social experiences and within formal institutions of learning) can play a role in the formation of people's rational ability for self-governance. In Germany, specifically, this socialistic line of thought continued to develop into the question of how a democratic government could successfully form and remain effective if the individuals who comprised said democracy do not tend to care for one another or use their personal power or status within the society to promote and support every individual member of said society, regardless of class, rank or social standing. In other words: how could a society of individuals succeed when society itself requires many to remain successful, unless all members of the society reach some level of 'success'? In the US, however, a more economic reasoning of the social question came to the forefront, and as the 'American Dream' began to take hold within the social psyche, cries for help or assistance were often condemned as weakness.

It is perhaps easier to explain the social question in the US with the words of Ira Howerth (1906):

Although literally hundreds of books, pamphlets, and articles have been published on 'The Social Question', or titles which mean the same thing, the phrase conveys to the mind of the average person no definite conception, and is used for the most part to cover vagueness or confusion of thought ... 'The social question' is a phrase that has a double meaning. It is applied first, to the general and eternal question of social well-being. So understood, the social question involves a multitude of questions, political, moral, social, and industrial. (p. 254)

In Germany, the newly defined citizen of this era became the centre of debate which encompassed issues of socio-economic stability, education, military might (and right), industry, sexism and other pressing matters. Reformers argued that education (*Bildung*) was the most basic element of societal change and that the *Bürger* (voting citizens) must be educated well in order to enact and participate in a functioning society. *Die soziale Frage*, then, became the question and analysis of how to best address and manage not only the rapidly increasing incidence of poverty nor the rising industry coming from the UK and slowly changing the face of Europe, but also the issues of child rearing, education, citizenship, class structure and women's roles in the newly forming societies. Each of these issues required not only thorough philosophical or statistical assessment, they also demanded a new field of analysis, social theory and decisions regarding how social policy could and should be built to strengthen and rebuild Prussia as the heart-state of an envisioned new Germany.

As a newly created nation state, Germany was confronted with two fundamental problems of integration – social integration in terms of class divisions and cultural integration because although the new state used a common language, it contained deep cultural divisions and its citizens, divided by religion and strong regional affiliations, had yet to be committed to a set of common cultural reference points. (Lorenz, 2008, pp. 631–2)

Thus, while Germany was searching for clarity (*Klarheit*) with respect to *die soziale Frage*, US Americans were simply acknowledging that, for them, the concept may well best remain undefinable. It is this emergence of cultural division – not only from the search for 'answers' to social problems of the day, but to articulation of what those problems are – which lead to distinct and important differences in how they may be addressed. The evolution of how each country decided to tackle these social problems gives an interesting insight in the philosophical backgrounds of development in social care work.

I would like to direct the reader's mind back to the statement regarding the US American tendency to define 'individualism' as linked more directly to a view of self-sustaining economic ability in opposition to Germany's understanding of *Individualismus*, which is defined through a more socially conscious lens. To put it simply, at the time, literature from the US understood social problems to be a problem *in* society for singular, independent individuals who, only when counted en masse, comprise a 'society', whereas German literature of the same era understood social problems to be a problem *for* the society which affected individuals *within* that society. This is a key point when attempting to construct a better understanding of the development of social care work.

## The idea of community as 'social' and understandings of 'citizenship'

As Sandermann and Neumann (2014) noted, development of social work and social pedagogy has been occurring in Germany for more than 120 years as an attempt to 'react to the social issues and upheavals of the 19th century by means of a pedagogical approach and with reference to educational understandings' (p. 16). Sandermann and Neumann later refer to a "'conceptual framework" for social pedagogy on the one hand, and a "practical science" of social pedagogy on the other' (p. 22), illuminating a clear relationship with modern social pedagogical practice in Germany as related directly to Hans Thiersch's theories of lifeworld orientation.<sup>11</sup>

Thiersch's lifeworld orientation regards social work 'as a human rights tradition and therefore ... emphasized social help and social support' (Schugurensky, 2014, p. 8). This development of the discipline of social pedagogy can be arguably traced to debates and insights around the idea of community, particularly as espoused by Tönnies (1855–1936). Tönnies (1887, quoted in Smith, 2019) argues that a community was defined as 'the permanent and real form of living together, while society is only transitory and apparent, and therefore community should be seen as a living organism and society as a mechanical aggregate and artefact' (n.p.). Debates following these definitions of community/society, coupled with understandings of individualism and how each individual plays a part in their respective communities and has a part to play in their society, informed and influenced the subsequent developments in social care work – to include, but not limited to, social pedagogy. As Hämäläinen (2015) stated, 'Social pedagogy is seen to originate historically from the discrepancy between individual autonomy and the requirements that modern society imposes upon a person, especially of the younger generation' (p. 1023), or rather, from a decoupling from traditional, hegemonic value-generating institutions, as acknowledged above in reference to the writings of both Mann and Grey.

It becomes necessary here to borrow Dolwick's (2009) definition of 'social' as being 'a collective whole with several basic unifying elements' (p. 28), to clearly sharpen the intended meaning for this article. Thus, when referring to social change, I am referring to an ideological shift among a defined grouping of individuals which will then determine or affect actions or behaviours. This shift is often the result of a decoupling of behaviours from previously held social expectations or norms. If, as Hämäläinen (2015) suggests, social pedagogy originates *from* such decoupling in German culture, I must argue there is irony in the argument I will put forth here that similar decouplings are equally indicated in the *lack* of development of social pedagogy within the US.

Returning to our example of *The Loyal Subject*, the figure of Diedrich Hessling is given satirical treatment by Mann; he is unable, or unwilling, to decouple from Society in order to love and care for those closest to him or his society as a whole. His inability to decouple the expectations of his bourgeoisie class prevents him from engaging with his 'true love', caring properly for his sisters and mother or treating the workers in his factory with respect and kindness. In fact, the faster his world changes, the more tightly he holds to the old ways. As a satirical, ironic figure, Diedrich Hessling is inadvertently offered by Mann as a support for Hämäläinen's theory regarding the development of social pedagogy; social pedagogy became the professionalised work and efforts of those *unlike* Diedrich, a believed-to-be-necessary change which developed from a need for the improvement of German cultural norms of the time. The Germany of Mann's youth was newly unified and attempting to build a nation from several tribes, kingdoms, cultures and beliefs. Much of the literature and discussion of the time supported the elimination of class division, a decoupling from the previously prevailing feudal class system. Mann's writing beautifully reflects the burgeoning strife between the nobility and working class, while simultaneously reflecting the views of the dissenting cultures. *Volk* literature helped to define the 'citizen', as citizenship was often portrayed as producing a sense of belonging, which was built by the above-mentioned ever-changing identity of what it meant to be 'German' as people searched for unity through culture, rather than politics (Werner, 2021).

Alternately, however, in *The Last of the Plainsmen*, Grey depicts Charles Jesse 'Buffalo' Jones as a hero for almost exactly the same reasons that Mann ridicules Diedrich Hessling. Buffalo Jones is a loner, a self-sustaining, singly successful man, lauded for his ability with a rope, his toughness in the desert and his lack of dependency on any other individual. Even the dogs and horses in Grey's books are given the hero treatment when accomplishing tasks without, and sometimes in spite of, the help of their owners

or others in the pack/herd. Jones makes the choices that serve him best, thinking of others only second, and for this he became a national hero. Unlike Germany, in America, citizenship was 'given' and since 'everyone' was a citizen without the need to find unifying ground,<sup>12</sup> it was unnecessary for cultures to blend or shift to accommodate a national identity. Westward expansion, thousands of miles of open land and the belief in manifest destiny gave those not wishing to share cultural exchange with other urban dwellers the ability to 'just leave' and head to the frontier. Thus, decoupling was not a decoupling from societal expectations or a movement towards cultural unity but rather a refusal to shift and change with the prevailing movements within cities and towns. Citizens were not searching for meaning through culture but rather finding their identity through the formulation of covenant, the agreement to abide by the overarching ideologies within the US Constitution, a document written more than a hundred years earlier.

## Public education and social pedagogy

In both countries public education has historically been developed as a means of educating citizens for the purpose of supporting the society in which they will live. Thus, understandings of 'citizen' become important when attempting to theorise foundations of social care work. Pedagogy/education also informs the social care work of a country. How education is viewed seems to frequently mirror expectations of the care of fellow citizens within communities.

In the US, where citizenry was automatic, education was derived from the need for, and built intentionally with the purpose of, facilitating the workings of the government, rather than helping facilitate the government to work. As historian Michael Katz writes,

The crusade for educational reform led by Horace Mann ... was not the simple, unambiguous good it [has] long been taken to be; the central aim of the movement was to establish more efficient mechanisms of social control, and its chief legacy was the principle that 'education was something the better part of the community did to the others to make them orderly, moral, and tractable'. (Katz, 1971, pp. ix–x, quoted in Murphy, 1998, p. 403)

In essence, the US was educating citizens primarily as a means of increasing its labour force, which would support the continued expansion of the country within and beyond the western frontier. In the late nineteenth century, educational curricula in the US were based on formulaic determinants of need to maintain control and continue or increase the worth of the human capital<sup>13</sup> for the defined communities at the time – all while 'communities' (towns, municipalities and so on) were being built under a deliberate corporate structure (mining towns, factory towns, even university towns).

Meanwhile, in Germany, towns, villages and other communities had been established, some literally for hundreds of years, in kingdoms, hamlets and otherwise; so these communities were not built to fit the capitalist agenda – the capitalist agenda had to fit the pre-determined communities. Public education in Germany from 1763 to the early decades of the twentieth century was compulsory within either denominational or confessional schools engaging hierarchical structures led by religious leaders, which echoed monarchical and autocratic methods of governance. The struggle to decrease the influence of religious education is an example of the decoupling of youth from the dominant discourse of the Church and bourgeoisie leaders of Germany:

Social Democrats favoured a definition of culture as a set of non-political texts and practices, whose meanings were always determined in the extra-cultural spheres of economic and social life. This is visible in the dominant strategy of raising workers to the level of 'culture' and in the opposing strategy, emanating from radical members of the party leadership like Schulz and Clara Zetkin, of attempting to develop specifically proletarian educational and cultural values. In the latter case, Schulz and Zetkin argued during the 1906 party congress in Mannheim that 'In view of its historical mission, the proletariat cannot simply take over the intellectual culture of the bourgeoisie; rather, it must re-evaluate (*umwerten*) the latter according to its own perspective.' (Sweeney, 2003, p. 181)

While public education did not undergo a dramatic shift in practice until the rise of Nazi Germany, and subsequent recovery efforts, this cultural shift did have a profound effect on the ideology of the

working class in Germany. Theories of education began to emerge which lauded public education as a potential solution to the social problem. Emerging discussions on how to best engage in society used words such as 'pedagogy' as both an entity that could reform society and as a curricular means with which to educate in mathematics and sciences. Nonetheless, while formal educational curricula were embraced as necessary methodology for mass public education, more emotive methods of cultural and social interventions than the schoolhouse were recognised as being necessary, resulting in a social-pedagogical lens of social change: social pedagogy. While social pedagogy and the formal pedagogies of schools complemented one another at times, they were ultimately developed into separate praxes (Dollinger, 2007).

When these pedagogical backgrounds are examined, one can begin to understand why pedagogies *for* and pedagogies *of* social needs developed within Germany that did not develop concurrently in America, despite shared intellectual discourse, mass immigration and frequent travel between the countries.

In the US, science was *the* answer to education; science could provide the best formula to calculate a 'how-to' means of caring for people, while the humanities were overlooked, labelled as 'soft sciences' or discarded altogether as sentimental or wasteful. The men who wrote the original US Constitution were scientists, interested in building the country as a social experiment, rather than as a means of caring for those who lived on US soil. In Germany, however, the humanities and sciences were considered equally important for cultural development (as a part of national pride of the time). Therefore, while in both countries social work as a mathematical, methodological concept developed as a means of addressing the social question (Courtney, 1994), in Germany pedagogy kept a firm grasp on the idea of culture and social care as not only important but necessary for a new world. It was this grasp on the humanities and care for others which built the foundation for the unique development of social pedagogy in Germany, which would not be followed in America for more than a century.

As stated previously, social care work methodologies developed in parallel in these countries, resulting in sister practices of social work and social pedagogy in Germany, and social work alone, sans social pedagogy, within the US. As Schugurensky (2016) has frequently noted, in the past 20 years, academic researchers and care work professionals in the US have begun to recognise the lack of, and evaluate the necessity for, social pedagogical practices within the modern US. This is important, as:

social pedagogy could be used ... to empower oppressed groups and contribute to social transformation ... These traditions tend to work primarily with the most marginalized members of society, have a holistic approach to learning, are oriented towards community building, draw on the experience and knowledge of participants, connect the curriculum to local problems, encourage a dialogical relationship between educators and learners, and acknowledge that, in order to be effective in the long run, pedagogical interventions must be accompanied by justice-oriented policies. (Schugurensky and Silver, 2013, pp. 2–3)

The increasing global movement towards the emancipation of oppressed peoples through more inclusive social care work practices, coupled with ever-growing desires for transnational definitions and understandings of prevalent practices and methodologies, indicates a need for a deeper exploration into the shared understandings and movements which support the growth and evolution of social pedagogical practices and philosophies worldwide.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>I believe we are losing a lot of great information and knowledge by giving German influence an 'American Pie Wash' of history. I hope that an article like this, as well as subsequent studies, can help not only to illuminate more clearly the discursive history of social pedagogy (which may, in turn, help to build more cohesive theory and define philosophies surrounding the discipline and praxis of social pedagogy), but also bring to light the many wonderful academic parallels and contributions which exist between the countries in an effort to bridge the gap of knowledge.

<sup>2</sup>An ideology that would, within a few decades, be coined as 'rugged individualism'.

<sup>3</sup>To include, but certainly not limited to, Charles Darwin (1809–82), Herbert Hoover (1874–1964), James Bryce (1838–1922), Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59), Jacob Burckhardt (1818–97), Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Karl Popper (1902–94), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Margaret Fuller (1810–50).

<sup>4</sup>Despite later philosophical movements challenging and changing this schema, the overarching influence of Rousseau's thinking persists in much of the ideology surrounding social care work in the Western world.

<sup>5</sup>The term 'US American' is used in this paper to specifically refer to residents or citizens in the United States, rather than elsewhere on the American continent.

<sup>6</sup>It is crucial to note here that this trope regarding government help is not reflective of land grants, schooling opportunities or other social efforts offered at the time. In fact, several historians argue that these aids and interventions have been deliberately skewed in the public eye. Nonetheless, this belief or understanding certainly seems to permeate the frontier literature and mythology from the time and, as such, produces an interesting, misguided 'truth' in the statement.

<sup>7</sup>"'Rugged individualism' – extolled by Herbert Hoover during his presidential campaign in 1928 – was associated with traditional American values such as personal freedom, capitalism, and limited government' (Lukes, n.d., n.p.).

<sup>8</sup>Despite later criticisms of Bosanquet's work, he was quite influential in his time, and his work cannot be dismissed within historical contexts.

<sup>9</sup>Translations of *Der Untertan* have been referred to as poorly done and difficult. For English translation of *Der Untertan*, see Roche (1986).

<sup>10</sup>Grey refers here to 'Americans' as those residing in the US – it is not the author's intention to promote exclusion, but rather to give a direct and accurate quote.

<sup>11</sup>While this article makes no attempts to theorise the work of social pedagogy, it recognises the term 'social pedagogy' as used in Sandermann and Neumann (2014) as encompassing many of the same frameworks for social care work in general to which I frequently refer.

<sup>12</sup>References such as this to the 'citizens' of/in America are solely meant to refer to those granted legal citizenship and are clearly and obviously lacking acknowledgement of the 'second America' of the enslaved and newly emancipated populations in the US. This lack is intentional; this topic deserves to be handled by experts in this field. In short, the history of 'second America' is too broad to be covered in this article.

<sup>13</sup>The US government was *already* using enslaved people as 'capital', and so the change was, culturally, insidiously small. While America 'freed' enslaved people following the Civil War, they were 'freed' at the cost of wage-slavery – which is also true and worth noting of peasants in feudal systems in Germany.

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### Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

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