The reality of relational elements in social encounters

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Background
My presentation draws upon an ethnographic study conducted in two upper-level compulsory schools in Helsinki, where I explored teenage boys' encounters with adults in school. In my thesis I present, how encounters between teenaged boys and adults are conditioned by adult-boy relationships. The foundational thought is that encounters between adults and young persons, as any situational activity between humans in general, involve complex relational elements.
My aim is to show, how the conditions of practitioner's and service user's social relationships can be analyzed through a reflective process. The meta-theoretical framework of the presented reflective model is based on critical realist philosophy as well as on implementation of Thomas J. Scheff's theory on social bonds and Derek Layder's domain theory.

Conclusions
I claim that the quality of a relationship can be critically analysed by exploring three elements in the interplay between the practitioner and the service user: (1.) The level of insight refers to the extent of knowledge that the practitioner has of the service users life career, (2.) the level of influence refers to the extent to which the service user recognizes the practitioner's initiatives as meaningful, and (3.) the emotional atmosphere refers to the quality of emotions that derives from the interplay between the practitioner and the service user.

Realising Conference Aims and Themes
Recognition of relational aspect adds complexity for the evaluation of social work practices, but from a realist point of view, it is necessary when assessing the adequacy of social work methods. Referring to the work of Gillian Ruch I suggest that it is essential that social work practitioners recognize the reality of relational elements when addressing unique individuals in unique circumstances.

Key words: relationships, social bonds, critical realism, social work practices.