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DOI:

[10.1080/01488376.2018.1479676](https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2018.1479676)

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Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Gibson, M 2018, 'The role of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation in social service organizations: A conceptual framework from a qualitative case study', *Journal of Social Service Research*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 112-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2018.1479676>

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The role of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation in social service organizations: A conceptual framework from a qualitative case study

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Acknowledgements: I would like to thank everyone who took part in this research and Professor Sue White, Mark Chesterman, and Dr. Jerry Tew for their advice and guidance.

Accepted in: Journal of Social Services Research

Date Accepted: 18th May 2018

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Abstract

Emotions have become increasingly recognized as constitutive elements of organizations and organizational processes. While the emotions of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation have long been considered to play a significant role in what people do and how they do it, they have received little theoretical and empirical attention within the literature on social service organizations. This paper responds to this research gap by outlining a conceptual framework for the role these emotions play, developed from an ethnographic case study of one English local authority child protection service. The framework outlines how these emotions influenced the wider institutional processes to construct an ideal form of practice, which was then used to evaluate the social workers' actions and praise, shame, or humiliate the social workers accordingly. The threat of shame, and promise of praise, influenced most social workers to enact or conform to the standard, thereby regulating their identities. Some social workers, however, felt ashamed or guilty of what they were doing and sought to resist these attempts at control through acts of compromising, concealing, and influencing. This paper considers how this understanding contributes to our understanding of these emotions and how they are experienced in a modern social service context.

Key Words: Institutional Logics, Institutional Work, Identity Regulation, Child Protection, Practice, Case Study, Organizational Culture

Introduction

Emotions have long been considered significant components of social practices and scholars, such as Hochschild (1979), began to conceptualize how the individual responded to, and managed, their emotions within the context of organizational demands and expectations. Further work has begun to consider the role emotions play in the construction and regulation of organizational and professional identities in attempts to maintain control over organizational actors (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Emotions have, therefore, become increasingly recognized as constitutive elements of institutions and institutional processes within the management and organizations studies (Scott, 2014) and social work and social service literature (e.g. Ruch et al., 2010; Gerdes, 2011; Ingram, 2013; Warner, 2015).

Unrelated to such research programmes and debates, however, the emotions of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation have long been considered to be significant emotional experiences, influencing what people do and how they do it (e.g. Cooley, 1902; Garfinkel, 1956; Freud, 1962). Such emotions are usually grouped under the term 'self-conscious emotions' (Tracy and Robins, 2004), which connotes the emotional experiences resulting from a person's consciousness of the 'self' in the moment, embedded within one's social situation. They, therefore, relate to one's relationship between the self and others, whether that other is real or imagined. While these experiences have been widely researched within sociology (e.g. Lynd, 1958; Goffman, 1963; Scheff, 2000) and psychology (e.g. Lewis, 1971; Tangney and Dearing, 2002), and have begun to be considered within the management and organizational studies (Creed et al., 2014) and social work literature (Gibson, 2014, 2015), no empirical studies have yet been undertaken that specifically considers their role in social service organizations (Gibson, 2016). Consequently, we know very little about whether such emotional experiences are a common experience for practitioners, how such experiences are managed and responded to on a personal and organizational level, or what kind of influence they have on practitioners and their actions. Answers to such questions may open up new possibilities to better understand the micro-foundations of practice and how they are involved in the creation, maintenance, and disruption of social service institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). The study

reported on here, therefore, sought to respond to this research gap by undertaking a case study into the role of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation on what social workers do and how they do it.

This paper provides a conceptual framework to understand the interaction between the external forces placed upon the social workers within an organizational context, that set the boundaries for self-conscious emotional experiences, and the internal processes the social workers engaged in to respond to these forces, that resulted in the actual experience of self-conscious emotions. While the analysis that has been provided here is specific, not only to the case study site, but also to the time in which data were collected, as Hughes argued back in 1958, such specific accounts of processes in one context can be useful to understand the processes in others. This study, therefore, provides the first account of the role these emotional experiences have in a social service context, providing a source for others to understand practice from this perspective in different organizations and contexts. It, therefore, extends the literature in relation to emotions in professional practice; compliments and extends the work of others who have considered issues of identity construction and regulation within social work (e.g. Leigh, 2013; Wiles, 2013); and develops the work of those who have sought to theorize the influence and effects of conflicting institutional logics in social service organizations (e.g. Novotná, 2014; Bévort and Suddaby, 2016). By analysing how the social workers responded to the demands and expectations placed upon them, given recent changes to social service organization and management, this study further contributes to our understanding of how practitioners respond to, and manage, these specific emotional experiences (Hochschild, 1979). Indeed, these emotions could not be considered to be a separate component of institutional processes, or even the lived-experience of practitioners, but something that was inherently part of the institution, the experience, and, therefore, practice.

Emotions are taken in this paper to be social and psychological constructs that are experienced as a unified conscious field, constituted by internal thoughts, bodily sensations, and actions, together with external situations, events, and meanings (Gordon, 1981; Barrett, 2006). In other words, they

are patterned responses that tell us something about our relationship to our environment (Burkitt, 2014). Shame is taken to be the displeasurable experience resulting from negative self-evaluations that threaten one's identity, which is often associated with a desire to hide (Lynd, 1958; Goffman, 1963; Lewis, 1971), while guilt is considered to be the displeasurable experience resulting from negative self-evaluations due to moral transgressions, which is often associated with a desire to make amends (Lewis, 1971; Tangney and Dearing, 2002). Humiliation, meanwhile, is considered to be the highly displeasurable experience resulting from devaluation or invalidation by another, which is often associated with a desire for revenge (Klein, 1991; Smith, 2008). And pride is taken to be the pleasurable experience resulting from a positive self-evaluation due to living up to one's personal or behavioral standards, which is often associated with a desire for connection (Cooley, 1902; Tracy and Robins, 2004). These concepts were used as sensitizing devices (Bowen, 2006) in the analysis of the data to guide certain lines of enquiry about each emotion and make inferences made about the social workers' experiences in relation to these emotions. This paper will first outline the study design and methodology and then briefly outline the resulting conceptual framework, before detailing this framework in the analysis. A discussion is provided on what this study contributes to the field and the implications for practice and social service leadership and management.

Study Design and Methodology

Case study research provides a flexible approach that is able to collect multiple sources of evidence in real-world contexts suitable for exploring the role of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation in social work practice (e.g. Stake, 1995; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Thomas, 2011). The case study site, referred to as the Council throughout this paper, was an English child protection social work service and the fieldwork was undertaken in 2014. Power (1997) and Munro (2004) argue that the context for child protection social work in England has been heavily influenced by the New Public Management agenda, which seeks to impose a standard upon all public services, which are set by the central Government and imposed on local services by mechanisms of audit and inspection. The case study

site is one example of a local service under such standardization. The aim of case study research is to produce knowledge of an example understood within the context of the researcher's own experience (Thomas, 2011). This example is not representative of all local services within England, but rather provides a specific representation of a local service at that time, which is used to gain an insight into the role of these emotions in practice.

The child protection service within the Council provided the boundaries for the overall case (Thomas, 2011). Two child protection teams were chosen within the Council as they agreed to take part in the research. Overall, there were 19 social workers and 2 team managers involved in the study. Experience ranged from less than one year to 24 years, age ranged from 24 years to 63 years, there was one male and the rest were female, and there was one Black-Caribbean social worker and the rest were White-British. To ensure anonymity, any identifying details relating to the individual or the team have been removed throughout the reporting of the findings.

Data Collection

Data were collected on the child protection service within the Council to gain a historical perspective of the service and to understand the current arrangements. All publically available Council documents that related to the child protection service were collected that dated from 2005 to 2014. These data were available on publically available databases related to the Council or the inspectorate, while some were collected during field visits. Together, these documents totaled 329 pages.

Ethnographic methods were considered appropriate to get close to the experience of the social workers and record the actions of the practitioners in context and I observed those within the teams for one to two days per week over a six month period in 2014. Fieldnotes were taken throughout the day according to advice provided by Emerson et al. (2011) in a note book that I carried around with me. These notes were then typed up when I got home that same night. In total, I conducted 246.5

hours of observations across the two teams. To gain a more specific focus on the participants' internal self-conscious emotional experiences I designed a semi-structured log, i.e. a diary sheet, that asked them to reflect on one experience in the day where they felt good/bad about themselves, asking them to detail the situation, their thoughts, feelings, provide an emotion term, and their subsequent actions as a result of this experience. This diary sheet was given to each member of the team at the end of the day to complete and give back to me before they left the office. Each diary entry was typed up on to a computer that same night. In total, I collected 99 diary entries. Together, these logs provided data with greater detail on the internal experiences of specific situations which I could combine with my observations and discussions with the social workers to build a more comprehensive picture of the role of self-conscious emotions in their practice.

Constructivist grounded theory methods were used to “move ethnographic research toward theoretical development by raising description to abstract categories and theoretical interpretation” (Charmaz, 2006, p.23). I collected the data and began to analyze it as the research progressed. From my initial analyses I developed a semi-structured interview schedule which looked at the three areas which had become most pertinent in answering the research questions, namely: (1) how they perceived themselves and their practice within the context of the Council; (2) their experience and perception of the context in which they practiced; and (3) specific examples of practice where self-conscious emotions were salient. Seventeen social workers¹ and two team managers were interviewed. Each interview was conducted in an interview room within a Council building. Interviews lasted between 55 and 100 minutes and were recorded on a digital recording device, transferred to a computer, and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Following Charmaz's (2006) advice, the ethnographic data was initially coded line by line in a Word document using a gerund that best represented the action within that line. Within the documents I

¹ Two social workers stated that they could not find the time to be interviewed due to their workload

had collected, any data that related to the development of the child protection service were extracted and also coded in this manner. The initial coding of the data guided what data to collect in subsequent observations and discussions allowing me to identify patterns and significant processes, to compare experiences within and between individuals, and to find similarities and differences (Charmaz, 2006); what Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to as the constant comparative method. As the analysis/data collection progressed, more data could be compared to more data and the most significant codes, i.e. those which made the most analytical sense to understand the actions of the social workers, could then be used to categorize the data; a process Charmaz (2006) calls focused coding. Data could then be compared to these codes enabling further refining.

Memos were written throughout the data collection and analysis process (Charmaz, 2006) and helped consider the possible theoretical explanations for the data, develop hypotheses, test these hypotheses in the field, and come to the most plausible explanation; a process Peirce (1903) termed abduction. I wrote memos to help me formulate ideas about the data. I used them to make comparisons between data, codes, categories, and concepts. As I began to construct the categories, the memos aided my collection of relevant data through, what Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to as, theoretical sampling, i.e. seeking data to develop the emerging theory. Theoretical sampling enabled me to define the categories, outline the properties of the categories, specify the conditions under which the categories arose, were maintained, and changed, and describe their consequences (Charmaz, 2006). The memo writing was able to bring the fieldnotes, diary entries, documents, and interviews into an integrated analysis. All memos were typed up and stored on a computer for later retrieval and sorting. I did not aim for theoretical saturation, however, as is the aim in classical grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), but rather what Dey (1999) terms “theoretical sufficiency” (p.257). Following Charmaz’s (2006) advice on gaining sufficiently rich data for constructing a theory grounded in the data, I stopped collecting data when I believed that I had enough background data, detailed descriptions of a range of self-conscious emotional experiences

and their contexts, and I had confidence in my analytical concepts and categories to address the research topic.

The final stage of the process was to sort, compare, and integrate the memos through theoretical sorting (Glaser, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). The memos were considered in relation to a range of theoretical codes that had become pertinent either through the data collection and analysis phase or in the sorting of the memos. The theoretical codes were identified from my own background knowledge or the reading I undertook throughout the data collection/analysis. The memos were sorted (and resorted) by using tables and diagrams according to different theoretical codes to create the best possible balance between the studied experience, the categories I had constructed, and my theoretical ideas about them (Charmaz, 2006). Sorting the memos enabled the integration of these categories into a conceptual framework.

Ethical Considerations and Study Limitations

All research participants were informed of the study and its aims through documentation and discussions with me. Written consent was gained from each participant for observations and interviews. All participants were made aware that they could withdraw their consent for specific incidents, or even entirely, from the research at any point during the time I was collecting data. Observations including parents, carers, or children were only undertaken following a discussion with the social worker as to the capacity of the parent/carer to consent to me observing the session, documentation being provided to the parent, them agreeing to take part, and written consent being gained from them. All participants were given pseudonyms in the data to ensure anonymity and all data were stored securely. Ethical approval was granted through the University ethical review panel and the research was approved by the Council's research governance process.

There are, of course, limitations to any study. I acknowledge that my presence altered the dynamics within the teams. Observing and asking questions about their work while they undertook it, and

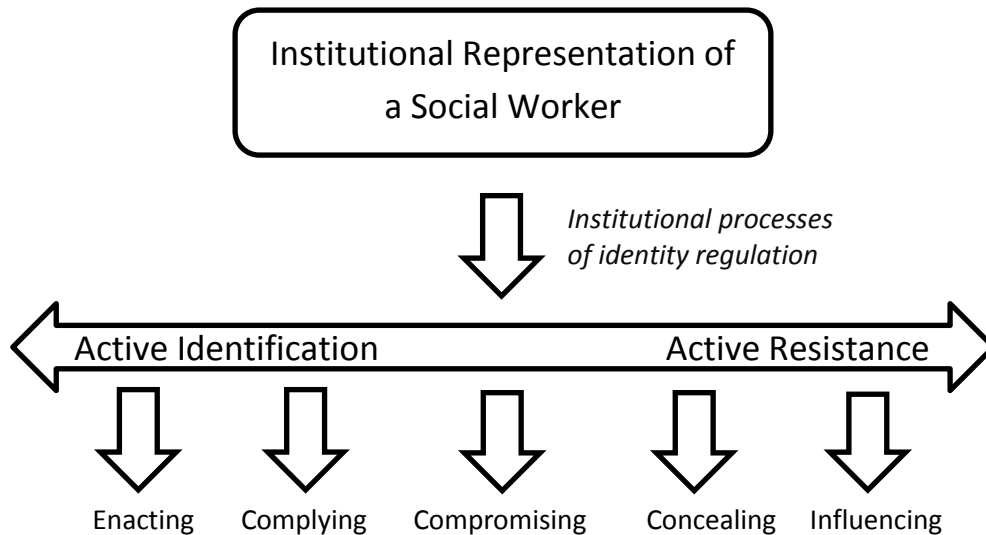
asking participants to construct textual data, inevitably altered some of what they did and how they did it. The data can, therefore, be considered to have been contextually co-constructed (Charmaz, 2006). I also acknowledge that by asking questions about how they were feeling could change how they perceived the current, or even future, situations. Furthermore, while all efforts went into gaining as holistic a picture as possible into the role of self-conscious emotions in the practice of those within the teams, the resulting picture has been limited by the amount of time I spent in the field and the types of situations I observed. Not only were the situations I was able to observe limited by the amount of time I could spend with the teams but they were also limited by the social workers themselves who invited/agreed to me observing certain situations and not others. Clearly, the more time I spent in the field, the more diverse situations I could have observed and the more corroborating data I could have collected for the evolving and ongoing analysis. Furthermore, being an observer-as-participant (Gold, 1958), with no formal role in the situations I was observing, made some situations inappropriate for me to be present within, which a complete participant role (Gold, 1958) would have gained legitimate and appropriate access to. Such limitations are acknowledged. Further still, while I have sought to collect data which provides as close a representation of the emotional experiences of the participants as possible, given practical considerations, the resulting data and analysis can only be understood within the context of my interactions and interpretations within the teams, within the Council, at that specific time (Thomas, 2011). Indeed, it is an ontological commitment within this study that the resulting theory is interpretive, contingent, and tentative (James, 1907; Dewey, 1929; Mead, 1934).

Analysis: The Conceptual Framework

The coding, categorizing, and comparing of data constructed a theoretical explanation to understand how the social workers experienced pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation, and, therefore, the role these self-conscious emotions played in practice. These experiences stemmed from the interaction between the social workers' identities, and, therefore, how they expected to practice, and the

organization's expectations of the social workers, or what their identities were expected to be. The first category of the conceptual framework is, therefore, the collective identity of the social workers as defined within the organization, termed here as the 'institutional representation of a social worker' (Moscovici, 1961, 1981; Breakwell, 2001; Duveen, 2001). The second category is the mechanisms used by those within the organization to regulate the identities of the social workers so that they acted in accordance with the institutional expectations (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Scott, 2014). The social workers, however, may or may not have identified with this collective identity and so the third category is the identification with, or resistance to, the institutional representation (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Pratt, 1998; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). The type of practice the social workers engaged in could then be categorized on the basis of their identification or resistance: *Enacting* the institutional representation, *complying* with the institutional representation even though they did not identify with it, *compromising* the expectations of the institutional representation, *concealing* acts of resistance to the expectations of the institutional representation, or *influencing* the institutional guardians to change the expectations placed upon them (Oliver, 1991). This conceptual framework is summarized in figure 1. How these categories contribute to the experience of self-conscious emotions, and how the experience of self-conscious emotions influenced the social workers' practice, is provided in the description and analysis of these categories that follows.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework to understand the role of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation play in practice



The institutional representation of a social worker

Neoinstitutional theory (see DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) provides a useful foundation to understand social work practice in the case study site. This theory helps to conceptualize how social structures, norms, and rules become established as organizing principles for action and how, over time, these structures are disrupted and changed to give way to new institutions (Scott, 2014). The social workers operated within multiple organizational fields, and were governed by competing institutional logics, which Friedland and Alford (1991) consider to be a set of principles that provide organizations and individuals with means, motives, and identities. While the institution of social work provided an institutional logic based on service to the public, the institution of public administration, which has been influenced by New Public Management, provided a competing institutional logic of social work organizations as businesses, which need to provide effectiveness, efficiency, and value for money (Power, 1997; Courtney et al., 2004). Within England, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspects/audits child protection services on these latter criteria

(Munro, 2004) and grades them as Inadequate, Requires Improvement, Good, or Outstanding (Ofsted, 2015). To achieve a grading of 'Good' or 'Outstanding', organizations need to ensure that its employees produce the evidence it needs for a positive inspection judgement (Power, 1997; Munro, 2004). The Council was graded as 'Good' at the time of the fieldwork.

What it means to be a 'social worker', i.e. the meanings and expectations associated to the role (Burke and Stets, 2009), therefore, depends on the institutional logic that defines the collective identity, or, what Moscovici (1961) terms, the social representation. The primary expectation of the service in the case study site came explicitly from the professional field, which was to protect children, as Donna, differentiating their work from other forms of social work, stated:

"more often than not with very complex families we're safeguarding at a significant harm level. We're not [family] support team" (interview)

Implicitly, however, the primary expectation of the service was to produce evidence that would provide a positive inspection evaluation, as indicated by Carol who defined performance as a social worker as:

"the indicators what they're measuring you by. It's the percentage of assessments that you do on time, how often you see children. Are you seeing them all the time in a timely manner? Are you giving reports out to parents? It's all that that's being constantly collected and collated" (interview)

Due to knowledge of historical incidents, it was known within the Council that a failure to protect a child could result in the organization being 'named and shamed' in the media and by politicians (e.g. Warner, 2015; Shoesmith, 2016). Consequently, the service was organized to 'intervene' in families lives at an early stage to prevent child abuse, as the Director argued:

"A potential failure to intervene at an earlier stage would have very high risk consequences for the child (ren) involved, the reputation of the local authority and poor Ofsted inspection results" (Council meeting minutes)

Equally, it was known within the Council that a failure to produce the desired evidence for the inspectors could result in being shamed by the inspectorate through a negative judgement that would be made public, which led one team manager to comment:

“...the nightmare here is that you fail Ofsted. If you were here at the time, you’d think everybody was going to have a heart attack...” (interview)

The result of such threats of being shamed, and the concomitant allure of being praised, resulted in one institutional logic being prioritized over another, which led to a particular ‘institutional representation’ of a social worker within the Council (Breakwell, 2001; Duveen, 2001). This was succinctly stated by one team manager, when asked to describe the ideal type of social worker for the organization, as:

“Somebody who ticks all the boxes and meets all the timescales, makes all the deadlines, satisfies the performance indicators, can work 60 hours a week and not get ill or complain they’re tired, somebody who isn’t affected by their emotions and their dealings with human nature. I think somebody robotic really” (interview)

The institutional processes of identity regulation

As Miller (2010) argues, social workers are engaged in a process of socialization within the organization they practice in, which influences how they come to define their identity as a social worker. Alvesson and Willmott (2002), meanwhile, argue that there is an active process by those in management positions to influence this ongoing identity construction process, through what they term identity regulation. The effect of the institutional representation of a social worker within the Council was to provide the institutional guardians, i.e. those with cognitive, emotional, and/or moral commitments to the organization (Creed et al., 2014), with a standard to evaluate and direct the social workers’ practice, thereby regulating the identity construction process, as Melanie states:

“...it’s coming from the top down, you know, what’s expected, what isn’t expected, what’s acceptable and what isn’t. It’s process driven, isn’t it? You know, you have supervision, you talk it through “ok what’s next? Right we’ve got to do this”” (interview)

Some, however, struggled with the tasks they were asked to undertake, as demonstrated by Paula’s first experience of removing a child from their parents:

“Paula: I can remember that as we... drove over the Bridge, to head towards the address - and I can remember thinking, “child snatcher”... I really felt like I was living up to that image of a child snatcher

Me: What did it feel like when you thought that you were living up to this idea of being a child snatcher?

Paula: I felt an element of shame and, sort of, “Well, what would my next door neighbours think of me, if they knew I was doing this? And my friends, what would they think? you know, they’re Mums themselves and what would their perception of me be?” (interview)

Through discussion with more experienced team members and in supervision with her team manager, however, the dominant institutional logic could be used as a tool to regulate how Paula felt, turning her shame into pride, enabling her to meet the expectations of what it means to be a social worker within the Council, as she stated:

“although it wasn’t easy to remove the children, it made me feel quite good, in knowing that now these children were going to be in a place of safety” (interview)

Failure to adhere to the institutional representation, however, provided institutional guardians with legitimate grounds to shame the transgressor in attempts to change behavior and force compliance so that they acted in accordance with institutional prescriptions (Creed et al., 2014). Christine, for example, was perceived by a manager to have not followed certain procedures and left a child at risk of harm, which Christine denied. Christine told me that she was shouted at by the manager in the

team room, was stopped from working on the emergency duty team for 3 months, which Christine believed was “to frighten me”, and was sent to occupational health for a cognitive functioning test. She said this experience had made her feel “worthless” and “hurt” and told me she felt “humiliated”. To prove her worth as a safeguarding social worker to the senior managers, Christine had to work long hours, which took a significant personal toll with her saying she couldn’t eat or sleep and that she dropped a dress size in a week. All those in the team were aware of this humiliating experience ensuring everyone knew that the boundaries for action would be policed through shame and humiliation, further embedding the institutional representation as a the only accepted standard within the service, leaving the social workers with a sense of vulnerability, as one team manager explained:

“I feel it strongly there’s a big change and it’s, and I say ‘accountability’ because that’s how I feel, you know, if I do something wrong, they’d sack me. I don’t feel secure in this job anymore... I don’t know if it’s come from the government or what but this pressure that you’re always being looked at to be sure you’re doing it good enough, you know” (interview)

The practical effect of the construction of an institutional standard, along with using, or threatening, shame for those who did not adhere to this standard, and praising, or promising praise for living up to it, was to regulate the identities of the social workers (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). By knowing the boundaries for being shamed and praised, the social workers learnt the institutionally ‘appropriate’ ways of being.

Identifying with and resisting the institutional processes of identity regulation

The social workers all had experiences prior to successfully engaging in formal education programmes and attaining a recognized qualification, which provided them with a range of meanings they had already associated to their identity as a social worker (Burke and Stets, 2009).

The institutional logic provided by the social work profession provided a significant influence in this

identity construction process (Thornton and Ocasio, 2005). So while they were being evaluated by others within the Council against the institutional representation, they were evaluating themselves against their own identity-standards. Furthermore, while the social workers were being asked to perform certain tasks in certain ways, the situation could be complicated by how much they empathized with those they were working with. Consequently, the social workers could consider how likely it was that they would feel ashamed or guilty of performing certain actions, how likely it would be that they would be shamed or humiliated by others, i.e. a feeling of vulnerability, or how protected they felt from such painful experiences, i.e. emotional safety. Such information, i.e. (1) the level of conflict between the person's identity-meanings and those within the institutional representation; (2) the level of empathy they felt for the family they were working with; and (3) the level of emotional safety they felt in the situation could be considered to lay the foundations for the social workers' responses to the institutional processes of identity regulation. In some contexts the social workers conceptualized the situation in such a manner as to accept the meanings and expectations of the institutional representation as their own, i.e. identification, and, therefore, acted in accordance with it. While in other contexts the social workers did not accept the meanings and expectations of the institutional representation as their own, i.e. dis-identification, and sought to resist the institutional processes that sought to regulate their identity (Pratt, 1998).

Enacting

A social worker could be considered to enact the institutional representation where they actively and willingly sought to practice in a manner consistent with its meanings and expectations. Such situations were founded in minimal conflict between the social worker's identity-standards and the institutional representation as a result of accepting the dominant institutional logic and the resulting interpretive framework. Consequently, a social worker's conception of a good job, and therefore what they would feel proud of, was consistent with the needs and ideals of the organization, as Jane demonstrated:

“you’re doing a good job, like if you put an ICO [Interim Care Order] in place or a child on a child protection or a child’s had to be removed and placed in foster care, you know at the end of the day the child’s safe and that, that for me, that’s a good job” (interview)

Furthermore, accepting the interpretive framework ascribed meaning to the administrative component of the work, which provided opportunities for the social workers to feel proud, for example, “Completed 2 assessments and closed 2 cases” was recorded as pride in the diary entries. Equally, being prevented from being able to perform the administrative tasks to a high standard provided opportunity for shame, as Julie described:

“She complained that she had to complete 4 reports for the meeting next Monday but she works part time and has meetings all booked up in the days she is in... She then said “I tell you what it makes me feel, inadequate, like I can’t be a good social worker”, “I take pride in my reports being robust but it’s not good enough” referring to the one she is writing” (fieldnotes)

Enacting was also founded in a low level of empathy for the family members as a result of blaming them for harming, or potentially harming, a child. By holding them responsible for this wrong-doing, the social workers’ attention was focused on the child and the moral transgression, rather than consider the situation from the parent or carers’ point of view, as the following interaction demonstrated:

“[Amy] is talking to [Mandy] while sitting at their desks about the “starved child”... She says they got an ICO and [Mandy] punches the air and says “get in”. I ask her why she says that... [Amy] says that it was “intentional abuse” and [Mandy] says she didn’t like the father, [Amy] responds saying “he’s a tosser that’s why”” (fieldnotes)

While their actions adhered to institutional expectations, blaming the father reduced their capacity for empathy towards him. This served as a form of emotion work (Hochschild, 1979), which prevented them from feeling the distress of the father and enabled them to remove the child from

the family without a troubled conscience. Indeed, adhering to the meanings and expectations of the institutional representation meant they could feel pleasure in being involved in removing the child from her family.

Finally, a desire to create emotional safety for themselves by acquiescing to the institutional norms, pressures, and rules, which offered protection from being shamed or humiliated, contributed to a social worker enacting the institutional representation. For example, a typical situation was of a social worker prioritizing the administrative component of the work at the expense of the relational component, as demonstrated in a session between Donna, a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) worker, and a mother:

“As they discuss issues [Donna] spends most of the time making notes with her head down while the mother and the CAMHS worker talk about her son. The CAMHS worker and the mother laugh at points while [Donna] continues making notes... When the meeting is over I ask [Donna] about the notes and she says that if she doesn’t do them you get into the situation like she had the other week when [the team manager] accused her of not prioritising her minutes of meetings in front of the parents” (fieldnotes)

When a social worker felt able to verify their identity as a social worker while acting in accordance with the institutional representation, however, not only did some social workers report feeling proud but they also reported feeling ‘professional’, an embodiment of the institutional representation, as Amy recorded in her diary entry:

[Situation:] I have completed all paperwork in relation to a particular case ready for court...

[Thinking:] Relief. Thank god I’ve finished! Proud of the quality of work that I have produced. Relieved that we will be able to get the children to a place of safety.

[Bodily sensations:] Relaxed, smiled, did a little dance. Less pressure on brain.

[Description:]

Relief. Pride. Professional. Happy”

Complying

In contrast to enacting, some social workers did not accept the meanings and expectations associated with the institutional representation as their own but complied with them anyway (see Oliver, 1991). Consequently, there were greater conflicts between the social workers’ identity-meanings and the institutional representation, as Melanie demonstrated while explaining the impact of her work on one family:

“[Melanie] said that the children are 16 and 17 and are hard to engage, and are difficult for the parents too, yet they have put in place a child protection plan, which she said, “the plan is destructive and ineffective. It’s more damaging than supportive” as she said nothing is going to change and this plan has caused a lot of problems for the family. She said “it’s just a tick box exercise... we have to do it for accountability and show we have tried to engage them when it all goes tits up”. She said “I don’t know what to do” but she has discussed it with [the team manager] who has told her to continue with what she is doing. She described it as “uncomfortable”” (fieldnotes)

Melanie did not blame the parents and displayed empathy for their situation. Furthermore, the conflicts between her identity-standard and the institutional representation created a troubled conscience that questioned the usefulness of the child protection procedures. Yet, while she felt unsure, she also felt she had no choice but to comply and hide her “uncomfortable” feelings. Social workers who complied felt they had no choice but to comply because they felt emotionally unsafe. The need to prioritize avoiding being shamed, therefore, became a consideration above all others. With knowledge of the conditions for being shamed within the institution the social workers routinely adhered to the expectations placed upon them undertaking tasks that they didn’t agree with, as Lucy stated:

“She comments that sometimes they hold on to cases for too long and that sometimes they’re involved when there are no concerns against her better judgement “just because ‘they’ [managers] want to control things”” (fieldnotes)

While they knew their actions would not change the outcome, by adhering to procedure they created a sense of emotional safety in the knowledge that they would be beyond blame under scrutiny. Such action, however, inevitably created feelings of shame and guilt in the social workers, as Lucy’s experience showed:

“[Lucy] comes over to me and tells me that she has to go out and speak to a mother to ask her to accommodate her child... it was decided at a meeting that [Lucy] had to ask the mother for voluntary accommodation and then to issue Court proceedings after, but not to tell the mother. [Lucy] says she feels like she is stabbing the mother in the back” (fieldnotes)

In some situations social workers felt unsure or concluded that the parent or carer was not to blame for the harm or potential harm to a child, or that the use of certain procedures was unnecessary or even harmful to the family. Yet the potential for being shamed by not living up to the institutional meanings and expectations remained a central feature of how the situation was conceptualized. Therefore, despite any reservation, social workers could still actively comply with the meanings and expectations of the institutional representation as a strategy of shame avoidance. Feeling ashamed and guilty of what one was doing as a result of complying inevitably led to a sense of disillusionment. While the social workers engaged in a form of emotion work (Hochschild, 1979) to hide these feelings of disillusionment, or at least carry on while feeling it, without an ability to see any change in the system, that disillusionment could turn to hopelessness, as Jemma demonstrated:

“I’m quite disillusioned by it all... I think I’ve just come to accept it now there’s not a lot I can do about it, I can’t change it... I’m looking around to see what other kind of work I can do with this qualification, I don’t think it will be local authority forever” (interview)

Compromising

While enacting or complying with the institutional representation provided the social workers with social acceptance and emotional safety, there were many situations in which either response was considered unworkable or unpalatable (see Oliver, 1991). Where social workers held identity-meanings that were inconsistent with the institutional representation, yet felt vulnerable to being shamed, some were seen to engage in action that could be considered to partially resist the institutional pressures. Such action could be considered to be either an act of necessity to avoid being shamed or an act of choice to provide sufficient space to be able to focus on work that they could feel proud of. The foundation of compromising actions was adherence to the minimum standards, which did not fully satisfy the institutional requirements, but ensured they avoided criticism.

Compromising became an act of necessity where the social workers conceptualized the situation as presenting unresolvable competing and conflicting demands. In such situations the social workers felt that they could not comply with these expectations even if they wanted to, creating a feeling of vulnerability to being shamed. In such cases, the social worker compromised both the institutional standards and their own identity-standards, as Amy described:

“sometimes, you’re doing a child social work assessment after doing two visits. A 40-day assessment in two visits. That’s not 40 days is it? That’s not knowing the family for that, to do that assessment justice, or to do the children justice, because that’s what it’s about” (interview)

The expectations as laid out in the Council’s procedures were that a forty day assessment should be an in depth assessment of the child’s needs and circumstances. Amy was aware that two visits over forty days did not meet this expectation but she felt she had no option but to reduce the quality of her work to pacify the institution and protect herself from being shamed. Compromising was, therefore, a form of emotion work (Hochschild, 1979).

In some contexts, however, the social workers felt they had more choice over their actions. In such situations compromising could be considered a strategy to create some space in which the social worker could do work that they felt proud of while avoiding the likelihood of being shamed or humiliated. By minimally complying with the institutional expectations on some cases, sufficient time could be freed up to focus on a small number of cases in which the social workers could verify their identities. Greater levels of empathy for a child or family provided the foundation to want to focus on a particular case. Such empathic identification created a desire to do more for them than was expected by the institution, as illustrated by Helen, who was working with a child she had known previously:

“he was one of the cases where I did lots of direct work with him, and I put the time in, and I made sure I saw him every week. But that was a massive commitment in my diary, but I made sure that, to do a good job for him, you make sacrifices” (interview)

The child was living in foster care and the expectation was to see the child for “statutory visits” every six weeks. It was unusual to visit more regularly than that. However, by making sacrifices elsewhere, Helen was able to go above and beyond the expectations with this particular child, which verified her identity as a good social worker. As this case illustrates, compromising tactics could be considered as minor levels of resistance, whereby some of the institutional pressures, expectations, and demands were adhered to while others were not. Consequently, the social workers could create a sufficient level of emotional safety and attract a sufficient level of social acceptance, while in some situations being more active in seeking to verify their own identity-meanings (Burke and Stets, 2009). This provided the opportunity to feel proud of what they had done (see Hochschild, 1979).

Concealing

Concealing acts of resistance were founded in the rejection of the dominant institutional logic and the resulting meanings and expectations of the institutional representation. However, a practitioner

could not escape the institutional pressures without leaving the organization. Some social workers, therefore, sought to disguise their resistance (Carey and Foster, 2011). The social workers could be seen to comply with the institutional expectations and demands in situations where their actions would be detected by institutional guardians, in attempts to avoid being shamed, while resisting them in situations where they would not, in order to practice in a manner they could feel proud of. While the levels of surveillance and monitoring of the social workers were considered constant within the office, there was a distinct lack of monitoring of the social workers' direct work with families. The dominant form of practice could be considered to be enacting or complying, yet the lack of oversight of their direct work provided opportunities to resist the institutional norms, values, and expectations, as Monica demonstrated to me as we sat in the car following a home visit:

“[Monica] tells me she is worried she is too soft. She tells me that the 12 year old boy disappeared yesterday with a 9 year old boy from next door and that [Julie] is working with that family. She said that [Julie] told her before she went out that she was going to call the mother of the 9 year old boy and “give her a bollocking”. [Monica] said to me “I didn’t give her [the mother] a bollocking””
(fieldnotes)

While Monica expressed self-doubt that her practice did not conform to institutional expectations, it could be seen as an act of resistance by practicing in a manner contrary to them. Such acts of resistance were, however, sporadic and concealed by practice that conformed to the institutional norms and practices in contexts where their practice was exposed to the surveillance and monitoring of the institution. While some acts of resistance outside of the institution's sphere of observation could be concealed relatively easily, acts of resistance were also reported to be concealed within its sphere of observation through a more active form of deception, as one team manager experienced:

“Team Manager: I’d much rather them tell me they can’t do something or they need extra help than lie to me and say they’ve done it and I find out they haven’t because I can’t cope with that

Me: Does that happen?

Team Manager: Sometimes... I don't get cross but I deal with it and say, "Right, you haven't done it.

I want it done by such and such a date and I will be monitoring more"" (interview)

Such disguised resistance could enable the social workers to avoid the expectations placed upon them (see Hochschild, 1979). As the team manager demonstrated, however, it was usually only a matter of time before such pretense was identified and action taken to regulate their identity.

Influencing

For those who rejected the institutional representation but found themselves under pressure to act in a manner contrary to their identity-standard, concealing their acts of resistance was not always sufficient to placate their conscience. In such situations, social workers could seek to influence the source of the institutional pressures, norms, and expectations either through challenging the source or controlling the processes that reinforced the cultural norms and practices (see Oliver, 1991).

While this risked being shamed by institutional guardians, it ensured they did not feel ashamed of their actions. Indeed, challenging the rules, norms, and practices could be distinguished from other forms of resistance by the lack of desire to conform or feign conformity. While minor acts of challenge could be seen in single interactions, challenge was necessary across multiple interactions in order to successfully influence the outcome of a situation, as demonstrated by Donna's resistance to the expectation to remove a child from his mother:

"mum got pregnant again but with a different partner and we completely reassessed it, we didn't judge it by, I pushed for that and it was a hard fight. It was a fight with the guardian. It was a fight with management but people did listen to me and it worked. And she's at home now with that baby... instead of removing at birth, which would have been the natural thing... But it was the fact I fought for her to keep that baby because it was the right decision" (interview)

Donna challenged the “natural” thing to do because she did not think that was “right”, which compelled her to fight the multiple layers of institutional arrangements which were reinforcing the pressures and expectations. It is important to note, however, that it was not a simple process of the social workers resisting the senior managers. The institutional forces operated outside of any individual and at times it was the social workers who could be considered the source of institutional pressures while the senior managers resisted them. In one example, a social worker brought a case of a boy who had been beaten with a belt by his mother to a legal meeting asking to enter Court proceedings expecting this to be a straight forward agreement, yet this was not the case, as I recorded:

“They discussed the son refusing to have a bath and a few days before he had posted pictures of the mother, who was pregnant, in her underwear on Facebook for the second time. The area manager stated, “he’s being fucking arsey”... She explained that she has had teenage boys so “I’ve lived it”... the senior manager refers to the Facebook photos saying that “all women could understand” how the mother felt about the pictures going on there” (fieldnotes)

Being a woman, a mother, and having parented teenage boys, the area manager had a high capacity for empathy with the mother in this situation and could find reason to excuse her actions. Being in a position of greater power than the social worker and team manager, she had access to greater resources to influence the outcome of the situation. Such instances were infrequent, however, as the senior managers’ social location and corresponding responsibilities made it more likely that their situated conceptualizations would be in line with the dominant institutional expectations creating actions which reinforced them. As one team manager told me, “there must be something in the further back you are the harsher you are” (fieldnotes).

There were some instances where the social workers sought to gain a greater level of influence than by simply challenging institutional sources. In some contexts social workers felt that they had to more directly control the institutional processes to avoid an outcome they could not accept. One

example of such action was demonstrated in a conversation between Amy and a social worker from another team, who stated that she felt compelled to act in a manner that provided the maximum amount of influence she could exert, a more extreme form of emotion work (Hochschild, 1979), which enabled her to avoid feeling ashamed:

“The social worker said that she had put her job on the line as her managers were saying they had to separate some siblings, with the younger one to be placed for adoption, but she couldn’t agree to this and said she would resign if that happened. She said in the end senior managers had to agree to a further sibling assessment, which concluded they shouldn’t be split up. She said her name was mud for 3 or 4 months” (fieldnotes)

Discussion

This study argues that pride, shame, and humiliation can be strategically used as a mechanism of institutional control by constructing contextually specific boundaries for shameful and praiseworthy behavior. These boundaries provided both a systemic force (Foucault, 1990) and a guide for institutional guardians to shame or praise individual practitioners. This had the effect of attempting to create compliance to institutionally ‘acceptable’ ways. The social workers, however, could not simply be considered as institutional automatons. Even when they engaged in habitualized routines and practices that conformed to ‘acceptable’ standards, they did so with awareness and purpose (Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009). Furthermore, while one social worker may have actively agreed with the boundaries, another may have actively resisted them, with a range of possibilities in between. Further still, one social worker could actively agree with them in one context while actively resisting them in another. The emotions of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation can be considered to be central components not only in how social workers feel about their practice but also in this process of how social workers decide how to practice. And while the social workers ‘felt’ these emotions, they struggled to communicate them. Their influence, therefore, remained unacknowledged.

This study provides some important insights into the nature of social work practice and the role of social services' organization and management. Of course the managers and leaders wished to create a system that supported good practice and improved services for children and families. However, the managers could not be considered to act as heroic leaders, able to set the institutional prescriptions, meanings, and expectations as they saw fit. They occupied a particular position within, but were part of, a wider system that seeks to maintain a set of central Government standards, even then those standards seemed to be contradictory to the aims of the profession and the organization. The snapshot provided in this study provides a window into the lives of those who were expected to implement the contextually embedded intentions of these leaders and senior managers that would maintain those standards. The resulting conceptual framework to explain the actions of the social workers conveys the complexity of how they came to practice within this context, while ultimately providing the institution with the evidence it needed for external legitimacy. While this case study is specific to its context, theoretically, at least, it could be conceived of how the ideal practice could be aligned to professional values and ideals so that more practitioners felt proud of themselves and their work, decreasing a desire for resistance. Further studies in this area would be able to provide a window into the worlds of others from this perspective and build and develop our theoretical understanding of the role of self-conscious emotions in social work practice.

The perspective provided in this paper contributes to the field of social work by providing a detailed case study of the role of pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation in social work practice. While such experiences have been identified in previous research, no study has sought to understand their role specifically in what social workers do and how they do it (Gibson, 2016). This study, therefore, provides an exemplar for others to consider these emotional processes in other contexts. Indeed, it can be considered to compliment and extend the work of other scholars who have begun to consider the role these emotional experiences play in decision making (Ferguson, 2011; Featherstone et al., 2014; Platt and Turney, 2014) and organizational constructions (Parton, 2014; Warner, 2015).

This study also compliments and extends Hochschild's (1979) notions of emotion work and emotional labor and contributes to the literature on how these concepts apply to social work practice (e.g. Karabanow, 1999). Burkitt (2014) critiques Hochschild's conceptualization of emotions as essentialist and argues that this led her to focus her ideas on how people seek to manage their emotions internally. The findings in this study certainly support Hochschild's concept, as the social workers were often engaged in internal 'work' by hiding how they felt, acting in a particular manner, or consciously trying to think differently about a situation in order to change how they felt about it. What this study also found, however, was that the social workers were often engaged in processes of changing how they felt by changing the external environment. Resisting, influencing, or even defying expectations were attempts by the social workers to change the pressures placed upon them. Such 'work' was external rather than internal and supports Burkitt's (2014) extension of emotion work as a concept relevant to analyzing professional practice.

Furthermore, this study integrates these emotional experiences into institutional processes and consequently extends the debates about how emotions contribute to the processes which create, maintain, and disrupt institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Voronov and Vince, 2012; Creed et al., 2014; Moisander et al., 2016). Indeed, the social workers' practice, conceptualized through the lens of self-conscious emotional experiences, necessarily needed to be understood in light of the work of the Government, the inspectors, and the Council leaders and managers who were seeking to embed a certain institutional logic into the service they were responsible for delivering. Social workers' conceptualizations of situations were heavily influenced by the institution in which they were embedded, which was felt as pride, shame, guilt, or humiliation or the threat or promise of such experiences. This analysis extends the literature on conflicting institutional logics (e.g. Pache and Santos, 2013; Novotná, 2014) by incorporating self-conscious emotions as a component of analysis. Such a perspective compliments the work of others who have sought to consider the emotional experience of social workers (Ruch et al., 2010; Ingram, 2013; Warner, 2015) and even suggests that there needs to be a re-evaluation of the role of fear and an expanding of what we

mean by stress and anxiety. Rather than the anxiety the social workers experienced being considered as fear, this study suggests that it might be more useful to consider it as an expectation of shame. Equally, while the social workers did indeed feel stressed, much of this stress could be attributed to the self-conscious emotions they were experiencing or anticipating.

And further still, this study illuminates potential avenues for understanding specifically how professional identities are constructed and enacted (e.g. Leigh, 2013; Wiles, 2013). The professional institutional logic presents a social work identity as being rooted in social action, justice, and change, which can be found throughout the profession's history (e.g. Addams, 1910; Richmond, 1917), its literature (e.g. Biestek, 1961; Parton, 1996), and modern day teaching (e.g. Gray et al., 2012). What Government organizations require from a social worker in practice, however, may differ from such ideas of social work. While this clash has been identified and debated by others (e.g. Parton, 1996; Ferguson, 2009), this study provides a tentative framework to understand how new identities may be imposed upon practitioners and how practitioners may respond to such processes. As Jenkins (1996) argued, "identification is often a matter of imposition and resistance" (p.73). Incorporating self-conscious emotions into the analysis of institutional logics, professional identities, and practice ensures we keep the debate grounded in the lived-experience of those these policies, inspired by the New Public Management discourse (Power, 1997), are intended to affect.

Conclusion

This study highlights that self-conscious emotions, such as pride, shame, guilt, and humiliation, can indeed be a significant component of social work practice. While the emotional dimension of practice has often been treated as an add-on to any analysis of practice, this study suggests that they can be considered an inherent and integral component of practice, inseparable from the overall understanding of what social workers do and how they do it. Furthermore, it highlights that emotions are not only experienced by practitioners but also used as a technology of power, evoked and utilized in attempts to motivate and change the actions, and identities, of others. Any discussion

on how power is created and exercised within social work services may, therefore, find value in including self-conscious emotions as an analytical component. Further still, this study suggests that while Governments and organizational leaders and managers may seek to control the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of institutional actors, it is not a simple process, at least while they have access to alternative meanings to construct their professional identities. Indeed, such attempts at control may well find social workers reassessing the value in the bonds they have developed to the people within the institution, the value they see in the institution, and even the value in the profession (see Creed et al., 2014).

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