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Constructing Pride, Shame, and Humiliation as a Mechanism of Control: A Case Study of an English Local Authority Child Protection Service

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Abstract

This paper reports on findings from the first study into the role of self-conscious emotions in child protection social work practice. This ethnographic case study employed constructionist grounded theory methods to develop a conceptual understanding of the emotional experiences of the social workers. Integrating data from 246.5 hours of observations, 99 diary entries, 19 interviews, and 329 pages of documents, a conceptual framework is presented to understand the emotional experiences of the social workers, before using this framework to analyse the case organisation and experiences of those within it. Pride, shame, and humiliation can be considered to be strategically used as a mechanism of control by constructing contextually specific boundaries for shameful and praiseworthy behaviour. By policing these boundaries the actions of the organisation and the social workers could be regulated to ensure they developed institutionally acceptable identities, enabling the organisation to gain legitimacy. While the analysis that has been provided here is specific not only to the organisation that the research took place in, but also to the time in which the data were collected within the organisation, case studies provide important insights into one context that can be useful to understand the processes in others.

Key Words: Pride, Shame, Humiliation, Regulation, Practice, Child Protection, Social Work

1. Introduction

We, perhaps, all have a desire to present ourselves in a way that makes us feel good and encourages us to be included and accepted as a friend, a lover, or team member. While at the same time we, perhaps, all have a desire to present ourselves in a way that avoids feeling bad about ourselves and avoids being rejected and isolated. Sometimes, however, things go awry and we can feel painful emotional experiences as a result of not being able to achieve this. Indeed, to these ends, the theory and research findings suggests that self-conscious emotional experiences, such as pride, shame, and humiliation, play a significant role in what people do and how they do it (e.g. Cooley, 1902; Lynd, 1958; Goffman, 1963; Lewis, 1971; Scheff, 1988; Tangney and Dearing, 2002). To explore the role

these emotional experiences play in social work practice I undertook a scoping review to examine the nature and extent of the research evidence (Gibson, 2016). While there were no studies which specifically investigated the role shame or humiliation played in social work practice, and only three studies explicitly identified such experiences, there were a wide range of studies which implied their presence. Without a specific focus, however, the role they played and the influence they had on what social workers did and how they did it was lost. This study sought to fill this gap by specifically investigating the role these emotional experiences have in one area of social work practice, namely child protection social work in England.

This ethnographic case study employed constructionist grounded theory methods to develop a conceptual understanding of these emotional experiences within the case study site. It provides an exemplar, the first of its kind within the field of social work, which may be useful to other empirical studies in developing our understanding of the role these emotional experiences play in practice. This paper reports on the main conceptual framework stemming from this study and details a major theme, namely that pride, shame, and humiliation were constructed, evoked, and regulated as a form of institutional, organisational, and individual control. This paper, firstly, outlines the case study design and methodology and, secondly, presents the findings in two parts. Part one details the conceptual framework to understand the role that pride, shame, and humiliation played in the practice of the social workers within the case study site. Part two applies the framework to the case study site. Finally, this analysis is considered in relation to the wider literature and consideration given to the implications for policy and practice.

2. Study Design and Methodology

The purpose of this case study was to gain knowledge of an example to provide an insight into the role of self-conscious emotions in social work practice (Thomas, 2010). Case study research provided a flexible approach that was able to collect multiple sources of evidence in real-world contexts suitable for such an aim (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Thomas, 2016). Ethnographic methods were considered most appropriate to get close to the experience of the social workers in context and constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006) were used to move this ethnographic research toward theoretical development. A local authority was chosen on the basis of (1) it not being considered to be providing inadequate services to children by the inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) at the time the research took place and (2) that they agreed to take part. This organisation will be referred to as the Council throughout this paper. Two child protection teams were selected to be involved in the research on the basis of which teams agreed to participate. A team consisted of one team manager, two senior practitioners, five social workers, and two newly

qualified social workers. Overall, there were 19 social workers (as there were two part-time 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. For the purposes of ensuring anonymity, all participants will be reported as female and White-British and referred to using pseudonyms. The child protection service within the Council provided the boundaries for the overall case. The teams, and the individuals within the teams, fitted into this service and were, therefore, considered to be nested within this wider case (Thomas, 2016). Data were collected over a period of six months in 2014.

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 onwards. Audit/inspection reports that related to the child protection service in the Council were also collected from 2005 onwards. Together, these documents totalled 329 pages. Principally, however, data were collected from me sitting with the social workers in the team room and observing what they did, how they did it, their facial expressions, body language, and general presentation. I observed the environment and the social situations in which they were engaged. I asked them what they were doing and both why they were doing it and why they were doing it the way they did. I asked them about how they were feeling while they were doing it as well as asking about how they perceived themselves or how they thought they were being perceived in these moments. I listened to their conversations, their use of language, gestures, and tone. I enquired about the background to their conversations and how they perceived themselves or how they thought they were being perceived in the situation they were referring to. I would go with the social workers when they went to talk to their manager, to meetings, on home visits, to schools, or to the Court. 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. I visited the teams one or two days a week over the six month data collection period, and, in total, I conducted 246.5 hours of observations across the two teams. I also asked each participant to complete a diary log for each day, which asked them to focus on self-conscious emotional experiences by describing any situation which made them feel good/bad about themselves that day. In total, I collected 99 diary logs. Towards the end of my data collection/analysis phase, I undertook semi-structured interviews with each participant, which totalled 19 interviews.

The data were analysed as the research progressed, informing the subsequent observations and discussions. Data were initially coded line by line in a Word document (Charmaz, 2006), which allowed me to identify patterns and significant processes, to compare experiences within and between individuals, and to find similarities and differences (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As the analysis/data collection progressed, those codes which made the most analytical sense to understand the actions of the social workers were used to categorise the data (Charmaz, 2006). Data could then be compared to the codes enabling further refining. Memos were written throughout the data collection and analysis process (Charmaz, 2006) to consider possible theoretical explanations for the data, develop hypotheses, test these hypotheses in the field, and come to the most plausible explanation. The memo writing was able to bring the fieldnotes, diary entries, documents, and interviews into an integrated analysis. The memos were then sorted, compared, and integrated through theoretical sorting (Glaser, 1998), using a range of theoretical codes that had become pertinent either through the data collection and analysis phase or in the sorting of the memos. 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 about persons, processes, and settings to understand and portray the contexts of the study; I had gained detailed descriptions of a range of all of the participants' views and actions; I had confidence in my interpretation of what lay beneath the surface of these views and actions; and I was able to develop analytical categories and make comparisons between them to generate and inform my ideas in answering the research questions.

3. Ethical Considerations

Detailed information was provided to the participants about the research prior to them signing a consent form. The social workers 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. A further consent form was provided for the semi-structured interviews. 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. The social worker then spoke to them about the research before the session and provided them with an information sheet. If they agreed to me observing I then spoke to them prior to the session on their own to answer any questions, confirm they were in agreement to me observing, and sign a consent form. Children were only seen in the presence of their legal parent/carer who had agreed that I could observe the session. Where there were others involved in the observed situations, an information sheet was provided to them. If anyone objected to my presence I did not observe the

situation. Ethical approval was granted through the University ethical review panel and the research was approved by the Council's research governance process.

4. Limitations

Observing and asking questions about the social workers' 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 was, therefore, co-constructed (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, the resulting analysis 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 or disconfirming data I could have collected for the evolving and ongoing analysis. 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, 2010). Indeed, it is an ontological commitment within this study that the resulting theory is interpretive, contingent, and tentative (Dewey, 1929; Mead, 1934).

5. Part 1: The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is multidimensional, incorporating a set of analytical levels, analytical concepts, and analytical categories. These are defined below and used to analyse the case study site in part 2.

5.1 Dimension 1: The analytical levels

5.1.1 Institution:

The social workers operated within a series of institutions, which provided meaning and stability to their social life. The formal institution of the organisation, and the set of formal and informal institutions that supported it, provided the foundations for shared rules and world-views, defined social relationships and roles, and provided ways of acting and interpreting the behaviour of others (Scott, 2014). Indeed, it was at the institutional level that the role of a 'social worker' and 'client' was created, specific policies and procedures were constructed, and a particular individual was provided with the power and responsibility to assess child protection concerns, etc. The identities of the social workers were, therefore, contextualised by the institution. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) argue,

however, that despite the enduring nature of institutions, they are not static entities. Indeed, institutions are reproduced through the actions of those within the institution and are, therefore, open to change. In other words, there is a recursive relationship where the institution affects the individual and the individual affects the institution.

5.1.2 Identity:

An identity, such as a social worker, can be considered to be a social category, to which a particular social group associates a set of meanings and expectations (Burke and Stets, 2009). Within England, for example, the idea of a social worker carries an expectation to work with people where there are social issues. Individuals can categorise the self with such terms, a process called identification (Stryker, 1980), and internalise the meanings and expectations as their own. Having internalised what it means to be a social worker, for example, an individual is able to decide what to do and how to do it when acting as a social worker (Burke and Stets, 2009). Given the complexity of social life, however, we can develop many identities that define us as occupants of particular roles (role identities) or as members of particular groups (social identities) (Burke and Stets, 2009). A person may, therefore, hold identities about themselves as a social worker, as a mother, and as English, etc. and multiple identities can be invoked in any given situation (Carter, 2013). When working with a family, for example, what a person thinks they should do as a social worker may conflict with what they think they should do as a mother. A person may be able to live up the standards they hold for a particular identity in a situation, leading them to feel good, or not, leading them to feel bad (Burke and Stets, 2009). One's identities, therefore, contextualise one's emotional experience.

5.1.3 Emotion:

From a constructionist perspective an emotion is a unified conscious experience made up of a range of biological, psychological, social, and cultural components (Burkitt, 2014). Feeling angry, for example is more than the physiological sensation of a raised temperature and increased heart rate. It also includes a social situation, interpreted in a particular manner, bringing together a set of thoughts and feelings that we experience in the situation as an emotion. An emotion label, such as anger, fear, or shame, provides a way of categorising these experiences so we are able to understand and communicate them. Our understanding of particular emotion labels is, therefore, both culturally and linguistically specific (Barrett, 2006; Burkitt, 2014). To say one feels anger, for example, is to understand and communicate a set of situational cues, physiological changes, and expressive gestures (Gordon, 1981; Thoits, 1989), which fit a socially agreed upon set of features for the term 'anger' (Wierzbicka, 1992). Shame, pride, and humiliation can be considered terms for

particular experiences that have meaning within the English language linked to one's identities and are defined below.

5.2 Dimension 2: The analytical concepts

5.2.1 Systemic shame and pride:

Systemic shame and pride are concepts about power and are useful as analytical tools in a study about shame and pride. Power from a Foucauldian perspective is an effect of social relationships. It is through our interactions with others that we come to understand what is 'normal' and what is not or how to act and how not to. Power can be considered, therefore, to be relational, distributed, and often invisible within a social group (Foucault, 1990). In other words power is systemic, as it can be ever-present and all-encompassing, and disciplinary, in that it has the effect of establishing conformity to established rules within a community (Lawrence, 2008). Creed et al. (2014) argue that institutions develop shared rules that constitute shameful behaviour within the group, which come to be taken-for-granted as objectively correct and natural. They term this form of power systemic shame. Social workers, for example, do not usually enter romantic relationships with their clients because this has been constructed as inappropriate and, therefore, shameful. While such a rule is set out in codes of practice it is usually a boundary that is taken-for-granted within the profession and it is rare that it needs to be justified. Extending this analysis, we can consider the shared rules that constitute praiseworthy behaviour as systemic pride. Consequently, those within an institution hold a set of ideas and rules about what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour.

5.2.2 Sense of shame and pride:

While people are capable of experiencing shame, as discussed above, they learn the conditions for being shamed within the context of their interactions within the group. With such knowledge, they are able to assess the potential to be shamed in any given situation, which Creed et al. (2014) term intersubjective surveillance, and manage their actions so they avoid being shamed, which Creed et al. (2014) term self-regulation. Creed et al. (2014) term this whole process a sense of shame. We can extend this argument to pride, to also include a sense of pride, i.e. an ability to feel proud, knowledge of praiseworthy behaviour within the group, the constant assessment of whether one will be praised in a situation, and the management of behaviour to attract praise.

5.2.3 Episodic shaming and praising:

While a sense of shame ensures that most social transgressions are avoided, where transgressions do occur, and are noticed, others within the social group may seek to use shame as a mechanism to

induce compliance to social expectations, which Creed et al. (2014) term episodic shaming. Again we can extend this analysis to include the actions of others to induce pride to encourage and support particular ways of being through episodic praising. A person, or a number of people, who have cognitive, emotional, and/or moral commitments to existing institutional arrangements, i.e. institutional guardians, can police the boundaries of acceptable behaviour through attempts to make someone feel shame or pride, thereby coercing compliance (Creed et al., 2014). A social worker may, for example, be shamed by colleagues for contemplating a relationship with a client, thereby providing pressure to conform to the taken-for-granted group rule. If, however, they continue to seek to enter a relationship with a client, they may be shamed and removed from the organisation and/or profession. The felt emotion as a result of being shamed by someone else may, however, be experienced as humiliation rather than shame (Combs et al., 2010).

5.2.4 Pride, Shame, and Humiliation:

Pride can be considered to be a term that relates to feeling good as a result of living up to the standards they hold for an identity (Cooley, 1902; Lawler, 2001; Tracy and Robins, 2004). A social worker who believes it is important to do direct work with children well, for example, may feel proud after they are praised by their manager for some direct work they had done with a child. Conversely, shame can be considered to be a term that relates to feeling bad as a result of failing to live up to the standards they hold for an identity (Cooley, 1902; Lynd, 1958; Goffman, 1963; Lewis, 1971; Gilbert, 2007; Tracy and Robins, 2004). Shame is feeling personally responsible for something that threatens one's identity (Ferguson et al., 2007). A social worker who believes it is important to do direct work with children well, for example, may feel ashamed if the quality of their direct work is criticised. Humiliation, on the other hand, is a term used to describe feeling bad as a result of another person unfairly rejecting or invalidating them. In identity terms, it is an unjust threat to their identity (Klein, 1991; Elison, 2005; Gilbert, 2007; Torres and Bergner, 2010). The social worker who has been criticised for their direct work, for example, may feel humiliation, rather than shame, if they felt there was no justification for the criticism.

5.3 Dimension 3: The analytical categories

5.3.1 Institutional work / Institutional regulation:

As institutions are not static entities, to understand an institution we have to analyse the actions of the individuals that influence it. Those within an institution can be considered to be engaged in institutional work, which is defined by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) as the "purposive actions aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions" (p.216). Those outside of an institution

can, however, still exert an influence on a particular institution and such actions can be considered as institutional regulation, aimed at shaping, enabling, and constraining institutions.

5.3.2 Identity work / Identity regulation:

Like institutions, the meanings and expectations a person holds for an identity are not static. What it means to be a social worker may change within a person over time as they gain more experience and knowledge. To understand an identity, therefore, we have to analyse the actions a person takes to create, maintain, or change an identity, which Alvesson and Willmott (2002) term “identity work”. Other people, however, may also have an influence on a person’s identity construction and maintenance. We also, therefore, have to analyse the actions of a person intended to construct, shape, and change another’s identity, which Alvesson and Willmott (2002) refer to as “identity regulation”.

5.3.3 Emotion work / Emotion regulation:

From a constructionist perspective, emotions do not just happen to a person, as discussed above, they are constructed from a range of components, many of which are open to influence. To understand a person’s emotional experience, therefore, we have to analyse the actions of the person intended “to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling” (Hochschild, 1979, p.561), which Hochschild terms “emotion work”. In addition to the intentional actions of the individual themselves, however, we also have to analyse the actions of a second person intended to induce, influence, or alter the emotional experience of the first, which we can consider as ‘emotion regulation’¹. The resulting emotional experience stems from the interaction between the work of a person to feel a certain way and the attempts by others to regulate how that person feels. This interaction, between the regulation of others and the work of the individual, can be considered at any of the analytical levels, i.e. the institution, identity, or emotion.

These dimensions can be brought together to provide a framework to understand the role these emotions play in practice. Systemic shame and pride can be considered to provide a set of boundaries for behaviour within the institution. Institutional guardians strategically use episodic shaming and praising as a mechanism of regulation, intended to align the institution, the identities, and the emotional experiences of institutional actors to these boundaries. How a person feels, meanwhile, may induce institutional, identity, and/or emotion work to influence and/or change the institution, their identity, or emotion. This can create a tension between the regulators and the

¹ The psychological literature refers to intrinsic and extrinsic emotional regulation, where intrinsic refers to what I am calling emotion work, and extrinsic refers to what I am calling emotion regulation (see Gross, 2008)

regulated. While a social worker may be happy with what they are being asked to do by their manager, for example, at times they may not be and in such situations may seek to resist or change what they are being asked to do. There is, therefore, a recursive relationship between the regulators and the regulated.

6 Part 2: A Case Study of a UK Local Authority Child Protection Service

6.1 Regulating the institution

The context of social work reform within Britain can be seen within the wider public sector reform agenda. Under the guise of creating greater effectiveness, efficiency, and value for money, objectives for practice, standards of good practice, and indicators of good performance have been defined so that auditors can use such measures to make judgements about organisations (Power, 1997). These processes have been developed so that public service organisations are provided with an inspection grade, which are used to create league tables for comparison and competition, with the possibility of being placed in 'special measures' for those organisations perceived to be 'failing'. Processes of pride and shame are, therefore, embedded into the system of regulation: Praiseworthy and shameful behaviour are set for particular institutions at a political level, providing a systemic force on all those within that institution to conform to these boundaries, with power being granted by the Government to the regulator to episodically shame and praise organisations that do not.

The legitimacy of such mechanisms of regulation within child protection social work services has been heightened by the perceived systemic failures in high profile cases where a child has been killed while in the care of their parents. Parton (2014) argues that the Government's response to such cases has followed a now familiar pattern, which has been to implement major reforms in an attempt to ensure that such a thing can never happen again. The death of Victoria Climbié in 2000 defined the reform agenda within the field of UK child protection social work until the death of Peter Connelly in 2007. Following the Court case into Peter's death in November 2008, a situation was presented by politicians and the media that social workers should have prevented Peter's death and should be able to prevent the deaths of other children in the future (Parton, 2014; Warner, 2015). The moral outrage at the perceived failings of the social workers created a shared view, which seemed objectively correct, that the way things were was not acceptable and that changes needed to be made to the system to keep children safe. The fact that the Council involved with Peter Connelly, and specifically the social worker, had not been able to keep him safe legitimised the episodic shaming of the social worker, the Council, and the entire field of social work in the press and parliament (Warner, 2015). Indeed, while the social worker and the Director of the child protection service were vilified in the media and by politicians, receiving death threats from

members of the public, and both being sacked, a number of politicians and journalists targeted the profession, accusing it of failing children more generally (Parton, 2014; Warner, 2015). Such systemic pressure threatened the identity of all local government children's services, which recast them, potentially, as shameful. This provided a regulatory pressure on all Council's to demonstrate that they were competent at protecting children.

While these pressures induced forms of institutional work by some within the profession to disrupt the assumptions and practices that had contributed to the failures in protecting Peter Connelly and create new, professionally endorsed, ones (Social Work Task Force, 2009; Munro, 2011), Featherstone et al. (2014) argue that the resulting reforms, i.e. institutional regulation, encouraged an authoritarian form of practice perceived to be absent in the case of Peter Connelly. Indeed, the language of partnership, inherent to social work practice, was absent in the renewed statutory guidance, and in its place the idea that social workers should "rescue children from chaotic, neglectful, and abusive homes" (HM Government, 2013, p.22). Under the auspices of transparency, all reviews into cases where a child had died were made public, which, while explicitly not about apportioning blame to individuals, served to provide a perpetual highlighting of the most serious mistakes in child protection work. Furthermore, the regulatory regime, undertaken by Ofsted, was reformed, introducing unannounced inspections, while making it more difficult to attain the higher categories in a new grading system: Inadequate, Requires Improvement, Good, and Outstanding (Ofsted, 2015). Being graded as inadequate, or even requires improvement, threatened the identity of the organisation, and those who work within it, while the introduction of unannounced inspections only served to place all social work service organisations under an atmosphere of continuous inspection. The boundaries of the systemic shame and pride had been refashioned, sharpened, and heightened within the organisations, which was supported by the regulator who were given a greater ability to shame and praise organisations.

Furthermore, the financial crash of 2007-8 led to a new Government in 2010 committed to reforming the system in the context of austerity. The first budget of the new Government meant local authorities were facing a reduction in funding by about a third (HM Treasury, 2010) making it a political necessity that all local authorities reduced their spending. The boundaries for systemic shame and pride relating to the administration of social work services were set at the national political level, which made it seem objectively correct that all government services had to save money. Failure to do so could result in episodic shaming through the system of regulation.

6.2 Regulating the Organisation

In 2007, the Council's services for children were successfully organised according to the national reforms imposed following the death of Victoria Climbié and the service had developed a positive reputation within the field, as Lucy, a social worker within one of the teams, stated:

"To me the reputation of [the Council] has always been very good but I come from [a] University where [the Council] was thought of as a good local authority" (interview)

Indeed, the positive organisational identity was verified by Ofsted, who graded the Council as 'Good'. Observing the episodic shaming of specific social workers and organisations nationally following the death of Peter Connelly, however, the leaders and senior management team within the Council sensed the possibility of being shamed themselves and classified all their social workers as "an "at risk" staff group" (Council publication, 2010) and engaged in institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) to change the service arrangements. Under the old arrangements there was a general consensus that social workers should try to preserve the family by keeping children at home. The new systemic pressures, however, had encouraged a swing away from this towards rescuing children through state intervention (Lindsey, 1994). Consequently, the social workers were encouraged to place more children on child protection plans and place more children in state care, as a team manager explained:

"...with children in care I can remember for years and years and years being told we've got to keep the [foster care] population down... [but] some of the language that was used in years gone by about [why] we must reduce our [foster care] population, I don't hear that language very much nowadays" (interview)

Indeed, the old arrangements were recast as dangerous and a new moral case put forward that they should have had more children subject to child protection plans and children in state care all along, as a team manager stated:

"...what [the leader] said about the increase of child protection plans surprised me somewhat because she said... we were always too low compared to comparator authorities and what's happened is actually good" (interview)

At the same time, while the Council considered itself to be "well managed and financially sound" in 2007 (Council meeting minutes), saving money was now a priority, with any service failing to do so threatening the Council's identity as a competent administrator of public policy. Knowing these conditions for being shamed or praised by politicians or within the media provided a regulatory pressure, which provided further foundations for the deterioration of the consensus within the Council around the value of the current arrangements. Therefore, despite continued internal and

external announcements of improvements to the Council's services in the years 2007 to 2009, the Director wrote to local councillors in 2010 stating that "doing nothing or staying as we are currently is not a viable option" arguing "that there needs to be a new paradigm to improve outcomes for [the Council]'s children and young people" (Council meeting minutes). A proposal was made to the councillors for a "transformation and radical reshaping of existing provision" (Council meeting minutes). A new project was formed, made up of a number of managers and frontline workers, which designed a new service intended to deliver high quality social work and reduce the amount of money the service cost. While such action can be considered a form of institutional work, it could also be considered a form of emotionwork, intended to protect the social workers and the Council from being shamed.

A few months before the start of the reorganisation, however, Ofsted undertook an unannounced inspection, which heightened the sense of shame within the Council, as a team manager told me in her interview:

"...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)

Ofsted found the Council "to be failing children needing help and protection" (Ofsted report), which threatened the identity of the Council, which was described as a "shock" by the Director (Director's report). In attempts to provide a positive organisational image and mitigate any reputational damage, the senior leaders of the Council engaged in identity and emotion work by highlighting the positive comments within the Ofsted report, using them for internal communication and press releases. The message was that many of the services for children and young people were in fact good; the problem was the child protection service, a message which was received by all those working in that service, as a team manager explained:

"...the pressure, and it's because of the safeguarding. I get that. We're the problem but we're the bit that keeps the children safe..." (interview)

What started as episodic shaming by Ofsted, intended to regulate the identity of the Council, led to episodic shaming by those within the Council of the child protection service, intended to regulate the identities of the social workers. The fact that the team manager now perceived herself, and all those she worked with, to be the problem presented her with a threat to her identity as doing a really important job of protecting children. Such organisational self-protection had the effect of spoiling the child protection identity within the Council (Goffman, 1963). The only way to regain

legitimacy was to present a positive image of the new service to the regulator by ensuring the social workers provided them with the information they required for a positive evaluation.

6.3 Regulating the Professionals

The leader of the new child protection service within the Council, known as the “strategic lead” for safeguarding, engaged in a form of institutional work to redefine the boundaries for membership to this new service (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Knowing the conditions for being shamed and praised, she created a set of “basic requirements” that would avoid being shamed and attract praise, as a team manager explained:

“I’ve found that if you do the basic requirements as [the strategic lead] calls them, and ‘if you can’t do them please give in your P45’ ... they tend to leave me alone more” (Interview)

The term “basic” served to make these expectations seem reasonable and achievable providing a boundary between those who belonged within the new service and those who did not (Crowley, 1999). This created a systemic pressure within the child protection service that regulated the identities of the social workers, who, not wanting to be cast as not capable of doing the work, acted within these boundaries. These basic requirements, however, were principally administrative, as Christine, a social worker within one of the teams, explained:

“I’m doing a good job for the department if I’m ticking all the boxes. I’m doing a good job for [the team manager] if I’m keeping in all the timescales and that she can go through supervision and I’ve done everything she’s asked of me” (Interview)

The strategic lead also made attempts to infuse the administrative work necessary to avoid a negative inspection result with long established social work practices, as explained by another social worker, Amy, in her interview:

Amy: “[the strategic lead] said, in the training, “If you don’t do your paperwork, you don’t have empathy”. What the hell has paperwork got to do with your empathy?

Me: What do you think of that?

Amy: Well, she followed it by, “You don’t have empathy, so you shouldn’t be here, and leave”. I just thought, my initial thought was, “Fuck off”. Because paperwork is important, it’s very important, but it doesn’t mean you don’t have empathy, it means you don’t have time. I thought it was a disgusting statement, if I’m being quite frank. I thought it was disgusting”

While these attempts to remake the moral foundations for professional practice were resisted by Amy who saw these as separate components of the work, such attempts to infuse the two together

provided the message that the administrative component of the work was of equal, if not of greater, importance. Earning status within the teams and the possibility of promotion, a stated aim of many of the social workers, was therefore directly associated to such administrative tasks. Indeed, the direct work the social workers undertook with children and families largely remained hidden to those in management, as Lucy explained:

“she [team manager] doesn't get to see the day-to-day practice and the engagement with children or anything like that. But what she does get to see is the written side of things” (fieldnotes)

These boundaries for institutionally acceptable action were embedded through the use of auditing, monitoring, and surveillance of their work, which were regularly performed through the computer system by the team manager and senior managers. As the computer system was used to allocate and store work, it held a record of what the social workers did and what time they did it, and as they had access to the system at home, it became a symbol of the systemic shame within the Council that instilled the notion of being under constant scrutiny, as a 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... It's come recently, that has, probably since 2011/12, that feeling that you're for the chop if you do wrong. I never ever felt that in my career, that I would lose my job if I messed up. I do now. It's changed but 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”

These boundaries for action were further embedded within a system of monitoring the “performance” of each team through administrative devices known as the “duty tracker” and the “report card”. The “duty tracker” was a spreadsheet of all the cases in the team linked to the allocated social worker with information on whether they were within timescales or overdue. This information then went together with a range of other information from the computer system to make up the “report card”, as a team manager explained:

“She said there is a team 'report card' which details all the information about the team. This is circulated to all team managers in [the Council] so everyone can see everyone else's. The teams are ranked according to the data. It is colour coded, with things highlighted in red meaning it was considered bad, and has a commentary from the area manager on the team performance” (fieldnotes)

The effect of the duty tracker and the report card was to provide a public league table which provided a regulatory pressure on the actions of the social workers by further embedding the systemic shame and pride into each team. The social workers and team managers did not want to be

shamed by being at the bottom of the table from a negative judgement from the senior managers or other teams. Equally, while not seen to be as important, the social workers and team managers could take some pride in being high in the table. The social workers and team managers' sense of shame and pride was therefore heightened within this context and aligned to these boundaries, ensuring the timescales and paperwork were prioritised. Where they were not prioritised, such surveillance devices could be used to regulate the actions of the social workers, as demonstrated by Linda's experience:

"She said that she had had an email from [the team manager] which had told her to do less visits to families and do more paperwork. She said she was upset getting it. I asked her what the upset was about. She said "I work really hard at home to get my paperwork done" ... She then shows me the 'duty tracker', a print out of all the cases in the team which has the statistics of how in date or out of date assessments are in relation to the timescale. Her name was against 2 children's names which said 'overdue'" (fieldnotes)

Such forms of regulation not only served to alter the behaviour of the social worker in that situation but in all future situations as the social workers learnt the conditions for being criticised, blamed, and shamed, which aligned their sense of shame and pride to the institutional expectations. Such a scenario was explained by Amy when she described how it felt to be close to having a piece of work out of timescale:

"For me, I can go, "Yeah, I've got five assessments to do. Phew, I've got two days. It's not gonna happen." Done. And whilst making that decision, I'm like, "Fuck it. I don't care," and then after I'm thinking, "Shit, shit, shit, they're seeing that, shit. Right, [Amy]'s name's coming up". Do you see what I mean?" (interview)

Amy's sense that she would be shamed for not adhering to the administrative expectations of her role ensured that she engaged in emotion work to alleviate this anxiety and avoid being shamed. The culmination of these expectations can be considered to have created a Weberian ideal type (Weber, 1978), as one team manager explained:

"Me: If you were to describe the ideal type of social worker that you think the organisation wants, what would that look like?"

Team Manager: 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... if you appear to meet all your timescales and you appear to be fully compliant and doing everything

quietly, without complaint, not causing any problems anywhere, then you're pretty much what's required" (interview)

Yet those who did not conform to this ideal were legitimate targets for episodic shaming. While this was usually through a disparaging comment or threat of discipline, more extreme forms were occasionally observed. Donna recalled such an experience in a team meeting, where the health and safety officer had attended to talk the team through the Council's occupational stress risk assessment form. While the specifics of Donna's experience were not typical, the process was:

"[Donna] explained to the health and safety officer that "I had 88 cases and I worked 9 til midnight every day"... She said at that time an email went round with a list of all the social workers names on with the number of cases they had... She said her name was on the top of the list highlighted in red and that she was told that she had too many cases because of her time management so she had to photocopy her diary and account for every minute of her time. She spoke with a slightly raised voice and spoke quickly and forcefully. She said "it was the most humiliating experience of my professional life" and said "it feels like being punched". She said she acquired 300 hours toil [time off in lieu] during this time and one day when she was not at work "I was called and someone told me to cancel my 300 hours toil because how dare I have that amount of toil with 88 cases", implying that it was her fault she had too many cases therefore she was not entitled to the toil she had accrued. She stopped talking, stared into space, bit her top lip and her eyes welled up. No one asked her about how she was feeling or attempted to comfort her. She said "I was put on medication"" (fieldnotes)

Donna claimed that it was the effects of the reorganisation that threatened her identity as a social worker. This, however, was turned on its head by the managers who presented Donna as a threat to the identity of the organisation. Donna's identity as a responsible and competent social worker can be considered to have been publically denounced in such a manner, as to be a painful humiliating experience, constructing a new spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963), as Donna told me in her interview:

"...your name goes round on a blacklist round [the Council] and that's how you're introduced to team managers, as the person in [the Council] with the most cases" (interview)

Donna's options to validate her professional identity were either to leave or to comply with the expectations and standards within the Council in an attempt to earn sufficient social acceptance and status to reclaim her identity. The systemic shame within the Council had been asserted and Donna's sense of shame aligned accordingly. Such a process served to defend the institutional expectations throughout the teams through deterring anyone from deviating from them. Indeed, all those in the team were aware of this humiliating experience ensuring everyone knew that their identities

would be policed through shame and humiliation, further heightening their sense of shame, ensuring all workers performed to an 'acceptable' standard, as Julie's experience demonstrated:

"the clerk asked her if she had written the report for the LAC [Looked After Child] review next Tuesday. She said she hadn't and she was going in 5 minutes and so she will have to do it next Monday. I asked if this bothered her and she said "come Sunday I'll be panicking"... I asked "what would happen if you didn't get the reports done?" [Julie] said "you have to get it done" and then "you'll be hauled over the coals"" (fieldnotes)

Julie's actions to complete her report can be seen as both a form of emotion work, intended to avoid being shamed, and identity work, intended to verify her identity as a good social worker in the minds of others. Having firmly embedded the institutional expectations into the identities of the social workers, they routinely worked more than their contracted hours, for example often finishing late and still taking work home, with Linda one Saturday morning sending emails at 4.30am, Christine undertaking visits to families at 7am, and Donna summed this up as:

"The expectation is that you work your arse off into the ground and you do it until your work's up to date. And if your work isn't up to date, then sod you. But nine to five it's not possible, or eight thirty to five, it isn't physically possible to do what's asked of us" (interview)

The consequence of such mechanisms, however, was that the social workers began to question their role and their commitment to the organisation, as demonstrated by Jemma's comment:

"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)

Despite such disillusionment, the result was that the Council gained a grade of good by Ofsted on their next visit. The senior managers and team managers engaged in emotion regulation to make the social workers feel proud by praising them for achieving this result, as I observed in a team meeting:

"The team manager then asks for a review of the year and opens this by praising everyone for their hard work over the year and stated that Ofsted had been in during the year and they got a Good rating which was one of the best Ofsted have given all year" (fieldnotes)

And the social workers could then feel proud:

"Me: How did it make you feel that [the Council] got good in the Ofsted inspection?

Lucy: Proud. I did feel proud" (interview)

7 Discussion

The main argument of this paper has been that pride, shame, and humiliation were an inherent part of practice within the teams under study, on both a micro and macro level, and significantly influenced the actions of all organisational actors. The systemic shame and pride provided the boundaries for shameful and praiseworthy behaviour for the Council's child protection service. Having been episodically shamed by the regulator, and seeing other Council's being shamed by similar mechanisms, the leaders and senior managers of the child protection service engaged in institutional work to avoid such institutional shaming in the future. This meant defining the meanings and expectations of the social workers within the Council and ensuring the social workers had knowledge of the conditions to be shamed, for transgressing these boundaries, or praised, for adhering to these institutional prescriptions. The social workers, therefore, developed a sense of shame and pride in line with such institutional forces. This served to embed the regulation of the social workers into the social workers' identity constructions. Consequently, pride, shame, and humiliation could be considered to be at the heart of the processes that (1) installed the logic of administration and auditing as a dominant feature of the service; (2) created and embedded the meanings and characteristics of an ideal typical professional identity; and (3) guided and shaped the acquiescence (or resistance) of the social workers to the institutional expectations. Space prevents me from exploring issues of resistance here and this will be the subject of another paper, but suffice it to say that some social workers in some situations sought to compromise, conceal, or even defy the expectations that were placed on them, risking being shamed and humiliated by institutional guardians to prioritise adhering to their own identity standards.

This study contributes to the field of social work in four main ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that the experiences of pride, shame, and humiliation were prevalent and significant for both the social workers' and team managers' practice. This finding complements the work of others within the field concerned with improving the systems and practices within the institution of social work (e.g. Ruch et al., 2010; Featherstone et al., 2014). Indeed, it provides a hitherto underexplored dimension to practice and a language to describe these experiences. Furthermore, the theoretical perspective that was built complements and expands the existing literature and current perspectives on the forces that are created by wider social mechanisms in response to social, political, and functional pressures and their effect on organisations and their actors (Parton, 2014; Warner, 2015). It suggests that these self-conscious emotions are an inherent part of social workers' experience and, therefore, guides and constrains the actions and interactions that underpin what they do and how to do it, extending the debates on naturalistic decision making in social work practice (Platt and Turney, 2014). It also highlights the significant role of those who set the context for their practice and how this context specifically influences what the social workers do and how they do it (Ferguson, 2011;

Featherstone et al., 2014). This study has provided a language to highlight their use as political tools and cultural-cognitive resources, which can be used to understand these emotional, psychological, and social processes.

Secondly, this study contributes to the field of social work by incorporating and extending the literature on institutional work. While there is a long history in studies on institutions and organisations, institutional work as a field and research agenda is comparatively recent (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and the role of emotions in institutionalisation has only recently begun to be considered (Voronov and Vince, 2012; Creed et al., 2014; Moisander et al., 2016). This study integrates a range of these ideas to provide a conceptual framework to understand how the boundaries for shameful and praiseworthy behaviour were not only constructed within the institution of child protection social work but also through formal and informal regulatory mechanisms, which were then translated and enacted within the organisation. It is only within such a perspective that the actions of the social workers could be comprehended. These frameworks extend the existing literature on emotions in institutional work by demonstrating how emotions can be used as a resource for the exercise of episodic power (Moisander et al., 2016). Indeed, it extends this literature beyond that of shame, or even pride, to include humiliation as important resources to be mobilised in the process of disrupting, creating, and maintaining institutional arrangements. This identifies a new area of research in the field of social work, which has yet to consider these processes and experiences in any depth (Gibson, 2016), and demonstrates their significance, at least within the organisation under investigation, in the processes of institutional reproduction and change.

Thirdly, this study contributes to the debates on what power is and how it is exercised in institutional processes (Lukes, 2005; Lawrence, 2008) and social work practice (Hasenfeld, 1987; Tew, 2006). Considering self-conscious emotions as a component of the micro-foundations of interpersonal dynamics, communication, and social and symbolic interaction provides new avenues for theorising and researching how certain actions can be deterred, constrained, and shaped, while others encouraged, maintained, and supported (Voronov and Vince, 2012). Indeed, by considering self-conscious emotions as both an effect and source of power, this study compliments the literature on how power opens up or closes off certain opportunities not only for the social workers but also the managers and the organisation as a whole (Tew, 2006). By constructing notions of legitimacy and standards to achieve legitimacy, both for organisations and professionals, self-conscious emotions can be considered the systemic force that achieves motivation and commitment to certain ways of acting and being within a given institution. Shame and pride can, therefore, be considered inherent

components of the legitimising process, while humiliation may be a standard organisational product (Czarniawska, 2008) in the rituals of verification (Power, 1997).

Fourthly, the findings from this study can situate these processes of institutionalisation within the wider debates on social work, the professions, and the welfare state. A broad pattern of neo-bureaucratic reorganisation of public services has been observed in recent decades. This has been argued to shift the mechanisms of control of organisations, and those within them, from a Weberian-type bureaucratic one, i.e. the 'iron-cage', to more of a Foucauldian one, i.e. the 'panoptic gaze' (Power 1997; Reed, 1999). Some, however, have argued that such analyses provide a too broad a perspective, which limits the effectiveness of such analytical devices in empirical work (e.g. Hoggett, 1996; Farrell and Morris 2003; Exworthy, 2015). This study suggests that instead of a move from one to the other, it could be seen more as a merger, creating new forms of "compliance structures, knowledge systems and surveillance technologies" (Reed, 1999, p. 17), which produces a more effective system of control by constructing and imposing new identities on institutional actors (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

Despite these contributions to the existing literature, it is perhaps more important to consider what the implications of the analysis provided here are for the field of child protection social work generally and the Council involved in the study more specifically. The colonisation of the social work service within the Council by auditing priorities had created a system intended to provide organisational legitimacy which, as Power (2008) argues, resulted in the aims and purpose of social work being undermined. The social workers and the managers within the Council expressed a strong desire for this national situation to be changed and their daily lives improved. Given the interpretation provided here, there are perhaps two general target areas to help and support the changes that the children, parents, social workers, managers, and even politicians need. The first is a focus on changing the systemic shame and pride that supported and sustained the institutional arrangements. The reproduction and continuation of the systemic pressures should not be taken for granted, as the dominant discourses, beliefs, and shared rules require active maintenance over time and are, therefore, always open to reinterpretation. Coordinated efforts to undermine the logic of administration and auditing, while simultaneously making available alternative techniques and methods of monitoring and evaluation, may create sufficient space for institutional guardians to fulfil their vision and align their service as they intended. This offers the space for alternative expectations for shameful and praiseworthy behaviour, moving towards a service founded on professional values, empathy, and a pragmatic view on what is, and is not, achievable.

The second is a focus on the boundaries for episodic shaming and praising within a Council. The language of emotions can be powerful tools in the construction of a new interpretive framework, as they can powerfully describe both the actions of the regulators and the experience of those being regulated. Through such powerful descriptions, cultural legitimacy for certain practices can be disrupted and new ones created. Indeed, the senior managers, team managers, and social workers did not want to see their actions as shaming or humiliating. The fact that they did not communicate to each other that this was indeed how they felt only enabled such action to continue, embedded in the belief that they were doing the 'right' thing. To perceive oneself as shaming and humiliating another, while painful and uncomfortable, can induce sufficient empathy and reflection to motivate change (Gausel and Leach, 2011). Honesty about how we feel and courage to speak up about this can be considered to be a deliberate and crucial form of institutional work. It is through such action that political, and ultimately regulatory, support can be mobilised (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) in efforts to create a better system. As M.C.Richards (cited in Turnell and Essex, 2006, p.1) states "the world will change when you can imagine it differently"; to which we can add, when this is combined with sustained efforts at institutional change.

8 Conclusion

While the analysis that has been provided here is specific, not only to the Council involved in the study, but also to the time in which I collected data within the Council, as Hughes argued back in 1958, such specific accounts of processes in one context can be useful to understand the processes in others. So while this paper considered the role of these emotional experiences specifically for the Council, it provides the first account of their role in social work practice providing a source for others to understand practice from this perspective in different organisations and contexts. 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 these self-conscious emotions play in social work practice.

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