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Title, Recollection-as-method in social welfare practice: dirty work, shame and resistance,

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to introduce a methodology for critical welfare practice research, “recollection-as-method”, and to use this to demonstrate the social relations of social welfare institutions.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper analyses a series of personal recollections from the author’s experiences of academic life and welfare work to establish a methodology for critical welfare practice research. This uses concepts memory, dirty work, shame and complicity, and is grounded in critical feminist and critical race work, and psychosocial and socio-cultural approaches to governance.

Findings – The paper establishes a methodology for critical welfare practice research by demonstrating the significance of using an ontologically driven approach to governance, to achieve a realistic and complex understanding of statutory welfare work.

Research limitations/implications – Recollections are post hoc narrations, written in the present day. The ethics and robustness of this approach are deliberated in the paper.

Practical implications – The focus of the paper is on statutory welfare practice that involves the assessment and regulation of homeless people. Principles and arguments developed in this paper contribute to reflective and reflexive debates across “front-line” social welfare practice fields in and beyond homelessness. Examples include assessment of social groups such as unemployed people, refugees and asylum seekers. Arguments also have application for criminal justice settings such as for prison work.

Social implications – This foregrounds practitioner ambivalence and resistance in order to theorise the social relations of social welfare institutions.

Originality/value – The recollection-as-method approach provides a methodology for critical practice research by demonstrating an alternative way to understand the realities of welfare work. It argues that understanding how resistance and complicity operate in less conscious and more structural ways is important for understanding the social relations of social welfare institutions and the role of good/bad feeling for these processes. This is important for understanding interventions required for anti-oppressive social change across the social worlds of policy-practice life.

Keywords

Resistance, Emotions, Welfare, Power, Shame, Agency, Reflexive, Memory, Dirty work, Psychosocial, Insider, Recollection

Introduction

“Now that you have finished, you can go and find out what social policy is really like.”

A lecturer said this to me on the day that I graduated from a social policy undergraduate degree in the summer of 2003. I remember it clearly. We were walking out of the arched door of a grand building surrounded by people following the ceremony, the sun was shining, and I was confused. The moment has stuck with me through my 20s when I worked as a practitioner and manager for a local authority, and going into my 30s as I have carried out research and teaching on social welfare institutions. I remember that it was said confidently, with certainty and surety, and that it jarred hazily. “I’ve just finished my degree. Why are you telling me that there is a world I don’t know about? And it’s a world I should know about shouldn’t I? Because I have just spent three years thinking and writing about it”. The investment in the study of social policy and welfare as something distinct from real-life is something that I have held on to as a point of interest. How does a subject field that purports to reveal lived inequalities, and which holds ambitions for social change, become caught up in binary narratives? If one world is “real”, what is the other world?

To respond to these questions, the paper moves beyond exploration of borders between intellectual theory or policy intentions on the one hand, and real-world practice on the other. Instead it uses personal recollections from statutory welfare work, specifically UK homelessness practice, to develop a methodological device; recollection-as-method. The purpose of this is to explore dynamics of shame and complicity (Probyn-Rapsey, 2007), and to understand these as constituted by, and constitutive of, the social relations of social welfare institutions. Here, shame is conceptualised as dynamic, interactively produced and relational phenomena linked to both presence (I am ashamed of what I have done) and absence (why do not I feel ashamed?) (Tomkins, 1995), capable of producing collapse into the self, but also reparative motivation and connection with self and others (Probyn, 2005). Engagement with shame in personal experiences has enabled an ontological approach to the realities of social welfare work.

Recollections are based on my experiences of working in a metropolitan local government homelessness department in the north of England, which I entered, a 22-year-old middle-class white woman, in the same city where I had just completed my undergraduate studies. They are selective encounters with practice colleagues, customers and academic peers, which span a nine-year period where I was a full-time practitioner (2003-2005), practitioner and researcher (2005-2010), and a full-time academic researcher (2010-2012). As a practitioner I assessed “customers” (terminology that describes the users of services) entitlement to resources on the bases of housing legislation. I also managed temporary accommodation provided to customers should they achieve “homelessness status” under the law. My undergraduate engagement with social inequalities did not prevent me from pursuing the job. Aside from that push from my lecturer, the work felt consistent with an extended maternal family history of working for the state as social workers, teachers and nationalised utility companies. I later studied the homelessness department as part of my doctorate and thereby became an “insider” researcher (Dobson, 2009). Recollections were first written in 2014, rather than drawn from at-the-time journals and did not form any part of my doctoral research.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, underpinning principles for the recollection-as-method approach are explained. Second, contextual detail about the activities of the

homelessness department and their relationship to power, “bad” feeling and dirty work are outlined. Next, five recollections are listed. Finally, critical feminist, critical race, psychosocial and cultural approaches to state materialities, power and the emotions (Fortier, 2017; Hunter, 2015; Probyn-Rapsey, 2007) are brought to the recollections. The paper concludes by arguing that recollection-as-method provides an ontologically driven qualitative methodology for critical practice research.

Recollection-as-method: key principles

Recollection is defined as a subset of memory (Bergson, 1911), or as the agency of memory because it relates to the action of remembering something (Hustvedt, 2011). Memory and recollection are contested and dynamic phenomena, claimed as imaginative reconstructions without discrete origins (Wilson, 2011). They are stories, remembered explicitly but formed unconsciously (Hustvedt, 2011), their meanings grounded in present feelings, rather than reproductions from the past (Leys, 1994; Bergson, 1911). It is well established that critical feminist, critical race, subaltern and postcolonial scholars have used memory and personal experience to unpick knowledge construction through the knowledge/power relation (see Spivak, 1988). In particular, Black feminist scholars pioneered the use of personal and bodily experience, documenting memories and encounters to build theoretical insight (see Nayak, 2015 on Lorde, 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983). These identify the specificity, individuality and multiplicity of human subjectivity within, and as constitutive of, institutional, social, cultural, economic and political relations, to argue for the locatedness of personal and collective experience (Lewis, 1996, 2009; Rich, 1986, Mohanty, 1992). Feminist memory-methodologies have since been inspired by these insights, such as for “memory work” (Onyx and Small, 2001; Haug, 1987); a collective process that embeds theory in personal experience (Kitchen et al., 2016).

Elsewhere critical feminist and critical race scholars have used psychoanalytic and psychosocial approaches to unpick reflexive personal engagement with memory and affect. Liz Bondi (2005, p. 442) argues that one way to understand the emotions is to explore what we experience as our own emotional life. She suggests that the act of writing can prise open a space to make new “sense” of oneself in relation to a myriad of relationships. When Bondi describes this “sense-making” as simultaneously “thought, embodied and abstract, affective and emotional, performative and representational, personally experienced and relational” (p. 444), she moves beyond introspective diarist acts of self-examination to explore human actors’ unconscious dynamics and relationships between their inner and outer worlds. Bondi conceptualises affect as intrinsically relational, encompassing senses, feelings and bodily sensations, such that the emotions are not properties of any one individual but part of the flow of emotions between and among people. This flow represents a “between-ness” that is constitutive of relationships (Bondi, 2005, p. 441). This psychoanalytic approach to the emotions is also used to understand the relational enactment of subjects and objects that include phenomena associated with state structures (e.g. human actors, policy, legislation, the state), such as for Ahmed’s (2004) affective economy. Ahmed prioritises exploration of how emotions circulate, as well as what they do, to develop an ontologically informed account of human experience and social structures. The recollection-as-method approach is grounded in these intellectual interventions.

In the present paper, recollections are described in a considered way, through efforts to avoid clichés, to include relevant detail, and to be attentive to bodily sensations (Cornforth et al., 2012). People involved in the recollections have not consented to the present analysis of their

actions and there has not been an attempt to confirm the veracity of these. This of course carries ethical implications, which necessitate careful use of the data. All names and organisations are anonymised. There is emphasis on describing my reactions within encounters as opposed to speculation about the motivations of other people (Lewis, 2009) and I remain accountable for article content. In recognition of how I have limited control over how recollections are understood by others, it is worth being explicit about problematic interpretations. For example, recollections could be read as individualisingly universalistic (my experiences are all workers' experiences) or subjectively particular (my experiences are only my experiences), victimized (I had no control), persecuted (I am not that bad), oppressive (I am bad) or reparative (I did something bad but now I know better). A starting point for working against these more reductive analyses, and towards a more social and relational critique, is to revisit my "insider" status (Dobson, 2009).

"Insiderness" describes how shared institutional experiences with the researched shapes research processes. The concept differs to standpoint theory which is more commonly associated with researching people with shared social identity, such as for gender (Hekman, 1997). Critical approaches show that the concept is seductive but problematic. The insider/outsider binary denies the sorts of temporalities, multiplicities, intersectionalities and relationalities that guide us towards a more complex appreciation of human subjectivity and social reality. It flattens institutional spaces and the relations that make them, disavowing hierarchies that enable and deny access to a range of people, experiences and knowledge at any one time. It also rejects human actors' capacities to work with and across difference on the bases of their varied and related personal, biographical and professional experiences, identifications, subjectifications, representations and positionings (Hunter, 2003; Lewis, 2000). It regards researcher and researched as human actors who are subsumed only by singular identifications (the organisation/the professional identity), and as exposed and always-already knowable to each other, rather than understanding that researchers will encounter multiple and variable points of infinite and interchangeable connection-disconnection or "transitory spaces" (Mullings, 1999, p. 340) because of institutional actors' complex and non-unitary self- and subject-hood (Hoggett, 2006).

I have previously contended that insider experiences result in refusals to see and hear certain voices and perspectives on the bases of their specific engagements and investments with whatever the "inside" represents to them (Dobson, 2009). However, in the present paper I argue that "being there" worked as an ontologising orientation to the world, supporting reflexive post hoc engagement and "sense-making" (Bondi, 2005) with questions of reality/unreality in social welfare institutions outlined at the start of this paper.

Engagement with questions of reality in social welfare research is commonly found in desires to uncover how everyday practices are "in fact" messy and create "drift" from policy, legislation or state intentions. Such approaches are used to develop improved systems in an operational or technocratic sense, or identify social and political forces that bear down on welfare workers' power and agency, which they comply with and/or resist. One effect of this is that subjects and objects of welfare work (e.g. practitioners, service users, local government, policy, legislation, the state) are constructed as material and hierarchically ordered entities outside of the everyday agency and actions of welfare workers (Dobson, 2015). Following this, understanding "hidden" experiences as realities (e.g. day-to-day encounters, conscious/unconscious feeling states) is important because it demonstrates the role of emotions in the social relations of social welfare institutions. Socio-cultural and psychosocial approaches to governance are central to this argument.

Starting with the latter, psychosocial approaches demonstrate that institutional realities are shaped relationally and intersubjectively. A psychosocial approach to human agency and the emotions understands welfare workers as embodied subjects who actively constitute the everyday of their working environment via processes of construction and negotiation that are material, symbolic, social and cultural and emotionally and physically felt (Gunaratnam and Lewis, 2001, p. 133). This approach understands all people involved in social welfare institutions as non-unitary actors, whose actions and engagements with different objects are driven by less rational and more unconscious and ambivalent aspects, experiences and orientations across their social worlds (Hoggett, 2006). Understanding agency and actions psychosocially demonstrates how social welfare institutions come into being, are maintained, are permitted to evolve, and the human investments associated with these processes, as well as how they “act back” to dynamically and relationally structure human agency and subjectivity (Froggett, 2002). As psychosocial scholar Paul Hoggett (2006) has argued, a critical approach to social welfare institutions understands these inner and intersubjective dynamics, as opposed to the stated “primary task” of an organisation (e.g. to care, to support, to assess), as the realities of welfare work that deserve attention from researchers.

Psychosocial arguments resonate with critical socio-cultural approaches to governance, which demonstrate that when practitioners resist entities like policy, legislation and social welfare institutions (e.g. because they are oppressive to service users), they do not just subvert these phenomena, but rather re-work them (Barnes and Prior, 2009). There is now a body of poststructural and Actor-Network Theory informed work that highlights the peopled, performative and relational nature of these phenomena to expose their multiple and contested realities, effects, directions and meanings (Clarke et al., 2015; Law and Singleton, 2014). The emotions, as a methodological and conceptual tool, have entered these debates (Newman, 2012). Significantly, these realities, effects, directions and meanings are not benign and more recently, critical feminist, critical race and psychosocial approaches have used in-depth ethnographic and/or biographical methods to demonstrate how and why particular realities cohere in governing practices and structures.

For example, Anne-Marie Fortier’s (2017) *psychic life of policy* argues that state interventions shape individuals/social “groups” relations to each other through practices and judgments that establish unequal access to material resources, and they also structure practitioners’ ambivalent relations to a range of subjects and objects associated with this work. Fortier draws on Shona Hunter’s theorisation of state relationalities, which argues that welfare workers’ struggles with institutional others and their more internal ambivalence, are means of producing the state practically bringing people/entities together and morally by positioning policy and practice actors via “good”/“bad” feeling (Hunter, 2015, p. 173). Taken together, socio-cultural and psychosocial approaches to governance demonstrate that human experiences, agency and action in social welfare institutions are not just representative of a world “out there”, they are constitutive of it (Lewis, 2000). The contribution of these works is that they go further than just tracking the constitutive people and parts of state phenomena by demonstrating how power and the emotions are central to the ways that governing structures are materialised and imagined, the forms they take, the inclusions/exclusions these engender, and what these social orders are in the service of. These works are revisited after the next section, which engages with the relevance of Hunter’s “good”/“bad” feeling by identifying dynamics of power and dirty work in statutory homelessness practice.

Power, dirty work and recollections

Local government homelessness departments can be conceptualised as “Cinderella” services because of their association with administrative practice and lower status as compared to other welfare professions¹. Historically, their remit is to establish entitlement to resources under housing legislation. At the time of my employment this involved assessing customers’ needs in a Housing Act 1996 part VII assessment, by way of reference to five “tests” (see Table I). Passing tests 2-5, rather than being “just” homeless, was required to achieve “statutory homelessness status” and secure temporary accommodation and permanent rehousing². The role of local government practitioners in enabling or denying resources is long recognised by advocates and researchers, in part because the number of customers achieving “statutory homelessness status” are low when compared to the levels of homeless people in the UK (Crisis, 2016).

Table 1. Tests to establish entitlement under a part VII assessment, Housing Act 1996

Test	Explanation
1. Are you homeless?	Demonstrate loss or lack of accommodation
2. Are you eligible for statutory services?	Prove national identity and citizenship
3. Are you in Priority Need?	Demonstrate vulnerability
4. Are you (Un)Intentionally homeless?	Demonstrate that a loss or lack of accommodation is not the result of a deliberate act or omission
5. Do you have a Local Connection?	Demonstrate a designated period of time as resident in the local authority presented to as homeless

In effect, local-government power is written in to housing law and everyday practice and structures the part VII assessment. Practitioners interpret customers’ needs and experiences by way of reference to an official Code of Guidance, which is based on legislation and case-law. The successful appeal of an assessment decision has potential to alter the Code and result in alternative interpretations of homelessness thereafter (Loveland, 2016). There is also evidence that availability of local housing stock restricts how far practitioners interpret customers’ needs in “generous” terms, especially in areas with high-demand and a lack of affordable housing (Crisis, 2016). More “informal” factors include practitioners’ interpretations of social problems and assumptions about homelessness applicants.

¹ Roles in allied UK welfare services such as health and social work are varied, not least due to the growth of mixed economies of service delivery across charitable, private and public sectors. However, there is evidence of defined and defended knowledges and overarching accreditation and training in those fields, as compared to homelessness provision.

² Rights for homeless people in the UK have evolved over the past ten years and efforts to prevent homelessness in the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Bill in England follow the example of devolved regions (Shelter Cymru, 2015). Despite diminished funding under Conservative-Liberal and Conservative governments since 2010, UK responses to homelessness remain historically unique when compared to other western contexts because of how legislation enshrines rights to housing and housing support (Fitzpatrick and Pleace, 2012).

Homelessness research suggests that single adults and childless couples may struggle to prove their complex needs (e.g. mental ill-health, addiction, offending) because of difficulty evidencing such issues and a lack of understanding from statutory practitioners (Cornes et al., 2011). There is also a body of evidence about “gatekeeping”, where practitioners’ decisions are structured by gendered, classed and raced assumptions about the users of services (Cramer, 2005; Jeffers and Hoggett, 1995).

Local government power is also historic and institutionalized. Homelessness legislation in the UK emerged out of campaigns from the 1960s, which highlighted the plight of poor families in urban “slums” (Shelter at 50, 2016). The developing social realism genre supported these campaigns, such as for film from famed director Cathy Come Home (1966). A harrowing sequence arrives in the closing minutes as various agents of the state remove and contain Cathy’s children, leaving her to sleep on the streets³. This aspect of the film, when coupled with contemporary assessing practices, gestures to the role that statutory practitioners are invited to play in doing the “dirty work” of the state.

³ The subsequent 1977 Homelessness Act worked against “splitting” families.

Dirty work

“Dirty work” is a discourse on a set of practices, which involves dynamics of good and bad feeling. The concept describes jobs, activities and tasks as physically, symbolically, morally, socially and emotionally disgusting, contaminating, compromising and tainted, which can lead to others withdrawing and distancing themselves from the dirty worker (Hughes, 1958; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). The capacity to resist or even embrace dirty work designations is relationally structured by historic and institutional factors (Dick, 2005), subject to shifting professional status (Morriss, 2016), and experienced variably within worksites and across different interpersonal relations (McGregor, 2007).

Research into welfare work and dirty work is demonstrative of these dynamics. For example, it is historically argued that front-line practitioners working in mental ill-health fields are designated by self/others as dirty workers. However, in contemporary research Morriss’ (2016) Advanced Mental Health Practitioners and McMurray and Ward’s (2014) Samaritans helpline volunteers resist bad feeling, articulating pride in the skills and satisfaction involved in their job-roles. In social work, Walker’s (2011) practitioners report how they are labelled “baby snatchers” by peers, who respond with derisory and mocking comments to their work; practitioners’ subsequent resistance to revealing their roles creates cultures of silence indicative of the profession’s disempowerment and inability to resist attacks. Gibson’s (2015) social workers are anxious about making the wrong practice choices in a popular and political climate willing to shame and discipline practitioners because of perceived failings, specifically child deaths; these feelings are intensified in a vortex of under-resourced services and managerialist performance cultures. Overall, these research studies represent workers as committed practitioners who do difficult jobs in tough times and challenging contexts.

In contrast, when Humphries (2004) rails against social workers’ involvement in enforcing state immigration controls, she indicates that they should feel a sense of shame because they are doing the state’s dirty work; their complicity with racist actions means they have failed to live up to professional ideals. In doing this, Humphries claims a role for social workers in fighting oppressive state practices. The idea that social workers should be vigilant to state power when working with vulnerable service users is not new (Frost, 2016; Houston, 2015). Social work researchers have called on practitioners to give recognition to power’s effects, and develop a morally and ethically driven social justice education for professionals entering the field (Beddoe and Keddell, 2016; McAuliffe et al., 2016), which includes realistic guidance about fighting for social change in neoliberalising worksites (Marston and McDonald, 2012). These works build on professional orientations that fit with ambitions for social justice and anti-oppressive practice. Indeed, they can be seen as struggles over social work’s normative aspirations. In contrast, statutory homelessness work occupies a different practice space. While workers encounter vulnerability on a day-today basis and may have a social justice orientation at a personal level, there is no overarching mission, ethos or professional qualification that institutionalises these orientations and their “primary task” to assess customers has explicit regulatory effects. Personal recollections in the next section demonstrate how this can lead to statutory homelessness practitioners being positioned as “dirty workers” by practice and academic colleagues, who link their actions to oppressive power and inequalities.

Recollections

1. 2004, “You have to move right now”

I am in charge of the team that manages temporary accommodation. We are told that the strategic group has changed contacts with private providers who deliver temporary accommodation. We spend the day moving customers from their accommodation into new housing. It is stressful. There are four of us on the case, sat in a row, making phone calls. I manage the process. Towards the end of the day there are still people who need moving, and who we have not been able to contact. I get a taxi to their temporary accommodation to tell them myself. It is winter: cold and dark. I am met by a representative of the accommodation. It feels like we are in it together in trying to get people out. I walk into a small studio attic flat, which houses a young woman and her new-born baby. It is warm inside. Her male partner is with them, but he is not living there. I tell them they have to move to a flat a few doors down. Today and now. Mum and baby feel to me to be settled there. There are belongings on shelves and in cupboards, there is a Moses basket on the floor with blankets. It feels like a home.

They hear the news from me and start packing. They just get on with it. The man starts picking things up purposefully, running things up and down the stairs. They get moving, physically, literally. The accommodation representative is standing on the stairs leading up to the attic flat. She says out loud how she thinks I am just great: so calm, making decisions, getting stuff done. A few days later the contracts change back to the original provider. Some, not all, customers are moved back. I think there was some kind of contractual dispute going on. The person who sent the directive to move customers had called me while we were getting people out of accommodation. I had said I was too busy to take the call. My manager is kind to me and pensive where she insists I need to be aware of hierarchies; they are my manager, I should have taken the call.

2. 2005, “What’s the point in us being here?”

I am working part-time now, combining doctoral research with homelessness practice. My manager asks me to consult with local organisations. We are trying to be better as an organisation. We are known as being tough gatekeepers who deny services, who are rude and insensitive to our customers. We have a reputation. I invite people in from statutory and voluntary sector agencies: drop-in centres, supported housing, social housing, social services and campaigning organisations. The session takes place in a tiny cramped room around a small round table in the attic of our building. There are seven or eight of us, including me. I am the chair and the youngest. I introduce myself and my interest in doing the work. I explain that I am doing a PhD. It starts: “What’s the point in us being here? Beyond your P-h-D that is” says a social worker, spelling out each letter with emphasis. They provide example after example of what we are doing badly, how terribly we treat our customers, how little we know, how wrong we are. Afterwards I feel shaken and want to cry. My manager and I talk it through; she stares at me like she does not know what to say to make it better.

3. 2006, “That was a shit presentation”

I present findings from my postgraduate research to peers; a study of statutory homelessness practitioners’ attitudes towards their work. There is a quotation from Leanne, a “mixed-race” woman in her 30s, who says that she sometimes wants to say to people to “y’know, fuck off

back to where you came from”. Leanne thinks she should not feel like this, says she knows it is bad, but she just does. I live in a small city. A friend catches up with me a few weeks later. “You know that presentation you did? I met people when I was out last night, they said they knew you. They thought it was really shit”. Apparently, they thought I was agreeing with Leanne when I shared her views.

4. 2009, “I could never do that”

I am socialising with other researchers and explain my job. Someone responds: “I could never work there. You have to turn people away? I could never do that”. It is said quickly and feels like a statement of fact, without drama, antagonism or anticipation of debate. It feels like a statement of me as someone doing something bad. The conversation moves on but I am stuck in that moment.

5. 2012, “So what, you just gave up?”

I am talking to an academic colleague who has researched front-line power in welfare practice. I share that I use their research in my writing and teaching. I explain that one reason why I left the job was because I thought I had too much power at too young an age; that after a time, it just did not feel right. He responds: “so what, you went and left someone less able to do the job? Nice one”. This jars; it is different to normal reactions about my work.

Conclusions: shame and complicity

In these five recollections I am positioned, and position myself, in different ways on the bases of my relationship to doing the dirty work of statutory homelessness practice. In recollections 2, 3 and 4, for example, I am called on to experience shame because of my complicity in practices that deny vulnerable people resources. As well as shame, resistance is also a feature of the recollections. First, there is resistance to multiple actors via actions, such as my refusal to engage with managers or embrace the accommodation representative’s praise in recollection 1, and reactions, such as irritation and annoyance with academic colleagues in recollections 3 and 4. Feelings in the latter, in particular, are reflective of resistance to being positioned as someone who should feel shame (Barbalet, 2005). Second, resistance features through my own refusals to come to judgment about the work. This is not only evident through my resistant reactions to others’ desires to position me and the work as good or bad, but also through how shame felt. Encounters were neither mundane and benign, nor agonising, heavy and excoriating. It is more accurate to describe affective surges, memories that linger, discomfort without clarity or resolution, and expressions of doubt that lurk in the post hoc. These affective responses suggest that shame’s effects feel like incursions and prompts into I thought I was, rather than transformative interventions. Clarifying my feeling states is part of insisting on my experiences of a negotiated, uncertain and occasionally alienated relationship to a range of actors and practices associated with the work (Fortier, 2017).

The point of emphasising personal resistances and feeling states to shame is not to suggest that this emotion should not be a part of conversations about how to achieve social and redistributive justice for vulnerable people. Experiencing marginalisation in grossly unequal societies generates shame for poor people (Frost and Hoggett, 2008), and is intensified through day-to-day encounters such as for accessing welfare services (Connelly, 2010).

Indeed, recollections demonstrate that I, and others, exercised power with material effects: upheaving families from their homes (recollection 1), rejecting people from services through discretionary judgment (recollection 2), oppressive responses (recollection 3) and formal assessing practices (recollection 4). However, to read shame dynamics in the recollections at face-value – i.e., to position statutory homelessness practitioners as individuals who should experience shame because of how they exercise power, or even to then celebrate their resistances to this (as in recollection 5) – would delimit a deepened critical understanding of what is being played out. Specifically, it would miss how these dynamics are suggestive of how the move to shame (shaming others and self-shaming) works against ambivalence; how it coheres human subjectivity and social structures in ways that fix these bodies and entities and what attachments of good/bad feeling to these phenomena conceal.

This is where recollection 5 becomes significant. Here, I introduce my departure from my role in a performatively apologetic way; as if my colleague would understand why it was just wrong for me to be doing it; “my age and naivety mean I am ill-equipped to responsibly manage the power at my disposal”. Questioning this move to self-shaming matters, even though on face value it signifies my personal shifts to a more explicitly social justice orientations. This is because the move I make here rejects a more complicated and relational understanding of complicity in social welfare institutions by taking these phenomena outside of myself material and imagined sense (Hunter, 2015, p. 173); realities, as understood in this paper, fade here.

Writing on Australia as a settler colonial state, racial domination and potential for a more “response-able” future, Elspeth Probyn-Rapsey (2007) argues that using accounts of domination (and resistance) to expose oppressive power are less productive than understanding complicity, in the fight for social and racial justice. She conceptualises complicity as structural and networked in contrast to shame’s more guilt-ridden and individualising connotations. Probyn-Rapsey offers a spatial and temporal approach when describing shame as vertical, individualised, deep, and chronologically ordered, referring to one-off and exceptional events, in contrast to complicity’s horizontal and networked breadth; a multiple and “sideways” condition of relations and encounters between others (p. 68). The author demonstrates complicity as a structural relationship that exists in multiple and networked forms, which demands a more historical and critical reading of actions. This is because complicity is part of the wider conditions of living, working, existing and investing in states of domination, and the ways that these are patterned through human actors’ multiplicities, biographies, and relations, and link to individual and collective questions of power and nationhood.

Shona Hunter’s (2015) critique of state relationalities expands Probyn-Rapsey’s argument, because the author theorises multiplicities to demonstrate the social relations of governance as constituted by, and constitutive of, racialised, gendered and classed power and inequalities. Hunter thinks about everyday interactions, actions and practices as “negotiating already existing entities and the negotiations themselves as bringing the entities into being” in a material and moral, ethical and political sense. Underpinning this approach is a conception of human subjectivity and group relations, which understands that the person and the group are the products of relations that appear singular from the outside, but are made up of difference (multiplicity) from the inside (p. 172). The processes through which singularity coheres to foreclose multiplicity, described as “relational politics”, “relational choreographies” and “feeling work”, are central to Hunter’s argument. This is because they reveal practices that attach hierarchically ordered emotions to various state subjects and objects, including policy

and practice actors, legislation, institutions, local-government and the central-state. These attachments are power-driven insofar as they attach the cause of bad feeling to subjects/objects and demonstrate refusals to engage with a wider set of structural dynamics. Specifically, in Hunter's critique, social actors submit to their desires to see the bad/oppressive state as an entity outside of themselves; as something they not relationally constituted by and through; this is, for Hunter, a very neoliberal suicide (Hunter, 2015, p. 5).

To conclude, tracking "our" complicities in the social relations of state structures in empirical, conceptual and theoretical terms (Cooper, 2016) remains a task for future critical practice research. The recollection-as-method approach provides a methodology for this work by demonstrating an alternative way to understand the realities of welfare work. It argues that understanding how resistance and complicity operate in less conscious and more structural ways, and via everyday actions, is important for unpicking the social relations of social welfare institutions and how binaries of good/bad feeling are central to these processes. Ultimately, exploring relationships between power, the emotions and governing practices, and maintaining the significance of ambivalence via engagement with personal experiences, is important for an ontologically driven understanding of the interventions required for anti-oppressive social change across the social worlds of policy-practice life.

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