

## Self-disclosure in criminal justice: what form does it take and what does it achieve?

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## Introduction

Self-disclosure, the act of revealing something about oneself to a client in the context of a professional relationship, is considered a key skill in counselling and psychotherapy although it brings with it the risk of breaking roles and countertransference. It is also considered critical to effective work with people engaged with the criminal justice system, from arrestees to people in prison or under supervision. However, very little is known about what criminal justice practitioners disclose, nor do we know when and why they do it. There is a small body of literature which suggests that practitioners' use of self-disclosure leads to better outcomes for both voluntary and involuntary clients. Moreover, the evidence is based on research which does not define self-disclosure, nor acknowledge that, as we show in this article, it is a skill which must be deployed judiciously and carefully. This is a significant gap in knowledge considering the role it potentially plays in terms of effective practice.

This article begins with a literature review which defines self-disclosure and then unpicks the evidence which has examined the use of self-disclosure in both criminal justice and related fields. Then, by way of a case study approach, the article uses probation practitioners' own descriptions of self-disclosure to shed light on the way in which self-disclosure could be used in the broader context of criminal justice. The data which are analysed were generated in a larger research project which sought to understand the emotional labour of probation practice. We conclude by arguing that self-disclosure is a complex skill which is used frequently by practitioners for various ends and argue that any research which seeks to identify a correlation between the use of self-disclosure and effective practice needs to build this into the research design. Finally, we reflect on what probation practitioners' use of this skill can tell us about a changing probation culture, and consider the way in which a similar analysis might shed light on similar developments in other criminal justice contexts.

## Self-disclosure: what is it and why use it?

The literature review discusses what we know and do not know about self-disclosure. It also provides us with a framework for understanding what self-disclosure is, and how it might be used in criminal justice settings. Self-disclosure is broadly defined as 'verbal statements that reveal something personal about the therapist' (Knox and Hill, 2013: 530) rather than the sharing of information relating to the professional status and qualifications of the social worker (Gibson, 2012). It is important to highlight that self-disclosure is 'one of the more controversial and misunderstood aspects of social work practice' (Knight, 2012: 297).

Early discussions of self-disclosure focused on the need to maintain neutrality and not expose any personal information or opinions (Freud, 1912). While this assumes that practitioners have the ability not to self-disclose (Zur, 2007; Farber, 2006) this tradition still remains prevalent and focuses on any self-disclosure by the practitioner to be counterproductive which can reveal a lack of competence and open the door to possible countertransference (Bloomgarden and Mennuti 2009; Zur, 2007; Farber, 2006). However, others have concluded that 'by embracing the technique of self-disclosure, the patient may feel the analyst's emotion, without which emotion an authentic analysis is impossible' (Billow, 2000 as cited in Knox and Hill, 2003: 531).

Those who align themselves with humanistic schools of thought view self-disclosure as allowing not only an authentic relationship with the client, but also argue that it shows respect for the client and fosters transparency within the relationship (Robitschek and McCarthy, 1991; Kaslow, Cooper and Linsenber, 1979). Moreover, one might argue that it challenges the power disparity which is inherent to many roles. They maintain that practitioner self-disclosure allows the client to have a frame of reference in terms of any internal struggles they may have, display the human side of practitioners, allow practitioners

to act as role models (Lane and Hull, 1990), as well as more equally distribute the power within practitioner-client relationships. There are links here to Rogers' (1951: 348-349) client-centred therapy in which self-disclosure can achieve 'warmth, empathy and genuineness'. Self-disclosure is also seen as beneficial by those with a cognitive-behavioural orientation. Here, self-disclosure can strengthen the relationship, or therapeutic alliance, between practitioner and client and encourage client change. This is achieved by challenging a client's perception of themselves and others - changing the way they think - as well as modelling coping techniques and behaviour which clients are encouraged to emulate (Goldfried, Burckell and Eubanks-Carter 2003).

It is therefore well established that self-disclosure occurs in the context of any therapeutic relationship and that it can take several forms. Moreover, the relevance to criminal justice practice is clear, be that for those with a humanistic or cognitive behavioural approach. Murphy and Ord (2013: 335) describe 'realms of self-disclosure' which they characterize in five ways. Firstly they refer to appearance, which is essentially what a practitioner wears and displays on their person and might also include the way they arrange their work space. The second realm of self-disclosure is the beliefs, attitudes and values presented both explicitly and implicitly by the practitioner. Third to be described is behavior. This is the conduct of the practitioner which reveals their reactions and/or lack of reaction which, in turn, shows their expectations of other. The fourth realm is feelings which Murphy and Ord (2013) maintain can be both verbal and non-verbal with the latter occurring through facial expressions and body language. The final realm of self-disclosure is experiences, which is the recollection of positive or negative knowledge, memories and motivation of the practitioner.

Knox and Hill (2003) describe seven subtypes of disclosure which they assert are 'used at different times and can have different impacts on the therapy process' (530). These

are described as disclosures of fact, disclosures of feelings, disclosures of insight, disclosures of strategy, disclosures of reassurance or support, disclosures of challenge and disclosures of immediacy. Of particular interest is a type of self-disclosure they describe as 'here and now' disclosures. 'Here and now' disclosures or disclosures of 'immediacy' (2003: 536) are 'self-revealing' (Knight, 2012: 298) in that they are reactions by the practitioner to what is happening during an interaction with the client. These types of interventions are regarded as helpful in that they provide transparency to the client by imparting insight into the practitioner's thoughts and reactions to the client as it happens during the session (Knight, 2012). In contrast 'there and then' disclosures, or 'self-involving disclosures' (Knight, 2012: 298) are disclosures where the practitioner describes relevant experiences from their life outside the particular session to, for example, give the client an insight into their own behaviour (Ganzer and Ornstein, 2002). This is particularly relevant to 'wounded healers' who are experts by experience (Jung, 1951). Considering there is a move to increase the number of peer mentors in criminal justice this is likely to become increasingly important.

Workers should not be disclosing every element of their personal lives to their clients and 'no school of practice advocates total uniform levels of disclosure across all domains of personal and professional life' (Gibson 2012: 288). Thus, literature which advocates the use of self-disclosure often caveats the phrase using words such as 'appropriate' or 'moderate'. Indeed, the appropriateness of self-disclosure has resulted in considerable debate. In terms of practice it is acknowledged that, 'Effective self-disclosures are given to serve the client whereas ineffective and/or inappropriate self-disclosures may well obstruct these very goals' (Knox and Hill, 2003: 535). Knox and Hill (2003: 533) maintain that it needs to be employed 'infrequently and judiciously' and that the practitioner must have appropriate reasons for self-disclosing. This puts the emphasis on disclosure which serves the client rather than the practitioners such as: the provision of information to highlight the perceived similarity

between the practitioner and client, or as a model for behaviour, to challenge the ways in which the clients thinks and acts.

There are also several risks to the practitioner which arise from the act of self-disclosing information about oneself in the context of a professional relationship. As Masters (2003) highlights, self-disclosure can make a practitioner vulnerable to manipulation. It can also introduce the risk of collusion and counter-transference whereby a therapist transfers feelings to a patient in order to meet their own psychological needs (Goldstein, 1994; Greenberg, 1995).

### Self-disclosure in Criminal Justice

In criminal justice research, self-disclosure has been researched primarily in literature related to the effective supervision of adult and juvenile offenders in the community, as well as work with drug using offenders and sex offenders (Dilts et al, 1997; Ward et al, 1996; Hartz and Thick, 2005). However, much of this research is speculative in nature. In some cases, the research does little more than count the extent to which workers in different settings self-disclose. Hopkinson and Rex (2003) argue that self-disclosure can be used to encourage the development of trust and respect when working with offenders, and make explicit reference to Rogers (1951) in doing so. They argue that self-disclosure must be used judiciously and always be truthful. However, much of the literature which attempts to assess the use of self-disclosure does not start with a definition of what disclosures might count. This is doubly problematic. Firstly, the literature fails to acknowledge that self-disclosure takes different forms and has different aims. Secondly, there is a strong case to be made for understanding self-disclosure in the context of criminal justice because the relationship, which we know is crucial in terms of supporting desistance and enhancing legitimacy, has to be formed in a 'coercive atmosphere' (Arcaya, 1978).

In much of the relevant criminal justice literature, self-disclosure is seen in a positive light, primarily because it is considered to result in more effective outcomes such as reduced reoffending rates or improved relationships between the officer and client. For example, Trotter (2013: 235) found that probation practitioners who were 'rated as open and honest, non-blaming, optimistic, enthusiastic, used appropriate self-disclosure and who were friendly all had clients with lower offending' although the skills effects were not significant. Durnescu (2014) noted that self-disclosure was used infrequently in the sessions that were observed. In Serrin et al.'s (2013) Correctional Relationship Counsellor Competency framework, self-disclosure is one of the seven facets of being a good correctional worker but, again, what it is and how to use it, is not defined. Raynor, Ugwudike and Vanstone's (2014; Vanstone and Raynor, 2012) JS3 study of skills used by probation officers in Jersey has not, as far as we can tell, coded self-disclosure into their checklist of skills. That said, the use of body language is included and can be considered an important form of self-disclosure. Much of this research counts instances of self-disclosure in order to evidence which skills are effective and it is worth noting that the effects are often insignificant. However, just because a practitioner does not explicitly self-disclose does not mean they are working ineffectively. Firstly, they may not have control over whether to self-disclose, and secondly avoiding self-disclosure does not necessarily imply poor practice. Its use is very much dependent on context and this needs to be acknowledged in the research which attempts to draw correlations between the use of certain skills and the effectiveness of an intervention.

Bourgon and Guitierrez (2013: 268) argue that self-disclosure provides 'an opportunity for the client to voice his/her understanding of the role and responsibilities of the officer' and that this can be seen as an attempt to 'de-emphasize the social control component of a dual role relationship'. Thus, self-disclosure can be understood as a means with which to highlight the caring nature of the role as distinct from the surveillance role that is inherent to much

criminal justice work and which distances it from counselling and psychotherapy. Masters (2003: 41) argues that self-disclosure with offenders presents particular issues. She states that self-disclosure with offenders can 'hasten trust and rapport in counsellor-offender relationships' but points out that self-disclosure should not be used in a way which puts the worker at risk. Masters' discussion is couched in terms of seeing offenders as unscrupulous individuals who will breach confidentiality yet it raises an important issue: that people receiving support in the criminal justice system are not there by choice and that, therefore, self-disclosure might play a more significant, or diverse, role than that suggested by the literature discussed above.

Indeed, Arcaya (1978: 232) argues that criminal justice is an environment which:  
produces an attitude in clients which helps to de-personalize or otherwise stereotype their therapeutic workers so that he/she becomes like all authority figures in the criminal justice system and society at large. The ex-offender sees himself to be very much at the mercy of indifferent forces.

There are key differences between the coerced treatment which occurs in the criminal justice system and what we know about how the therapeutic alliance works. There is evidence to suggest that the therapeutic alliance is more difficult to create with involuntary clients and so the role of self-disclosure, an important tool with which to create an alliance, is likely to be different (Ross, Polaschek and Ward, 2008). Self-disclosure might, therefore, be seen to play an important role in enhancing the offender-officer relationship which, in turn, will have a positive effect on outcomes such as offending. This is where much criminal justice research on self-disclosure has focused.

However, we would argue that self-disclosure can have broader aims. We know that people in conflict with the law are more likely to be disadvantaged, marginalised, from a



minority ethnic group and/or see the 'system' as lacking in legitimacy (Bauwens and Burke, 2013). This means that the task of the criminal justice counsellor is to show they are 'not just a person to the offender, but an essentially good person' (Arcaya 1978: 233 original emphasis). This could be said to reveal the values of the worker and identity of the profession. Thus, he argues in favour of the use of self-disclosure as without it 'no meaningful dialogue will occur unless the client can identify a glimmer of his own humanity in the individual with whom he deals' (1978: 231). For Arcaya, self-disclosure in the context of coercive counselling brings with it the potential for 'narrowing the distance which the ex-offender has placed between himself and the "establishment"'. Therefore, self-disclosure in criminal justice might be seen to have a role in enhancing the legitimacy with which offenders view the criminal justice system and authority more broadly over and above the 'better' outcomes as highlighted by Trotter (2015). Thus, there may be a link between self-disclosure and reduced reoffending but this is likely to be a longer process than that intimated by research discussed above. Trotter's (2013) research has identified a positive correlation between the use of self-disclosure and reductions in reoffending but the correlation is not statistically significant. This, we argue, might be because self-disclosure is defined too simplistically in addition to issues around operationalization and measurement of the skill. In turn, this might be further exacerbated because the effects of self-disclosure in criminal justice contexts might be too long term to be picked up by studies with relatively short follow-up periods.

Self-disclosure in criminal justice is also used to persuade clients themselves to self-disclose, and to creating a trusting relationship. Such self-disclosure on the part of clients is seen as a signifier of remorse and a reduction in risk: indeed, it might be seen as the postmodern version of the confession (Kemshall 2002). Whilst the use of self-disclosure in this way can elicit information about the client which can then be worked on in future

counselling sessions, it also serves the broader function of criminal justice work: that of risk assessment, management and public protection. As such, a search for literature on self-disclosure in police work (Stokoe, 2009) reveals that it is primarily used in suspect interview settings with a view to eliciting potentially incriminating evidence from the suspect. The use of self-disclosure here is more about protecting the public than serving the interests of the recipient of the self-disclosure. Thus, as Sawyer and Prescott (2011) point out, self-disclosure is not always authentic or transparent. Moreover, it cannot automatically be considered therapeutic even if it might be appropriate. Again, this raises questions about the way in which self-disclosure has been examined in criminal justice research and highlights the different ways in which self-disclosure can be deployed.

There are several key points to take from this review of the literature. Firstly, self-disclosure is considered a key therapeutic skill in the fields of social work, counselling and psychotherapy, it takes many forms and is used to achieve different aims. Secondly, there appears to be an assumption in research that has examined the use of skills in criminal justice that self-disclosure is potentially useful, but the evidence is not particularly strong, and methodologically weaker. Thirdly, the reason for this may be the overly simplistic way in which self-disclosure has been coded and measured in research which seeks to count the number of times a skill is used. The logical next step is to investigate what criminal justice workers self-disclose when working with service users.

### Methods

The literature review raises questions which we have sought to answer in the analysis below:

- What do criminal justice practitioners disclose about themselves when working with offenders and how do they do this?
- What are practitioners attempting to achieve through the use self-disclosure?

In order to answer these questions, the research presented below takes the form of a case study of one criminal justice institution, namely probation services in England and Wales. A case study approach was chosen because it has the potential to provide an 'extensive' and 'in depth' description of the use of self-disclosure by practitioners in a real-life context (Yin, 2013: 4). Whilst this means the findings are not generalisable to other criminal justice institutions or jurisdictions, the data are sufficiently detailed so as to enable the beginnings of a deeper understanding of self-disclosure which might be examined in other contexts.

After carrying out a pilot study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with probation practitioners in both the National Probation Service (NPS) and a Community Rehabilitation Centre (CRC) in England. The NPS in England and Wales is a public body responsible for supervising high risk offenders whilst CRCs are private entities that supervise low and medium risk offenders.<sup>i</sup> We used a purposive sampling technique with the only criterion being that participants worked as probation practitioners in either institution. We gained approval for the research from the National Research Committee of the National Offender Management Service. Practitioners were invited to take part by responding to an advert sent out on our behalf by research officers and managers in their respective organisations. The interviews were conducted at the participant's place of work and lasted, on average, one hour. We interviewed 24 people in total: 18 from the NPS and 6 from a CRC. 22 were probation officers (POs) and 2 were Probation Service Officers<sup>ii</sup> (PSOs). Experience ranged from 6 months to 29 years and participants' ages ranged from 30 to 64. All except one described themselves as white British with the remaining participant describing their ethnicity as mixed. The sample was self-selecting and so there is the potential for skewed data as those who had something to say would have been more likely to volunteer.

The interviews were fully transcribed and the researchers then spent time familiarising themselves with the data. It became clear during this process that self-disclosure had been discussed by a significant proportion of the participants and a decision was taken to explore this in a more systematic manner by a member of the research team. The subsequent analysis sought to uncover the key themes related to self-disclosure that were present in the interview data and can be most accurately described as a process of thematic analysis. The first stage of analysis involved identifying every instance a participant discussed some form of self-disclosure. The second stage of analysis broke these examples down into sub-types with a focus on the form that the self-disclosure took (using Murphy and Ord's (2013) typology). The aim of this stage of analysis was to answer the first research question: what and how do probation practitioners self-disclose. The next stage of analysis sought to identify the aims of self-disclosure to identify coherent patterns which could be used to answer the second research question posed above. The analysis produced distinct ways in which self-disclosure is used in probation practice: the therapeutic use of self-disclosure, the correctional use of self-disclosure and the risk focused use of self-disclosure. These themes are discussed in more detail in the next section.

## Findings

### Self-disclosure as a therapeutic tool

This theme bore most resemblance to the literature on self-disclosure in the fields of counselling, psychotherapy and social work. Participants said that they used self-disclosure to develop what Rogers (1951) might have termed the 'therapeutic alliance' but what contemporary probation officers would describe as a professional relationship. Self-disclosure is used to build rapport and develop an effective client-officer relationship:

**PARTICIPANT:** You have to get along with people and have an understanding of where- it's about honesty, it's about being very honest and

having integrity and saying you know "we have to work together at some point you're going to be released you know, I don't want you to get into trouble again and I don't want anybody to be harmed what do you think about that? what do you want?" ... And if you can find something, some common ground you can hopefully take it from there. (NPS17)<sup>iii</sup>

The idea that the professional relationship is enhanced by finding some 'common ground' between themselves and the client occurred frequently in our discussions with participants. Moreover, it was used to demonstrate how they made a connection with their clients which, in turn, they argued, would create trust.

**INTERVIEWER:** You said just before that you've got to show people that you're human, how do you do that?...

**PARTICIPANT:** ... not giving too much away about yourself as well but at the same time letting them know that you know shit does happen to everybody, you know you're not on your own in facing a problem you know. So quite often I'll say like generic things, like you know "you'd be surprised about workers ... that have maybe experienced something similar to you but you know it's how you deal with it that counts" ... or sometimes it might call for that like to be really open and honest, say if somebody's lost a family member but maybe going "do you know what yeah it was really crappy when my grandma died , too, you know it's horrible and it takes a while to just-" ... I think, you know, you've got to give a little bit to get a bit back as well. (NPS21)

**INTERVIEWER:** So you're saying that you, your self-awareness, presumably in relation to your mum [who had a mental health illness] ... do you ever share that with clients?

**PARTICIPANT:** yeah I sometimes do... in order for them to respect me, sometimes, that I have a deep understanding of mental health, personal views on mental health, albeit not my own, I do think that helps with quite a number of my clients because when they're discussing something with us and I get it...

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, and that helps to build that professional relationships?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I suppose it does, it's never had the opposite effect, let's put it that way. (CRC2)

It is interesting to note that participants described more 'there and then' (Knight, 2012) disclosures when discussing self-disclosure as means of creating a professional relationship. This was seen to be key in terms of conveying a sense of authenticity to their clients:

**PARTICIPANT:** ...it's about demonstrating my realness as well, do you know... I think the one thing with offenders is, if you were in the room with them and you were being fake and you're not being your genuine self, you'll get caught out. (NPS10)

Moreover, such forms of self-disclosure were seen to put the client and officer on a (more) level footing which, they argued, might lead to a more dialogic and less inquisitorial supervision session:

**INTERVIEWER:** ... you're kind of talking about how you disclose your feelings and be honest with someone- why do you think that's helpful?

**PARTICIPANT:** Because I think they then see you on some sort of level footing, there's you know, there's not this "he knows everything, he's above me, he's superior, he's gonna judge me, if I say something he's gonna come

down on me like a ton of bricks." ... that makes people maybe not feel so vulnerable and open to attack or challenge, it then becomes more of a constructive conversation than accusations and interrogation demanding answer you know "why have you done this?" ... it becomes a two-way conversation and an exchanging of ideas. (NPS8)

The final therapeutic use of self-disclosure revolved around the use of empathy. We have written elsewhere about the role of empathy as an effective skill in probation (XXXX) and Trotter (2013) has discussed the importance of empathy in terms of developing professional relationships in probation using data from a separate study. Participants talked explicitly about how they go about conveying that empathy and the importance of bringing authentic experiences into the interaction. This can be done through both 'here and now' and 'there and then' disclosures:

**PARTICIPANT:** we can all remember feeling maybe low or bullied or something from our own lives ... and families have divorced or social circumstances maybe you didn't achieve at school or we got into a bit of trouble or, so we can all kind of I think we've all got sort of those different experiences to bear and I think that's how you, you know you kind of you click into those, those feelings and those, your own background to be able to say: "well, you know it wasn't always easy for me either but you know look at, this is how you do it, this is -." (NPS18)

**PARTICIPANT:** ....because I guess for your own enjoyment of the job and well-being, if you were constantly breaching and recalling people... whereas ... celebrating that somebody has got a job interview or, you know a small, a small success and being genuinely happy for them and showing that

emotion they'll think "oh he's genuinely pleased for me" you know and they might, I might be the only person who believes in them, in their life. (CRC1)

Probation practitioners use self-disclosure to develop a constructive working relationship. In common with other talking therapies this is used to build capacity to influence which, in turn, can be used to initiate and support change. Self-disclosure appeared also to be deployed in order to close the gap between the client and officer, perhaps in a similar way to that envisaged by Arcaya (1978) and Hopkinson and Rex (2003). However, it was not only used in this way and the following section highlights the use of self-disclosure which was more offence focused and with a view to shaping behavior.

#### Self-disclosure as a correctional skill

This section highlights the ways in which self-disclosure is used to focus specifically on criminal justice issues such as criminogenic needs, low levels of self-control and victim awareness. It is distinct from the previous section in that self-disclosure is used here to focus on very specific criminal justice issues and in order to change behavior. Moreover, the use of self-disclosure reflects some changes that have occurred in the broader penal landscape such as the shift from rehabilitation to correctionalism (Raynor and Vanstone, 2007). McNeill (2004: 424) argues that correctionalism involves the management of risk and 'developing skills through (enforced) treatment'. Thus, we have seen the extensive use of cognitive behavioural techniques and approaches such as pro-social modelling which came to the fore in the What Works literature of the 1990s and 2000s.

Participants talk about how self-disclosure is relevant for pro-social modelling which, according to Trotter (2009: 144), involves:

the worker keeping appointments, being punctual, honest and reliable, following up on tasks, respecting other people's feelings ... It involves being



open about problems the worker may have had which are similar to the offenders.

However, self-disclosure is about the 'revealing of something personal' about the therapist and the examples provided by Trotter do not all do this. The final point in the quote from Trotter is the closest to the definition of self-disclosure adopted in this article yet it lacks substance and is more about 'there and then' rather than 'here and now' disclosures. Our participants described, in more depth, the way in which self-disclosure is instrumental in the practice of pro-social modelling with offenders. In the next two quotes, participants describe the way in which they manage emotion to pro-socially model the appropriate use of emotion:

**PARTICIPANT:** ...saying "look, you know you're really upsetting me, you're making me really angry you're saying some really horrible things but I'm not losing my temper with you" and I guess, batting that back to them if you know what I mean and getting them to see that just because someone's horrible to me, doesn't mean you have to lose your temper and smack them

**INTERVIEWER:** so you don't show it to your offenders?

**PARTICIPANT:** I might tell them, occasionally I might [sigh], do you know, it might come out like, in a sigh or "why have you done that?" or but I would, no I wouldn't. I suppose because we're pro social modelling; if I'm losing it, that's not very good for him is it? That just says oh well if people are frustrated it's alright to lose it. (NPS10)

**PARTICIPANT:** Sometimes it's really easy just to say "well I'm angry", or you know we often hear "you're making me angry" or "she made me angry" or you know the guy this morning "triggering my anger". I think I have a really strong belief, anger doesn't just come on its own, there is something building up to it, there is something leading up to it. So if I'm telling a client I'm

angry maybe I'm not managing my emotions very well... in terms of modelling how to manage feeling appropriately. (NPS15)

In both of these examples, the participants believe that the way in which they are managing and displaying emotion demonstrates to the offender appropriate ways of dealing with emotion. Their behaviour illustrates a different way of doing things; a different way of thinking and acting. These examples are acts of self-disclosure in that an emotion is disclosed in order to do pro-social modelling. This, it is worth noting, would not be picked up in research which seeks to count the use of certain skills in correctional practice. Whilst this kind of self-disclosure is unlikely to be unique to criminal justice work, if we start from the argument that so-called cognitive deficits and low levels of self-control are key correlates in the likelihood of offending, we can surmise that such a skill might be effective in this context because the practitioners are using pro-social modelling to develop skills.

A second way in which self-disclosure is used for specific criminal justice ends is through the use of the therapist as a proxy victim in order to enhance an offenders' victim awareness. Garland (2001) has documented the rise of the victim in the broader penal landscape. In probation this macro shift has manifested in terms of a much greater emphasis on individual offenders' levels of victim awareness and empathy. However, in the absence of any meaningful engagement in some form of restorative justice process, much victim awareness is carried out in an abstract manner (see Burrows 2013). Our participants described how they used themselves in order to enhance their offenders' levels of victim awareness:

**PARTICIPANT:** I'd sort of give it back to them and say "what do you think about that? Because ... if your behaviour is having that impact on me what do you think, how do you think it's having impact on other people within your life?" (NPS7)

The third example of the use of self-disclosure that is criminal justice specific concerns challenging inappropriate behaviour. Whilst this was only discussed by two participants, it demands attention. One participant discussed the way in which he used negative emotion (in this case, anger) to challenge offenders' own use of emotion:

**PARTICIPANT:** Sometimes on the odd occasion I have to meet anger head-on, with anger ... the ones that I've used it on thankfully, it's worked quite well because they never expected me to get angry, "well you can't get angry at me." "Why can't I get angry at you?" "Well you're a probation officer." "So what I'm still a human being. Actually what you've said to me has made me really angry. I'm really disgusted at that name you just called me. What makes you think that you have permission to, you know, talk to me like that." (NPS21)

Interestingly, in this example, the participant uses their own emotion to challenge behaviour but also to demonstrate the officer's humanity: 'I'm still a human being'. Therefore, self-disclosure can be used to achieve different aims simultaneously: to shape behaviour and work correctionally - with a very specific focus on criminogenic risk and need - whilst also working to enhance the practitioner's authenticity.

#### Risk focused use of self-disclosure

As well as being deployed in order to shape behaviour and instil skills through the use of pro-social modelling, self-disclosure appeared to be a useful skill with which to elicit information from people about the risk they pose. This reflects another element of correctionalism, that of risk management. In a similar vein to the way in which police officers use self-disclosure to elicit information from suspects, probation officers use it to assess risk:

**PARTICIPANT:** ... I've tried the whole you know, "are you sure?" the whole nicey-nicey, I then tried the "I'm really struggling, I am getting quite frustrated", you know, to try and sort of show that I'm not, instead of saying "I

think you're lying or I think you're talking rubbish or whatever, you know what I mean?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah...

**PARTICIPANT:** But you're trying to ... show that in a more positive way if that makes sense, of sort of saying "look, you know I'm really struggling with this, you know I'm finding it quite frustrating, you know that you're saying this blah-blah-blah." So yeah, I suppose for him I am in those situations I do show the emotion to try and get it across that I'm struggling I don't know why, you know...

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah and that sounds like a kind of decision to show that emotion in a kind of tactical sense to show that you're kind of not really buying what he's saying in some ways if that's fair to say?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah... (NPS12)

In this example, the participant describes the way in which he discloses his own emotion in order to demonstrate the fact that he was suspicious of the offender's explanations of an incident - this was a tactical attempt to encourage the offender to be honest about what had happened. Here, we can see the emphasis on risk management that has been identified in much criminal justice policy and research over recent years (Kemshall, 2003). Moreover, we can see how a skill which, traditionally, was very client focused has arguably been appropriated by an institution to meet the purposes of the general public over and above the needs of an offender. Whilst the self-disclosure described here was perhaps 'truthful' it was probably not truthful in the way that Hopkinson and Rex (2003) envisaged.

The final use of self-disclosure is also related to recent correctional shifts in penal policy and is about the way in which self-disclosure can be used to control offenders:

**PARTICIPANT:** a lot of it is body language I would say, I tend to use body language an awful lot and tone of voice ... MY mother was very, very, very good at controlling us without having to raise a hand. (NPS21)

This participant's account reflects the way in which probation practitioners in England and Wales have had to take on a more controlling role over recent years. These are not the actions of someone who is 'befriending' a probationer; rather they are someone who has authority over how that person acts. This form of self-disclosure is neither about improving the professional relationship nor about shaping the behavior of the client. Rather, it is an imposition of power upon the client and starkly demonstrates the power differential between the practitioner and the client. This section has demonstrated the ways in which self-disclosure has been appropriated to serve not only the interests of the clients in the officer-offender relationship but also those of the general public.

### Conclusion

This article has examined the use of self-disclosure in probation practice through the rigorous analysis of interview data that were collected with 24 probation practitioners in England and Wales. Whilst the research was small in scale the findings presented above have some important ramifications for future research, policy and training. As noted above the interviews were conducted as part of a study into the use of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) in probation practice and self-disclosure emerged as one of the central aspects of practice which require the management of emotion. Thus, disclosures of emotion are, perhaps, over-represented in the examples provided below. In spite of this, participants provided such a range of examples of self-disclosure that we are confident that the data are not so skewed as to be unhelpful. Moreover we can use the lens of emotional labour to shed more light on our findings.

Emotional labour is about how people have to manage their emotions in order to achieve the goals of the organisation (Hochschild, 1983). We can see, in the examples provided above, that practitioners in this study use and manage their emotions to achieve the goals of probation in England and Wales: reducing reoffending, public protection and punishment. Emotional Labour is the act of conforming to the 'feeling rules' of the organisation to achieve organisational goals (see Ashforth and Tomiuk 2000). These 'feeling rules' are described as 'what guides emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges' (Hochschild 1983: 56). Thus, the use of self-disclosure reveals the emotion work which, in turn, helps to define probation's own 'feeling rules,' values, occupational culture and the identity of the profession.

Values are the particular types of 'beliefs that people hold about what is regarded as worthy or valuable' (Banks, 2012: 7). The values, or occupational feeling rules, of probation workers are revealed in the use of emotion. For example, NPS 21 uses empathy in self-disclosure as a therapeutic tool to 'give a bit back,' while NPS 10 describes the need to model an emotional response that is not aggressive to promote behaviour change as a correctional skill and NPS 12's authentic display of emotion challenges behaviour constructively to manage risk to the public. These emotional displays reveal something of the underpinning values and 'feeling rules' of the organisation to show compassion, support positive change and a sense of duty to protect the public. The intersection of therapeutic and correctional forms of self-disclosure and 'emotion work' (see Banks 2016) makes visible the sui generis nature of probation work and identity of probation workers. The manifestation of self-disclosure in the current context represents the identity of the workers as an historical amalgam of social work, counselling, psychotherapy and adaptation to the penal-welfare context.

Self-disclosure helps to identify offenders' needs, and initiate and support change through the creation of the therapeutic alliance. It also serves the broader function of criminal justice work: that of risk assessment and management, and public protection. Importantly, our analysis highlights the complex nature of self-disclosure which has, hitherto, been neglected in criminal justice literature. It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that the correlation between the use of self-disclosure and 'effective' practice is weak if the independent variable is so poorly defined. Thus, the first implication of our research is around research. There are two ways in which this can be taken forward: firstly, the studies which utilise checklists in order to assess the strength of correlations between the use of a skill and its effectiveness should incorporate a more nuanced definition of self-disclosure into their inventories. Studies such as the JS3 (Vanstone and Raynor, 2012) and STICS (Bonta et al., 2010) have the capability to shed considerable light on whether self-disclosure can be used to reduce reoffending but this is unlikely to be uncovered unless there is an acknowledgement, built into the research design, that it is a skill which cuts many ways. The research tools should allow for the recording of context: for example, has self-disclosure been used, and was it relevant to the context? They should also acknowledge that deciding not to self-disclose can be an example of good practice. Thus, future research which attempts to capture and measure the use of self-disclosure should move beyond a simple tick-box approach. Considering we have argued that self-disclosure can be used to various ends, research would do well to start with this. Thus, research could attempt to consider the aims of an act of self-disclosure within the framework set out above: therapeutic, correctional or risk management. This would require the recording of the content of an act of disclosure over and above the fact of disclosure.

In addition to this, the researcher should consider whether 1) any observed use of self-disclosure might have been appropriate and 2) whether a possible opportunity for using self-disclosure may have been missed. This might involve, for example, considering how the act

of self-disclosure was received by the offender. This could be achieved by looking at their physical responses (such as facial expressions), or by listening to and recording their verbal responses. However, there are additional challenges here. Firstly, the researcher needs to know what the practitioner may be able to disclose and, secondly, they need to be trained to understand situations in which self-disclosure may or may not be appropriate. Such a decision might be based upon Schwartz's acronym 'WAIT' to discern the appropriateness of an act of self-disclosure. WAIT stands for 'why am I telling?' and can work to make a person think through the purpose of an act of self-disclosure in order to consider its appropriateness, bearing in mind a set of rules which are relevant to the context (Sadighim, 2014). However, in criminal justice, such a set of rules does not exist and so all of this, we would argue, requires considerably more work to be done. One response to these challenges might be research which is co-produced by the practitioner and researcher whereby practitioners themselves are given the opportunity to reflect, after the fact, on whether their use or avoidance of self-disclosure was appropriate, or not. However, there is still a missing perspective: that of the offender themselves. As Gibson (2012: 288) highlights:

One of the challenges of self-disclosure is the very unpredictability implied in determining what another person may or may not want to know, and what the effects of this information might be.

There appears to be an assumption that, if used judiciously, self-disclosure can be a powerful tool in the probation officer's armoury. However, we know nothing about how offenders receive such information: do they want to know that their officer has experienced similar hardships, or is this seen as condescending? Do they believe acts of self-disclosure which are intended to convey authenticity, or can they see through them? Thus, we would argue that more research needs to be done with offenders. This might be done through observational research whereby an interaction between an offender and practitioner is



observed and then discussed by the researcher. As well as shedding light on the effect of self-disclosure on offenders, such an approach would also give valuable insight into when self-disclosure is, or is not, appropriate which could then, in turn, feed into inventory type research as discussed above. An alternative approach would be an adaptation of that taken by Cayanus and Martin (2004) which asked college students to assess the amount of self-disclosure used by their instructors as well as measured the students' perceptions of their instructor. Such an approach in criminal justice might ask offenders to use a scale to measure the extent of self-disclosure used by their officer followed by questions which seek to measure perceptions of their officer, their sentence and consider offending behaviour.

There is also the need to consider the effects of self-disclosure on the practitioners themselves. We know that self-disclosure needs to be appropriate - that if it takes the focus away from the offender then it risks no longer serving the purposes of the therapeutic relationship and that the risk of counter-transference is present. Moreover, participants said that self-disclosure introduces risk to their practice and that they were making themselves vulnerable by using this skill. Self-disclosure does not feature in the training for probation officers in England and Wales, nor did it feature in the SEEDS programme, an evidence-based programme of offender engagement that was piloted in England and Wales between 2009 and 2012. We must question whether staff are truly equipped to use this skill safely and effectively. This is particularly relevant when considering the recruitment of peer mentors whose expertise is based on experience as their ability to self-disclose effectively is paramount to the way in which they approach the job.

Finally, our analysis can be seen as a useful tool with which to examine practice in a particular institution and/or jurisdiction. In addition to our focus on a specific skill, we can discern something about what it means to be a probation practitioner in England and Wales. They were keen to develop a therapeutic alliance with their clients: the welfare element of

probation's history is still very much present, despite it becoming increasingly maligned in politics and policy over recent years. Thus, probation practitioners use self-disclosure to rehabilitate, manage risk and protect the public. Despite the fact that self-disclosure has disappeared from policy and research in recent years, its use has persisted - why and how this has happened represents a useful avenue for future research which might shed light on how professional cultures and practices persist. Criminal justice agencies have undergone many reforms over recent years and it would be an interesting exercise to compare the use of skills (be that self-disclosure or other skills) in order to ascertain differences between institutions. A similar approach might also be taken across jurisdictions. Comparative research in probation has proven to be particularly difficult (Robinson and Svensson, 2015) and it is possible that honing in on a particular skill might provide a useful method with which to compare practice across different countries and cultures.

To conclude, this article has argued that self-disclosure, an important skill in the fields of social work and counselling, has been neglected in the context of criminal justice. The article has used interview data to complicate our understanding of what forms self-disclosure takes, and what it is used for. This, we have argued, has ramifications for both research and policy. Should further research be undertaken in this area then our chances of reducing reoffending yet further through one-to-one criminal justice interventions could be strengthened.

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<sup>i</sup> This is a relatively new arrangement in England and Wales with the new organisations coming into being in 2014, several months before the research took place. For a detailed analysis of these reforms, see Burke and Collett (2016)

<sup>ii</sup> PSOs are probation practitioners who do not supervise high risk offenders.

<sup>iii</sup> All quotes have been anonymised. The codes denote the organisation for whom the participant worked (i.e. NPS or a CRC)

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