

## Exploring the concepts of recognition and shame for social work

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### Abstract

Recognition and shame are both concepts that potentially offer social workers a structure to build practice on; two states experienced by both social workers and service users. 'Recognition', within social, political and economic thought, has been established as a field in which inequality and exclusion can be analyzed. Social work theorists have also made inroads into exploring its reach. 'Shame' in twentieth century and contemporary sociological and psychoanalytical accounts, is understood as a force in limiting human agency, well-being and capacity. This paper briefly outlines some of the defining ideas in circulation in relation to recognition and shame, and then briefly considers how psychoanalytical and contemporary social structural analysis builds on this, making links to contemporary social work thinking throughout. The paper also specifically considers some of the uses of recognition and shame for thinking about social worker and service user 'well-being', and the connections, through both the relational and the socio-political, which inflect social work practice.

**Key words:** recognition, shame, psychosocial, psychoanalysis, structure.

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## **Exploring the concepts of recognition and shame for social work**

### **Introduction**

#### **Shame**

It was like I was embarrassed by my son's behaviour and I was disgusted, thinking if I spoke to anyone they're going to feel 'what a crap mother... Service User

When I see some of the kinds of practices that happen, some of the things that get in the press, I feel deeply ashamed of this profession.

Social Worker

#### **Recognition**

Someone believes in me and like I'm glad she believes in me and I didn't used to believe in myself until she told me I can do it... Service User

Why I think I'm still here today is that kind of feeling of support ...peer to peer stuff...people having an awareness of you or kind of having recognition of what work you are doing and where you are at emotionally. Social Worker

Shame and recognition: concepts which potentially offer social work a theoretical structure through which it can examine the organizational context and the human agents who people it; two states shared by social workers and service users. 'Recognition' is in many ways a contemporary social work concept par excellence. (Honneth (1995) and Fraser's (2003) political, social and economic theories of 'recognition' have secured it as a

field in which e.g. inequality and exclusion can be analyzed. Social work theorists such as Garrett (2010) and Houston (2010; 2015) have also explored its potential for understanding structural and inter-relational issues.

Shame, examined within classic and contemporary symbolic interactionist accounts, e.g. Scheff (1990; 2014) Goffman (1968) Giddens (1991) can be understood as a powerful force in limiting human agency, capacity, and potential. It has had considerable focus within sociology, psychology and psychoanalysis, and is studied as a collective and individual experience. Similarly to recognition, it is emerging as an analytical concept in social work literature (Gibson 2014; Walker 2011).

Here, then, are concepts, through which how people *are* (their ill-being and well-being) can be explored. The paper will firstly outline some classic thinking around the issue of recognition, and highlight where social work can draw on this. It then undertakes a similar discussion of theory for understanding shame, also linked to social work. It continues by examining what psychoanalytical theory can contribute towards understanding elements of recognition and then considers contemporary work on shame through the lens of social structural and socio/political approaches. This also foregrounds notions of power and identities. The relevance of shame and recognition to social work is highlighted throughout the paper, and the final section specifically discusses how these ideas can inform a clearer understanding of social worker and service user struggles (sometimes not dissimilar) in these areas, and to relational practice. Experiencing shame and (mis) recognition can undermine agency and dis-empower the subject.

Recognition and shame perspectives seem to offer the potential to construct a theoretical framework which could support practices of enhancing the one to reduce the other.

### **Recognition: ideas from philosophy and politic theory**

The German philosopher and political theorist Axel Honneth's account, advanced seminally in 'The struggle for recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts' (1949/1995) draws on the enlightenment philosopher Hegel, twentieth century theorist of socialisation Herbert Mead and psychoanalyst Winnicott (see below), and is the classic bedrock of recognition theory. To summarise: Honneth suggests that the basis for human well-being is being recognised, in three important senses which align, loosely, to self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. People need to be recognised, he argues, firstly, at an individual level, receiving appropriate care and love: the fundamental level from which other forms of recognition stem (its absence being highly significant). Secondly, in relation to the state (social and political rights): being full citizens, (being included in decision making, perhaps) being accorded respect. And finally, in relation to the individual's specific qualities skills and/or talents, amongst their 'communities of value'. Esteem is linked to the person's esteem within the group and the value of the 'group' to the society as a whole (e.g. 'communities of value') (Honneth 1995).

Even in this brief formulation of Honneth's basic structure for considering recognition it seems evident that it offers a perspective which is humane, wise, interdisciplinary, and potentially useful for an applied approach to

people's struggles and suffering. One might ask in social work, for example, 'whether/how this person is being recognised? Are they receiving love and affection? Rights and respect? Are they in some kind of community that appreciates what they do? Where might any of these lacks be resourced or their presence be validated?

Nancy Fraser, in contrast to and critical of Honneth, is a contemporary feminist and political economist, writing a mainly socio-political analysis of recognition theory with less overt focus on individual ill-being. She is her best summarist, and her language gives a powerful flavour of 'misrecognition':

To be misrecognized... is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life –not as a consequence of distributive inequality ... but rather as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. When such patterns of disrespect and disesteem are institutionalized- for example in law, social welfare, medicine, and/or popular culture- they impede parity of participation, just as surely as do distributive inequalities. (2013, p.176-7)

...misrecognition is an institutionalized social relation, not a psychological state. In essence [it is] a status injury... (ibid. p.177).

Fraser is concerned with structural power and the destructive capacity of institutions and the discourses they circulate, to constitute subjects as

unworthy and lesser. This seems to entirely reflect the reality of many contemporary social work service users who are constituted as lesser in multiple discourses - as inadequate, scroungers, dependents- and certainly misrecognised in Fraser's sense.

However, in places it is hard to recognise an experiencing subject in Fraser's account. Understood psychosocially 'status injury' must *also* be a psychological state. Fanon's post-colonial, highly personal work, for example, would refute Fraser:

...I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism [sic], racial defects, slave- ships. . . . I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object (1967, p. 111).

This is a powerful evocation of how misrecognising discourses are forced into individuals' psyche and damage the self. Self-objectification is one result. Shame may be another. The notion that misrecognition results in internal damage to the self underscores how recognition offers a way of approaching shame. Honneth is clear, for example, that 'diminished self-respect' links into the experience of social shame (1995). The paper now offers a brief outline of core theory for understanding shame.

### **Shame: symbolic interactionist and psychotherapeutic accounts**

Shame has been the subject of considerable social science attention for at least 2 generations. From a varied body of work the common ground that emerges seems to be that shame impacts on identity, agency, motivation and life outcomes. It has been seen as the most social of emotions and the most hidden and 'un-speakable'. Definitions vary, but this seems to

capture the (relational) strength of it: 'shame is the visceral experience of being shunned and expelled from human connectedness' (Walker, 2011, 452). Whether it is the same as embarrassment, mortification, humiliation, etc is a source of contention. It seems most helpful for thinking psychosocially and for practice to accept that all of these involve similar hurts and damages, hence Scheff's notion of 'a family' of concepts is adopted in this paper.

A substantial body of work from the 1950s onwards, (notably that of Scheff) focuses on the social nature of the experience of shame. Scheff himself offers a definitive intellectual history (Scheff 2000; 2014), showing how early 20<sup>th</sup> century thinking (e.g. Cooley, (1902 below)) underpin more recent psychoanalytically-oriented work on the subject, from e.g. Lewis (1971) and Lynd (1958 below).

The essentially social nature of shame is emphasised across a range of conceptualisations of the 'social'. Scheff uses the frame work of modernity's socio-political states - particularly alienation - to consider how shame is perpetuated through complex pervasive social systems. For example, as traditional/rural society gives way to the 'dehumanisation' of the city's new complex worlds, the social bonds between people decrease, the 'known-ness' of each individual almost disappears, and the potential of the judgement of 'the other' ubiquitous and rapid.

Scheff also draws on work such as Sennett and Cobb's on 'The hidden injuries of class' (1973), linking the notion of shame to social structural inequality and underlining the experience of hurt for those demeaned within class systems (see below). However that shame is also inextricable

from actual and potential interpersonal relationships is also fundamental. Cooley, for example, proposed the idea of a 'looking glass self' to explore how shame arises inter-relationally through how people imagine they must seem to others, and how they imagine what judgments the other is making of them, and the feelings this arouses in them. In other words, judging themselves through assumptions of the others 'eyes' (1902). Social psychologists such as Goffman build on shame and (relational) identity, both how we are perceived, as argued in, e.g., 'Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1959), and where self-definition is undermined or limited by the (negative) definitions of others (in 'Stigma' 1968 and 'Asylums' 1968). The latter two texts, like Scheff and Sennett's work, also concern themselves with the wider question of how groups of people are ascribed subaltern identities and suffer shame as a consequence: ideas of considerable consequence in social work understanding.

Shame has also more recently been a source of interest to symbolic interactionists such as Giddens who situate their work on identity in the 'new' epoch of late-modernity. Giddens builds on Goffman and Scheff, and offers a synthesized psychosocial account, framed within his thesis of the ontological insecurity (rather than Scheff's 'alienation') of late modern identities, and post modern narrative understandings of identity (1991).

'Shame', Giddens suggests

is a negative side of the motivational system of the agent. The other side is pride or self esteem: confidence in the integrity and value of the narrative of self-identity (1991, p. 66).



Shame becomes part of who people are and how they can be: their reflexive narratives of self, where shame feeds-back into shame. Shame is serious identity damage, which can be exacerbated, and perhaps also ameliorated under certain conditions: trust based on being known by another, and in relation to self revelation and exposure you can really be seen, and still be esteemed.

As with Fraser's 'misrecognition', shame is a fundamental experience for many social work service users. Even simply having contact with a social worker is a source of shame - let alone the nature of the relational, identity and/or social structural struggles that may have dictated that engagement. Houston's recent work on recognition and shame also acknowledges 'the repressive impact of shame on service users lives' (2015, p. 13), through multiple sources: a climate which constantly defines service users as inferior, so that feeling inadequate – being shamed –becomes internalised as 'ashamed'.

Further work, e.g. from Gibson and Wilson, is concerned with tracing how shame also impacts on social workers. Misrecognition and recognition can be deployed to understand resilience and professional retention problems (below) (Gibson 2014, Walker 2011).

Much of the foundational work on recognition and shame, then, has explored the socially located subject experiencing the damaging impact of these social relations, at both an interpersonal and social structural level. Social work has these concerns at its core. However psychoanalytic, sociological and psychosocial approaches, inflected with the recent decades' concerns with 'identity politics' are also helpful here. The paper

will now consider some of this work, bringing the ideas into the orbit of both structural/critical social work theory, and to relationship-based perspectives and practices.

### **Understanding shame and recognition psychoanalytically and structurally**

As has been argued elsewhere (e.g. Frost 2008, Trevithick 2008) to understand the complexities of social work and the multitude of subjectivities inscribed therein, theories need to be multidimensional and able to engage with socio/political contexts, social structural oppressions and differences, power, agency, identity and the individual. In psychosocial approaches, this also requires that the individual is understood as having inner landscapes of relational possibilities (objects).

Certainly the contemporary work on recognition and shame dovetails variously with all of these interwoven strands, to create a very rich field. This section will take a psychosocial stance and particularly focus on how shame and recognition connect to the unconscious world and inner self of the individual, and on social structural oppression and damage.

Shame's most obvious conceptual roots are in psychological or psychodynamic explanations. Walker, for example, understands shame in the context of attachment theory, as the result of early childhood experiences of the prolonged/severe rupture of parental attunement (meaning understanding and/or empathy) (2011). Recognition theory, as alluded to above, also draws on object-relations approaches. It is this the

paper will now consider to 'flesh out' the depth and application of these ideas.

### **The relational**

Recognition, named or inferred, is of course fundamental to much psychoanalytical thinking about identities forming, e.g. object relations' theorists' accounts of human development from infancy.

Honneth, writing his initial thesis on recognition in 1949, primarily uses Winnicott, who was probably the most well known of the English 'Independent School' of psychoanalysis in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, combining practice as a child psychoanalyst with writing and broadcasting his accessible ideas on mothering and child development. He was one of the more 'social'/ relational psychoanalysts, arguing that the relationship between the mother (figure) and her baby at the early stages of infancy requires the formation of a deep-rooted sense of trust. On that secure basis, the infant can move from 'other' trust to self-trust, and connected to this, the baby can also develop from dependence, (when this is met by the mother figure) to self-confidence. And also, importantly, she or he develops from having needs (e.g. for nurture) met, and from being 'held in mind' in the attentive concentration of the mother, to being able, to some extent, meet them from their own psychic resources.

These developments are part of the process of maturing, and have profound implications for whether adults can trust, nurture, love and also receive love- or indeed friendship, closeness etc. This same stage also lays down the capacity for shame as a universal experience, as the baby's

sense of omnipotence is revised in the face of experiences of ordinary limitations, small (but not to a little child) failures, gaps in competence, and so on. The toddler learns itself to be vulnerable, dependent and frail, not omnipotent: a basis for shame (Winnicott 1958). Failures, limitations, vulnerability, dependency and frailty: these most shame producing of states become so profoundly built in to the unconscious of individuals that they are both hidden and constantly present, the source of suffering and reflexive damage.

Contemporary psychoanalytical theorist Jessica Benjamin offers additional insight into infant recognition, particularly the need for mutuality and how this provides the unconscious bedrock for later human engagements.

Recognition, Benjamin argues, cannot simply be based on the infant's use of the carer as the fulfiller of their needs. The provider of care must be understood as an equivalent subject, an independent ego. Only then can the mutual necessity of recognition be established: young child to mother/carer and mother to this child. For recognition (of independent subjectivity- but perhaps generalisable to recognition per se) to be possible at all, it requires this mutuality: it must have a recogniser and a recognised, and involve dependence and mutuality.

The paradox is that the child not only needs to achieve independence, but he must be recognized as independent—by the very people on whom he has been most dependent (Benjamin 1988, p. 52–53).

Recognition is not done (or not) to passive subjects, the subject has to do the recognising too. Those very early relations are mirrored in all, including

all caring, later relationships. Social workers do not 'do' recognition to passive service users any more than managers 'do' recognition to passive workers.

This seems useful. Psychoanalytic theory helps us further understand the subject of recognition, and their potential agency within relations of recognition, at an unconscious and pervasive level. Shame too may be part of individual's unconscious affect, and impact on this most social of relations, a point developed more in the final section below. However it is to the social triggers and/or determinants of how such a devastating emotion is brought into play that the paper now turns.

### **Social structural damage**

'Psychologists against austerity', a contemporary radical group who, around the time of the UK election in 2015, produced a briefing paper on the psychological damage that austerity cuts – in benefits, services etc.-perpetrate, list five main areas of damage. To quote:

Austerity policies have damaging psychological costs. Mental health problems are being created in the present, and further problems are being stored for the future. We have identified five 'Austerity Ailments'. These are specific ways in which austerity policies impact on mental health:

1. Humiliation and shame... (McGrath et al. 2015,p. 1)

The first (of five) areas they pick out as the product of austerity policies and Conservative politics, highlights the psychic consequences of social actions, and squarely fore-grounds the political nature of shame. The

questions posed by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century sociologists working with these issues continue to inflect socio-political studies of the causes and impact of shame on people's well-being. How some groups of people – those who are already subject to oppressions and marginalisation within hierarchical consumer capitalist societies- may be structurally shamed, and how this will be experienced at an individual (and also collective) level, as the inner landscapes constructed through difficult infant experiences, described above, make such oppression even more profoundly damaging, is enduringly relevant for social work, social welfare and forms of radical activism. That shame, and its opposite – pride, perhaps, or self-esteem- are unequally distributed, and the relatively powerless are subjected to forms and intensities of humiliation which the privileged in society are cushioned from, and, structurally, inflict through misrecognition, is fundamental to how and where drives for greater social justice could be applied.

That social inequalities produce forms of social damage which are experienced at a personal level has been the theme of a great deal of research over the last decades. It is well-established that fundamental issues such as poorer health (Marmot et al 2010, Black 1982) and mental health (Murali and Oyebode 2007), violence (Gilligan 2001) child abuse (Hooper 2009), relationship breakdown and loneliness (Holt-Lunstad, et al 2010) are far more prevalent in poorer areas and in the most unequal societies (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, Marmot, 2010). The relationship between poverty itself and shame, in societies such as UK, in which success is measured in material goods and social status/capital is based

on consumption, attracts considerable empirical and theoretical analysis (Chase and Walker 2013).

Crime and violence provides an illustration. In Wilkinson and Pickett's 'The Spirit Level', a chapter is called 'Violence- 'gaining respect' (2009). The authors' consider how crime rates are highest in the most unequal societies – people 'at the bottom' are most likely to feel disrespected, looked down on, humiliated, excluded and undervalued: shamed in other words. This is an issue of structural inequality, and these are the cultures in which violence most easily erupts. They cite Gilligan, reinforcing the point that acts of violence may be

attempts to ward off or eliminate the feelings of shame and humiliation – a feeling that is painful or intolerable and overwhelming – and replace it with its opposite, the feeling of pride (Gilligan in Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, p. 133)

Bourdieu's work, e.g. on the social exclusion exacted on children through the class permeated education systems of 'Western' countries, as symbolic violence, and on how people experience forms of social suffering, powerfully analyses the crippling impact of inequalities on being itself (1984, 1999). That forms of social and economic capital are intrinsic elements of well-being in the world is fundamental here, but so too, and this is especially emphasised in later work, are 'the profoundly experienced personal feelings of social marginality and worthlessness at being excluded from these resources' (Tangney and Dearing 2004, p. 20). Research such as Chase and Walker's' exposes the mechanisms through which the politicised, media circulated shaming versions of those in

poverty are generated through discourses of 'scroungers', the 'work shy' benefit 'cheats' and so on, but also the damage these instigate. This is worth quoting in detail:

... interviewees invariably described avoiding social situations which risked exposing their lack of resources; pretending that they were coping better than they were; making out they were working when they were in receipt of benefits; and not admitting to needing help because it would mean a loss of pride or face (Goffman 1967). Such responses led to temporary withdrawal, hiding or pretense at one end of the spectrum, to attempted suicide and permanent social withdrawal at the other, ultimately demonstrating the potential of poverty-related shame to eliminate those who feel unable to measure up to the normative expectations of society (2013, p. 750).

Class and poverty, are crucial social structural factors in shame. So too are other dimensions of inequality such as gender, age and cultural difference. Full personhood in older people may be denied in various ways (Hockey and James 1993). This is also gendered. For women, the invariable loss or delay (depending on resources), of their 'looks', a primary way they are afforded admiration or 'respect' in patriarchal societies, may lead to a wrecked self-esteem and a pervasive sense of shame (De Beauvoir 1970). For women (and men) the changing body-declining strength; declining social approbation- connects to specific and general forms of shame (Woodward 1991). This might also be compounded by e.g. employment practices and other forms of discrimination which exclude and reject older women (Duncan and Loretto



2004).

Gender may also be implicated in relation to men and shame. Jimenez and Walkerdine's recent study of identity at the intersection of class and gender in a South Wales community in which its traditional industry – a steel works- has closed down makes a powerful case (2011). The closure of the works means that the community's young men cannot undertake the traditional masculine employment of the the previous generation of men.- Instead, they must access the available service sector work (like 'retail') that are considered 'feminine' and thus humiliating for the young men and their families. What has been lost is not just the actual industrial base but its formative role in working class masculine identity. For many of the individual young men this is experienced as anxiety, shame and embarrassment that they may be understood as- indeed understand themselves as- doing 'girls' work'.

Class, poverty, gender and culture - social structural divisions and oppression- and the intersections of these, are fundamental to the lived experience of shame, both how it is taken in and how it is lived out. The relational exists in contexts of inequality and sometimes desperation. The capacity to love and esteem others and feel loved and esteemed oneself, the strength to take collective action against forms of oppression: all of this is damaged by unequal power relations and the deprivation these produce, as surely as the psychic inheritance of a, more or less managing, internal world might offer some mitigation. Shame and recognition are profoundly psychosocial issues.

## **Recognition and shame for social work**

The above attempts to demonstrate how recognition and shame are conceptualised, and how these ideas elucidate forms of well-being and ill-being, and can be applied to 'misrecognised' sectors of society, including service users in social work. Given both the psychic and social need for recognition, and the social and psychic generation/impact of shame, these theories seem relevant to the inter-relationships and structural inequalities that are central to the social work field. What also seems evident in this body of work is that many of the fundamental features of shame and recognition can be understood as potentially affecting social workers- any workers perhaps- as well as service users. Struggles with recognition and shame, differential, may be experienced by many groups. Speaking about social workers and service users together makes sense. Certainly there are profound differences in relation to power, resources, life possibilities etc., but the capacity to identify and speak of their shame, and to be recognised, is problematic for everyone.

### **Speaking of shame: surfacing emotion**

Work on 'speaking' – being able to express shame and become recognised- seems fundamental to all forms of self and 'other' help. Shame impacts on social being, by separating individuals from each other and silencing them through fear of denigration and degradation (Nussbaum 2004). Shame is a repressed and disconnecting state, a point also made by Scheff in relation to notions such as alienation and separation. Lynd too, a psychotherapist on whose work Scheff draws,

identifies the deeply hidden though ubiquitous nature of shame. All of this leads to the crucial practice point that expressing this feeling – surfacing acknowledging and working with this - would be the common feature of any relational help, for workers or service users: for people. Lynd, summarises:

The very fact that shame is an isolating experience also means that if one can find ways of sharing and communicating it this communication can bring about particular closeness with other persons (1958 p. 66).

### **Speaking for recognition**

Connolly takes up Nussbaum's argument that it is not in the passive acceptance of recognition by others that social well-being lies, but 'self-realisation, whatever this means, is something we achieve by disclosing aspects of ourselves to others' (Connolly 2014, p. 421). But the importance of speaking out is not just an individualised therapeutic position, but also, in relation to the issue of recognition and misrecognition, the basis of a socio-political strategy, for groups to insist on their own definition of themselves, to reject labels which stigmatise and misrecognise and to assert their identities publically.

Both in the vulnerable private spaces of shame and the public-facing acts of asserting self-recognition, speaking out becomes both formative (of private and public identities) and connective (to single and collective others). This is the essence of applying these concepts within social work, for service users and for social workers: expressing, speaking out loud, connecting.

## **Worker shame and recognition**

The paper has already discussed shame in oppressed groups, who may also be service users. It is also an issue intrinsic to resilience in workers effecting their capacity to undertake sensitive and supportive relational work (see e.g. Browns' work on 'shame resilience' 2006, and Gibson's 2014 systematic review of social worker's shame). As Brown argues in relation to mental health workers: 'Clinicians must do their own shame resilience work before they can ethically and effectively do shame work with clients.' (2011, p. 356). From the perspective of all kinds of relational therapeutic practice, workers need to know what is their own emotion and how to approach it, before they can identify that of others' and approach it. Equally in terms of recognition. Social workers need both recognition from others and also more than just this. They need to assert their versions of their professional identities against the often hostile views of society.. Using Fraser's perspective, it is possible to understand the current denigration of social work in England, as text-book example of 'misrecognition'. The media circulates version of social workers as undeserving of respect, incompetent, useless: the discourses which precisely mirror those used of the service users with whom they work. Individual workers are vilified, on no evidence, even by politicians. The profession is regularly slated (Jones 2014). Ideas of 'inter-professional decision making' are exposed as wishful thinking, if social workers' views fail to coincide with doctors or lawyers, and the weight of inequitable gender and class structures in society (including professions dictates the

reality of how and by whom decisions are made. That social work learns to use tools such as the media itself and recognises and publicises sources of pride, is crucial to actively claim recognition. Otherwise the denigration of their profession, and issues such as not being able to bring about much positive, or prevent much negative, change, may be experienced as failure and therefore accrue shame (Gibson 2014).

### **Service user recognition**

Equally, service users need both to be recognized in all the ways Honneth outlines (above), and to be supported to make opportunities to combat misrecognition (as the 'disability rights' movement has and continues to do, for example). In relation specifically to work with service users, recognition and shame have been applied to social work practices per se. Houston has constructed a thorough taxonomy of the ways in which dimensions of recognition and shame can assist social workers in recognising and formulating service users' distress and struggle, and where, then, to most appropriately focus empowering intervention, within an overall framework of critical social work (2015).

For example, Honneth's second form of recognition (above) –in relation to respecting the rights of others- requires rights-based social work practices, 'which share a common commitment to redress social inequality [and]...to foster social change through transformative practice' (Houston 2015).

Houston's taxonomy translates each form of recognition into social work practices, which seems immensely helpful as a guide to how to work the theory into concrete practices.

## **Service users and shame**

In terms of shame, workers' own experiences of how powerful and degrading a feeling it is, how hard it is to admit and how isolating it can be, forms a good starting point for thinking about closeness and connection, the sense of being cared about, respected and esteemed that may be able to allow a service user to explore the feelings safely. As well as this general picture, acquainting themselves with how identity difference might impact on shame is also fundamental to good practice. Brown found gender differences:

Women reported experiencing shame as a web of layered, competing, and conflicting expectations that insist that they do it all, do it perfectly, and take care of everyone around them while they're doing it. For men, the expectations and messages center on masculinity and what it means to "be a man." ...They reported feeling trapped and confined by a single, suffocating message: Do not be weak.' (2011. p. 358).

Sennett and Cobb's work on class injury suggests an internalization and self-blame/shame for essentially social structural oppression. Other work, cited above on poverty, inequality, age and so on also offers social workers ways of understanding what kinds of life experiences may produce shame and how this might manifest itself. Showing understanding within a caring relationship can allow feelings to be expressed with a reasonable expectation of being understood. This offers hope of

connection, and a lessening of self-blame, shame and fear of being shamed.

### **Mutuality**

The body of theory on recognition and shame, is helpful, then, for understanding how people struggle with personal and professional identities, in the work place and social 'places'. Benjamin's psychoanalytic emphasis on the need for mutuality (above) of recognition also seems to elucidate some of the powerful relational under-tow of dissatisfaction where this is absent: the relational strength in recognition, and considerable relational damage in its lack. Venistendael, whose work with a diverse range of struggling groups, from street children in the vast cities of South America, to residents in an English hospice, strongly underlines the point of the need for recognising *each other*.

...Relationships of acceptance and trust are as important to resilience as friendship and formal and informal support networks. We certainly live in a sometimes hostile climate, with highly conditional, competitive, or indifferent relationships: "You can do whatever you want, I don't care." This indifference is almost worse than a conflict. It is like saying, "You don't exist for me." (2011- online interview).

This is social shaming, certain to make people feel worthless: 'we have no interest in you; you are irrelevant', and the antithesis of recognition. Good practice demands that with service users and colleagues, students and carers, recognition matters and its absence damages.

The substantial body of work on resilience in social workers- both why they stay and why they go- offers additional hints and pointers as to what kinds of relations and needs offer recognition and protect against shame (Frost 2014, Burns and Christie 2013, Grant and Kinman 2012) Some common themes emerge which precisely dove-tail with Honneth's framework.

Firstly, in relation to the need for caring and relationships in social work, Collin's systematic review concluded that colleagues, friends and families were the major source of support for social workers, with managers/supervisors important but given less weight (2008). What might this hint at in work with service users? What kinds of caring relationships do they have to draw on? How might they be enhanced? Rights at work in terms e.g. of employment practices and structures that are fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory are fundamental (Mor Barek et al 2006). Issues such as workers having a say in e.g. decision making as well as personally and collectively being treated with respect are fundamental to this 'rights' aspect of resilience. Again, what might this suggest social workers consider in relation to service users' lives? Are their rights respected, or are they trampled on? How can this be addressed? The need for sources of self-esteem and what contributes to this permeates working life in a variety of ways, and also is heavily implicated in sustaining resilience (see e.g. Venistendael's 'Casita' model of resilience, 2008). For Honneth, at a professional level, this means the worth of what one is doing being acknowledged, valued and appreciated by a 'community of value'. Again, this is transferable knowledge. In what dimensions, and through what systems are service users skills and competence valued? How can this be



supported? Does your salary and career structured suggest you are valued: does theirs? Do you feel shamed by a sense of failure to really change anything much (Gibson 2015)? Do they?

## **Conclusion**

The paper has attempted to argue that the concepts of recognition, as theorised by both Honneth and Fraser, and shame, e.g. as propounded by the symbolic interactionists such as Scheff and Goffman, are of considerable use for understanding how people experience struggle in their social worlds, with reference to social work. It has outlined these ideas, with some critical discussion, and then continued by considering psychoanalytical and social structural approaches to shame and recognition, developing the concepts psychosocially for the social work arena. In the final section the ideas are applied to understanding some service user and social worker struggles, and some ways in which relationships and relationship-based practices can contribute to the reduction of shame and the provision of recognition. One core point here is that the possibilities of shame and the need for recognition may well be ubiquitous, if often disguised.

At a recent conference where recognition and shame were the subject of some formal and informal discussion, the focus moved from service users to social workers to social work academics. How and when people in these roles – the group from which most of the conference delegates were

drawn- feel shamed within their profession and lacking recognition from within their organisations seemed to form a further painful and complex site of psychosocial experience. The possibilities for these ideas of shame and recognition to illuminate the social structural, inter-relational and intrapsychic experiences of people in many kinds of life worlds, and offer potential for reflexive change, seemed evident, and this paper's discussion hopes to support this in some small way.

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