Seeing anew: drawing on a psychosocial approach to consider vulnerability as a virtue for knowing.

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Abstract

Psychosocial thinking has a long association with social work, guiding practitioners to take account of the individual's inner world of emotion and feeling, together with the outer world of relationships and events that serve to create it. Straddling these two interconnected spheres, Social Workers find themselves in a unique position as 'knowers' as they endeavour to make sense of the lives and experiences of others – in much the same way as many social science researchers. This article explores how a psychosocial approach can help develop a reflexive awareness of the self and others, thereby creating opportunities for new ways of seeing. In doing so, it provides an original analysis of how vulnerability might offer space to enhance knowing, where greater ontological consideration is given to unconscious and structural influences that help shape the subject positions of both knowledge seeker and subject. References to social work practice and psychosocial research also help to re-frame the connections between emic and etic standpoints, showing how it is possible to narrow the epistemological distance between the two. In this novel sense, vulnerability is viewed as a virtue for knowing.

Keywords

Psychosocial, Reflexivity, Self-awareness, Social Work, Unconscious, Vulnerability.

Introduction

Psychosocial approaches have been influential in social work and the social sciences, more widely, for many years. Although psychosocial thinking continues to encounter charges that as a subject in its own right it is somewhat incoherent, entailing 'definitional looseness', such ambiguity is perhaps its strength (Redman, 2016, p. 75). Indeed, for social work, as a multi-faceted, largely applied discipline, it is a quality – codified more graciously by Frosh as 'theoretical pluralism' (2003, p. 1551) – that seems well matched. Social work has long been concerned with the inner world of feelings and the external world which serves to produce them. For over half a century it has been its gift to bridge the gap between the two (Winnicott, 1964), to gain an insight into how 'inner' effects 'outer' and 'outer' effects 'inner' and for practitioners to avail themselves with an awareness of patterns of action and reaction, so that they may make compassionate sense of events and relationships, cognizant of another's inner state (Schofield, 1998). It is these connections, the virtually inseparable and dynamic relationship between the self and the external world, that causes every one of us to be a psychosocial being, created and moulded by internal anxieties and desires, together with the discourses and cultural meanings of our external environments (Hollway, 2004). Social work's commitment to emancipation, social justice and care demand that an integrative person-in-environment approach is taken, without it, the dangers of omission, oppression and subjugation are all too clear. Hence, it is evident that what Redman outlines as subjects of significant interest to psychosocial studies – 'the intra-psychic, the intersubjective, the group, social interaction, social system and social structure, together with the ''intimate connections'' between them' (2016, p. 80) – are subjects allied to the concerns of social work.

This article champions a psychosocial approach as a reflexive method for enhancing knowledge of the self and others, of lives and relationships. The reflexive nature of this approach encompasses an interrogative dynamic which seeks to unsettle processes and perceptions involved in knowledge generation, pushing seekers of knowledge, whether it be social work or research practitioners, to look at and actively scrutinise themselves: for individuals to surface and make present the taken for granted, unchallenged and unconscious assumptions and influences that might unwittingly effect their vision and subsequent sense making. In considering what the manifestation of reflexive knowledge might look like, attention is given to the work of Bourdieu (1988, 1990) and Giddens (1987, 1991), along with those closer to social work, such as Fook (1999, 2002) and Heron (2005). Holding the unconscious in view, it is argued that to entertain a state of not knowing, individuals must first put themselves in a position of vulnerability, enabling them to let go of their assured knowledge and to see others free from distorting transferential representations (Shabad, 2017). Liberated, their new knowledge position means they are better placed to build shared understandings that narrow the emic-etic boundary.

A reflexive position: towards self-awareness

What is significant about a psychosocial approach, is that it is both outward looking, in terms of engaging with the subjects of practice and research, and reflexive, in the sense that it also asks the practitioner (or researcher) to apply themselves to analytical scrutiny, recognising that as information becomes comprehensible, it is likely that both the subject and practitioner will, in some way, be effected (Frosh, 2003; Frosh, 2018). An essential part of this entails a continuous questioning, where effort is made to unsettle the processes of knowledge

production, from reviewing the activities undertaken to probing the assumptions that inhere within them. To do this convincingly, involves learning to be 'always suspicious of' what has been produced (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008, p. 350), in much the same way a Social Worker in the field is encouraged to maintain a position of respectful uncertainly, giving themselves space to revise judgements in order to help avoid hastily made and inaccurate decisions (see Taylor & White, 2006). The acknowledgment of assumption and likely mutual effect underscores the reflective blood that runs through psychosocial thinking and emphasises the contingent nature of knowing. This stance not just refutes observer independent understanding, it centrally embraces the connection between the practices of knowledge generation and the 'knowledge', 'truth' or 'reality' that is so produced (see Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). In recognising the reciprocity inherent in the researcher subjecting themselves to the same scrutiny that they bestow on the subjects of their research, it takes further the idea of the double hermeneutic – a phenomena actualised in the way concepts from economics, political theory and sociology 'enter our lives and help redefine them' (Giddens, 1987, p. 21). Drawing on Bourdieu, Frosh and Baraitser describe how reflexivity of this kind requires the researcher to 'keep an honest gaze on what s/he brings to the research process', inclusive of how they might influence the subject's own meaning making, conscious of their respective structural positions and the effect of these structures on the knowledge produced, as understood by both parties (2008, p359).

While it is clear, as Giddens asserts (1987, 1991), that the very essence of the double hermeneutic is reflexive, its form is tied to the reflexivity of response, seated in the relationship between the researcher and an evolving 'subject matter'.   In summary, Giddens argues that the specialist information generated by the social sciences is 'constantly reappropriated by lay actors' (1991, p. 22) and, consequentially, this brings about societal

change, thus changing the nature of individuals as subjects of analysis (1987). Essentially, he offers a reflexive account of societal evolution, explained by a process of absorption – at the centre of which lies a relationship of delayed reciprocity, between the researcher and the researched. That is not to say Giddens feels the 'position of the knower' need not be sought (1987, p. 268), rather that, despite envisioning the self as a reflective project and seeing self-identity as '*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*' (1991, p. 53, original emphasis), there is a distinct difference in focus. What stands out between these two reflexive perspectives, is the stance taken by the researcher in relation to the researched and the level at which they position themselves within the research. Going further than Giddens, Bourdieu actively presses the need to 'objectify objectification', for the researcher to scrutinise their actions and systems of codification employed to make sense of the data before them (1988). Asserting that 'when we act without entirely knowing what we are doing, we make it possible to discover in what we have done something of which we were previously unaware' (1988, p. 7), Bourdieu hints at the way initially unconscious forces can guide action and, for him, it is through self-reflective scrutiny that theoretical understanding is strengthened, it having been liberated from 'distortions' set within the epistemological and social conditions of its making (1990, p. 27).

While it is beyond the aims and scope of this article to dissect these comparisons in any great depth, there are some clear parallels between the works of Giddens and Bourdieu, particularly in terms of their thoughts on reflexivity and the unconscious, as more vividly seen in some of their other contributions (see Akram, 2012). In relation to that which may initially evade conscious thought, Giddens' acknowledgment that there will sometimes be knowledge that is not 'immediately available to discourse' – a recognition he conveys via the notion of 'practical conscious' (1987, p. 63) – is an obvious area of overlap with the sentiment of

Bourdieu. Operating at a 'non-conscious' level, practical conscious references knowledge that 'could not be ''held in mind'' during the course of social activities, since their tacit or taken-for-granted qualities form the essential condition which allows actors to concentrate on tasks at hand' (1991, p. 36); an idea that also mirrors Schön's concept of knowing-in-action, where knowhow is revealed in action and understanding is reliant upon attention to feelings and the active questioning of 'some puzzling, or troubling, or interesting phenomena with which the individual is trying to deal' (1983, p. 50). In offering some useful parameters to help articulate this concept, Giddens describes the state of 'non-conscious' as being 'in a certain sense unconscious' but not in the same way as symbols or repressed cognitions might be, as these forms of cognition 'cannot be translated into discourse without the influence of some distorting mechanism' (1987, p. 63).

Ascertaining what such a 'mechanism' entails, or may entail, is precisely part of what this article is concerned with: if new understandings are to be gained, exploring what can make more visible that which is initially invisible, is essential. Fundamentally, what is sought is an enhanced awareness and this, or more pointedly, self-awareness, is a theme detectable – at times implicitly – throughout what has been discussed so far. Within the psychosocial literature, self-awareness is often talked about in terms of the understanding an individual has of their own subjectivity: for researchers, moreover, for any practitioner involved in knowledge production or sense making, an integral part of illuminating this understanding involves asking questions of themselves which contend with how they understand the power relations of which they are apart, how they position themselves in their practice and how they evaluate the knowledge claims produced (Hollway, 2004). In advocating that a reflexive approach be taken within health care and social work research, Fook (1999) suggests that the social and cultural positioning of the researcher, critically tied to research constructions,

holds emancipatory promise in terms of being able to challenge unjust structures and practices that might otherwise have remained invisible to interrogation. Indeed, one of the first steps in a self-reflective process which is critical in nature is to be able to open up knowledge about one's own identity and location within the prevailing social order, inclusive of considering how one might challenge the systems of power therein (for an enlightening contribution considering the influence of discourses of race, see Heron, 2005). Embodying a seemingly catalytical quality, the importance of self-awareness has long been recognised as essential for social work practice. For example, Ruch (2000), following the psychosocial tradition, notes that the ability to effect change in others asks Social Workers to look at the changes that might be required in their own internal and external worlds, along with examining any resistance provoked by doing so. This is a perspective echoed by Trevithick, who maintains that 'it is difficult for any human being to ''read'' the reactions and behaviour of another human being unless we have some knowledge of who we are and our own behaviour' (2011, p. 404). More recently, Trevithick (2018) draws on ideas from attachment theory and neuroscience to illustrate the importance of self-awareness for understanding relationships, stressing the need for a breadth of relationship experiences, over time, to be considered when reflecting on what shapes us and our responses to others. Her contribution to an understanding the self as a developmental-self, seen in some instances as a multiple-self, resonates with Giddens' conception of the self as a reflexive, work in progress, endeavour, where the individual 'seeks reflectively to forge a self-identity' (1991, p. 129) – common to both, the notion of the self as 'becoming' and environmentally responsive.

Uncovering the unconscious: unsettling the self

Perceiving the self as a state of becoming, combined with nurturing a reflexive stance which sees the individual subjecting themselves to scrutiny and surfacing their own subjectivity, in relation to the environmental context, holds merit when thinking about the development of self-awareness in the critical sense. A psychosocial approach is able to accommodate this type of layered analysis because it is part structural in its orientation and therefore has much to offer when thinking about perception and interpretation – the drive for meaning an 'ingrained' quality (Frosh, 2003, p. 1556). Certainly, without a recognition of how dominant ideologies maintain the subjugation of certain groups (see Brookfield, 2009), or an appreciation of what shapes our views of ourselves as compared to others within unequal societies (see Hoggett, Wilkinson & Beedell, 2013), it would be impossible to even begin to identify our own subject position. Positions that are structured by power relations and made available through discourse (see Heron, 2005), in some way linked to elements of an individual's biography (for example, Fook, 1999). Furthermore, in terms of recognising how relational patterns can develop and influence future behaviours, Trevithick contends that we should work towards knowing 'the default characteristics that make up our internal working models' (2018, p. 1850) so that, in being able to name our own emotional experiences, we are enabled to then be aware of and detect the emotions of others, our ability to do so, seeming honed by some emotions (specifically the aptitude for negative emotional differentiation) more than others (see Erbas, Sels, Ceulemans & Kuppens, 2016). Whether it be the structural power of patriarchy or a previous relationship that casts a shadow over current behaviour, what is apparent is that these potential determinants frequently operate at a level below consciousness. It should come as no surprise then that, in referencing psychoanalysis, a psychosocial approach is unequivocal in its recognition of the unconscious in shaping subjectivity (Frosh, 2003) and in influencing external reality. As Redman notes, '[it] is

consequential, not least in the sense it is said to always press on and frequently to interrupt this external reality' (2005, p. 532).

Attending to the unconscious is part of examining the nature of ourselves as subjects. Identifying what he terms the ambiguity of the notion 'subject', Frosh highlights the almost paradoxical character of agency that inheres within it, with the subject being both a centre of agency and action and 'the subject *of* (or subjected *to*) forces operating from elsewhere – whether that be the 'crown', the state, gender, 'race' and class, or the unconscious' (2003, p. 1549, original emphasis). For Frosh, one of the key principles of a psychosocial approach is to examine power and to see the individual (their subject position) as being cast and recast through interactions from outside and within themselves. The investment an individual has in a particular subject position may be driven by a range of motivating factors, each, in some way, affected by culture. These include fear and the desire to conform, with the presence of this vulnerability causing individuals to retreat from non-hegemonic positions (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2003) – as seen in research where boys eschew masculinities perceived as feminine or effeminate (Phoenix & Frosh, 2001; Redman, 2005) – to more benevolent motivations, for instance, to be an anti-racist, non-discriminatory, practitioner (Heron, 2005). Forming part of our identity, such investments often require work, even if a comprehensive understanding of the motivating factors behind them remains a little opaque. In the examples provided here, it is evident that there has been some level of conscious choice and/or effort employed in the formation and expression of an identity, yet such consciousness is not guaranteed. There are many occasions where identification of what influences one's position goes unnoticed or evades consideration – where structural factors, operating at an unconscious level, escape interrogation; for example, the internalisation of a racialised world view (Heron, 2005) or the development of welfare resentment (Hoggett et al., 2013). If

subject positions become static and unquestioned, it is likely that our actions and reactions will become unconsciously repetitive and self-perpetuating.   In psychoanalytical terms, individuals may become 'defended' subjects, their dynamic unconscious defending against anxiety, influencing actions and therefore lives (see Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The utilisation of defences, including repression, splitting and denial, intended to protect the individual from an awareness of 'thoughts, feelings, memories or actions' which might cause psychological distress (Trevithick, 2011, p. 392). To what extent then do unconscious processes play in hindering an individual's ability to see and to know? Could they limit, for example, the ability of the practitioner, heavily invested in an anti-racist, anti-oppressive position, to acknowledge their practice may have fallen short (see Heron, 2005)? If so, what remedial action might be helpful in order to unpick the understandings behind these positions?

Once again, drawing on inspiration from psychoanalysis to help answer such questions, Frosh calls for situations to be 'unsettled' by revealing the 'unconscious elements that feed into them' (2012, p. 58), asking questions about our own subject positions and investment in them, a solid starting point perhaps (see Heron, 2005, p. 349). Stressing the importance that this unsettling be socially critical – and therefore potentially transformative – he asserts, echoing Brookfield's (2009) notion of critical reflection, the need for it to expose power situations that 'rely on the denial of opposition and the pretence that it is necessary to maintain existing patterns of domination' (2012, p. 58). To unsettle is a primary occupation in psychosocial studies, an activity where, as Redman articulates, 'we *put at risk everything we believe* in order to learn something new' (2016, p. 88, original emphasis). To this end, knowledge becomes provisional, it is accepted that versions of reality exist and, most significantly, the understandings we hold of ourselves become questionable. This does not

just apply to views of ourselves or others, as subjects within set temporal spaces, but also to the processes of subjectification – those 'patterns of engagement that occur between ''inner'' and ''outer'' as each of us navigates the social world' (Frosh, 2018, p. 10).   In accepting the position of not knowing, the individual may feel as though they have put themselves in a state of jeopardy, their sense of physical and psychological safety perhaps already felt as vulnerable (see Dore, 2020). For practitioners who encounter distress and danger on a frequent basis, it is not always easy to open up to the critical gaze of reflection and there are occasions when Social Workers consciously act as defended subjects, putting in place emotional firewalls to 'defend themselves as a way of making the work bearable and doable' (Ferguson, 2018, p. 424). So, while reflective, self-scrutinising, questions may hold positive potential, whether it be the generation of a new understanding, a path towards possible emancipation or enhanced self-awareness, they are also invitations to think and feel, fraught with vulnerability.

Vulnerability exists to be embraced

Vulnerability is an existential human feeling, entailing uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure (Brown, 2015) and all of these elements lie at the heart of social work, which, as Brown puts it, is 'all about leaning into the discomfort of ambiguity and uncertainty, and holding open an empathic space so people can find their own way' (p. 8). An ability to do this, in line with what has been discussed so far, requires a value which can help orientate an approach to practice that welcomes singularity and the suspension of expectation – attributes that can been found within the value of acceptance (Dore, 2020). As argued elsewhere, this embodiment of acceptance is not passive, but embracing and inclusive, it champions diversity

and is open to possibility: 'With it comes tolerance and an ability to embrace the unsettledness that accompanies a more open, less imposing and uncertain way of being' (Dore, 2019, p. 379). Viewed as such, acceptance offers a sure-footed starting point for individuals confronted by questions laced with ontological and epistemological contention; those which invite us, as Redman suggests, to put at risk all that we believe, in order to see the world anew. Accepting the limitations, the ever-present fallibilities, of our own understanding and knowledge generating practices, is an essential stance if individuals are to avoid being unduly constrained by taken for granted knowledge or knowledge that becomes passively applied, rather than critically engaged with. Certainly, were an uncritical path to be taken, it would render us 'deaf to the unexpected', 'blind to what is different and strange' (Casement, 2014/1985, p. 4), putting people at risk of being seen as 'prototypes' (Orange, 2010, p. 237), where they become captives to positive knowledge and theories cast as illuminatory. Positive in terms of being, in some way, definitive (see Redman, 2016). If one is to see or contemplate the uniqueness in and of the other, both knowledge and subject need to be met without expectation. To fail in this regard, sets the scene for the pathologisation of the subject and a dismissal of their uniqueness (Orange, 2010), along with any enshrined needs they may have. Efforts to see someone else's subjectivity, to engage with negative form, namely that which 'escapes our knowledge' (Redman, 2016, p. 84), asks that, as seekers of knowledge, as assessors of need, as social work practitioners or therapists leaning into someone else's trauma, we refrain from imposing perception and seek to 'stretch ourselves beyond our mental comfort zones and recognise the difference of other persons in their own subjective right, without transferentially kidnapping and domesticating them as our own object representations' (Shabad, 2017, p. 362). As Shabad goes on to avow, this process necessitates a 'letting go of oneself' (p. 362), it involves a giving up of something, a belief, connection, state of knowing, the list could go on, yet at its core, orbited by all else, is

vulnerability. At its most potent, an attribute serving to guide one's thoughts and actions in a way which enables personal growth, as Shabad and others, such as Brown (2015), suggest.

To not know may provoke discomfort and, for Casement (2014/1985), developing ideas from Bion, the something that is given up involves the relinquishing of desire (to cure or influence), of memory (of what has gone before) and of understanding (in terms of what is theoretically familiar). Simply put, the individuality of the client is put at the centre and the 'distorting influence of theoretical bias' is guarded against by the practitioner asking themselves two crucial questions during their work with the client: ''Is the patient's individuality being respected and preserved, or overlooked and intruded upon?'' and ''Who is putting what into the analytical space, at this moment, and why?'' (p. 22). Throughout the period of engagement, Casement highlights the necessity to see with 'binocular vision'; to hold together knowing and not knowing in creative tension (p. 4); so that the practitioner can be led towards understanding, aided, rather than constricted, by prior theoretical knowledge and a 'familiarity with his own unconscious' (p. 185). An analogous reference to self-awareness is also made by Orange (2010), who notes that part of seeing in new ways entails putting aside, or at least having an awareness of, preconceptions emanating from personal or professional history. In calling for practitioners – analysts in the psychotherapeutic sense of her writing – 'to respect patients' expertise on their own experience' (p. 241), she describes how it is possible to see in a more unique way. In essence, through a process of dialogue and attunement, the practitioner is seen as able to enter the individual's emotional world, getting close enough alongside it so that they may gain an ontological sense of how this world is experienced by them, without appropriating or assimilating it into some sort of off-the-shelf schema. Again, a notion reminiscent of Casement's thinking, emulating his distinction

between '*telling* the patient' and '*finding out with* the patient' (see 2014/1985, p. 186, original emphasis) – the latter being his favoured approach.

As recognised throughout this article, the positioning of the seer is a frequent question in psychosocial research, as it is for social work – both its research and wider practice. With reference to the later, in common with Orange and Casement, Social Workers are encouraged to 'understand alongside' family members and others (Holland, 2011, p. 173), thereby permitting opportunities for change to be built together with service users. Similar too, are some of the more philosophically orientated thoughts, concerned with ethical knowing practices that seek to protect individuals (their singularity) from a perceived unjustness of representation and totalization (Rossiter, 2011) – an example comparable to Shabad's (2017) psychoanalytic insights. In terms of social work and social science research more generally, while debate has concerned how the researcher positions themselves within the research and the possible effects of their own biography upon it (which is where a psychosocial approach has currency) it has also raised questions about who is producing the knowledge and are they best qualified, in the broadest sense of the term, to do so. For instance, questions about whether non-practitioner researchers able to 'sympathetically represent the world of practice'? (see Fook, 2002, p. 92) are not uncommon. Fundamentally, the issue of positioning relates to how close one can get to a position of knowing, where a knowledge claim can be made which reflects, with minimal contamination and maximum transparency, the nature of the subject, the other. Inclusive approaches are helpful to this cause, for example, avoiding a monopolisation of theoretical ideas (Fook, 2002) and constructing interpretations with participants (see Hollway, 2004), methods illustrative of ways to connect, or lessen, the apparent differential that can exist between emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives. Partnerships with participants can offer both practical and ethical utility,

particularly in terms of reducing scope for misrepresentation – a consideration reflected by Olive, who, in discussing co-constructive methods employed during his own research, suggests researchers 'owe it to [their] participants to strive for as near a perfect balance as is possible between the emic and etic perspectives' (2014, para. 35).

Questions of legitimacy of knowledge and its generation are also no stranger to these areas of research (see Fook, 2002), which is where a psychosocial approach has added appeal, as, in seeking to identify what might influence knowing, it affords an increased level of transparency which can accommodate systemic analysis – inclusive, as previously observed, of the themes of power and the stratified nature of social relations that ensue (for example, Frosh, 2012; Heron, 2005; Phoenix & Frosh, 2001 and Redman, 2005). In being open to looking at itself and actively encouraging researchers put their own subject positions under the microscope, it seemingly embraces fallibility and is accepting of the limitations of its own perspective(s), invariably clouded, as they are, by personal experience and 'what we have access to' (Fook, 2002, p. 87). Additionally, it involves a need to stick with the subject, the individual, in the sense of being open to their experience and to allow oneself, as a seeker of experiential knowledge, to become vulnerable and, as Orange (2010) urges, to feel what it is like in the individual's emotional world – to strive to empathetically understand and to see, rather than consume (Dore, 2020), their singularity. In doing this, a psychosocial approach shows itself to be rooted in humility, a trait which gives space to others and to oneself, enabling new perspectives to be seen.

Insider and Outsider coming together

Originally applied to linguistics and anthropology, emic and etic concepts were conceived as a way to enhance the understanding of human activity (Headland, Pike, Harris, 1990), the heart of the distinction between the two – and thus the relevance for this article – resting on the positioning of the researcher. As standpoints for describing behaviour, their conceptual difference has been summarised as follows: 'the etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system, and as an initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system' (Pike, 1971, p. 37).

Pike encourages the analysis of behaviour to move towards emic description, noting the value that this can yield for appreciating culture as a 'working whole' and in understanding the 'attitudes, motivations, interests, responses, conflicts, and personality development' of individuals (1971, p. 41); his conception of emic, an attempt to situate understanding of an individual's behaviour, by means of 'trying to bridge *both* mind and matter, idea and thing, will and act' (1990, p. 35, original emphasis). For others, principally Harris (1976), this stance is seen as somewhat denigratory towards an etic perspective. In rejecting a conversion of etic to emic and emphasising the imperative to account for emic-etic convergence – or otherwise – as part of the analysis, he asserts 'etic analysis is not a stepping stone to the discovery of emic structures, but to the discovery of etic structures' (p. 333). He also highlights the insightful role etics can play when investigating unintended outcomes (such as when intentions do not match social consequences) and in seeking explanations for sociocultural differences and similarities through time (1990). It is not that Pike sees an etic position as, in itself, inferior: rather, there can be seen to be a divergence in opinion with regard to the site where meaning can be made. This is something visible in Pike's advocation that researchers use both etic and emic lenses with which to see. Viewing the same scene from both perspectives would, he believed, result in a ''tri-dimensional understanding' of

human behaviour instead of a 'flat' etic one' (1971, p. 41). What is significant here is not just meaning, but the issue of representation. Of gaining insight and of recognition, in the sense of recognising another's uniqueness in the manner described by Orange (2010) – contingent as it is upon the position of the seer, the person seeking to know.

With etic tied to what is observable and emic to that located within an individual's inner world, at stake, once more, is how to ethically capture and reflect what cannot readily be seen. As in practice, researchers will often use pre-existing knowledge templates, sometimes unwittingly selected, to aid analysis (Olive, 2014) yet often ripe with pitfalls associated with contamination and distortion. Olive provides an example of how this might relate to not just outsider knowledge sources (etic perspectives), but, in relation to his subject position as a 'non-heterosexual' man, to one's own emic perspective. Reflectively, he recalls: 'what I initially considered to be my emic understanding of sexual identity development, in fact, turned out to be an etic perspective, which was erroneously placed upon the young people I was studying' (para. 25). Discussing how he overcame this, Olive documents how participants occupied a dual role of co-researchers, supporting data collection and shaping analytical categories and themes – an approach consistent with Casement's notion of learning from the patient. Not imposing upon, but rather enabling the subject – the person with whom one is seeking to work – are themes present throughout the emic-etic debate, visible in Pike's assertion that emic systems 'are in some sense to be discovered by the analyst, not created by him' (1971, p. 55) and Harris' recognition of the need to base the analysis of other peoples' experience on 'their concepts, not ours' (1976, p. 338). In also acknowledging the difficulty faced by an outsider in producing an analysis that would be 'intelligible and acceptable' to the research subjects themselves (1976, p. 338), Harris indicates the necessity of an ongoing commitment to the realisation of shared understanding. Underpinned by acceptance and

openness to vulnerability, this process should perhaps be conceived of as a reciprocal spiral of sense checking and collaborative learning, the inner and outer worlds of researcher and researched, practitioner and client, brought together in a 'knowing frame' – a site of specific knowledge generation.

Conclusion

The extent to which a knowing frame permits new ways of seeing, hangs upon the actions and orientation of the individual seeking to know, whether they be a practitioner doing social work or a practitioner doing research. More often than not, success will involve a shift in position or an appreciation of one that is new. It may involve surfacing something not consciously engaged with before, because one has never had or needed to think about it before. Drawing on an analogy of riding a bike, which could equally be applied to Giddens' notion of 'practical conscious' or Schön's 'knowing-in-action' (1983), Pike states that an individual may know how to act (possessing culturally specific emic knowhow) but not know how to undertake an analysis of their behaviour. He adds that to use the emics of behaviour one must act like an insider, but to analyse their own actions they must 'learn to analyse like an outsider' (1990, p. 34). In social work, tacit knowledge of the kind associated with riding a bike is likely to be expressed in many of the tasks Social Workers routinely undertake. For instance, the practitioner who is able to calmly contain and sit with a service user's trauma, at the same time as effectively assessing risk, yet finds it hard to fully articulate what they did, or how and why they did it. To enhance their analytical skill, the individual is essentially asked to develop a greater sense of self-awareness, leading them to become reflexively engaged with a process of insider-outsider analysis; a prerequisite for understanding one's

own subject position and that of others (Fook, 1999; Frosh, 2003; Frosh & Baraitser 2008; Heron, 2005) and thus their inner, emotional, worlds (Ruch, 2000; Trevithick, 2011). As new emic insights are established, there is a danger that, if applied without respect or empathetic understanding, they become the short-cut prototypes envisaged by Orange (2010), acting like epistemological constrains when reflective engagement is forgotten (Bourdieu, 1990). Holding on to reflexive practice during quests for knowledge, means putting oneself in a position of vulnerability, of foregoing expectation, so that the puzzles and gaps are given the opportunity to be seen. Knowing, in this context, takes place in a way which is facilitated by the positive structure of things like psychosocial knowledge, theory and research methods (Redman, 2016), yet the door has been opened to seeing and feeling the world anew, where we are not afraid to put at risk what we previously claimed to know – true to the psychosocial spirit. Having availed themselves with a new position from which to see, better equipped to identify their own subject position as well as that of others, the individual – the seer, the person seeking to know – gains a greater insight of the insider looking out, from the perspective of an outsider looking in.

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