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# The Development of Social Work Practice with Lesbians and Gay Men

## Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Published Works

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# Content

## Context Statement

## Appendix

Submissions 1 - 9

.

# The Development of Social Work Practice with Lesbians and Gay Men

# Context Statement

## Introduction

The process involved in deciding to submit my publications for examination for a 'PhD by Published Works' has been a peculiar one. The peculiarity has been the separateness of the two endeavours, namely the writing of the publications and the submission for a PhD. When I wrote each of the submitted publications the idea that they would become part of a PhD submission had not occurred to me. They were publications primarily for practice, with the hoped for intention of improving practice and practice outcomes for service users. They were written during the last ten years during the time that I had entered academia and had become a hybrid academic/practitioner. The 'research' process involved in the publications was inductive; the writing was the culmination of ten years in social work practice as a social worker and as a team leader of a generic team in an inner London social services department during the decade of the 1980s. The writing was a synthesis of my reflections on practice experience and literature reviews, the culmination of which were the submitted publications. The submitted works fall within what Fuller and Petch refer to as "practitioner research" (Fuller and Petch, 1995) and what Buchanan refers to as 'practice experience' (Buchanan, 1999). The publications, at the time, were a record of my practice experience, reflections, contribution to and learning from practice, a way of 'giving back' something to my colleagues and my clients of ten years. However, even though my intentions when writing the publications did not include a PhD, here I am writing my context statement with the pursuit of a PhD as the goal in mind. This has involved considerable reflective critical analysis about the

1

processes and thinking I engaged in, in relation to each publication and the body of work as a whole. It has also involved analysis of myself as the researcher and my part in the creation of 'knowledge'. The 'reflexive journey' involved in this submission has helped me position my work but also to some extent myself and has helped me feel slightly less antagonistically ambivalent to the role of academic.

Why the subject area? Over ten years as a social work practitioner and manager I gathered a wealth of experience particularly within the fields of mental health, child protection, family support, children in public care and fostering and adoption. Since I moved into academia in 1989, my 'practice experience' has been in child protection, children in public care and fostering and adoption. My social work practice since 1989 has involved wide-ranging experience in relation to lesbian and gay carers and young people. This experience built on my time in social services, which entailed a lot of work with lesbian service users due to demographic peculiarities in relation to the geographical location of the social services department. My experience exposed me to the degree of anxiety that homosexuality in combination with social work provoked in social workers, social and health related professionals and agencies as well as the degree of fear and ignorance it aroused to the detriment of outcomes for clients. As a lesbian with my own children and as a then Trade Union activist in relation to lesbian and gay men's rights, I was confronted by what I considered the problematic nature of many of the approaches towards working with lesbians and gay men. The thought that 'there by the grace of god go I', in relation to the quality of intervention that the clients could be subjected to, based on the problematic perceptions of the agencies and workers towards them, was sometimes not far from mind. However it was also my experience that it was possible to offer effective social work interventions and services to lesbians and gay men, when the anxiety was contained and attitudes explored.

On my move to academia I became aware of the paucity of literature in relation to work with lesbians and gay men and was interested in making a contribution towards filling that void. This context statement endeavours to make sense of that 'contribution' and argues that as a whole the publications have made a significant contribution to the knowledge base of social work with lesbians and gay men.

The context statement first critically reviews each of the submitted publications including a brief summary of the content. The ordering and the numbering of the publications differ from that which appeared within my application for registration for a PhD by Published Works. In that application the publications were lettered in groups; those being the book; chapters appearing in edited books and articles. Here the publications are ordered developmentally and are numbered. To help the reader I have numbered the articles, but in my first reference to them I have also given the letter that relates to the lettering given to the publications in the original registration form for this PhD application. The relationships between the publications will be considered within this section. My own development as a researcher over the period of the research is addressed next as well as my relevant biography over the same period, as I am arguing that the researcher as subject has affected, distorted and manufactured the publication outcomes. The statement then moves to consider both the methodological approaches adopted within the publications as well as the research methods used, moving next to consider the limitations of the research. The penultimate section considers the collected work's significance and original contribution to knowledge. The last section argues why the works taken together are equivalent to a PhD thesis route.

## Background, Summary and Critical Review of the Selected Works and Relationships Between Them

To re-read my own work has been difficult enough, but to critically review it has been excruciating. It wasn't until I was undertaking my Masters in Social Work that I was confronted with the fact that I was dyslexic. It was both a relief to 'know' as well as a burden. A burden because I could no longer feign mystification about why I received inconsistent marks, where the marker either chose to 'notice' my 'illiteracy' or not and also that I knew I had to learn to manage 'it'. To read my material is to be reminded that early on I realised that if I was going to be able to convey ideas and thoughts to others I would be limited to what I rather exaggeratingly describe as a writing style where sentences are no more than four words long made up of words of three letters or less. Of course this limitation has also been a strength. Reviewers have often referred to my writing as being 'accessible', 'clear' and 'simple' as a result. But as my oldest child reminds me 'it is possible to be dyslexic and thick', and I am always left wondering which one I am or perhaps both.

Critical reviews have taken on different meanings since the development of 'Critical Reviews' by particular bodies for example the Cochrane Collaboration and the Barnardo's 'What Works' series as well as reviews commissioned by the Department of Health for example the review of foster care research (Berridge, 1997). Such reviews have become an integral part of what is referred to as 'evidence based' knowledge informing practice. I will refer to some of the debates, within the 'methodology' section, on the meaning of research as it relates to 'evidence' and the search for truth and certainty, which is often illuminated via such reviews. I will argue that the current 'obsession' in some quarters of social work academia, research and policy with 'evidence-based'

practice informed by such research reviews is as much to do with an inability to stay with the anxiety and ambiguity of 'not knowing' as it is about improving outcomes for service users. Uncertainty and individual assessment are integral to and difficult aspects of critical social work practice. Although I will return to this in the methodology section I say this as a preamble to reviewing my own work. These publications draw heavily on a range of existing literature; they do not conform to the stringencies of an 'evidence-based' research review method.

To critically review each piece requires an historical contextualisation of the work and the consideration of how the works relate to each other chronologically, epistemologically and biographically. This review of my own work reflects what Hart argues in relation to literature reviews 'all reviews, irrespective of the topic, are written from a particular perspective or standpoint of the reviewer. This perspective often originates from the school of thought, vocation or ideological standpoint in which the reviewer is located' (Hart, 1998:25). This review in line with my methodological stance is subjective. Subjectivity however does not preclude rigour or critical thinking. I have chosen to review some of the publications chronologically, to better reflect the development of thinking and ideas and the relationships between the publications. The exception to this approach is the decision to review submissions 8 'E' and 9 'F' last as they are not directly to do with the subject matter of the PhD title however the ideas within both underpin all the submissions and are integral to them.

*Submission 1 'G'.*

**Brown, H.C. (1991) 'Competent Child-focused Practice: Working with Lesbians and Gay Carers'** *Adoption and Fostering,* **15:2 pp 11-17 ISSN 0308-5759**

This paper was written for the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering's (BAAF) non-refereed journal. I was commissioned by the editor to write it as the

culmination of a number of papers I had given at conferences between 1987 and 1991. It was the first publication in English to appear in relation to the subject matter. The paper arose, as did submission H, directly from a paper I gave to a BAAF conference in 1991 entitled 'Issues of Sexuality and Gender in the Assessment of Prospective Carers'. This was the second non-refereed article I had had published the first having appeared in 1986 (Brown, 1986a) when I was still in practice. Although I had had three book reviews published by this point (Brown, 1984; Brown, 1986b, Brown, 1988) I was still inexperienced as a writer for a public audience. Given this it is interesting that this publication as well as submission 2 'H' have remained two of my most influential publications. This publication has been used widely within social work fostering and adoption teams and I would argue has been influential in relation to the quality of the assessments undertaken with lesbians and gay men. It has also led to my being used as a trainer and a consultant to fostering and adoption teams and agencies, including; Surrey Social Services Department, 1992, National Foster Care Association, 1993, Hackney Social Services Department, 1993, Barnardo's Birmingham, 1994, Hackney SSD, 1994, National Foster Care Association Birmingham, 1996, National Children Homes, Birmingham, 1997, Newham Social Services Department, 1998, Hammersmith and Fulham Social Services Department, 2001.

The article itself is fairly simple and advocates a particular approach to the consideration of the assessment of lesbians and gay men as carers for children in public care. It breaks the preparation for this assessment work down into reflection upon the knowledge, values and skills needed to undertake the work in a competent manner. I argue that this approach will potentially contain the anxiety provoked by the subject. In the article, as in all the publications, I draw on psychodynamic ideas such as 'anxiety' although as yet this is not made explicit. The article, controversially, argues that the assessment of prospective carers should include specific material in relation to the applicant's experience of homophobia and their own sexuality. This meant arguing that the prospective

carer's sexuality should neither be ignored in the assessment nor become the sole focus.

The article starts, as do many of the submitted works, with a section setting the political and social context. This tends to be a recurring theme throughout the publications and clearly comes from what Hart referred to as the author's 'ideological standpoint' (Hart, 1998: 25). I think both historically and politically. I studied history at Teacher's Training College from 1973 (which I sadly did not complete) and Politics and Government from 1977. Both courses affected and developed my thinking, I have remained convinced that it is helpful to locate debates within their historical and political context, to realise the specificity of time and location. The historical and political moment of the article was during the Conservative Party's onslaught on lesbian's and gay men's right to parent. This collided with the development of equal opportunities initiatives in some social services departments, to further lesbian and gay rights. The article addresses the specific areas of knowledge, (which includes a brief review of the relevant research literature of the time) values and skills, and this is another recurring theme within the submissions. The article is simple in its stance and optimistic. It underestimates the difficulty of such a 'behavioural' approach as applying the model advocated to 'contain' such a powerful area of practice anxiety. It omits any discussion of support for foster carers which has become such a key issue in relation to the retention of carers (Triseliotis, Borland, Hill, 2000).

*Submission 2 'H'*

Brown, H.C. (1992) 'Gender, Sex and Sexuality in the Assessment of Prospective Carers' *Adoption and Fostering,* 16:2 pp 30-34 ISSN 0308-5759

*Submission 3 'D'*

Brown, H.C. (1999) 'Gender, Sex and Sexuality in the Assessment of Prospective Carers, in M. Hill (ed) *Signposts in Fostering: Policy, Practice and Research Issues,* London: British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, pp 77-86. ISBN 1-873868-72-3

I have grouped these two submissions together because submission 3 is a direct reproduction of submission 2, which appears in an edited collection. Submission 2 arose from the same BAAF conference paper as submission 1. Submission 2 was selected for the Hill publication (Hill, 1999) as one of the articles appearing in *Adoption and Fostering* over the previous ten years that had been influential.

The article was significant in that it tried to assert the importance of sexuality in the assessment process of all prospective carers. This article pre-dates articulated professional concern in relation to allegations against carers and issues of 'safe care' (Nixon, 2000). Subsequently the importance of the inclusion of sexuality within assessments has been generally accepted but not always acted upon. My article was not written from the perspective of 'safe care', but rather that as an area of human emotion assessors had 'a responsibility to

8

ensure that the carers with whom we are working will have the ability to offer a comfortable framework in which children and young people can develop their sexuality (Brown, 1992b: 30). This was the first article to appear that directly addressed sex and sexuality in the assessment of prospective carers. It draws on the work of Ryburn (1991), arguing that the assessor has to be made visible during the assessment. He argues that 'objective' assessment of prospective carers is a myth, rather that what we should be trying to achieve is making the subjective assessor a visible part of the assessment. This theme is developed in the methodology section within this statement.

The article follows a similar argument to submission 1, that 'anxiety' can be contained through a process of practice intervention preparation. It also makes the point, which recurs in later submissions, that the values of the practitioner impact on their selective use of 'knowledge', a point made again in 1995 by Banks, (1995). The article, like its sister article submission 1, is written for practitioners. However, Hill in his editorial comments in relation to submission 3 saw its significance as being my observation that 'assessment has two interrelated aspects: evaluation of prospective carers' strengths and weaknesses and assessment of the capacity to learn, adapt and change' (Hill, 1999: 65). This 'observation' arose through the reflection on my own fostering and adoption practice as well as my membership of the Social Service Department's fostering panel during the 1980s. The ideas expressed in submissions 1 and 2 had not been published before. On reflection more could have been made of both submissions theoretically, however they were written for a practitioner audience not an academic one, although I admit I am making a false divide.

*Submission 4 'A'*

**Brown, H.C. (1992) 'Lesbians, the State and Social Work Practice', in M. Langan and L. Day, (eds) *Women, Oppression and Social Work: Issues in Anti-discriminatory Practice,* London: Routledge, pp 201-219. ISBN 0-415-07611-0**

Unlike the two previous submissions this one built on an existing radical tradition in social work. It was written within the discourses of the time in relation to anti-discriminatory practice but differed from much of the literature as it repudiated the concept of 'identity politics'. As with the other submissions, it draws on psychodynamic ideas in relation to the significance of the subjective individual: 'To offer a non-discriminatory service to a lesbian it is necessary to understand not only the general character of her oppression, but also to appreciate how she experiences her oppression in her particular situation' (Brown, 1992a: 202). The same year I co-authored an explicitly psychodynamic refereed article (Brown and Pearce, 1992) which looked at work with young women and professional anxiety.

Langan in her editorial comment said I examined 'an issue that has been largely ignored in mainstream, radical and feminist debates on social policy-that of lesbianism' (Langan and Day, 1992:9). My reading differs slightly from this. I argue that there were a number of significant and substantive texts on social work and homosexuality written within the radical social work tradition of the 1970s and early 1980s, more, as it has subsequently become apparent, than within the anti-discriminatory literature of the 1990s. The chapter was significant in relation to social work knowledge on two counts. Firstly it is the only place to my knowledge either in the UK or in America where there has been any writing in relation to child protection issues within lesbian families. Secondly, it bridges the radical social work tradition and the anti-discriminatory practice literature. It was the first publication since 1981 (Hart and Richardson, 1981) that specifically

addressed social work practice with lesbians and the first within the anti-discriminatory practice literature that addressed social work with lesbians.

The chapter was part of an edited collection addressing 'radical' anti-discriminatory social work practice with women. This chapter was more theoretically developed than submissions 1, 2 and 3, and was aimed at practitioners as well as academics. It looked at some of the theoretical influences on social work with lesbians, drawing on sociology and psychology as well as psychoanalysis. It critically examined the 'women and social work' literature and its exclusion of lesbians. The chapter recorded the historical and political contextualisation of the development of lesbian visibility in social work as well as the process and significance of 'coming out' in social work; this latter issue is developed more fully within the book submission. This chapter can be seen as a 'coming out' of lesbians and social work as a valid area of study and practice. The chapter addressed specific areas of practice, child protection and working with older lesbians.

The framework of this chapter was further developed within the book and the other submissions. It involved contextualising the subject matter historically, politically and theoretically before addressing practice issues directly. The chapter was limited in what it could address within the word length but many of the themes were developed in 1998 within the book submission.

### Submission 5 'The Book'

**Brown, H.C. (1998) *Social Work and Sexuality: Working with Lesbians and Gay Men*, Basingstoke: Macmillan. 166 pages. ISBN 0-333-60884-4**

The book received positive reviews both within this country and New Zealand on publication and has been, like submission 4, widely cited since. It remains the only text of its kind in this country, although there have been a number of related

publications since in the UK (Buckley and Head, 2000; Wilton, 2000), but none is equivalent. Two American publications (Mallon, 1998; Van Wormer, Wells, and Boes, 2000) are more similar but cover different areas of practice and are primarily focused on voluntary social work interventions. They are also written from a stance, similar to Kus (1990) (which I later refer to as the 'American School') of which I am theoretically critical within my book. The book built on the work undertaken in submission A and broadened its perspective to include work with gay men.

The book was the first publication in the UK, which comprehensively looked at social work practice with lesbians and gay men. The nearest equivalent remains Hart and Richardson (1981) which was theoretically more sophisticated than mine but with a more limited practice focus. Practice areas within the book have subsequently been developed by others in relation to theoretical understanding and through empirical study, for example Hicks and McDermott, within the field of fostering and adoption (1999). There remains no similar development of my work either relating to the political and historical contextualisation of social work with lesbians and gay men or within child protection.

The book is divided into ten chapters including the introduction and conclusion. The introduction is important as it comments on the implicit methodological stance of the book; the visibility of the reflexive subjective researcher. It also makes explicit that the book is a contribution to 'conversation' it is not seeking to be definitive truth (Brown, 1998a:2). The first substantive chapter addresses the framework of competence and anti-discriminatory practice and re-visits the knowledge, values and skills model first mentioned in submission 1. However this model, by 1998, had been considerably elaborated upon and draws on submission 8 'E' (Brown, 1996) where these ideas are developed and have come to fruition.

The following chapter sets the political and social context. This chapter draws on the excellent work of Cooper (1994), applying some of her ideas on social work. This chapter remains in my view unique in that it draws on my own reflections as an actor (practitioner and Trade Union activist) during that period. A number of primary sources are utilised and it tracks the historical development of social work with lesbians and gay men, and makes an international comparison.

The following chapter looks at the position of lesbians and gay men as part of the workforce within social work and social care. The next chapter, which draws on submission 8 (Brown, 1996) as its underpinning foundation, reviews the 'knowledge base' of social work and its impact on work with lesbians and gay men.

The chapter on the organisational context and its impact on service delivery to lesbians and gay men has not been replicated and remains unique. The section on supervision relies heavily on the reflexivity of the author and my own practice experience, drawing on 5 years of supervision notes.

The chapter on children and families, although others have developed aspects of this work, remains a substantial contribution to social work literature. As I have said before the child protection section is unique, drawing on reflection, supervision notes and a small piece of empirical research.

The two last substantive chapters draw on the literature reviews, social work with adults and social work and probation practice with offenders. At the time of writing the book Buckley stood out as a practitioner and academic in this last area and this remains the case (Buckley, 1992; Buckley and Head, 2000).

The book is optimistic in tone and similar to submissions 1 and 2 in conveying the message that it is possible to undertake effective social work practice with lesbians and gay men. It draws on ideas developed in relation to the 'knowledge

base of social work' as well as my then unwritten ideas about the quality of the social work relationship with the client being fundamental in dictating outcomes (Brown, 1998d).

Critically reviewing the book, three years on from publication, in terms of its contribution to social work practice and academia, I believe it has raised the profile of the subject area but specifically has made an original contribution in the following chapters: 'placing the debate within its social/political context, 'social work: organisation and context' and lastly 'children and families'.

**Submission 6 'B'**

**Brown, H.C. (1998) 'Working with Lesbians and Gay Men: Sexuality and Practice Teaching', in H. Lawson, (ed) *Working with Lesbians and Gay men: Sexuality and Practice Teaching,* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp 49-65. ISBN 1-85302-478-3.**

Lawson's edited collection (1998) focused on practice teaching and covered areas that up to that time had been given little academic attention, for example submission 6 itself as well as a chapter by Crow (1998) looking at endings in relation to placements and practice teaching. I was asked to produce the chapter by the editor. It was based on training I had run for the University of Sussex Practice Teachers Course from 1994, which is still ongoing. The training addressed developing competent practice teaching in relation to lesbians and gay men as service users, practitioners and students.

Logan et al's, (1996) publication, looking at homophobia in social work education overlaps with the content of this submission, but does not have the same focus on practice teaching. This submission develops ideas set out in the book submission (Brown,1998a: 51) relating to social work education.

14

As with the other submissions the chapter starts with a political and historical contextualisation of the subject area and moves on to address theoretical considerations. This it does by using specific examples of theory problematic to lesbians and gay men used by academics and practitioners and argues that rather than dismiss theories that are considered oppressive we need to assess their use after having located their specificity in time and place. This makes it possible to identify what is useful, and to adapt theoretical ideas, following careful critical appraisal, rather than dismiss them as oppressive because it is fashionable to do so. The detail of practice teaching is then considered under the headings of 'the practice teacher student relationship', 'placement organisational issues' and 'the integration of theory and practice'. This last section is done via a case study of a supervisory session. The British Journal of Social Work's reviewer saw this section as particularly useful (Cigno, 1999).

Although critical appraisal of this submission could not ignore the repetitive nature of the early part of the chapter in relation to material that appeared in the book submission, the second part of the chapter, where the focus is specifically practice teaching, is new. The second part of the chapter is undoubtedly practice focused in relation to the 'practice' of practice teaching and learning but also contains constructive material in relation to the thorny problem within social work of the integration of theory and practice.

***Submission 7 'C'***

**Brown, H. C. (1998) 'Lesbians and Gay Men: Social Work and Discrimination', in B. Lesnik, (ed) *Countering Discrimination in Social Work: International Perspectives in Social Work,* Aldershot: Arena, pp 89-110. ISBN 1-85742-436-0**

As this edited collection's title suggests, my chapter is one contribution to a collection of papers looking at social work in relation to discrimination and

oppression and ways that social work can intervene in those processes. This book appeared the same year as my book submission. Inevitably this submission draws on the book. However I took the international perspective seriously and reviewed literature in relation to Europe and beyond, exploring the global/broader dimension of the subject in a way that I had not previously considered. I also looked at the work of Amnesty International, which helped me 'feel' as well as 'know' the specificity of lesbian and gay experience in the UK, and the specificity of the development of social work practice and ideas within that context. The chapter was written after the 'New Labour' government was elected in 1997 and reflects some of the feeling of change of the time. For lesbians and gay men this should not be underestimated as the 'New Right' from 1979-1997 had made a 'near fetish' out of their focus on lesbians and gay men as being the 'other', the bogey men and women intent on undermining civilisation as we knew it.

This chapter is divided into five sections, those being: an historical and international overview of lesbian and gay oppression, lesbian and gay identity, the social and political context of social work with lesbians and gay men, social work education and training and possible ways forward.

Some sections within this submission repeat material that appears in other submissions, particularly, the political and social context and social work education and training. However the material in relation to the international perspective is new and is the only published work in relation to lesbians and gay men and social work. An area developed within this submission is that of 'lesbian and gay identity', and how perceptions of this have impacted theoretically on writing about social work with lesbians and gay men. As far as I am aware this is the only existing critique of what I will refer to as the 'American School' this is not to suggest that all Americans belong to this school. Reviewing the American literature in relation to lesbians and gay men and social work I was struck by its 'biological determinism' and inherently conservatism (Brown, 1998c: 96). There has been refreshing debate more recently in relation to 'identity' and social work

best articulated by Aymer (2000: 125), which critically reflects upon the social work 'truth' that somehow identity is sacrosanct and cannot be open to question.

This submission makes a unique contribution to social work knowledge in that it puts the international into UK social work's thinking about social work with lesbians and gay men and most importantly reminds us of the specificity of our experience and ideas arising from our experience, i.e. the specificity of this inductive knowledge. Its limitations lie in the repetition of material that appears in other submissions to enable it to stand in its own right as a piece for an international, although predominately European, audience.

*Submission 8 'E'*

**Brown, H.C. (1996) 'The Knowledge Base of Social Work' in A. A. Vass (ed)**
*Social Work Competences: Core Knowledge, Values and Skills,* **London: Sage, pp 8-35. ISBN 0-8039-7800-6**

Vass's edited book arose from the Middlesex University social work team's approach to managing the Central Council for Training and Education in Social Work's new framework for competence (CCETSW, 1995) The book was structured around the framework of knowledge, values and skills and I was asked to write the chapter on knowledge. The chapter is thus structured around: 'knowledge that informs the practitioner about the client's experience and context; knowledge that helps the practitioner plan appropriate intervention; and knowledge that clarifies the practitioner's understanding of the legal, policy, procedural and organisational context in which their practice takes place' (Brown, 1996: 10).

In my usual historical mindset I firstly address the historical context of social work's use of knowledge. This section is of its time; although I make reference to some debates about theory and practice (Sheldon: 1978), the chapter pre-dates

17

the concern with 'evidence-based' practice and what 'knowledge' would constitute 'evidence'. Some authors within the 'evidence-based' practice school argue that interventions, which have been subject to randomised control trials (RCT) or similarly rigorous evaluative research methods, should be the only ones that social workers should ethically draw upon (Macdonald, and Macdonald, 1995). I will argue in the methodology section why I believe this position is redundant if not dangerous and that inevitably social work has to throw a wide net in relation to 'knowledge' to help inform practice. This is not to suggest that 'hard' research such as RCTs are not helpful or that this 'wide net' is not also fraught with difficulties and open to misuse and sloppiness.

The chapter reviews 'knowledge' used in social work from a range of disciplines and reflects on its usefulness. The chapter's major contribution is its underpinning of the other submissions. In its own right it demonstrates that 'knowledge' has to be subject to critical re-appraisal as to its usefulness and is open to adaptation and development; it is never truth and cannot offer certainty, however many social workers wish that it did.

*Submission 9 'F'*

**Brown, H.C. (1998) 'Counselling' in R. Adams, L. Dominelli and M. Payne, *Social Work: Themes, Issues and Critical Debates,* Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp 138-148. ISBN 0-333-68818-x**

The editors of this social work text approached me to write about 'counselling' and social work. It was a useful opportunity for me as it drew on my interest in the detail of 'doing the work', the actual work, by which I mean direct work with clients, as well as drawing on my interest in psychodynamic ideas and counselling theory and skills more generally. My passion for this area lay in my conviction that the quality of the direct intervention and the quality of the inter personal skills of the worker were the major variables that dictated the outcome

of intervention. Truax and Carkhuff (1967) had argued this position in the 1960s most eloquently.

Social work has had an intimate and complex sibling relationship with counselling and psychotherapy since its recognisable inception from the 1920s. Counselling, its youngest sibling, has had much to offer social workers, who do not normally do counselling but, who do draw on counselling theory and skills to inform their practice. The chapter re-emphasises the importance of the quality of direct work and its significance within social work. It also explores the sibling relationship between counselling, social work and psychotherapy. Although other publications cover similar ground (Brearley, 1995; Seden, 1999), the accessibility and optimism of the chapter makes a specific contribution to the literature. As with submission 8 the ideas within this chapter, although written after the rest of the submissions, permeate them. The chapter argues that the 'utilisation of relevant counselling skills and theory could enable professional reflection to take place when working with the needs of specific, unique individuals within their own context and lead to the deployment of sensitive, relevant and effective interventions that facilitate negotiated change' (Brown, 1998c: 148). This theme of reflective practice and the unique individual within his/her own context is a coherent thread linking all the submissions.

The chapter reviews the separate theoretical schools within counselling and addresses their usefulness to social work practice. This is done by looking at the following bodies of thought: psychodynamic ideas, humanistic person-centred ideas, cognitive behavioural ideas and lastly eclectic and integrative approaches. The chapter goes on to explore the relationship between counselling and social work as well as 'specific issues'. One of the 'specific issues' addressed is the question of 'self awareness' in social work as an aspect of reflective practice. This theme runs throughout the other submissions and will be returned to in the methodology section.

**The Submissions as a Whole Body**

Taken as a whole the submissions make a significant contribution to social work knowledge in relation to social work with lesbians and gay men. Social work historically has contributed to the oppression of lesbians and gay men by default and directly. The texts are optimistic in that they argue that effective social work with lesbians and gay men is an obtainable goal. Unlike some of the anti-discriminatory practice literature the texts are not blaming or recriminatory in tone. Theory is addressed both to make sense of practice but also to be critically re-appraised to enable its utilisation in practice.

The nature of the publications, being directed to specific audiences and needing to stand in their own right, means that there are elements of repetition, however there is also new material that provides added value to each publication.

## Critical Review of my Development as a Researcher Over the Period of the Research

To critically review my development as a researcher requires me to go back before 1991, the date of my first submission. I am arguing within the methodology section that the researcher's biography is relevant to the research endeavour, not just in that it may impact on the research subject orientation but is also likely to impact on methodological approaches chosen as well as interpretation of the research data. In line with my general historical approach I will outline my development using the passage of time as the framework and grouping key themes together within that framework. To do this I have used a detailed curriculum vita, which I have kept since 1985, as well as other relevant documents and academic outputs and my submitted publications.

**Academic Experience Before the Attainment of my Social Work Qualification**

Undertaking this PhD submission has made me realise that the inductive approach that has underpinned my publications that are submitted here was also the approach adopted in my dissertation as part of my BA in Politics and Government, as well as for my Masters in Social work. I had worked for a year prior to starting my degree for Save the Children Fund as a play worker running a pre school facility and an after school centre for Traveller's children on a designated site in Hertfordshire. My dissertation drew on my reflections on the work as well as work on another site in Oxfordshire, which I continued during my degree. This inductive approach reflecting on past experience to inform theoretical development came 'naturally' to me. Having grown up in a family where there had been significant 'mental disorder', from childhood I had been pre-occupied with trying to understand the 'why' of circumstance and experience. The relationship between this and my eventual arrival as a social work practitioner and academic is obvious but I am also suggesting it has influenced a particular research stance, that of trying to make sense of experience through a reflexive process. Another 'strength' related to my experiences of familial mental disorder is that it emotionally positioned me 'outside'. I felt that my family experience positioned us outside society and left me as an observer looking in. This positioning has changed over the years but has left me with a capacity to take on an observational stance, which has been beneficial in relationship to research curiosity.

My next academic output was my dissertation for my Masters in Social Work course. Again as well as doing empirical research I reflected on my observations and practice as a residential social worker working with black children in the seventies, to undertake the dissertation: 'The question of self-image and identity of black children in residential care'.

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21

My motivation to be a social worker was fuelled by a commitment to change, not just in relation to individuals and families but also the wider community and society. I was not unique in relation to this but part of a phenomenon of the time (that is not to say that people have not been similarly motivated before and after). I believed it was possible to 'change the system from within', what has been described as 'In and Against the State', one of the strands of the radical social work tradition of the 1970s and early 1980s (The London to Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979). This early motivation, to facilitate change, has stayed with me in different forms. On re-reading my submissions and critically appraising their development, I see that most of them were written from that perspective, with the intention of facilitating change.

## Social Work Practice 1980-1989, in an Inner London Local Authority Social Services Team

As I have already indicated I worked for four years as a social worker and five as a team leader in a generic social work team. I was a Mental Welfare Officer under the 1959 Mental Health Act and an Approved Social Worker under the 1983 Mental Health Act. My own work and the work of the team was heavily weighted towards mental health, family support, child protection, work with children in public care and fostering and adoption. We also worked with a significant number of older people and people with disabilities. During my time in the team I sat on the Borough's fostering panel and undertook carer assessments both for fostering and for adoption. During this period we worked with a number of lesbian households in relation to child protection. I kept detailed supervision notes from 1984, which I have drawn upon as a reflective tool within the submitted publications.

During this period I was part of a London wide women and social work group, the women were all lesbian social workers bar one. This group set up and ran the last of the women and social work conferences held at Goldsmiths College,

London University. I have also drawn on notes of the group and the conference as primary sources.

From 1980 I was part of the Borough NALGO Women's group as well as a national NALGO Lesbian and Gay group, and was part of the organising committee for the first NALGO lesbian and gay national conference. Original documents in relation to these groups and the conference have been invaluable in relation to the historical and political contextualisation of social work with lesbians and gay men.

As a practitioner I began, in a small way, to start writing for a public audience (previously cited) and ran training for practitioners and social work courses in relation to social work and gender as well as sexuality.

**Arrival into Academia 1989-1996**

My first academic post was at Middlesex University as a lecturer in social work. I moved to being a principal lecturer by 1993 and acted up as Head of Department during 1996. This acting up role entailed my being responsible for the development of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) submission for the social work Unit of assessment in 1996. I was a RAE 'returner' in 1992 and 1996 and have been included in the 2001 return.

My teaching included 'social work theories and methods' and 'social work skills'. The former laid the basis for submission 8 and the latter for submission 9. My contact, over seven years, with a large number of lesbian and gay students also informed my thinking in relation to submission 6, on practice teaching and the sections on social work education within the book submission.

During my time at Middlesex I acted as a PhD supervisor and took my first PhD student through to completion. The process of supervision drew on my

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During my time at Middlesex I acted as a PhD supervisor and took my first PhD student through to completion. The process of supervision drew on my

supervisory experience within social work and also developed my own thinking in relation to research. Without exception, the research of the seven PhD students I have supervised to date has been in relation to relatively small-scale pieces of qualitative research. Up to that point my research experience would fall into what Buchanan refers to as 'practice experience' and 'descriptive studies' (Buchanan, 1999: 7).

During this period I undertook two pieces of empirical research for one local authority. The first culminated in a research report and a publication (Brown and Pearce, 1992), which looked at professional anxiety and work with young women, the method of data collection being semi-structured interviews with practitioners and managers. The second piece of research looked at lesbian and gay issues in child care practice in preparation for the enactment of the Children Act 1989 (Brown, 1990). The method of data collection for this was the use of focus groups with key social services personnel including practitioners, managers and policy advisors. Neither pieces of research involved service users and the research was limited by their exclusion. The latter piece of research was significant in that it was part of the substantive content of the chapter on children and families within the book submission.

**Move to the University of Hertfordshire 1996-1999**

My move to Hertfordshire as a Head of Department of a large multi-professional department was significant in relationship to my own research development. During this period I had the strategic responsibility to develop research within the Department across and within all the disciplines, which included probation, social work, counselling, psychotherapy, learning disability nursing and mental health nursing. This involved the development and realisation of a research strategy for the Department. I led the RAE social work Unit of assessment group, during which time publications and research income increased rapidly. I also managed collaborative research projects with health and social service partners and

created research assistant posts, which I managed. Although I developed, at a pace, in my understanding of research projects, strategies and funding, I had no time to undertake any empirical research myself. Although I did manage to publish four of the submissions, (5, 6, 7, 9) all of which were written during the night!

My move to Hertfordshire exposed me to larger scale pieces of research that I had no experience of before and different research methods and research paradigms. This experience was further built upon by my move to the Barnardo's research department.

## Barnardo's Research Department 1999

My move away from higher education was a mistake, and one I was quickly able to retrieve as I moved to South Bank University within five months of arriving at Barnardo's. However, mistake or not, this five months were fundamentally important to my development as a researcher. I had the opportunity of working with Helen Roberts (Roberts, 1981) as my manager and was able to discuss her move towards 'evidence based' practice and her interest in Randomised Control Trials for social welfare provisions and interventions. During my time at Barnardo's I was part of a national group developing a bid for the Surestart Treasury Evaluation Development Project, which included key exponents of 'evidence-based' practice. Working on the development of such an evaluation rapidly increased my research methodology and methods repertoire.

During my months at Barnardo's I acquired more learning than at any other point in the last ten years in relation to research. It exposed me to large-scale evaluation methods as well as quantitative research. It also exposed me to complex debates in relation to 'evidence based' practice. Despite this exposure I was not converted to their overall ideological approach although I was affected by it. I am now much more sympathetic to the usefulness of for example RCTs to

assess the effectiveness of social welfare interventions. However I am left with the belief that whereas these approaches to research are useful in relation to directing social policy on the provision of social welfare, for example such an initiative as Surestart (and they may be useful even in relation to social care), where the needs of the majority may have to take precedence, I am more cautious in relation to social work. Research is about the general and social work is about the particular. Sellick and Thoburn argue, in relation to childcare, that 'when it comes to using research to throw light on specific decisions to be made about specific children, there is no alternative to a careful scrutiny of the studies which seem most relevant. An appraisal must then be made as to the validity of their conclusions in the context of the specific case' (1996:26). General research 'findings' have to be treated with great caution when applying them to individual cases. I have developed an understanding of the meaning of 'research literacy' in that it involves understanding research but also, in the social work context, assessing its relevance to the unique and specific individuals and circumstances being worked with, it is helpful as guidance but it does not provide certainty.

## South Bank University

At both Hertfordshire and South Bank Universities I continued to supervise PhD students and while at Hertfordshire I examined a PhD thesis for the first time. As well as having the academic lead for the group, my role at South Bank University as Principal Lecturer for social work has involved responsibility for the development of research and publications within the social work group. As at Hertfordshire this has included the development and realisation of a research strategy. The research emphasis here has been on research evaluations undertaken for partner social work agencies. My research interests have also developed in relation to clarity about my main interests, which are fostering and adoption and children in public care. This has not meant a move away from lesbian and gay issues in social work, as I am still committed to this area as demonstrated in my practice and consultancy activities. I am now also, since

26

1999, part of a national research group who are interested in matters related to childcare, children and young people and lesbian and gay issues.

**'Practice' Post 1989**

Since my entrance into academia I have developed three distinct areas of 'practice'. Firstly I have been used nationally as a trainer/consultant regarding sexuality and fostering and adoption, and sexuality and young people in public care. The latter has involved work with the National Foster Care Association including chairing a national conference for them on sexuality and young people in 1995. My reputation in this area has stemmed from the publications.

Secondly, in 1993 I was made a patron of the Albert Kennedy Trust. This is a Trust which recruits, assesses and supports lesbian and gay carers for homeless lesbian and gay young people aged between sixteen and twenty-one years of age. I have been actively involved with the Trust, undertaking carer assessments and training for them, as well as being a member of the social work group developing policy and practice. This experience has exposed me to a wealth of practice material, which I have been able to draw on in my publications. At the same time my practice has been better informed as a result of my reflection on theory while working on my publications. This practice experience has meant I have built up expertise that has been recognised. For example, I was asked in 1998 by the High Court to act as an expert witness in a complex childcare case involving a young gay man.

Thirdly, since 1998, I have been an Independent Chair of the Fostering Panel for a Coram Family (formerly the Thomas Coram Foundation) fostering project which tries to retain very troubled ten to eighteen year olds within the community. The Panel sits monthly to approve, register and de-register carers. We involve the prospective carers in the Panel process. Again this experience has built on my

Panel involvement in my SSD in the 1980s. My academic and research endeavours have, I believe, improved my practice.

The above, as part of a developmental cycle, has been fundamentally important to my development as a researcher. Through this involvement I have been able to test ideas and theories in practice (carefully) and with practitioners and thus been able to adapt and change them in the light of fresh feedback and experience. My practice reflection has thus stretched twenty years and has been fuelled by an injection of my more recent practice since 1993.

## Account and Critique of the Research Methodologies used in the Works

In my introduction I commented upon the peculiar enterprise of submitting for a PhD by published works. The submissions were not designed to be submitted for a PhD therefore the nature of the process of work undertaken in relation to the production of each publication is implicit rather than explicit. This context statement allows me to make explicit those processes. I have done this by dividing this section simply under the headings of methodology and methods. The first looks at the 'wider approach' and theoretical material in relation to the debates surrounding that 'wider approach', and the latter looks at the actual specific methods that were used.

### Methodology

I start this section by saying what the research is not. It is not part of the 'what works' 'evidence based' research that would be recognised by such researchers as Newman and Roberts, (1996) or the McDonalds (McDonald and McDonald, 1995). To over simplify, the above writers believe that true research evidence is that arising from Randomised Control Trials (RCT). Clearly my publications have never had a whiff of one, never mind involved one. I start with this point as the

'what works' and 'evidenced based' practice lobby both within New Labour and social work academia have become highly influential and as a result the question of what constitutes 'evidence' and what 'evidence' constitutes knowledge have become deep concerns for social work (Trevillion, 2000:429, Webb, 2000). My concern relates to the notion that research about human experience can ever be seen as conclusive and that social workers might apply research 'evidence' in a mechanistic, procedural fashion, irrespective of the detail of specific individuals and circumstances. For me this is as dangerous as research ignorance. Also this positivist paradigm of research gives only certain types of information, it does not reveal the detail, ambiguity, and complexity of lived experience which, I believe, can only be revealed through qualitative research approaches. In other words it has its place in helping throw light on specific problems and interventions, but not to the exclusion of other methods of research. Macdonald and Macdonald write tellingly of their view of research; 'research might be viewed as the continual battle against the bewitchment of our senses by immediate experience' (Macdonald and Macdonald, 1995:46). In contrast to this position, I would see research as the analysis of the bewitchment and a recording of that experience and the Macdonald approach as a defence against anxiety that both provoke. However my time at Barnardo's helped me see the value of the above approaches, in how they might guide social welfare social policy in a helpful way.

If my approach is not the above what is it? It is as I said in the introduction what Buchanan refers to as 'practice experience' (1999), and as such falls within what Fuller and Petch describe as 'practitioner research' (1995) and what Sheppard et al describe as 'process knowledge' (2000). However the submitted works are not just a record of experience. The experience has been significantly processed through reflection and my own subjective interpretation and understanding of my biography which has inevitably affected that reflection. There are arguments, which would question the validity of such an approach and would deny it added to the knowledge base of social work. I am arguing that the knowledge base of social work should be and has to be more than the collection of 'research

evidence'. The role of ideas and records of practice are also valid contributions to knowledge. Stanley and Wise referring to feminism argue that that discipline 'should remain open to, adopt, adapt, modify and use, interesting and useful ideas from any and every source' (Stanley and Wise, 1983:18). My approach to my publications has reflected this. My work is a contribution to the ideas of social work and as a body is also a record of social work's development over the 1980s and 1990s both in terms of practice and academic debate.

What is 'reflection'? It is a concept used both in practice and in research, often referred to as 'reflection' in practice and 'reflexivity' in research (although in reality the processes are very similar). A major exponent of the practice reflection model is Schon (1983) who refers to 'thinking in action'. Through this inductive process the practitioner develops perceptions and ideas. Schon argues that reflection also happens in retrospect: 'they may do this in a mood of idle speculation, or in a deliberate effort to prepare themselves for future cases' (Schon, 1983:61). Alsop and Ryan also recognise the retrospective nature of reflection. They suggest that the reflective practitioner 'must arrest a particular moment in time, ponder over it, go back through it and only then will you gain insights into different aspects of the situation' (1996:184). My work has fallen within this retrospective reflective approach and as such is inductive, in that my ideas have developed as a result of reflection upon preceding practice, designed to enable myself and others to prepare for future practice.

McCarthy (1999) identifies reflexivity within research as being one of the key components of feminist research methodology. Reflexivity is a key element of my research process. As part of feminism's contribution to reflexive research it has located the subjective researcher visibly within the research process, as well as developing critical self-awareness of the research endeavour. 'Reflection means interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's perspectives from others perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author' (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000:vii). The same authors

30

argue that as well as having an inward looking eye in relation to the research process there is also the need for an outward looking eye: 'Reflection means thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways difficult to become conscious of' (2000: 245).

The concern with the reflexivity of the researcher and his/her awareness of self was pioneered by feminist researchers at a time when there was, within academia, less acceptance of this approach. In 1983 Stanley and Wise argued: 'We feel that it is inevitable that the researcher's own experiences and consciousness will be involved in the research process as much as they are in life, and we shall argue that all research must be concerned with the experiences and consciousness of the researcher as an integral part of the research process' (1983: 48). Social work as a profession had accepted this position as part of the psychodynamic social casework tradition a long time before 1983, whereas mainstream positivist research was still resistant to these ideas. Wise, both a social worker and an academic, used her reflective approach as a social worker and her reflexivity as a researcher to good effect in an important contribution to the feminist social work literature in a monograph, where she reflected upon her work as a local authority social worker (Wise, 1985).

Another way of articulating the above is to emphasise the need to make the subjective experience and consciousness of the researcher explicit. Crowley and Himmelweit define subjectivity as 'that combination of conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions that make up our sense of ourselves, our relations to the world and our ability to act in that world (1992:7). One of the differences between the psychodynamic tradition in social work and what Stanley and Wise were arguing in relation to research was the role of the unconscious, in the former tradition. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) bring these two areas together in what they describe as 'defended subjectivity'. They argue that it is not

easy to 'know' our subjective selves as researchers because we are defended against 'knowing' as part of the normal mechanisms of 'defences against anxiety'. Whether or not we agree with their psychoanalytic approach, I would agree that 'knowing' your own thought processes, both conscious and unconscious, is a complex business and we only partially 'know' our selves as the researcher. In my own work I am aware of a continual theme of optimism in relation to bettering outcomes for service users and that this is somehow possible. I am self-aware enough to know this reflects my biography in relation to a difficult as well as wonderful beginning and the development of a lived experience that life gets better and anything is possible. However, this is clearly my subjective experience, and one I can articulate and may be shared by others. There will be other areas of my unconscious that may influence my research approach of which I remain unaware. So to be a visible researcher is only ever to be partially visible, but the commitment to work towards achieving that visibility will improve the rigour of the research process and enhance the ethical dimension.

**Methods**

In this section I describe the methods of 'data' collection that underpinned my publication submissions. I am not going to repeat material in relation to practice reflection that I have argued above and detailed within the 'critical review of my development as a researcher', although this 'reflection' has in fact been the major part of the method of 'data' collection. Rather I am concentrating on other methods that were used and how data was analysed. I will start back to front, with the analysis.

## Content Analysis

This method of analysis has been associated primarily with the analysis of documents (Denscombe, 1998). However it has also been used to analyse such 'documents' as interview transcripts. For my purposes, drawing on original documents (primary sources), as well as the existing literature (secondary sources) content analysis proved to be a useful tool. However this did not mean that I adopted the process to the letter and methodically on all occasions over a ten-year period.

This method of analysis is often associated with grounded theory and an inductive research approach. It simply involved the analysis of materials by reading, identifying categories arising from the material as well as those imposed upon it, identifying key words, and developing a sub-category for each category. This involved careful reading of the texts, identifying the categories and sub categories, and literally counting their occurrences.

To illustrate this in relation to submissions 5 and 4, I will discuss child protection issues in lesbian families. The 'primary sources' drawn on were five years of supervision notes and my research report for the local authority in relation to lesbian and gay issues in child care, mentioned previously (Brown, 1990). The supervision notes were carefully read and content in relation to lesbian households identified. A sub category from the 'lesbian households' category was child 'protection issues', which were duly identified. Another category identified from the supervisory notes was 'child protection' (in relation to the whole service-user population) and a sub category identified from that was 'professional fear'. These two sub categories; 'professional fear' and 'child protection in lesbian households' were then compared. This comparison revealed that lesbian and gay social workers working with child protection cases often manifested fear in relation to being inappropriately 'outed', as opposed to being physically harmed, which was the fear of the heterosexual workers (Brown,

1992:16; Brown, 1998:81). A similar process was adopted in reading other primary sources as well as secondary ones.

The researcher was key to this process because I defined the categories and decided what and how the content was analysed, so inevitably it was a subjective process. To use the above example, I have always had a keen commitment to supervision in social work and the importance of the supervisory process as 'part of the work' but also as a process of 'holding' the practitioner, to help them reflect upon the work to enable effective client focused practice (Hawkins and Shohet, 1989). I have also had an interest in fear and its role in social work and decision making, a little discussed topic but an extremely common phenomenon. Hence my supervision notes recorded these areas and in retrospect I was likely to highlight them.

What I have described as the 'outward eye' of the researcher is necessarily drawn upon in this process as May describes: 'Qualitative content analysis,..., starts with the idea of process, or social context, and views the author as well as a self-conscious actor addressing an audience under particular circumstances. The task of the 'analyst becomes a 'reading' of the text in terms of its symbols. With this in mind, the text is approached through understanding the context of its production by the analyst themselves' (May, 1993: 173). In my reading of both secondary and primary sources I attended to the contextualisation of the ideas and texts in my reviewing of the literature.

**Literature Review – Secondary Sources**

I reviewed the literature using content analysis, although somewhat loosely, as I have said. I drew on the widest literature I could as I was exploring areas about which little had been written. The groupings of the literature fell into the following categories: social work theory and practice, social work anti-discriminatory practice, probation theory and practice, research in relation to the development of

children growing up in lesbian and gay households, lesbian and gay studies, lesbian and gay history and feminist including black feminist literature.

I used electronic databases to gather relevant texts and extensively used 'Gays the Word' bookshop in London, which was a wealth of information and had its finger on the pulse in relation to relevant publications in the UK, America and Australia. I only used secondary sources written in English and written predominately from the 1960s onwards.

My subjective approach, which also tried to be rigorous, fell in line with Hart's definition of a literature review: 'The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or expose certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research ...' (Hart, 1998: 13).

## Primary Sources

I had available to me a range of primary sources, because of my own biography, which I utilised within the submissions. These Included:
- Five years of supervision notes from when I was a team leader in the SSD
- Trade Union material from the 1980s and 1990s including NALGO, Unison, NAPO, AUT, and NATFHE
- High Court expert advice notes
- Notes from relevant conferences from 1982
- Albert Kennedy Trust records (excluding case files)
- Fostering Panel minutes
- My own training materials used in consultancy and training events that I have run
- Documents made available to me from the New South Wales Anti-discriminatory Board.

These primary sources were crucial in that they were part of a three pronged approach in relation to checking the validity of my subjective reflections. They were part of a process of triangulation in checking my reflections against the secondary sources of the time as well as my own primary sources. What became evident is that sometimes my memory of events was different from the records of specific ideas and events evidenced in the primary sources.

**Analysis and Synthesis**

The publications submitted are the product of my reflection upon practice and my reflexivity as a researcher synthesised with the literature both secondary and primary. The analysis occurred as part of the reflection on practice as well as the reading of the literature; the synthesis was the bringing together of both processes.

Hart describes analysis and synthesis simply as follows: 'analysis is the job of systematically breaking down something into its component parts and describing how they relate to each other – it is not random dissection but a methodological examination'. Synthesis is: 'the act of making connections between the parts identified in analysis. It is not simply a matter of reassembling the parts into the original order, but looking for a new order' (1998: 110). I am not arguing that I have 'created a new order' in its wider meaning, but that I have analysed both a significant amount of practice and a breadth of literature which I have hopefully synthesised into new material that has made a significant contribution to the discursive body of social work knowledge.

# Limitations of the Research

As I have said earlier in the section on 'methodology' my work is not a contribution to the 'evidence based' research of social work. It is rather a contribution to the discursive body of social work knowledge and debate.

The limitations as I see them are as follows. The lack of empirical research other than the small piece that was drawn on in the submissions (Brown, 1990) means two things in relation to the work. There has been no opportunity to 'test' deductively ideas developed within the work and the inclusion of empirical research could have given a voice to service users and to social workers. The voices of both these groups are aired through my interpretations but never directly and that is a major limitation.

The second limitation of the body of work is that it originally was not designed as a whole. By this I mean that as I was commissioned to write each piece, each piece had to stand in its own right and therefore there is some degree of overlap between some of the submissions. If the submitted works were to be edited they could stand as one coherent work of a shorter length than the sum of all the works as they presently stand.

The third limitation is in relation to methodology and methods. Because of the nature of the audiences and the publications themselves the methodological approach and methods used were not made explicit in the texts. The result is that it is harder for the reader to be aware of my thinking in relation to the publications than might have been the case. Also the lack of methodological discussion within the texts limits them in relation to their theoretical development, which hopefully has been rectified to some extent within this Context Statement.

The fourth limitation is that I have only drawn on texts written in English, which inevitably biases both the data I have looked at and the interpretations drawn from them.

The fifth limitation is in the nature of inductive retrospective research in that it is highly reliant on subjective memory (Alderson et al, 1996). I have argued in my methodology the strengths of this approach, however I am also cognisant of the drawbacks. The power of experience and our subjective responses to them do affect the accuracy of memory. I have argued that a substantial amount of my work has been the product of reflection, but are my memories of what I am reflecting upon accurate? All I am suggesting, as with any contribution to knowledge, is that my claims are treated with caution. I write at the beginning of the book submission 'this book is offered as one contribution to the knowledge base on which social workers may discriminatingly draw' (Brown: 1998a: 7), I am not claiming more than that.

## The Work's Significance and Original Contribution to Knowledge

Significance can be measured in different ways, however it is difficult to accurately measure significance other than through crude measures like citations in others' work. To start with this crude measure, since the publication of my submission, in the UK, material written in relation to the subject area has cited my work. Citations of my work include: Campion, 1995; Logan et al 1996; Hicks and McDermott, 1998; Clare, 2000; Trotter, 2000; Thompson, 1998; Thompson, 2000 and Wilton, 2000.

Significance of the work can also be measured by requests for me to offer training, consultancy and expert advice to social work agencies, Universities and the High Court since the beginning of the 1990s. The value of my work, as seen by others, is also evidenced in its inclusion by the Department of Health in their 2000 National Recruitment Campaign for Foster Carers (NFCA/D of H/ADSS and

38

LGA, 2000). Between 1989 and 1993 I was asked to contribute my professional opinion to three television programmes about lesbians and gay men as carers of children in public care, two for Channel 4 and one for BBC 1.

The originality of the contribution of the whole submission lies in that it is currently the most comprehensive comment on social work with lesbians and gay men in the UK. It encompasses as a totality an extensive review of the relevant literature, which has then been synthesised with reflection upon practice; there is no equivalent body to date in the UK. The scale of this enterprise taken as a whole has made a unique and significant contribution to the knowledge base of social work. The works taken together are the largest collection in the field by one author in the UK. The book is the only one of its kind and was the first comprehensive practice focused book in the field, the nearest equivalent being Hart and Richardson, (1981).

The works as a whole make a major contribution to the social work anti-discriminatory practice literature within which there has been a lack of writing in relation to lesbians and gay men. The publications also make a contribution in that they try to integrate theory and practice in a way that is accessible to practitioners and will be useful in bettering outcomes for lesbians and gay men as users of social work and social care services.

The submitted works have involved practice reflection and research reflexivity and as such involved analysis, synthesis and critical reappraisal. It is my contention that the body as a whole has made a significant and unique contribution to the knowledge base of social work.

## The Works' Equivalence to a PhD Thesis Route

The submissions taken as a whole are equivalent in length to a PhD thesis. The word total excluding this context statement is approximately 130,000 words.

Taking repetition between articles into account, I estimate the content to be around 80,000-90,000 words in length, the word length expected for a PhD thesis.

The works submitted were published over a six year period, which is also an equivalent period of time in which to complete a PhD, part-time. The submissions however drew on reflections in practice spanning a much longer period.

The breadth and depth of the publications are also equivalent to that expected within a PhD thesis and as they have made a significant contribution to knowledge I am arguing that this submission with the attached context statement is equivalent to a PhD thesis and meets the requirements for a PhD by published works.

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