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## Is social work the work of love? : love practice and queer doing in the process for full self-determination

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Sady K. Horn  
Is Social Work the Work of Love?  
Love Practice and Queer Doing in  
the Process for Full Self-  
Determination

### **ABSTRACT**

The 1915 National Conference of Charities and Corrections, during which Abraham Flexner stated that social work was not a profession because it lacked a “communicable technique”, is understood as a historically significant event in social work history. Part of the discourse regarding the legacy of this conference has spoken to social work’s struggle with comprehending the nature of its purpose and definition as a profession. In this thesis I explore the phenomenon of social work, understood as a profession, and how its professionalization may contribute to its struggle in developing a comprehensive practice method that makes its stated values of justice and full self-determination of the individual intelligible. I look at love as theoretically formulated by Erich Fromm and M. Scott Peck in what they offer in regarding love as a practice, and queer theory in exploring the social and political situation of social work and to illuminate the diversity and multiplicity that is inherent in social work and its humanistic origin. Through this exploration on a struggle for a definition, I posit that this challenge comes from the field attempting to understand itself within the structure of professionalism and academia, both of which value empirical inquiry and scientific positivism in social theory over creative engagement with an inquiry on love and human connection.

IS SOCIAL WORK THE WORK OF LOVE? LOVE PRACTICE AND QUEER DOING IN  
THE PROCESS FOR FULL SELF-DETERMINATION

A project based on independent investigation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work

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2012

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In many ways this study feels just as much like community work as it does an individual or “independent” study. Much of the thoughts and discussion presented in this paper feels like a written extension of the types of conversations I love to have all the time. It is through such conversations that I myself grow and feel inspired by the beauty and complexity of how we desire and have love in our lives. My opening up to a dialogue on love came out of my own exploration with an incredibly talented and caring therapist to whom I am deeply grateful. I will always hold her and our experience together as an inspiration.

Through this writing I often thought of the people I worked with in my past two internship years while at Smith. Their willingness to share and work with me reminded me of the courage and vitality within all of us that can move us to take chances with others, not knowing how it might look or what may happen.

I want to thank my research adviser, Fred for having these conversations with me that did so much to develop this work. I really do not think I could have had a better adviser for this project. I appreciated all of your comments, openness, and support that helped me to maintain my focus.

I feel extremely appreciative and fortunate for my community of friends here at Smith and Northampton these past two years. Their kindness and love nurtured me and also moved me forward in this project and to Shoshana love, with whom I get to share so much growth and magic with. I’d also like to thank Cara Segal, my first field adviser who supported my learning and continued to make herself present, Annemarie Gockel who ran an amazing practice class where I began to explore things I felt challenged with, and Yoosun Park whose questions about this field inspired me to search deeper and think more critically about how and why we engage with what we do.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

*Is social work the work of love?*

"Why would a king be talking with a shepherd?" the boy asked, awed and embarrassed.

"For several reasons. But let's say that the most important is that you have succeeded in discovering your Personal Legend."

The boy didn't know what a person's "Personal Legend" was.

"It's what you have always wanted to accomplish. Everyone, when they are young, knows what their Personal Legend is. At that point in their lives, everything is clear and everything is possible. They are not afraid to dream, and to yearn for everything they would like to see happen to them in their lives. But, as time passes, a mysterious force begins to convince them that it will be impossible for them to realize their Personal Legend...It's a force that appears to be negative, but actually shows you how to realize your Personal Legend. It prepares your spirit and your will, because there is one great truth on this planet: whoever you are, or whatever it is that you do, when you really want something, it's because that desire originated in the soul of the universe."

*(The Alchemist, Coelho, p. 22)*

My curiosity, confusion, and interest in the idea of love earnestly began as a very young child. I grew up with my mother, a South Korean woman who had recently immigrated with her husband's family to the United States with no knowledge of the English language, and who worked two full-time jobs. As a result of sexism and patriarchy in her country of origin, she was denied the opportunity for any type of schooling in her family unit, and found herself in an

arranged marriage to my father. Shortly after arriving in the United States she separated herself from the marriage, fleeing in the middle of the night with me in tow. We lived in a tiny apartment, in a small town in Idaho, and I often found myself alone – starting in kindergarten I would wake and get ready for school by myself. When my mother was concerned with how alone I was she had me stay with various families of the Korean church community. I constantly tried to adjust to these family units but I never truly felt a part of them. I didn't really experience or understand myself as connected to any larger unit; not to my mother, the families with whom I would stay, or the school I attended (which was mostly comprised of White students).

I desperately desired to exist beyond this feeling of “separateness”. An incredibly curious observer, I found myself completely fascinated by everything that surrounded me, especially people. When others expressed enthusiasm, delight, or grief, I was fascinated to see how and what they attached to. I was curious about connection; I was looking for expressions of love. I remember being entranced by old movies and musicals, by the ardor with which the characters would sing about such declarations of love. But these movies didn't reflect me, as they were clearly about White people in a White world where I couldn't find myself. I read voraciously, and noted my particular attachment to narratives about being different, the experience of being othered. Eve Sedgwick, known for her seminal work in queer theory, wrote about the resilience of such seeking out:

I think that for many of us in childhood the ability to attach to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival. We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up

tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love.

(1993, p. 3)

I wanted things to be messy. I wanted to know that such differences existed even though I couldn't make sense of them by myself at the time. All the while I felt like I was hiding something, something huge though I wasn't sure what - just that perhaps it was something that was different from those around me. While I desperately desired to "fit in," I had a concurrent feeling that I never could.

Growing up as an Asian American I have had my share of feeling othered racially. While I always experienced this with conflict, it also felt like someone's curiosity about my "differentness" seemed justified: there was nothing that I could really find in the world around me that told me I was an American, that I belonged in the very country I lived in. It wasn't until I read Ronald Takaki's (1989) "Strangers from a Different Shore" as an undergraduate student that I began to understand and see myself as part of a group of people with its own unique history, struggles, and contributions to a country of which I am a part. I became deeply passionate about antiracism work, which I knew I wanted to continue pursuing in my graduate education.

Entering Smith College School for Social Work, a program that highlights its anti-racism mission statement and incorporation of anti-racism into its curriculum, I was excited and eager to enter into compelling conversations about racism with professors and students, expecting many to share the same passion. Surprisingly, however, I found the classroom discussion on racism did not quite seem to work. I observed frustration, anger, fear, defensiveness, and sadness among both White classmates and classmates of color. I was surprised at how challenging the dialogue was within a structured academic setting, even one with a specific position on anti-



racism. This made me question my own assumptions and expectations about doing this work and left me humbled at the depths of such racial intricacies. These responses and challenges to discussions on racism are well documented by Miller & Garran (2008) in facilitating antiracism workshops and highlighting the interactive web of institutional and interpersonal racism. I came into the program with this agenda to fiercely expose racism; I believe this was about my desire to exist beyond these systems. However, something about my approach felt like a closing rather than an opening. My interest in anti-racism work came from trying to see how I was connected to others in a society where I and other groups of people had been made to feel disconnected or different, and so I began to wonder about the place of connection in anti-oppression work.

Differences matter. I knew this, but what felt complicated about talking about race was how to talk about such different experiences in a way that allowed for more connection rather than more division. Someone once challenged me with a question of what it was that I wanted out of talking about racism, what it was that would make me “feel better?” This seemingly simple question helped me to further examine what I found compelling about social justice and anti-oppression work in the first place. I realized that I wanted to be seen. I wanted to be seen in my realness, fullness, and complexity, and I wanted to see those around me in the fullness of their experience and reality, outside of systems that are supposed to tell us about who we are. To me, it seems impossible to fully see someone without also unraveling and understanding the devastation of oppressive systems and how we are all a part of it. Further, the sadness and grief that accompanied this unraveling process seemed to make sense, and my intuition told me this was because it created the possibility to actually connect, to truly love. I was taken aback by this thought and from that point onward I furiously focused in on one deceptively simple question: what is the role of love in social justice work?

Before this question could be properly explored, however, came the infinitely more challenging question: what is love, and why is it so difficult to define? In *All About Love: New Visions*, bell hooks (2000) states that one of the reasons that we do not want to define love is because we don't actually want to see how loveless our lives are or have been. She asserts that if we were to have a clear understanding and definition of love, we might have to make changes about the way that we are currently living our lives, the way we relate to others and our environment. This made me think about a parallel socialization process that occurs with both systems and with love, involving the way we open and close ourselves (consciously or unconsciously) to others based on race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. I wondered then, is love the answer toward transformation and healing? Indeed, isn't that the very reason that people come into therapy if not for their experiences of suffering and losses of love? Is love then the solution toward dismantling racism and other oppressive systems? If systems of oppression exist to give power to certain groups of people at the cost of the suffering of other groups of people, how can love exist in such relationships, in such a world? Systems blind us and keep us from fully seeing the humanity and individuality of the person in front of us. Perhaps then, systems keep us from having love. If everyone desires love, if love is our natural state as bell hooks asserts, then how can love inform the social work discourse, particularly around anti-oppression work, and stir people towards change?

Love is limited and hurt by oppressive systems, and dismantling these systems provides room for love. And, critically, a parallel process can occur on a relational level in the work a social worker engages in within a clinical therapeutic relationship. In my research class as well as other social work classes, the point was persistently made that empirical research has consistently shown that therapeutic approaches ranging from cognitive behavioral therapy to

psychodynamic frames are insignificant in the results of desirable changes, and that what has been proven to be significant is the quality of the relationship. Despite this, the search for something concrete and scientific continues, as I often heard at the community mental health agency where I interned this past year, about the push toward a more technical behavioral model focused on documented observable behavioral outcomes.

Bodenheimer (2011) questioned the use of love in social work and therapy through an examination of the erasure of love in the history of psychoanalytic practice. Bodenheimer (2011) traced the earliest rejection of love to a singular relational failing between Freud and Ferenczi. While Freud appeared to recognize the significance of love in human existence he perceived it as a “diluting force” in the presence of psychotherapy:

Freud never elaborated any further on this idea that love cures and he never explored the role that love plays in treatment, except in terms of transference. It was probably Sandor Ferenczi who first recognized “the analyst's attitude as a variable in the therapeutic equation, therefore placing this at the center of his interest” (Haynal & Falzeder, [1991](#), p. 9) and it was also only he among Freud's followers who interested himself in the role of love in psychotherapy although “for Freud the term love means transference love, and for Ferenczi (also) countertransference” (Bodenheimer, 2011, p. 10).

Bodenheimer emphasized the impact of this relationship and discussion of love as critical, since it reveals what continues to be present today around the field's hesitation about this discussion of love. When Ferenczi urged him to interrogate his beliefs regarding the role of love in treatment, Freud rejected Ferenczi. Bodenheimer (2011) wrote about how this rejection was followed by both a character and conceptual elimination of Ferenczi and relational love respectively, and that this rejection continues to impact theoretical and practice ideology today. Alfred Alder, a

medical doctor and psychotherapist known for the founding of individual psychology, experienced a similar removal from the Freudian society for his divergent approach and focus on a more holistic perspective of patient care, equality, and socialist values (Fiebert, 1997). Alder strongly espoused ideas of equality being essential to mental health. This was most significantly conceptualized in his idea of the “inferiority complex” in underscoring the effects of power dynamics on the psyche. According to Alder, psychological well-being is completely related to social equality.

Bodenheimer (2011) stated that there are many reasons not to discuss or study the reality of non-erotic love in the psychotherapeutic relationship. These include,

conceptual struggles regarding the actual meaning of ‘non-erotic love;’ linguistic difficulties that are byproducts of the evocative tenor of the word ‘love’ itself; and the obstacles produced by researching a concept that is so largely defined by its subjective nature. (p. 40)

She stated however that despite all of those complications, the most powerful reason to avoid the presence of love in the therapeutic relationship is the very reason why it is essential to be pursued as a study, because it is profoundly controversial or, as she states, an “ethical minefield.” She related the necessity of a discussion of the presence of love in social work to its stated mission,

A field founded on the dismantling of hierarchical power structures and the curative nature of human relationships must also examine the curative nature of every element of such relationships. Love is an essential element in human interaction. Further, social workers and therapists work with populations that are historically underserved, oppressed, and placed on the periphery of services that make living a sustainable and

fulfilling life possible (p. 40).

Bodenheimer (2011) stressed the consequences of avoiding a discussion of the deprivation of love in the lives of vulnerable members of treatment populations and the related deprivation of a discussion of love in treatment practices, and the significance of this research for a field whose focus is equality.

Dominguez (2000) in *For a Politics of Love and Rescue*, pondered the reasons for the avoidance of love in scholarly writing particularly in anthropological study,

Perhaps many of us simply do not feel any genuine affection for those we study or with whom we engage intellectually, or we deliberately choose critical projects. Perhaps we feel love but fear that it would be awkward to show it, or perhaps we believe that making it visible would undermine the weight of our scholarship. (p. 365)

In my own process of this study, I felt my own insecurity about presenting my topic and questions to my research adviser. I wondered whether my questions on love and justice would not be regarded as a legitimate social work issue warranting academic pursuit in a thesis project. It was this very conflict that I felt within myself that revealed its desire to be present and I was only further empowered when it was enthusiastically supported. bell hooks (2001) argued that love and power (over others) cannot coexist and therefore we will continue to live in a loveless culture if issues of oppression continue to go unaddressed and capitalism, rather than love, remains the dominant cultural value.

In a sense, the formulation and execution of this thesis seems to have resulted within and along with the convergence of different moments moving toward love in this particular time of my life. As I engaged with this question I began to see love and its motivations all around me in the struggle for justice and healing. Charles Eisenstein (2011), a writer on economics and human

cultural evolution, ponders in *Occupy Love*, a documentary in development about the Occupy Wall Street movement, the possibility for a more equitable economic system and the role of love in such a system. Eisenstein made the point that economic power does not benefit anyone involved. This includes the “1 %”, a term used to refer to the wealthiest one percent in the U.S. population along with growing income inequality and wealth distribution:

The system isn't working for the 1% either. You know if you were a CEO, you would be making the same choices they do. The institutions have their own logic. Life is pretty bleak at the top too-and all the baubles of the rich are this phony compensation for the loss of what's really important. The loss of community, the loss of connection, the loss of intimacy. The loss of meaning. (Quote extracted from *Occupy Love*)

Recently, *The New York Times* published an article, “Capitalists and Other Psychopaths” (Deresiewicz, 2012), noting a study in 2010 finding that a four percent sample of corporate managers met clinically defined criteria for being labeled psychopaths in comparison with one percent of the population at large, while another study found that “the rich” were more likely to lie, cheat or break the law (Kiff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). These studies are not intended to be representative of this group, but rather point to the emerging and ongoing debate about economic inequality and the roles of all other systems of oppression in a money system. Eisenstein resonated with hooks (2000) on the point that oppression does not benefit anyone involved and it leaves you bereft of love, and it is the structure of such a system that motivates such behaviors for the accumulation of power.

This study is my earnest attempt to explore what I am doing in this work, perhaps a question I have been engaging with all my life: that of love. I find myself aligned with Dominguez's (2000) statement on the importance of the evaluation of love in our work:

It is important that we all pay attention to the presence or absence of love and affection in our scholarship-at all stages of the production of our scholarship. If it is not there, it is important to ask ourselves why and what we should do about it. If it is there, we owe it to our readers to show it, to enable them to evaluate its role in the nature of our work. To maintain a bifurcated view of who should and who should not is to diminish us all and to make everyone's work suspect. (p. 388)

Perhaps if we were to ask such questions, it would lead to further self-examination and clarification about our work, to fully explore our motivations, reveal ourselves, and be then vulnerable to challenges, shortcomings, change, and growth within this field. I initially began this thesis believing I would focus on a particular piece of anti-racism curriculum that I thought was "messed-up" but I was never able to feel settled in it. I kept wondering, "What is it that I am really trying to do?" Allowing myself to feel that conflict and discomfort led me to realize that the original sharp critique I wanted to produce felt like staying in a realm of security and of power. It did not feel like opening. This process led me back to the origin of social work, which is the phenomenon I focus on: the struggle of defining social work as a practice and as a profession. I will then discuss love as a practice from the theoretical perspectives of Erich Fromm (1956) and M. Scott Peck (1986), focusing on the role of love relationally and in the therapeutic process. My selection of their theories on love is due to how they correspond with social work's stated value of full self-determination, in the idea that love is the desire and action to allow the full growth of another individual. In my second theory chapter I will discuss queer theory as I find it particularly helpful in questioning and exploring how one experiences shifts and alterations in the attempt to fit within presupposed categories, particularly in such a social and political existence. Queer theory particularly illuminates the political force of such ideas

about who we are supposed to be within a constructed norm, not through providing answers but through asking questions which also enlighten how one might be disconnected from understanding one's self in the presence of such guiding ideas of norms.

My own experience has been one of comprehending conflict in every category of social identity from which we attempt to discern information about each other. None of the social identity "categories" has ever made sense for me or proven helpful for me when trying to describe who I am, so I fully hold my own bias in the selection of queer theory in the desire to create space for the complexity of identity experiences. These categories never captured my experience as a first generation Korean-American immigrant who then grew up mostly abroad; as a person of color growing up with a mostly White family that my mother married into; or my multiple class experiences both within and outside the military micro-society that I also was a part of. My experience of sexuality never felt comfortable within terms of "straight" or "gay" or "bisexual." None of those words felt big enough to hold the way I connect, relate, or desire. The term "bisexual" itself refers to a binary idea of sexuality. I think that is what felt so hopeful about "queer," as a resistance to being defined and as provoking of a question rather than providing an answer, but in some ways queer has lapsed into another binary category of queer or not queer. Queer is also referential to an oppressive experience of sexuality that I have mostly held privilege in (Sedgwick, 1990, 1993). All of this makes me feel that our language is just not big enough, not expansive enough to hold the complexity, diversity, and multiplicity of who we all are individually and together. We need another discourse and I aim to explore what love would provide for that discourse, and moreover if this is a similar struggle that social work finds itself within the limits of, in its own language and discourse of what it means to be a profession.



## CHAPTER II

### Methodology

#### *The Process for Full Self-Determination*

The Preamble in the National Association of Social workers (NASW) Code of Ethics states:

The primary mission of social work is to enhance the human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living. Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. "Clients" is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities." (Preamble, Code of Ethics, NASW, 1996).

This preamble clearly states social work, as a profession, is one that is allied in the work toward social justice. Bartlett (1970) in *The Common Base for Social Work Practice* states "Probably the oldest and most widely held value in social work asserts the worth and dignity of every human being" (p. 65). This value she further described is embedded in the social work thought of another value that has been expressed as "self-determination," "self-fulfillment," or "self-

realization,” which was expressed by the Working Definition subcommittee as “maximum realization of each individual’s potential for development throughout his lifetime” (p. 65). However, the field of social work itself has historically been in its own struggle for a purpose and definition, or otherwise “self-realization.” Holosko (2003) claimed that the practice of social work has been in actual existence for over 400 years, yet a comprehensive definition and purpose was only first officially identified in North America in 1958 with Bartlett’s *Working Definition of Social Work Practice*. The practice of social work however appears to maintain and encompass an expansive and diverse range of issues and conceptualizations, both in the field and within the academic community. Holosko (2003) argued that continuing a discussion of the definition of social work is essential if the profession ever desires to become a productive profession and realize its goals, however so defined. Wakefield (2001) stated at a conference on reworking the working definition of social work that “Social work’s lack of a clear consensual foundation is unique among the professions, and I think, disastrous for social work’s long term credibility and effectiveness” (p.1).

Ross and Shireman (1973) at the third NASW Symposium presented a paper that explored whether the field of social work has been in fact working toward social justice, as one of its professed values. They highlighted how the “profession of social work is based on a system of values, which acknowledge the dignity, and worth of the person the right of each individual to the fullest self-determination possible in a world where others have the same right” (p. 11). Ross and Shireman (1973) identified that if there were greater acceptance of the field’s validity by social workers themselves, that the profession would not be in a situation of “overpromising” as its goals would become clear, which would breed more creativity and experimenting in finding actual solutions to the problems of social justice and service

implementation identified by the field. In this sense the field would be enabled to search for more solutions rather than trying to validate its position of professionalism and purpose in the first place. However, Ross and Shireman (1973) do not challenge the particular professional validity that social workers seek and question the political structure the field finds itself situated within but rather blames the profession as a whole. Nor does the paper they present question how the very quest for professional validity currently places constraints on problem solving or whether acquisition of this validity would be the result of the loss of the creative capacity they speak of.

In my exploration of this phenomenon of definition and identity, I wonder about what obstacles and barriers social work experiences in its own pursuit of “full self-determination” in practice. How has the field made sense of its values historically and in relation to other structures, i.e. academia, professionalism, and within its own discourse? As a helping profession, England (1986) wrote that the real nature of social work is obscured by the field’s attempt to define itself as a discipline of the social sciences. England argued that as the field has professionalized, it has been in the process of denying the real talents and human instincts that created this field in the first place, that being intuition, imagination, and experience. While this is the case, England also argued that there is a great need for a common theoretical base in social work:

It is notoriously difficult to find out what social workers *do*. To ask them is to invite vague replies such as ‘visit people in need’, ‘help people’ or even ‘talk to people’. To survey them is to note their presence in diverse settings and their contact with diverse groups-social workers are well established in court settings and in prisons in their work with offenders, and in hospitals in their work with physically and mentally ill people, and

their work with children, families and old people largely occupies the resources of local authority area office and residential settings. It may not be possible to say what social work is, but clearly it is substantial and pervasive. (p. 11).

Janet Finn (2010) questioned whether the substantial nature of social work is related to love and human connection. Finn historically investigates the role of love in social work and social justice and questions whether the process of professionalization has also resulted in a simultaneous process of distancing itself from a core origin of human connectedness. Finn (2010) posed the following questions about love and social work:

Has a language and practice of love been lost in the (post) modern practice of social work? Have the powers of professionalization silenced a more intimate discourse on human connection and squelched a motive force for social action? Has the postmodern turn further denigrated a connection to our fundamental humanness as a core value base for the practice of social work? Did a loving practice of social work ever exist? Should a language of love inform and inspire social work today? (p. 179).

Finn (2010) engaged in a dialogical exploration of the language of love in Northern American social work history and found that ideas about love are often used in efforts to understand the foundation of social work practice. Finn also questioned her own lack of inclusion and use of love when developing the integrated practice model for social work in *Just Practice* (Finn & Jaconbsen, 2008). Finn reflected on how while she and her co-author included stories that demonstrated love in justice work, they did not examine the concept of love itself in social work.

Saleebey (2006) stated that humans can only come into being through creative and emergent relationships with others and that without such transactions there is no possibility to discover and test one's own power, knowledge, awareness, or internal strengths. Through a

transactional dialogue humans confirm the significance of each other and also begin to heal and connect the rift between one's self, other, and larger institutions. Despite such acknowledgement of the significance of relationships in healing, transformation, and justice, there has been very limited literature in the field that has questioned this phenomenon as part of therapeutic practice and social justice activism. While there is acknowledgement of the proscribed use of love within a therapeutic relationship and academic or professional discourse, there has been very limited literature in the field that has questioned such limited use of words revealing emotional connection between a client and clinician in a therapeutic relationship (Bodenheimer, 2011) and why such use is understood to be professionally compromising or what "professionally compromising" means in the first place.

bell hooks in *All About Love: New Visions* (2001) wrote about how love is not conceptualized or understood as an earnest and valid intellectual pursuit. Love in this sense is also gendered, where reason, intelligence, and mind is masculine, and emotions, connection, and relationship is feminine, "Taught to believe that the mind, not the heart, is the seat of learning, many of us believe that to speak of love with any emotional intensity means we will be perceived as weak and irrational" (p. xxvii). This dichotomy of reason versus emotion or masculine versus feminine parallels Judith Butler's exploration of the politics of the public versus private space under the thought of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) in evaluating social and public action for change. Butler used Arendt's identification of private and public space as also being gendered as a way of delineating the political forces at play in the recent Occupy Wall Street movement and demonstrations and how this is present in all public demonstration work itself. Butler (2011) in a speech given regarding the Occupy Wall Street Movement, pointed out how the very engagement of public demonstrations presents a political battle of defining space,

thereby existence, “As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for public assembly and public speech, we have also to ask how it is that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space, and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment” (Butler, 2011).

Butler stated that human interdependence is, private, feminine and rendered invisible, while individual action is masculine, public, and what is seen. Butler interrogated the public versus private dichotomy by demonstrating how it is a false dichotomy in the first place that has been constructed and used as a source and location of power. She identified how the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations enact these identified “private activities” by having a group of people who are cooking, eating, washing, singing, and sleeping in a "public" space and makes visible the interdependence that underlies all action in the first place. Similarly, bell hooks (2001) contended that love is understood to be an individual, interpersonal phenomenon that is reproduced by women and remains in the private sphere, while intelligence, information and reason is created by men and maintained in the public sphere. In this discussion, bell hooks stated that men are understood to know and contain knowledge of love yet women are the holders of love but are not able to produce information and so, thereby, unable to produce knowledge of love which resonates with the most influential works on love being written by men.

In the phenomenon chapter of this study, I will more fully explore the field’s experience of professionalization and its relationship with such tropes as love, justice, and power in the struggle for a definition and the role of such in practice. bell hooks desired to “reclaim” love by deconstructing the ways in which love has been gendered and relegated as a private experience. Butler used a post-structural lens to evaluate social action and identity in socially constructed

dichotomies. In the phenomenon chapter, I will also examine the way social work struggles with its own capacity to be a force toward social justice while also being a profession in the way that bell hooks argues love is similarly challenged as a motive source of social action.

In an effort to engage with this problem of a definition for social work, I will explore love as a theory, primarily under the thoughts of Erich Fromm's (1956) *The Art of Loving* and M. Scott Peck's (1986) *The Road Less Traveled*, both for their resonances with each other and the popular success of these two books that also came to significantly define the work of these respective psychoanalysts. It is to be noted that they are both men and thereby as hooks (2001) suggested, progenitors of love yet for the purposes of this study are used for their attempts to move the psychoanalytic field to a more humanistic understanding. Fromm does this by discussing love from a philosophical existential perspective about the problem of human existence where love is an art form, and Peck discussed love as a spiritual and intellectual matter where love is an activity and investment. Both Fromm and Peck spoke about love as being the desire and action of nourishing one's inherent potential while preserving the integrity and individuality of that person. Therefore, if love is the desire to see another person grow and develop as fully as they have the capacity to, in other words, one's full self-determination, I would then postulate that love would necessitate the dismantling of systems of oppression as they do the exact opposite of love, since they limit a person's ability to realize their full selves.

Queer theory looks at such complexities of power and language, how they are enacted, define individuals, and regulate bodies and thoughts into socially constructed norms. Queer theory then, questions and deconstructs these social norms and institutions (Callis, 2009). Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, a book regarded as a seminal text in queer theory, highlighted how the socially constructed binary system of gender and sex are not reflective of one's ontological

core, but rather are performed (Butler, 1990). Gender then, understood as a performance, is what one engages with in a particular moment in time in relation to the external environment in its cultural constructs, instead of the essential experience of the individual outside of this situation. In the second theory chapter, I will examine queer theory in its relevance to identity construction, to interrogate how something comes into being in the first place or “defined,” and thereby performed. I believe that queer theory will be a useful examination for social work in exploring how the field itself has been enacted into being within these different power structures and how it might continue to find itself in a place of identity confusion.

I maintain no pretenses of offering any solutions to what I have typed as “the problem of a definition for social work,” particularly within the scope of this project or perhaps ever. Instead, this is an earnest attempt to engage with this question in the hope to explore some of the “core” experiences and values of the field where there might not be space for within the realms of a socially constructed idea and the politics of such in a “profession.” The nature of this study is exploratory, to question and investigate meaning, to provide a reflective and honest discussion about the nature of social work as might be rendered by these two theories, while also holding the critiques of how such ideas came into being in the first place. The intent of this effort of engaging in this discussion on the nature of social work is to provide the opportunity for more alternative discourses on practice and definition, particularly a discourse on how the field of social work might exist, function, and look, if it were to challenge the construction of professionalism and identify itself as a practice and art inspired by love.



## CHAPTER III

### Phenomenon

#### *Love and Justice, A Humanistic Origin*

Social work has long identified one of its core values to be justice. Understanding what “justice” is and what it means for the role of social work in the larger political structure has been a long and provocative discussion within the profession (Abramovitz & Bardill, 1993; Gibelman, 1999; Haynes, 1993; Ross & Shireman, 1973). Rimor (2003) argued that “justice” exists in the public realm and thereby is the relationship between the individual and its larger social structures. Rimor (2003) never clearly defined how he conceptualizes justice but does state its semantic interpretation of justice reveals connections with concepts such as fairness, impartiality, uprightness, integrity, truth, lawfulness, right, virtue, and so on. He further argues that justice is related to love in the way that love exists in the private realm; he states that “true love” is desired within relationships and “perfect justice” in our social lives. While Rimor (2003) does not substantively define justice, he asserted a sense of “fairness” and equality with the term:

Consider the current economic situation. It is common knowledge that less than 10 percent of the people of all countries or states hold more than 90 percent of the power, land, business, money, education, information, and technologies available. This is one of the contemporary, mainly unjust, and painfully inhuman situations. Now, even if all humanity becomes one global state—with one central government, one language and the

same technologies—this situation would not necessarily change. The only way to create a more just situation is to distribute at least some of the surplus of the well-to-do to the poor. (p. 168).

By this example, it appears that Rimor (2003) understood economic inequality, where one small group of people maintains the majority of wealth despite the effort of the majority of that population that contributes to such wealth through the exploitation of labor of marginalized groups, as “unjust.” Rimor (2003) alluded to, however never fully states, how systems of oppression are entangled in or feed into capitalism.

An interesting piece of Rimor’s (2003) argument is how he framed love and justice within two dichotomized spheres of existence, love in the private (interpersonal relationships) and justice in the public (society). Rimor (2003) also defined two paths to achieve justice in society, one that is public and one that is private. The public route is the attempt to impose justice by laws and regulations and those who do not abide are punished in some manner. Rimor (2003) argued that this method towards justice is slow with notable historical drawbacks while also being personally and socially unfulfilling but the desirable outcome of this process would be social justice in the hope that it would enhance compassion, tenderness, and genuine fulfilling relationships and attachment among people and communities. The problem with this assertion however is that Rimor (2003) does not also investigate the many ways in which laws and regulations have been historically unjust and have not been at all motivated by desire to increase capacity for compassion, tenderness, etc., but rather to keep certain groups in power over others and to in effect institutionalize injustice (Miller & Garran, 2008). Rimor (2003) also identified the private path toward achieving justice on a personal level that begins with the building of warm and open relationships, as love:

this is the way that we mostly do not use. It should be the principal way. That is, while not neglecting the way of justice, we should give priority to the way of love by investing most human efforts there. Justice will be a sure outcome (p. 175).

That is, when coming from a “love” position, social justice is inevitable. Rimor (2003) identified a relationship between love and justice where love presupposes justice but justice does not hold the same relationship with love:

Love belongs to the personal realm, while justice belongs to the public. Love originated evolutionarily in the subjective parent-child relationship. Justice originated in the objective perception of our social relationships. Both concepts have deep roots in our feelings. Although justice and love are interdependent, love is a prerequisite to justice. Most of those who love would behave justly to their loved ones, but not vice versa. Laws and norms try unsuccessfully to enhance love among us. However, they would hardly attain justice. With love we do not need laws or armies. Justice would necessarily prevail, and much more. Intuitively and psychologically, love is more basic than justice for our existence. Research shows that in our pursuit of happiness, love plays a central role, while justice does not. For many, love is also a goal of our existence. (source unknown, extracted from “If Love Then Justice” p. 167)

In this argument about the nature of the interdependent relationship between love and justice, Rimor (2003) is however caught in a circular argument as he argues that to love also means to behave justly, however one can also behave justly in the absence of love. Rimor (2003) is only able to make this argument by producing a series of assertions and thereby framing love in the private realm and justice in the public realm, however he then argues against this statement by asserting that justice would be inevitable in our social world if efforts toward love became a

priority, thereby taking love out of its private location. By identifying love as a private phenomenon, Rimor's (2003) argument is based on the identification of two constructions of love and justice located in two different spheres of a private versus public dichotomy, yet then states that the construction of love is more significant in managing and understanding issues that are public, such as social justice, than justice itself. The argument holds an inherent self-contradiction: if love and justice exist in two separate spheres, they are then incapable of being measured by each other, how then can one construction be more significant than the other? Despite its logical inconsistencies, Rimor (2003) however did illuminate the basic phenomenon that other voices have echoed about the relationship between love and social justice, that love calls for justice,

acts of individual compassion, trust, or tenderness find their weak echo in the just norms and laws we impose and to which we adhere. It is as if justice is a pale imitation of the idea of love we all have in us from the start. It seems that humanity uses justice as an 'in-the-meantime' device in order to keep society running (p. 169).

This idea has become a central question of this exploration: If justice is inevitable in any relationship that is based in love, be it interpersonal, communal, societal, and if social work is committed to such justice, then is the purpose of social work to create the capacity for such love?

As mentioned in the methodology chapter of this study, Ross and Shireman (1973) explored whether the field of social work has been in fact working toward social justice. In their investigation, they examined the profession's engagement with the status of four groups identified as "second class citizens": the poor, patients of mental and medical healthcare services, pupils of public education, and prisoners. Ross and Shireman (1973) asserted that social justice is not what one merely does for others, but is what one does for oneself since social

justice, through their conceptualization, in practice is the ability to identify values and live by them. With this understanding of social justice, Ross and Shireman (1973) questioned how the field's commitment to the "fundamental dignity of the individual" could provide a standardized, competent, and responsible practice:

Social work's operational definitions of its convictions about the nature of man and the proper relationship between man and social order transcend the lines among fields of practice. These lines largely reflect the concerns of service delivery systems at a particular juncture in history, but the problems of social justice pervade all of fields of practice and reflect the concerns of the larger society. (p. 6)

This paper was presented thirty years ago and concluded that social workers' practice and operations reflect the norms and societal goals of the system in which they work, rather than the stated profession's values and goals. Furthermore, despite this inconsistency, there are not any social work interventions to reflect this incompatibility between the social work values and the systems within which they function. Ross and Shireman (1973) in contrast to Rimor's (2003) argument about governmental practice and social policy, stated that one of the significant barriers to achieving social justice is the lack of social policy in relation to human need and that this is largely due to human development not being a cornerstone of national concern.

Ross and Shireman (1973) appear to define "human development" as the previously stated "fullest self-determination possible" and connect that such capacity is directly related to the success of anti-oppression work, however they do not question or investigate further how anti-oppression work expands an individual's opportunity for development. Berlin (2005), in a historical study of how the social work value of "acceptance" has been named and used throughout the field's history, finds acceptance to be connected to practice efficacy and

empowerment. Berlin identified how this value stems from social work's history in humanitarian and religious traditions and while discussion of acceptance has varied throughout history, one discernible theme has been an implied moral obligation to honor the humanity of fellow human beings. Berlin stated of the value, "It prompts us to recognize clients as members of our own human family who deserve the same levels of respect, consideration, and care that we would ask for ourselves" (p. 484). Berlin offered a working definition of this concept and emphasizes that a key component of this acceptance is drawn from Bertha Reynolds's early rendering of this value, which is compassion with respect of the other's own individuality, to not try and mold another person to fit one's own preferences or sensibilities. Berlin appropriately noted how this power dynamic of offering compassion and care in a situation where one person is in need, can easily devolve into a situation of reproducing the experience of the very injustice that the client is seeking liberation from.

Finn (2010) engaged in this examination of the relationship between love and justice and questions whether a language of love has been silenced in practice. Finn, inspired by Berlin's (2005) working definition and examination of acceptance in the field, considered the meaning and significance of love in social work practice and social justice. Like Berlin, Finn wondered whether an inquiry into love would also help the field comprehend historical and contemporary value tensions, power relations, and practice possibilities while also questioning how a specialized knowledge base of diagnosis, interpretation, and interventions has possibly moved social work from a practice or form of loving kindness to a profession. Finn appeared to come to this question through a dialogical analysis of the conversations among early social workers in the settlement houses, where she suggests that strong, loving bonds both toward members in the community and among the Hull House residents is what supported and nurtured the ideas and

action for social reform and justice among Jane Addams (1910) and her colleagues. Jane Addams described her work in the settlement houses as “an attempt to express the meaning of life in terms of life itself” (Stebner, 1997, p. 33, as cited in Finn, 2010, p. 182). Finn noted how Jane Addams spoke largely about fostering compassion and autonomy while Mary Richmond talked about an “ethic of empathy” in the work they engaged with. Of these early reformers, Finn states,

They invariably drew on a love grounded in faith, in human mutuality, and in intimate connectedness among women and men, they used its power to fuel and sustain justice-oriented action, and they grappled with tensions of power and privilege therein” (Finn, 2010, p. 165).

While there were certainly limits to the efforts of these early White women reformers, revealed by their failure to engage with and support the work of African American women activists, Finn argued that what appears to have sustained the work toward justice was in some form a language of love in the commitment for social action.

hooks (2001) noted in her own experience, that when giving lectures on social justice and ending racism and sexism, students often became agitated when she spoke about the role of love in any movement for social justice. Hooks asserted that cynicism about love is a cultural product of socialization that teaches that love is for the “naïve, the weak, and hopelessly romantic.” As such, hooks (2001) in her exploration of love, noticed how love has been disempowered and wrapped in its own social milieu of oppression, “whenever a single woman over forty brings up the topic of love...no one thinks she is rigorously engaged in a philosophical undertaking wherein she is endeavoring to understand the metaphysical meaning of love in everyday live” (p. xx). Furthermore, hooks observed how she was surprised to find that the vast majority of

nonfiction books about love were written by men. hooks connected that this surprise was due to an inconsistency with her own socialization in believing and experiencing that the topic of love was primarily a subject of contemplation for women. hooks argued that she continues to believe that women contemplate the topic with greater intensity but it is rather sexism that has kept women's thoughts on love to be taken as seriously as writings from men on the subject matter,

Men theorize about love, but women are more often love's practitioners. Most men feel that they receive love and therefore know what it is like to be loved; women often feel we are in a constant state of yearning, wanting love but not receiving it (p. xx).

In this example, hooks noted the gendered construction of love and what gets reinforced about who can have and know love. hooks illustrated the complicated layers between where social justice issues and issues or barriers to love become entangled, specifically how different power structures obfuscate a person's understanding of love while also keeping a person from their full self-determination.

Any study of love or social work appears to lead to the study of human existence and struggle for meaning and how that meaning becomes defined in any given culture or community. Berlin (2005), Finn (2010), and hooks (2000) note how social work and social justice has distanced itself from its own existential origination and sense of purpose, yet perhaps the field would benefit in a more fulfilling sense of self-understanding and guided practice if it were more connected to its existential roots and its history as a whole. Social work as a professional function has defined its role as one that aims to seek and institutionalize justice in the human social realm. Rimor (2003) argued that love, as it underlies all justice, is the basic and more significant value for our personal and social existence.



### *Social Work, the Need for a Communicable Technique*

Social work has been documented as a profession and practice in the United States for a little over a hundred years. Albers (2001) stated that the profession itself has been defined by its undeniable search for itself, that both in practice and in educational fields, social work's very purpose may be to discover its own purpose. It is widely understood that the history of social work is one that is characterized by its own search for a definition and that in this process of a definition; the field has throughout its history and continued to encounter ideological and developmental obstacles (Reid & Edwards, 2006). It is argued then that the core of the practice history of social work is its quest for a definition of practice. Holosko (2003) understood social work to have two key features that characterizes its unique history as a profession: one being the points at which the profession has resurfaced at different points of time in history; the second is how the development of the profession has been marked by major milestones. As previously mentioned, the field emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century out of the Charity Organization Society and Settlement Houses and were based on principles of voluntary philanthropy and generally improving the conditions of the "less fortunate" (Austin, 1983).

The term "social work" was coined by Simon Patten, an educator who applied the label to "friendly visitors" and volunteers of the social welfare movement (Holosko, 2003). The significance of the use of this term was that it identified the field's fundamental values of altruistic concern, social justice, and reform primarily focused on poverty, and the problems of society at large as they affected individuals (Reid & Edwards, 2006). At this time, the method employed to improve the condition of those "less fortunate" was primarily through the provision of tangible resources, such as food, clothing, housing, etc. These interventions were generally aimed at helping those deprived of such material and social comforts better assimilate and

function in society. The socio-historical location of the birth of social work is important to note as it came during a time of massive immigration to the United States in the age of industrialization and national concern over a new population and the impact of such on the current social organization of the country (Cox & Garvin, 1970; Popple & Leighninger, 2002; Jansson, 2009). The observation was that many groups of new immigrant populations found themselves in poverty and, as Addams identified, living in conditions of “squalor” (Addams, 1910). Regardless of the motives for such work, an interesting observation is that the invention of social work came during a time of rapid transformation in terms of identity and culture and called on social and political structures on how to respond and makes sense of such change.

Through a historical analysis of these different “milestones” in social work, Holosko (2003) highlighted how part of the struggle for a definition for the profession may have had its origins in the micro-macro dichotomy that developed with Jane Addams and Mary Richmond when social work, previously a voluntary philanthropy, became a scientific philanthropy and similarly shifted from a religious or spiritual calling to an education-based initiative. Holosko identified how this schism of locating the problem and thus its interventions either within the individual versus society has persevered in practice today. Holosko stated this division is an unfortunate part of the field’s struggle to develop a comprehensive and interconnected practice in such a polarizing split. In brief, Holosko pointed out the significant milestones in social work history primarily around the different gatherings of organizations in the profession in an attempt to define itself.

In 1915, at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (NCCC), Abraham Flexner presented a paper on the topic “Is social work a profession?” where he concluded that it was not, and asserted that the practice was more of an intellectual activity

than a professional one. This was understood as a defining event in social work history that highlighted the issue of field's professional status and is one that continued to be debated extensively since this conference (Austin, 2001). The most significant critique in Flexner's statement was his assertion that a profession must have a "technique capable of communication through an orderly and highly specialized educational discipline," which he felt social work clearly lacked (Austin, 1983 p. 368). Holosko (2003) argued that given the diverse nature of the field, it was not possible for social work to conform to this idea of a profession. Flexner was a well-known champion of reform in medical education and who had a special interest in the development of social work as a field. In the same paper, Flexner (1915) stated:

I have made the point that all the established and recognized professions have definite and specific ends: medicine, law, architecture, engineering—one can draw a clear line of demarcation about their respective fields. This is not true of social work. It appears not so much a definite field as an aspect of work in many fields. An aspect of medicine belongs to social work, as do certain aspects of law, education, architecture, etc. (p. 581)

Interestingly, in the same paper, Flexner also articulated what social work would look like as profession despite having defined it as a non-profession:

Finally, in the one respect in which most professions still fall short, social work is fairly on the same level as education, for the rewards of the social worker are in his own conscience and in heaven. His life is marked by devotion to impersonal ends and his own satisfaction is largely through the satisfactions procured by his efforts for others... (p. 581).

Here Flexner seemed to imply that the value of social work lies in more of a humanitarian and relational experience and does not however understand this to be enough to be considered as a

profession. Despite Flexner's identification of social work as not a "profession," it appears that Flexner himself experienced ambivalence about the significance and nature of social work if it were a "profession."

Flexner's invitation to speak at this conference carries its own information about the nature of what the field desired as a developing profession. Flexner, an educational reformer, first gained national attention with the publication of his Carnegie Foundation report in 1910 that was highly critical of the medical profession's education standards. Edith Abbott, who at the time was an associate director of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, was vice chair of the committee that organized the panel for the event where Flexner spoke, likely to what would have been a mostly women audience, and cited Flexner's report as an authoritative analysis on professional education (Morris, 2008). She and other social work leaders at the time sought the establishment of schools of social work as part of the development of the profession. In 1958, social work saw its breakthrough in a definition with Bartlett's working definition. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was founded in 1955 by the merging of seven different professional organizations that acknowledged a need for a unified professional organization through a definition of a single profession with a common base of practice that would apply to all related activities and settings. These organizations were the American Association of Social Work, the Association for the Study of Community Organization, the American Association of Medical Social Workers, the American Association of Psychiatric Social Work, the National Association of School Social Workers, the Association of Group Workers, and the Social Work Research Group. The significance of this joining was the combined effort of seven distinct social work organizations engaging in a question that had previously been unresolved by them separately but ever present in the field.

The NASW's first assigned purpose was to define social work and this occurred in a time when the profession itself was widely acknowledging its own need for a unified professional organization (Delahanty, 1961). Under the guidance of Bartlett, the definition was described as a constellation of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge, and method, and no part alone was solely characteristic of social work practice. The reception of this working definition both in academia and practice was hailed as the milestone that brought the field to some sense of legitimacy, whereas previously the future of the field appeared fraught with ambivalence and apathy (Holosko, 2003). In this working definition, however, Bartlett acknowledged that part of the struggle of social work in defining its purpose and practice is the inadequacy of words and concepts available to comprehensively represent the important facets and components of the profession's practice and understood her working definition as a "beginning formulation" (Bartlett, 1961, 1970). Bartlett understood that the nature of the work included levels of scaffolding:

It should be clear that in this approach the practice itself is not described as "generic."

The common base of social work practice consists of concepts, generalization, and principles relating to knowledge, value and intervention, i.e., abstract ideas. Practitioners learn these "common elements" in school and apply them in professional practice. The

base is not the doing but what *underlies* the doing. (Bartlett, 1970, p. 129)

Bartlett expressed that this was indeed a "working" definition of social work and emphasized that the common base for social work practice is what "underlies" the work not the particular activity of the work. In this sense, attempting to operationalize a definition of social work to be applied within a certain professional practice model would be particularly challenging. This understanding of social work however describes and makes sense of how a field can range so

diversely in the actual “doing.”

*Social Work and the Schools, Institutionalizing a Communicable Technique*

While Flexner declared social work to not be a profession, he expressed a particular value of social work that exists in the transactional process that resonates in Bartlett’s (1970) *The Common Base of Social Work Practice*, where she strongly suggests that the spirit of the profession is not what the actual activity of the profession looks like but rather the underpinnings of such activity. Though this point has been made historically, social work has a history of struggling with its identity as a profession and has grappled with issues around the nature of its purpose and how this fits within a professional model. Reid & Edwards (2006) explored the history of this struggle of a profession, and examine the argument of social work’s professionalization as a desire for greater social status, authority, and income. They instead argued that the issue of professionalization is not as strongly related to its status as a profession but rather that the status of being a profession is central to its relationship with academia. In their view, if social work were not a profession then it would have no place within the university system. The question to them is not so much whether social work is a profession but what the purpose of having a function within academia serves for social work.

Social work has an extensive educational structure that involves both private and public colleges and universities that carry a dual process that includes educational requirements that serve as the basis for professional accreditation through the state licensing and certification requirements for practitioners. The system of accreditation in the United States is carried through by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and is linked to the primary social work association in the United States, the NASW. These two organizations hold a reciprocal relationship in that the CSWE requires social work programs to include the NASW code of

ethics in their curriculum for accreditation and the NASW requires individuals to have graduated from a program accredited by CSWE for full membership in the association. Reid and Edwards (2006) argued that social work would not be what it is without the extensive structure of the social work education system and this is a result of the very basis and idea of professionalism. Greenwood (1957) stated that professions have certain identifiable traits that include a specialized body of knowledge, an established system for social or public sanction, a professional association capable of controlling entry and policing its membership, and an ethic of social or public commitment. According to Greenwood then, the very conception of professionalism involves the application of a body of specialized knowledge applied to an area of societal functioning.

Medicine and Law are understood to be the most recognized classical professions and encompass the attributes that Greenwood (1957) outlined and that other professions attempt to emulate as an established profession. Social work has itself been consumed throughout its history with the question of whether it is a “profession” under this classical construct of the definition. Larson (1977) who explored professionalism as its own phenomenon questioned how an occupation comes to be understood as being “professional” or “unprofessional.” Larson referred to an incident of professors in the 1960s who went on strike and were referred to as behaving like “longshoremen.” This made her question how groups of people in established professions might feel that strategies such as unionization, similar to that of the industrial working class, might threaten their own cherished professional identity. Larson argued that while the specific attributes of an “ideal” profession vary, there is substantial consensus on the general “dimensions” of a profession which include what she called a cognitive, normative, and evaluative dimension. The cognitive is centered on the body of knowledge and techniques that

can be applied to practice and the training or education that is required to master such knowledge and skills. The normative dimension defines the profession's service orientation as professionals and their corresponding code of ethics, which Larson argued is what gives professions their prestige and ability for self-regulation that is granted by society. The evaluative dimension is an implicit comparison of professions with other occupations that highlight professions' characteristics of prestige and autonomy. In other words professions are also defined in relation to other occupations that hold non-professional status.

Larson (1977) stated that these professions become their own "real" communities that are identified by representative organizations and institutional structures, such as associations, schools, and codes of ethics. Some of the features of these professional communities are that they provide its members with "relatively permanent affiliation, an identity, personal commitment, specific interests, and general loyalties" (p. x). The institutional supports are particularly interesting because they are professional features that occupations with professional ambitions can imitate if they do not necessarily hold the cognitive and normative dimensions of a profession. Larson further explained that the boundaries of what defines each dimension are unclear but the prestige afforded seems particularly connected to how "established" and autonomous the profession is in terms of the authority they hold in society and can have less to do with high income and class status.

Larson used Freidson's (1960) analysis of medicine to explore the implications of value and prestige assigned to professional autonomy and how the most salient characteristics become observable in practice. Freidson stated that "a profession is distinct from other occupations in that it has been given the right to control its own work" and that this privileged position is secured through "the political and economic influence of the elite which sponsors it" (Freidson,



p. 72; as cited by Larson, p. xii). Larson argued that this process through which professions specifically “gain” autonomy reveals that this is something an occupation can work toward and thereby increasing their independence from the dominant social ideology that also allows them self-evaluation and self-control. However there is complexity in this relationship, Larson stated that while this autonomy allows further removal from governmental regulation, it is that very structure that gives professions their prestige and independence. The extent to which professions are actually able to operate outside of this system then is tied to how significant and valued are the services they provide to the current social structure. It can be considered a false sense of autonomy for the profession then that is only afforded by the very structure that they may feel independent from. Larson (1970) argued an increasing significance in the professional phenomenon is the strategic placement of the ability to produce knowledge. Professions then in a sense are also granted the authority to not only produce knowledge but to also determine what is knowledge. Reid and Edwards (2006) argued that if, in a practice situation, social workers are not able to exercise professional judgment and discretion under high degrees of management and supervision, then their possession of such knowledge and ability to discern alternative applications would bear little meaning in the context of their role. Etzioni in 1969 also made a point about professionalism using social work as a case in point, of being a semi-profession as it relied more heavily on practice wisdom than full professions like medicine and law and as such social workers are typically located in organizations with managers and supervisors as opposed to collegial systems. Since this time social work has become much more research oriented and has developed a curriculum that supports evidence-based practice and has thus increased in professional status.

Reid and Edwards (2006) identified a transformation in social work’s professional

experience when the NASW changed its long-standing membership requirements to include people with baccalaureate degrees to become members in 1970, which came into full implementation in 1974 when CSWE began to accredit Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs. Reid and Edwards stated that an impact of this shift was that nearly half of more than 500,000 jobs identified by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics as social work jobs were to be filled by people with professional social work degrees, which was the highest the field had ever experienced previous to this change. Reid and Edwards noted that this result of further expanding the definition of professional preparation to be more inclusive changed the character of social work dramatically to expand largely to the mental health and health service sector. The field itself has turned more towards a clinical and evidence-based practice within the medical model which has allowed for more contracting with nonprofit or for profit agencies that deliver services to specified populations.

This shift within the profession has been met with criticisms of social work as a profession. Criticisms revolve around the ideology of the profession; in how social work positions itself on social issues and what may have transpired out of its professionalization and the sociological implications of such. Reamer (1993) stated that more than ever social work is attracting fewer people who are drawn to the field through a commitment to the profession's traditional concerns of social justice and public welfare. This shift he argued has resulted in the subordination of social justice ideals and an increased focus on efficacy of service delivery with accountability. For example, Kammerman and Kahn (1990) stated that there has been a traditional alliance between social work and public child welfare services which have strengthened and waned throughout American history but has experienced a re-emergence in the late 1980s and early 1990s when a series of legal judgments established a precedent that children in protective

services have the right to professional services and, as such, the system significantly moved to increase their number of professionally trained social workers in child welfare systems. This relationship with social work and child welfare was in conjunction with the increase of child welfare services being contracted by private agencies, which has had the impact of narrowing the focus of the issue of child welfare to abuse and neglect with a corresponding de-evaluation of the role of poverty in the child welfare system. Social worker training then is focused on treatment interventions to address abuse and neglect and not a movement to implement and support anti-poverty programs and policies despite the overwhelming experience of poverty in the population that the child welfare system serves.

*Treatment or Reformation, and an Ecological Perspective*

Part of the field's split in the debate about individual responsibility versus societal responsibility in the regulation of social problems has resulted in questions about the ideological purpose of social work itself. In *Regulating the Poor: The functions of Public Welfare*, Piven and Cloward (1971) argued that social work and the function of social policy was enacted more to regulate the poor and other oppressed populations and as a means of social control rather than social reform. There have been numerous critiques and writings on the purpose of social work as a field and whether the field itself is counterproductive to its ideals and mission. As mentioned previously the two most significant associations for social work are the NASW and CSWE both of which also engage in an interdependent relationship that reinforces the function of the other. The CSWE, an accreditation association, requires social work programs to cover NASW Code of Ethics and the NASW requires social workers to have graduated from a CSWE program for membership. These two associations define the purpose of social as such:

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being, and

help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.

(Preamble, Code of Ethics, National Association of Social Workers, 1996; as cited by Reid & Edwards, 2006, p. 461)

The profession of social work is committed to the enhancement of human well-being and to the alleviation of poverty and oppression. (Curriculum Policy Statements, Council on Social Work Education, 1994; as cited by Reid & Edwards, 2006, p. 461)

Both mission statements highlight social work values as improving the conditions of the poor and alleviating poverty and oppression. Specht & Courtney (1994) argued that the original intention of social work was community based social reform however the field had abandoned its mission in order to pursue professionalism and status. The authors saw social work's "fall from grace" in the pursuit of greater professional autonomy that looked to the middle class as consumers for less expensive therapy. Specht and Courtney (1994) called on the field to return to their original purpose and intention by being in solidarity with the poor and recommitting to social justice.

While Specht and Courtney (1994) made a significant point on the contradictions of the field, however they neglected to explore the inherent complications of engaging in work based on altruistic values and how the field of social work relied on a structure of professionalism in order to do casework and community organization work. Reid and Edwards (2006) made the point that a profession requires social sanction from an established authority and thereby its very nature tends to be case-oriented and that holding this inherent contradiction is a piece of what it means to be in a professional role, as it is in medicine, law, or education. This tension and critique between individual and collective interests in social work is strongly reflected in the

field's academic literature (Abramovitz & Bardill, 1993; Haynes, 1998; Specht & Courtney, 1994, Wakefield, 1996a, 1996b).

This dichotomy with its socio-historical roots has been made sense of in the field in the person-in-environment perspective that saw its first articulation in the working definition of practice (Bartlett, 1960). This perspective emphasized the importance of understanding both the individual and their behavior in the context of various environments that include social, economic, political, historical, religious, physical, cultural, and family systems. It is argued that this concept that focuses on change and improvement of the conditions of the individual and of society in an aim to improve the relationship between the individual and society is what is distinctively a social work motivation that distinguishes the field from other helping professions (Gibelman, 1999; Karls & Wandrei 1995; Stuart 1999). The person-in-environment model has been identified as a guiding principle for practice and views the individual in his or her own ecosystem that includes all of the systems with which the individual has reciprocal relationships. This interrelationship between the individual and the environment highlights the complexity of this reciprocal relationship where the individual is simultaneously affected by and affects their multiple environments (Hare, 2004; Kondrat, 2002). Kondrat (2002) has highlighted the significance of an ecological perspective while also noting the missing piece of human agency in another conceptualization of the person-in-environment model using a critical theory lens:

Emphasizing distinctively human characteristics, arguments define human actors as co-constructors of, not just interactors within, their social environments. It is suggested that the individual is “in” the larger social system not so much the way a smaller box is contained within a larger box but rather the way dancers are in a ballet or a football team is in a game. The dancers and the players co-constitute the dance and the game.

Although human behavior is shaped by society and its structures, those very structures are recursively constructed, maintained, and reproduced by the social actions of human agents over time (p. 435).

Kondrat identified the complexity of the different forces at play in any relational experience and in action. If humans co-create and reproduce the structural narratives of their environments, then it makes sense to question the process that can evoke changes to these structures over time, or how to alter the orchestration of a dance or how the game is played.

The focus of this model allows the profession to unify and embody the constructed either-or divide between individual and collective interest and aspire to a dual ambition of seeking change in both by acknowledging how they affect each other (Weiss-Gal, 2008). This process looks at interventions at both the individual and societal levels aiming to increase the capacity of individuals, families, groups, and communities to address and solve their own problems, realize their potential and enhance the quality of their lives while also aiming for social reform and policy changes to societal obstacles that impose inequality and hamper an individual's ability toward full self-determination (Hare, 2004). Similarly, Kohs (1966) wrote in *The Roots of Social Work* that the profession could be understood as, "the art science of helping people to help themselves." Kohs (1996) believed that social work operates under the guidance of more or less explicit philosophical concepts dealing with the central question of why social workers do what they do which produces the objectives of social work which then considerably determines practice procedures. Kohs (1996) underscored the importance of examining the philosophic foundations of any field as it underlies the practice and objectives and thereby its current values and ethics. Kohs (1996) argued that part of the complexity of the nature of social work is that the profession has been solicited by the government to meet social welfare needs and the

profession has become somewhat synonymous with and therefore responsible for social welfare. Kohs (1996) defined social welfare in its broadest sense as all the interests and activities of a society to develop conditions and to provide services promoting and assuring the well-being, happiness, and contentment of all its citizens. Social work, Kohs (1996) stated, only represents one aspect of this welfare effort; this is where there is the need to provide knowledge and skills in the treatment processes in such social welfare interventions.

Kohs (1966) illustrated how developing a clearer philosophical understanding of the “roots of social work” would assist in distinguishing the nature of the work and this can be accomplished by understanding the difference between social philosophy and social work philosophy. He contended that social philosophy is concerned primarily with the values and pursuits that will bring about a desirable society. Social work is related to social philosophy in the sense that it is but one aspect of society’s efforts to maintain its integrity and to conserve its human and spiritual resources in this ideal society. Social work philosophy, however, he argued, engages directly with the basic concepts, values, and purposes of social work practice with a focus specifically on problems, which strengthen or inhibit, enhance or interfere with the self-realization and the self-fulfillment of individuals, families, groups, and communities. Kohs (1996) understood the root of social work then to be the essence of this diversity in practice and thought:

Social work philosophy, then, is not something static; it is a continually changing inventory of ideas and beliefs, reflecting the social conscience of the period and the state of science and technology as they influence man’s conception of himself, his nature, and his destiny (p. 21).

Social work presented this way, is a growing and evolving product of its current historical

location and social situation.

Based on Kohs's (1966) theoretical discussion around the roots of social work, the purpose of social work would then exist in the existential realms of human relations. A review of the history of and thoughts around the purpose of social work reveals an expansive acquisition of seemingly endless perspectives and interpretations. Borden (2010) introduced *Reshaping Theory in Contemporary Social Work*, a collection of critical pieces surrounding emerging theories in the field, with a discussion of the field's undeniable feature of pluralism. Acknowledging the divergent range of thinkers, intellectual traditions, and theoretical perspectives that have shaped the field's practice and what continues to inform and develop the profession, Borden (2010) made the case that while most clinicians identify "eclecticism" as their theoretical orientation in practice, there has been little consideration on how such different perspectives are actually integrated over the course of intervention. Wakefield (1996a) claimed that the person-in-environment perspective, which attempts to account for the interconnectedness of the individual and the environment, does not actually provide the claimed clinical benefits, as the principle of connectedness is an intellectual contention without any functional account regarding the nature of such connections:

The perspective's lack of explanatory power - that is, its lack of substantive assertions about the nature, strength, or changeability of specific causal processes - is its undoing. This lack is the ultimate reason why the perspective cannot contribute to assessment, integration, or bias correction, which all depend on the practitioner's beliefs in specific causal hypotheses. Thus the way to improve assessment, integrate theories, and correct biases is to make progress in the formulation and teaching of domain-specific theories.

(p. 27)



Wakefield (1996a) believed then that the eco-systems perspective merely asserts that reciprocal connections exist between all aspects of the individual and all aspects of the individual's environment, however, because the principle does not make any explicit assumptions about the nature of such connections, it does not provide any useful descriptive content. While such critique of any all-encompassing perspective is warranted, Gitterman (1996) responded to Wakefield's critique by illuminating the significance of how an overarching conceptualization reveals the complexity of the experience of the individual in response to context, primarily that no one domain-specific theory or model can capture the uniqueness of an individual in that individual's own environment. Gitterman (1996) identified how domain-specific theories have been problematic in treatment in the past, since these models do not account for the wholeness of a person's experience and if a client had not been responsive to a domain-specific theory identified for their treatment, they had been blamed and labeled as "resistant," "unmotivated," and "nonverbal." Gitterman (1996) also highlighted the richness of experience that can be lost in domain-specific theories.

The specific use of such domain-specific theories also positions the social worker into the role of "knowing" and "expert." Such a role or how the field attempts to define itself within the social sciences at all, England (1986) argued, has been the primary obstacle for the field to have any sense of complete and purposeful self-understanding, "If I imagine social work as an entity I see it as a curiously puzzled and confused body. There are parts rushing off in all directions and sometimes falling over each other in the process" (p. 2). England's description here encapsulated both the challenge of a person-in-environment framework as well as the use of domain-specific theories in practice. Borden (2010) identified a related idea about how a growing number of graduate social work programs have established generalist, atheoretical,

skills-based courses of study and that perhaps part of the problem of the field is this specific instruction that does not encompass the need for pluralism and development of critical lenses for understanding the foundations of social work:

Such approaches are problematic in that they fail to introduce the foundational theories of the field and fail to provide the opportunities to develop the critical analytic capacities needed to negotiate the concrete particularities, complexities, and ambiguities of clinical practice. (p. 5)

Related to England's (1985) argument, Applegate (2003) critiqued social work education, stating that the knowledge base of the practice profession has increasingly neglected the dynamics of inner life, personal meaning, as well as the facilitating processes that are understood to sponsor change and growth.

#### *Social Work, A Humanistic Origin*

England (1986) observed that while there is a striking consistency and persistence in the way social work is defined and desires to be defined, it still finds itself struggling in uncertainty. England reveals that the problem is inherent:

Good social workers *know*, through their experience, the value of their helping work with clients. That value cannot be abandoned, so a way through the wall must be found; as there is no other route in sight, they must keep banging at the wall until the way is forced. The situation points to one of those gaps between the head and the heart, between understanding and experience, to which social workers so often refer. Their inability to explain and handle this gap is the cause of their dilemma; their inability to find intelligible ways of communicating their experience to their critics means that they can only keep repeating their claims even though they are not heard-indeed, even though they

cannot be heard. (p. 5)

England (1986) argued that the reason why “they cannot be heard” refers to how the very structure of the debate about the nature of social work does not allow a proper discussion and description because structures that regulate the professional capacity of the field require “materialist” responses or externally measurable procedures and effects. England (1986) further stated that social workers are compelled to reply using certain language and certain concepts for this conventional discussion however this is also the point of discord that continues to reinforce social work’s struggling definition because the available language in the professional field does not meet the experience of the social worker.

This point raised the question of why there is not an available language for the available experience that is engaged in social work. England (1986) suggested that part of the unavailability of the language about the nature of social work is due to the lack of such language about the nature of helping in the social sciences. England (1986) stated that part of the foundation of helping is essentially *understanding*:

It is as if the helper must make a journey with the client so that, because of his first-hand experience, he will then know the sights and experiences which the traveler must encounter...the worker will also know the significance of the experience of the journey, what it feels like to be in the midst of these events, places and sensations, not for any traveler, but for this traveler. (p. 23)

This description of the experience of joining with a client’s experience in a therapeutic relationship resembles Michael White’s (2007) practice of narrative therapy and the exploration of one’s “map” of life. In White’s introduction of narrative practice he describes a similar metaphor of therapeutic practice as a “journey:”

Maps like these shape a therapeutic inquiry in which people suddenly find themselves interested in novel understandings of the events of their lives, curious about aspects of their lives that have been forsaken, fascinated with unexpected territories of their identities and at times, awed by their own responses to the predicaments of their existence (p. 6).

England (1986) declared that descriptions of practice like these are not “whimsical fantasy” but rather a real part of the problematic nature of social work knowledge in that social workers must somehow try to characterize the meaning and experience of clients.

Both England (1986) and White (2007) described a “joining” experience of the therapist with the client as essential in this experience of *understanding* and the significant component of change. He states this is the case because people cannot work toward change and cannot believe change is possible unless they can see their experience shared by others without those others becoming disabled or incapacitated by their experience. Discussion of the substantial impact of “understanding” has been most evident in casework or counseling situations (Egan, 1975, Rogers 1969). Bernstein (2001) discussed love as cure in psychoanalysis and treatment. Since psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically informed psychotherapy are rooted in the premise that (infantile) sexuality plays a central role both in normal development and in the etiology of psychopathology, this connection is self evident. Love, to Bernstein in a sense, is the humanizing language of psychodynamic theory. Bernstein argued that there is a remarkable gap of this relationship and connection in the literature since the focus of the discourse reinforces a positivist view of the therapist's role, and thereby an intense reluctance to examine any processes that might be interpreted as unscientific or unprofessional by critics both outside and inside the field of social work.

England's (1986) argument that social work lacks the language to adequately describe the nature and purpose of its profession and how this has led social work into repeating itself has been a theme in this literature review so far. If the problem is that of an unavailable language, what is the language that could release social work from this position? Finn (2010) questioned whether it is a lack of the language of love, and whether this absence is not so much a position of never having a language of love but rather a distancing from love, its humanistic origin, as a central guiding tenet in practice. hooks (2000) argued that the lack of the pursuit of love and existence of love in our social structure can be directly attributed to oppressive systems and particularly the way each of these systems function under capitalism. Despite these obstacles, mostly around ideas of professionalism and power, that have functioned to prevent a discussion of love in the nature of social work, justice, and healing, the work of love does exist in some substantial ways.

It is important to again note the impact of Flexner's (1915) statement on social work's status as a non-profession or the interpretation of the impact of Flexner's statement. Morris (2008) stated that the contemporary discussion of the impact of Flexner's speech at the 1915 conference has mostly credited or criticized his influence in social work's early professional development. Morris stated that the following points have been both met with criticism and praise on social work's professionalization from the impact of the NCCC: pushing the field to develop a teachable practice method (Bruno, 1957; Bartlett, 1959; Austin, 1983), to develop an education curriculum for this teachable practice method (Eaton 1956; Pumphrey and Pumphrey, 1961; Lubove, 1965; Phillips, 2000; Franklin 2001; Reid and Edwards, 2006), to have left its tradition of social reform (Bisno, 1956; Bowers, 1957; Austin, 1983), to have rejected the significance of practice wisdom (Austin, 1983; Goldstein, 1990; Freedberg, 1993), and to have

replaced its humanistic foundations with scientific positivism (Goldstein, 1990; Saleebey, 1990; Szto, Furmna, and Langer, 2005). This last point about the nature of social work and its humanistic origin is what England (1986), hooks (2000) and Finn (2010) all seem to refer to regarding the role of experience, love, and human connection in social work and social justice.

Saleebey (1990) argued that social work as a profession will never exist or function in the same ways as other established professions and neither should it and the field should instead dispose of positivist orientation and move toward human inquiry because in there lies the inherent nature of social work itself (Hampden-Turner, 1970; Romanyshyn, 1971). Further, by locating professions within an empirical and positivist paradigm of generating valid theory, this requires the use of the scientific method to service related problems of the profession. Saleebey (1990) explained of social work,

We seek means of understanding that without violating its meaning, or distorting its nature, can bring us closer to the vagaries and mysteries of the human condition. Life is awash in ambiguity, change, paradox, contradiction and the continuing tensions between the possible and the thwarted, the tragic and the hopeful. We are reluctant to give up our own illusions and myths and to confront these sometimes discordant and frightening elements of the human condition. But we must. We do not want to lapse into the cheery bon mots of modern pop-psych, to pin on the 'smile button' that obfuscates the genuine struggles and the real sadness that are the mortar of civilization's bricks (p. 35).

In the following chapter I will explore love as a practice. I will examine both Fromm (1956) and Peck's (1986) conceptions of love in the psychoanalytic treatment process and relationally as well as the spaces where they locate the significance and function of love. I will then explore queer theory in the fifth chapter in the effort to see what it might reveal or help elucidate about

the social location and experience of professional identity for the field of social work and how a post-structural frame might actually allow for a deeper exploration on the meaning of human connection, social justice, and love rather than a distancing from it.

## CHAPTER IV

### Theory One: Love and Practice

#### *Love Defined*

*The Art of Loving* (1956) by Erich Fromm and *The Road Less Traveled* (1978) by M. Scott Peck are both works that have offered a definition of love and are also both acknowledged influences in the psychoanalytic field as well as in popular culture. Fromm's *The Art of Loving* most recently produced a fiftieth anniversary edition, has been an international bestseller, translated into thirty four languages and sold more than one and a half million English language copies by 1970 (Funk, 2000; Thomson, 2009). *The Road Less Traveled*, though it was first published in 1978, did not receive attention and popularity until 1983, and with its success it has been translated into over twenty three languages and selling over seven million copies in the United States and Canada alone, with more than ten years on the *New York Times* bestseller list (Donohue, 1997). My decision to highlight these two specific works are for the following two reasons, for having both been referenced significantly in hooks' (2001) discussion of love when she discussed the role of love in anti-oppression work, and secondly, Hooks uses Peck's definition of love in her exploration of the topic and often refers to Fromm's thoughts on love in illuminating the discordant values of love and power.

M. Scott Peck (1978) in *The Road Less Traveled* stated that the mysterious quality of love could be in one way attributed to the lack of ever having a satisfying definition, which then



allows us to exist in a world where we are clueless about love. Peck argued that without a widely understood or agreed upon definition we may be in a position of not knowing love. hooks (2001) argued that we are not so much just clueless about love, but become clueless about love in a process through relational experiences (e.g. oppression) that distance us from our actual inherent capacity to understand and know love. One of the points hooks made is that children have an natural sense of love and become confused when adults punish them with physical discipline with the reasoning that it is because they love them. Fromm (1956) argued that the majority of people tend to believe love is a matter of how to be loved rather than one's capacity to love, and as a result the problem becomes an issue of how one can make one's self loveable rather than learning how to love, what he frames as a matter of an "object" and not of "faculty." Fromm stated that a significant assumption about love that reinforces this mainstream understanding of love and therefore the idea that one does not need to learn about love, is the confusion between the initial experience of "falling in love" and the permanent state of being in love. Peck wrote that, of all the false ideas about love, the most prevailing misconception is the understanding that one "falls in love." bell hooks discussed how she had been confused by love through her own misguided learning about love from unhealthy patterns in her early childhood relationships and thereby reasoned that a definition of love could assist in avoiding disillusionment about love.

Fromm and Peck both immediately distinguished their own definition and understanding of love from what Peck calls the "myth" of romantic love and what Fromm refers to as "falling" in love. Fromm and Peck both explicated how the idea of "falling in love" confuses the understanding and learning of actual love. Fromm explained the experience of "falling in love" as the dropping of boundaries that allow two strangers the opportunity to experience a moment

of union or “oneness.” Peck described how part of the “falling” experience in the initial excitement and energy in early romantic love is actually the experience of the collapsing of ego boundaries. To describe this Peck discussed how a newborn infant in its early stage does not distinguish itself from the rest of the universe and part of ego development is the experience of one’s own will as different and separate from its caregivers as it is impossible for caregivers to be completely attuned with the child. This suggests Peck’s theoretical resonance with ego psychology and object relations theorists on development. When an infant begins to recognize its will to be its own and not that of the universe, is when the infant begins to make other such distinctions between itself and the external environment and that this is the development of ego boundaries. Peck stated that while these boundaries are protecting and can be comforting, they also present a feeling of loneliness and that we yearn to escape beyond the walls of our own identities and boundaries and that falling in love allows this experience temporarily. Fromm frames this as an existential issue, as the problem of separation and union. This sudden experience of intimacy is often initiated and motivated by sexual attraction and consummation and understood to be fleeting,

However, this type of love is by its very nature not lasting. The two persons become well acquainted, their intimacy loses more and more its miraculous character, until their antagonism, their disappointments, their mutual boredom kill whatever is left of the initial excitement. Yet, in the beginning they do not know all this: in fact, they take the intensity of the infatuation, this being “crazy” about each other, for proof of the intensity of their love, while it may only prove the degree of their preceding loneliness. (p. 4)

This experience particularly, the ability to have a momentary experience of union with another, the myth of romantic love, and ideas of love as perfect, easy, and, if fortunate enough, one will

magically find, is precisely what challenges and moves an individual and thereby society to evolve by not asking or calling for individuals to make efforts for more internal personal development, more caring of others, and seeking of genuine connection.

Fromm (1956) theorized that mankind in its own evolution has transcended nature resulting in a feeling of separateness from nature even though humans are still a part of nature. Since humans are gifted with reason and the ability to be aware of life itself, this sense of separation, Fromm believed, is the source of all anxiety and it is in our deepest need to overcome this separateness. For Fromm, love's significance is that it provides an absolution from the problem of separation and existence in a productive union. The awareness of life itself is what allows humans to be aware of themselves and those around them, the past as well as the possibilities of the future, and most significantly, their being a separate unit from others,

The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed the source of all anxiety.

Being separate means being cut off, without any capacity to use my human powers.

Hence to be separate means to be helpless, unable to grasp the world-things and people-actively; it means that the world can invade me without my ability to react (p. 8).

This anxiety is also connected to the awareness that one's birth and death has occurred and will occur outside of one's will, and as such one must recognize the possibility of their own death before their loved ones or that their loved ones' death may precede their own. Fromm argued that this awareness of one's aloneness and separateness is what creates an unbearable sense of isolation that we seek liberation from through union. This union allows the experience of transcendence, or existing beyond oneself. For Fromm, love then, was the only thing that productively releases humans from the insufferable condition of finiteness. Peck stated that this fear of death, or the risk of experiencing pain, is what limits the fullness of a person's life

experience and can limit one's capacity to love, "love anything that lives-a person, a pet, a plant- and it will die. Trust anybody and you may be hurt; depend on anyone and that one may let you down" (p. 133). Peck explained then that part of the experience of love, the experience of transcendence, self-evolving, is then to take a risk and experience pain. Peck went further to state that the inability or significant resistance to experience legitimate pain is a hallmark of mental illness.

Fromm and Peck thus highlighted the significance of the pursuit, study, and defining of love. Fromm (1956) stated, "There is hardly any activity, any enterprise, which is started with such tremendous hopes and expectations, and yet, which fails so regularly, as love" (p.4). Fromm drew a comparison of love to other activities, making the point that if there was any another activity that we engaged with in our daily lives that we repeatedly failed at, that we would be intrigued and eager to know the reasons for the failure and learn how to do better in the future. However, if one were to repeatedly fail at something one might also no longer see the value in the attempt of this activity. Fromm thus stated then that the only adequate way to overcome the failure of love is to examine those failures and the obstacles that keep us from having love and by engaging in the study of the meaning of love. Peck similarly stated in his engagement with love, "love is too large, too deep ever to be truly understood or measured or limited within the framework of words. I would not write this if I did not believe the attempt to have value" (p. 81). Fromm explicitly set out the purpose of his discussion of love in the preface of the book:

...to show that love is not a sentiment which can be easily indulged in by anyone, regardless of the level of maturity reached by him. It wants to convince the reader that all his attempts for love are bound to fail, unless he tries most actively to develop his total

personality, so as to achieve a productive orientation; that satisfaction in individual love cannot be attained without the capacity to love one's neighbor, without true humility, courage, faith and discipline. In a culture in which these qualities are rare, the attainment of the capacity to love must remain a rare achievement (p. xvii).

Fromm discussed love from a philosophical existential perspective about the problem of human existence where love is an art form, and Peck discussed love as a spiritual and intellectual matter where love is an activity and investment. Fromm understood love as the source of connection, as the way to experience union beyond the self; he defines love thus, "The productive form of relatedness to others and to oneself. It implies responsibility, care, respect, knowledge, and the desire to see another grow and develop. It is fusion under the condition of integrity" (p. 116). Peck (1978) defined love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own and another's spiritual growth" (p. 81).

Peck described love as an interestingly cyclical process where our own act of love is actually an act of self-evolution. If love is defined as the process of extending one's self, and extension of the self is an evolutionary process where one has grown into larger state of being, then in this sense, when one loves one evolves. This unitary definition of love includes love for oneself with love for another. To love another human being by this definition means that this includes love of one's self. In loving then, one becomes committed to the development of the human race of which we are all a part. Love of self and other is indistinguishable in this sense. Peck largely discussed love as a source of growth and nourishment. Love then, is not simply what one does for another, but what it can also do for one's self. This notion of love being an action of productivity and growth towards one's self is a component of love that is discussed by Fromm and Peck.

The theoretical underpinnings of Fromm and Peck's discussion of love as a theory resonated with each other and their conceptualization of love is influenced by and intersects with their psychoanalytic practice (Funk, 1982, Kramer, 2006, Peck, 2002). This has been a critique of Peck in his formulation of love, that while he did not attribute his own conceptualization to previous writers on the subject, he has offered little more than his widely acknowledged predecessors, such as Erich Fromm, Rollo May, and Karl Menninger (Wink, 1991; Doyle, 1994). Despite this, Peck's book was acknowledged as the first and one of the most read among the self-help genre (Doyle, 1994). Peck's book about love and emotional or spiritual wellness has had a far reach as well, from being present in the lives of lawyers, a book recommended by therapists, to being a common reference and source of material in 12 step programs (Grimes, 1992; Donohue, 1997; Keeva, 2006). While Peck's theory largely reiterated much of Fromm's explication of love, his delivery is one that speaks to its audience, both that of the general population and practitioners (Donohue, 1997; Doyle 1994). Peck has been complimented for discussing complicated and intrinsically human matters with depth and sensitivity, and writes strictly from the experience of being a psychiatrist in psychoanalytic practice. Therefore, much of his discussion of love is limited and defined within interpersonal relationships while Fromm includes a discussion of love at both interpersonal, community, and societal levels.

This chapter will focus on two conditions of love that are defined in how Fromm and Peck understand the formation and existence of love, one understanding love as a moving, growing, fluid process that continuously requires nurturing, action, and effort, and secondly, love as an act of freedom and liberation. Their reasoning for the need of love, what it means for the individual experience and what they identify to be the obstacles for the capacity of such love, will also be part of the focus of this chapter.

### *Fluidity in Love*

Fromm and Peck described love as a process one engages with, as an action, and a shared giving and mutual experience where all parties engaged in this process benefit. Peck argued that socialization of love leads people to believe that love should be “easy” and “effortless” but instead love is actually “effortful.” Fromm stated that a frequent error in the way people think about love is the illusion that it means the absence of conflict and thus reinforces the idea that pain and sadness should be avoided at all costs. Fromm stated that the opposite is actually true of love, that when one wants to be present in love, conflicts are present but they are “real” conflicts, distinguished from what he refers to as “conflicts” that are generally projecting and disagreements on superficial matters in an effort to avoid these real conflicts. Real conflicts between people do not attempt to mask the deeper conflict within each person but instead reveals the “real” inner experience of each person involved and leads to clarification, more mutual understanding, knowledge, and strength:

Love is possible only if two persons communicate with each other from the center of their existence, hence if each one of them experiences himself from the center of his existence. Only in this “central experience” is human reality, only there is aliveness, only here is the basis for love. Love, experienced thus, is a constant challenge; it is not a resting place, but a moving, growing, working together; even whether there is harmony or conflict, joy or sadness, is secondary to the fundamental fact that two people experience themselves from the essence of their existence, that they are one with each other by being one with themselves, rather than by fleeing from themselves. (p. 96)

Fromm stated that the presence of this exchange is made visible by certain qualities, the depth of the relationship and the “aliveness” and “strength” that is present within each person concerned. This “aliveness” and “strength” can be referred back to Fromm’s definition of love which he stated produces the growth and development of another and one’s self that is reflective of one’s inner reality.

Peck used the term “spiritual growth” to define this experience but also stated that he makes no distinction between “spiritual” and “intellectual” growth. Aligned with Fromm, is Peck’s idea that the extension of one’s self is what nourishes this growth. Extension of the self also requires effort because when one extends one’s self, it is in opposition to what he defined as “laziness or the resistance of fear,” therefore love according to Peck, is always an act of work or courage but all acts of work or courage are not necessarily always an act of love when it is not directed toward our own or another’s spiritual growth (p. 120). Peck stated that the primary form of the work of love is attention that is given to another or ourselves and that this is very much a reciprocal process,

When we attend to someone we are caring for that person. The act of attending requires that we make the effort to set aside our existing preoccupations and actively shift our consciousness. Attention is an act of will, work against the inertia of our own minds. (p. 121)

Peck refers to Rollo May (1969) in the role of attention in psychoanalysis and that the most important way we provide attention is by listening. Peck further described how “true” listening is a total concentration on the other and requires the listener to temporarily put aside their own thoughts and prejudices to fully take in another person’s experience and this true listening is always a manifestation of love. Truly listening, Peck argued, is the demonstration of and



assigning value to another; they are of significance. This making “room” for another is part of someone extending one’s self and also fully “accepting” of the other, which Peck also related to the practice of therapy,

This unification of speaker and listener is actually an extension and enlargement of oneself, and new knowledge is always gained from this. Moreover, since true listening involves bracketing, a setting aside of the self, it also temporarily involves a total acceptance of the other (p. 128).

Peck stated that there is a reciprocal giving relationship in this process that allows both parties to receive and give. The listener who truly listens leaves moved and is changed by this experience and so does the speaker. The expansion of the self by both parties allows for the acquisition of more knowledge and experience, which is manifested then in an actual expansion of who they are previous to that interpersonal exchange. Therefore, this process of love as described by both Fromm and Peck, is dynamic and ever shifting with its own flow and balances.

#### *Freedom in Love*

When the effort and work in love is made the benefits are present in the expression of the individuality and wholeness of a person. Fromm identified this “individuality” as the “real” inner experience and reality of an individual outside of the boundaries and behaviors that have been constructed through socialization. Peck stated this “individuality” to be the uniqueness of one’s spirit, and as love is present and enacted, the product is spiritual growth and that this in itself is a fluid moving process and allows for changes in experience and the development of the self. Fromm stated that one’s attempts for love will inevitably be unsuccessful if one does not actively develop one’s “total personality.” Fromm placed this particular focus on the self by illuminating the different paths that people take toward achieving a sense of “union” with love

being the only activity providing a “productive” union, “love is an action, the practice of a human over, which can be practiced only in freedom and never as the result of a compulsion” (p. 21).

In order to understand what is productive union, Fromm distinguished three other ways through which individuals attempt to experience union. Fromm theorized that the more humans distance themselves from the primary bonds of nature, plant and animal life, the need to escape separateness increases. One method to do this is through “orgiastic states” which can be induced through the use of drugs, which provides a transitory state where the outside world disappears and with such, so does the feeling of separateness. Fromm stated that sexual orgasms also produce this function, the experience of escape and momentary relief from the anxiety of separateness, however both the function of this temporary state of relief only heightens the experience of separateness as these activities without love cannot actually bridge the distance that one feels between one’s self and others. Fromm discussed how conformity is the most frequent solution chosen to overcome the anxiety of separateness. This is conformity to a group or society, which includes its customs, practices, and beliefs. In the situation of conformity, the individual’s unique individuality is diminished and only provides a false sense of unity because it is not an actual expression of the authentic inner experience of a person but rather what is expected. The third form of union is through creative activity, which provides a union between a person and the material world outside of one’s self, “in all types of creative work the worker and his object become one, man unites himself with the world in the process of creation” (p. 16). Fromm stated however that this does not allow for interpersonal union, which he identified as the strongest striving in our humanity.

Fromm stated that this interpersonal fusion is what binds the human race together as it motivates the forming of clans, families, and society. Failure to achieve this union inevitably leads to “insanity” or “destruction” of the self or others. It is not just union itself however that resolves the problem of human existence, Fromm stated that it is a mature productive union and distinguishes between a mature or immature love. In order to determine what is “mature” love versus “immature” love, Fromm distinguished immature forms of love as symbiotic union and mature love as union that answers to the problem of existence with a productive orientation.

Fromm stated that symbiotic union begins in the relationship between the mother and child when they are actually coexisting in the same body and part of each other and there is mutual need in order to accomplish the goal of birth, “the fetus is part of the mother, it receives everything it needs from her; mother is its world, as it were; she feeds it, she protects it, but also her own life is enhanced by it.” (p. 18). There is also a passive and active form of symbiotic union. The passive form of symbiotic union presents as submission, which Fromm identified with a clinical term of masochism. This is a power dynamic where one person submits completely to the other and thereby escapes the feeling of isolation by completely wrapping one’s own identity in the identity of another and therefore at the cost of one’s own individuality. Fromm asserted the active form of symbiotic union corresponds to masochism, where the focus is on the person who elects to be in a position of power over another. The latter Fromm identified as sadism. In this situation the sadistic person who desires to escape separation seeks to do so by making another person an extension of whom they are. In this situation, both parties are completely dependent on the other, as they need the other for a sense of identity, which Fromm called “fusion without integrity” (p. 19).

Peck wrote that this dependency, what Fromm called symbiotic union, is the second most common misconception about love, that one “needs” the other. Peck defined dependency as “the inability to experience wholeness or to function adequately without the certainty that one is being actively cared for by another” (p. 98). In this situation of dependency, one individual is dependent on another for a sense of one’s own worthiness or identity. Fromm also called this a narcissistic orientation that must be overcome if one is ever able to see another individual in one’s fullness as one exists in reality and not as an object to function to meet one’s own needs. Peck highlighted how this relationship situation is never satisfying,

It is as if within them they have an inner emptiness, a bottomless pit crying out to be filled but which can never be completely filled. They never feel “full-filled” or have a sense of completeness. They always feel “a part of me is missing.” They tolerate loneliness very poorly. Because of their lack of wholeness they have no real sense of identity, and they define themselves solely by their relationships. (p. 99).

Peck identified how this dependency is often the result of early unmet needs in early caregiving relationships and states that it is a “genesis in the lack of love” (p. 104). The challenge of this situation is the reduction of freedom and one’s individuality, Peck stated that this is particularly present in such relationships where the partners seek to increase mutual dependency rather than diminish it, resulting in a partnership that feels more like a “trap.” In dependency or symbiotic union then, one cannot act freely but acts compulsively and needs others in order to feel a sense of worthiness. It is choosing to have power, safety, or security rather than love. Peck stated this relationship “nourishes infantilism rather than growth. It works to trap and constrict rather than to liberate” (p. 105). It can be deduced from Fromm and Peck then, that love itself is an act that liberates; it is the experience of freedom.

### *Obstacles in Love*

Both Fromm and Peck stated that the obstacles for this love, a love that seeks to preserve the integrity and nourish the growth of another and one's self, are significant. Peck mostly attributed the challenge of love to socialized myths about romantic love and the experience of abuse or inadequate "love" in parental or caregiving relationships,

Children growing up in an atmosphere in which love and care are lacking or given with gross inconsistency enter adulthood with no such sense of inner security. Rather, they have an inner sense of insecurity, a feeling of "I don't have enough" and a sense that the world is unpredictable and ungiving, as well as a sense of themselves as being questionably lovable and valuable. It is no wonder, then, that they feel the need to scramble for love, care, and attention wherever they can find it, and once having found it, cling to it with a desperation that leads them to unloving manipulative, Machiavellian behavior that destroys the very relationships they seek to preserve (p. 104).

This process can also become cyclical when children who have had such experiences become parents and look to their own children as a function for fulfillment and happiness. In love, Peck stated, the distinction between one's own experience and another is always maintained and preserved. Fromm also stated that, in mature love, there is union that maintains the integrity of one's individuality and this occurs when two individuals become a unit by remaining two individuals, in other words by being able to find themselves in the other.

Fromm stated that we culturally seek happiness and fulfillment in objects and this misconception about happiness is itself one of the major challenges toward learning about and having love, "In spite of the deep-seated craving for love, almost everything else is considered to be more important than love: success, prestige, money, power-almost all our energy is used for

the learning of how to achieve these aims, and almost none to learn the art of loving” (p. 5).

That in fact, we may “objectify” ourselves by attempting to accumulate qualities that are commodities that indicate a social worth of a person, attractiveness, and other privileged status, and most profusely and intensely, money:

In a culture in which the marketing orientation prevails, and in which material success is the outstanding value, there is little reason to be surprised that human love relations follow the same pattern of exchange, which governs the commodity and the labor market (p. 4).

So, in an attempt to have love, one may attempt to become a desirable “object.” As referenced before, Fromm stated that this reasoning leads people to believe that the problem in love is a matter of finding a desirable object to love or a decision about the “right” object to love and that love itself is simple when the “right” object has been determined. Thus, in this culture, people learn to seek a right combination of qualities rather than to seek genuine connection and relatedness with others

Fromm and Peck’s discussions of love can be translated to what occurs to individuals in systems of oppression as well. Many of the “right” qualities as being a desirable object to others are socially privileged positions such as White, heterosexual, with higher-class status. In power relationships, the oppressor can be seen within that power dynamic that needs another subordinate population in order to have a sense of their own identity and power, to feel more worthy and significant than other groups of people. The other side of that is that groups who are in oppressive locations may feel challenged in leaving or attempting to change the system as that current system, though oppressive, does offer a sense of some identity, it is something already known. These forces are powerful and also have historical legacies of suffering and tragedy.

However the offering that love provides is to see how those in a social location of power also do not benefit because their choices are not out of a full expression of freedom either but rather succumbing to an idea about power, out of a desire for that power and produces existences that are without love.

Both Fromm and Peck similarly conceptualized love around ideas of individuality, that the nature of love is a fluid and effortful process that allows for the liberation and expression of each unique individual. These points are all interrelated and attempt to question what is “real” and how one can increase the capacity for authenticity in one’s own life and thereby love. Interestingly, Fromm and Peck also highlighted the reciprocally destructive nature of the power of dependency in relationships. Even in the situation of one person holding power over another in a relationship, both are feeding a need for identity for themselves within the relationship and neither person is free. The person in power needs another person to submit and give them that power while the person who submits and feeds into that power position needs the other for a sense of who they are, for there is safety or security in a situation that is known. To leave that space for either party is to venture into the unknown, to come out of hiding, which Fromm and Peck asserted is to venture into the territory of love. In the next chapter I will explore queer theory that engages with this very territory of the unknown and of what cannot be defined.

## CHAPTER V

### Theory Two: Queer and Doing

#### *Queer Defined/Undefined*

The minute you say ‘queer’...you are necessarily calling into question exactly what you mean when you say it...Queer includes within it a necessarily expansive impulse that allows us to think about potential differences within that rubric (Harper, White, and Cerullo, 1990, p. 30).

The term “queer,” is a contentious term that was originally used as a way of referencing something or someone that is “odd,” “strange,” and generally deviating “out of the norm.” This term later became used as a slur for mostly gay men and most generally anyone who engaged with sexual desire or behaviors identified outside of the heteronorm. Berlant and Warner (1995) defined heteronormativity as “the institution, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent-that is, organized as a sexuality-but also privileged” (p. 565). In recent decades the term queer has been reclaimed as an emblem expressing pride and anger speaking against homophobia and all forms of oppression, particularly related to gender and sexuality (Callis, 2009; Giffney, 2009; Seidman, 1994).

Queer theory found its academic manifestation in the intersection of postmodernism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, sexology, feminism, lesbian and gay studies, HIV/AIDS activism, and the Black civil rights movement. A central principle of queer theory is a mode of questioning that also interrogates the structures under which those very questions are formed as



well as well as reflection on what drives us to ask such questions in the first place (Giffney, 2009, p. 1). Queer theory began in response to the identity politics that the gay and lesbian rights movements engaged in as they advocated for equal rights as homosexual citizens through a process of normalizing homosexual identity in the early 1990s (Minton, 1997; Seidman, Meeks, and Traschen, 1999; Stein, 2010). The aim of this movement was civic inclusion on the basis of normality, in other words that a homosexual person is a “normal” citizen like any heterosexual person, whereas previously the homosexual person had been socially positioned as antithetical to a heterosexual person.

Organization around a shared oppressed and minority identity succeeded in contributing to gay political empowerment. However queer theory argues it has come at the cost of the repression of differences between the experience between lesbian women and gay men and that the narrow focus of legitimating same-sex preference has isolated its movement from other movements and has excluded other identities. Identity politics also reinforces the idea that identity is an empirical and observable ontological existence while also reproducing the construct of a hegemonic heterosexual/homosexual binary system and reinforcing the power of regulating what is “normal.” Seidman et al. (1999) argued that the conditions of identity politics have produced the act of “coming out” and affirming gay identity as the “supreme political act” where just being merely visible with a homosexual identity itself undermines heterosexism (p. 10). The rise of queer politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s focused on challenging the regulatory power of norms of sexuality, particularly the construction of identity binaries (Callis 2009; Giffney, 2009, Seidman, 1994; Seidman et al. 1999; Warner, 1991). Identity politics of the gay and lesbian movement of the 1970s revealed the political power of identity as well as its potential for “othering.” Queer theory of the late 1980s and 1990s responded to this and

questioned the very construction of these identity categories that place conditions and expectations on how one identifies and “should” identify.

Queer theory began out of a concern for identity and its function in the political sphere, not necessarily to abandon identity as a category of information but rather to render identity as permanently open and contestable as to its meaning and political role. The discussion of queer, as identity or action, is mixed within the queer discourse. Eve Sedgwick, who wrote *The Epistemology of the Closet*, (1990) a book regarded as one of the founding texts of queer theory states in a following book, *Tendencies* that “given the historical and contemporary force of the prohibitions against every same-sex sexual expression, for anyone to disavow those meanings, or to displace them from the term’s definitional center, would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself” (1993, p. 8). The term queer has been used by those who identify with the LGBT community or to refer to those who identify within those identities. Queer has served in this sense to resist concise definition in a sexual context that does not allow for experience outside of a sexual binary, allowing those who desired to be fluid or inclusive in their stated desire to label themselves with a “nonlabel” (Jagose, 1996). However some writers argue that this has become its own categorization and creating another binary of queer or non-queer, which presents its own contradiction in attempting to challenge hegemonic assumptions of sexuality (Halperin, 2003).

Lee Edelman (2004) stated that “queerness can never define identity; it can only ever disturb one” (p. 17). Nevertheless, the linking of queer with same-sex sexual behavior and relationships is considered self-evident and unquestionable precisely for the historical and social significance of the term that Sedgwick (1993) elucidated. However, queer theory was born out of a deconstruction of lesbian and gay discourses and thus queer has served as an analytical tool

for unpacking the ways in which identities are formed “Queer theory is an exercise in discourse analysis. It takes very seriously the significance of words and the power of language” (Giffney, 2009, p. 7). There has been discussion of the linguistic operation of queer as an adverb or verb rather than a noun, as a “doing” rather than a “being” and the usefulness of queer as “doing” stemming from the debates about who is or who is not identifiable as queer under the term (Hall, 2003). Khayatt (2002) argued “the term queer did not work because its very acknowledgement of plurality included all those deemed different from the norm, including young heterosexual people whose claim to deviance is blue hair” (Khayatt, 2002, p. 497). Judith Butler, resonated a concern of queer identity “I worry when ‘queer’ becomes an identity. It was never an identity. It was always a critique of identity. I think if it ceases to be a critique of identity, it’s lost its critical edge” (Butler, 2008, p. 32). Part of the “slipperiness” of queer is its strategic usefulness in its ability to “elude definition” (Dinshaw et al, 2007, p. 5). Queer, then, in some writings, has come to be used as a resistance to definition itself or to refer to that which cannot be comprehended within traditional conventions of understanding.

While this study acknowledges the multiplicity of use and understanding of queer this chapter will focus on the particular “doing” as a resistance to norm. Queer, as a critique for deconstruction can speak to the broader implications of one’s self and the how and what one comes to understand as “normal.” Halperin (1995) wrote:

Queer does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing particular to which it necessarily refers (p. 62).

Queer then is also a relational term, one that is situated within the structural conditions of existence and social experience. Sue-Ellen Case (1991) stated that queer theory “works not at the site of gender, but at the site of ontology, to shift the ground of being itself” (p. 3). Language itself structures our thoughts, the social images we conjure, and the articulation that provides the basis for the understanding of our identities while also defining the boundaries of such articulation and thus our ability to think we know what we know and act on what we think we know. Sedgwick (1993) wrote “an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (p.1). This chapter will examine queer theory particularly in its deconstruction of identity and understanding of identity as an investigative tool that may shed light on the social and political situation of professional social work and its stated value of full self-determination.

Queer theory, understood as a resistance to being subjected to the operating discourses at any moment, does this by unraveling the multiple and interacting layers of meaning that are contained within each statement. It provides a window outside of this discourse to question the social, cultural, and political imperatives that attempt to implant and impose ideas about who and what we think we are, and even more it allows us to question where the desire to know who we are in our context comes from in the first place. Just as queer theory deconstructs the confines of binary systems of identity and the desire to “know”, social work has historically experienced an anxious desire to know or understand itself within the structure of professionalism and fieldwork. This chapter will examine how queer theory examines the way sexuality became a “being” or “identity” rather than what one simply does and how it has thus been maintained and reinforced as such. The chapter will then focus on an essential component of queer theory which is its very

inability to be essentialized, defined or understood in any unified whole, “there is no ‘queer theory’ in the singular, only many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can be loosely called ‘queer theories’” (Hall, 2003, p. 5). Lastly, I will look at the understood challenges for a theory that challenges in the hope of revealing the possibilities for “queering.”

### *Identity and Doing*

In queer theory, heterosexuality and homosexuality are binary social constructs that are only meaningful given their social, political, historical context and not meaningful regarding any innate sexual qualities (Seidman, 1994). Therefore, instead of looking at the study of the homosexual or heterosexual person, queer theory would call for an examination of the webs of power and the discourse that upholds that idea that such an individual even exists, and how it makes sense to identify any individual by sexual sex choice in the first place (Henderson, 2003; Steinman, 2001). Foucault (1980), particularly his work in *The History of Sexuality*, is understood to be the progenitor of queer theory as many of the founding texts of queer theory draw from his analysis of sexuality. Foucault pointed to how the modern system of sexuality is a product of the medicalization of sex and pleasure and thus the creation of sexual species. He states that in western culture, sexuality is understood as “scientia sexualis” which is a matter of science rather than “ars erotica,” meaning a matter of pleasure (p. 58).

Defining sexuality as science and then locating that science within the person allows for the sexual being to be controlled by various locations of power, such as biology, psychology, and medicine, which Foucault understands as “scientific sexuality” (p. 41). Sexual acts or sexuality was thus defined in terms of reproductive intent and thereby any sexual practices that catered to pleasure rather than biology became stigmatized and pathologized:

As defined by ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, a life form. (Foucault, 1980, p. 43)

Foucault pointed out how the very process of controlling sexuality by means of labeling any sexual behavior outside of conjugal sex intended toward procreation, did not in fact eradicate society of this experience and its existence, rather it created a new person who was suddenly identified as a sexual deviant. A same-sex act was no longer a singular sexual experience or expression but rather became embodied as a problematized person, a normal person was any person who maintained and engaged with heterosexual and conjugal sex. Sexual desires and behaviors were therefore subjected to the institutional structures that infused sexuality with moral significance, which then legitimated extensive state and social interventions and such acts were penalized at an institutional level.

Foucault identified how the experience of sexuality becomes institutionalized within the medical-industrial complex and how such categorization of people actually creates a discourse on sexuality that becomes internalized, accepted as identity, and thereby a means of seeking out others who similarly identify (Callis, 2009, Epstein, 1987, Seidman, 1994). In effect then, this attempt to control becomes a way for meeting, organization, and the very individuals who were labeled to emerge and claim the creation of their self-identities. He wrote of the mid twentieth century, “homosexuality became to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy be ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (Foucault, 1980, p. 101). Thus the emergence of homosexual identity allowed the act of self-labeling through the power of the “coming-out” rhetoric.

Seidman et al. (1999) argued that the concept of coming out is inseparable from “the closet,” a concept that captures the experience of secrecy and sexual self-management that structures the history and social dynamics of gay life in a norm of heterosexuality. Seidman et al. (1999) proposed a view of the closet as a strategy of accommodation and resistance in the face of imposed normative heterosexuality. The closet then is a response to repressive strategies aimed at maintaining a norm of heterosexuality by excluding homosexuality from public life. Further, they argued how the conditions that produce the “closet” often turn homosexuality into a way of life and therefore a constructed primary identity.

Expanding on Foucault, Butler (1990) illustrated how such norms of heterosexuality are maintained through the act of being performed and thus introduced the idea of gender as performative rather than given. Butler stated that previous to her work, social constructionists have conceptualized sex, gender, and sexuality (or desire) as separate and discrete categories of existence. Sex, being understood as the biological body, gender as the cultural conceptualization of the biological body and sexuality as an articulation of sexual orientation. Butler highlighted the complexity of the interaction of these three constructions and that they could never be understood separately as one informs and performs the other, “intelligible genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among, sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (Butler, 1990, p. 23). For example, to be a man means to be masculine and masculinity is defined as heterosexual and therefore sexuality cannot be separated from gender, as they are constituent of each other. Butler argued that this understanding of identity is only made intelligible by the social and cultural configuration that the identity is comprehended within. Butler (1990) wrote, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be

its results” (p. 25). Gender then is created and performed in relation to the cultural context and it is within this context where gender is made coherent:

...acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (1990, p. 185)

Gender then, is not a stable or fixed attribute of identity in existence, but rather it is something that must be constantly revealed and restated through performance. Gender is also fluid and can be disrupted if it is a performance, such as when sex, gender, and sexuality are mixed up. For example, an effeminate male-bodied heterosexual would communicate a gender that is unintelligible in western culture. This is what Judith Butler identified as creating “gender trouble” and calls on her readers to make such “through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity” (p. 46).

### *Fluidity and Doing*

The recognition of identity as a construct as well as the construction of the categories through which identity is performed reveals the potential instability and fluidity of identity, as “fiction that prescribes and proscribes against certain feelings and actions” (Giffney, 2009). Rather than this proscribing and assuming to know, queer attempts to continually frustrate what we know and thereby opening up a space for reflection and exploring desire. Considering queer’s oppressive historical and social experience, it calls into question this very organization of



how we have come to understand ourselves; queer “derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult”

(Butler, 1993, p. 226). Giffney (2009) stated that queer:

is neither a statement nor a question yet functions metonymically as both because its opacity encourages us to search for possible meaning within it, prompts us to ask questions about what those meanings might be and compels us to reflect on why we are driven to conduct a search for such meanings in the first place. (p. 1)

Queer then cannot be defined but its very function is to open up space for questioning how we define. This very indefinability is what renders queer theory its undeniable fluidity and inclusivity. Queer itself in a sense can never be “understood” or “known” in the traditional sense of knowing as one would study a subject. Dowson (2000) stated that “queer theory does not provide a positivity, rather it is a way of producing a reflection, a way of taking a stand vis-a-vis the authoritative standard” (p. 163). Queer theory demands this reflection and engagement in understanding the multitudinous and various ways for comprehending one’s self:

Queer theorists understand that identities are always multiple, or at best composites, with an infinite number of ways in which ‘identity components’ (e.g. sexual orientation, race, class nationality, gender, age, ableness) can intersect and combine. Identity constructions functions, if you will, as templates defining selves and behaviors and therefore as excluding a range of possible ways to frame one’s self, body, desires, actions and social relations (Seidman, 1994, p. 173).

Giffney (2007) discussed how in her work she and her colleague Michael O’Rourke borrowed the concept of “becoming” from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) as a useful way to explore desire outside of identity categories. This understanding of “becoming” suggests that

movement does not occur through different categorizations of identity but rather movement and change is all there actually is. This can be explained in what Deleuze and Guattari termed as “rhizome,” which describes the human experience as one that “‘maps’ a process of networked, relational and transversal thought, and a way of being without ‘tracing’ the construction of that map as a fixed entity” (Colman, 2005, p. 231).

Understanding that change or “becoming,” is all there is in life necessitates the unraveling of any illusion of stability and certainty by accepting the relentless fluctuations that are a part of the very act of living. Becoming is the ability to experience yourself differently and thereby experience the world differently, “becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state” (Stagoll, 2005, p. 21). Giffney (2009) stated that the desire for identity persists as defined by the “will to meaning” which is “the primary motivation in (a person’s) life” (Frankl, 1959, p. 121; as cited by Giffney, 2009, p. 6). Giffney (2009) described her own experience with the identities offered to her in making sense of her “sexuality,”

The drive towards trying to make sense of my desires has led me to fixate on certain discursive categories at different times; terms such as ‘heterosexual’, bisexual’ or lesbian’, which I thought, in the past, facilitated me in understanding why I was drawn to particular people while assisting me in accessing other individuals clustering around such identities. (2009, p. 6)

Categorization of identities are given rather than experienced and thereby provide a false sense of self-understanding or understanding “others.” Similarly, in Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of “rhizome,” they “insist that bodies and things ceaselessly take on new

dimensions through their contact and different and divergent entities over time” (Colman, 2005, p. 232).

In queer theory, translating and understanding text is similar to psychoanalytic theory, where attention is given to not only what is said, but what is not being said and the contexts in which these narratives are unfolding. Giffney (2009) wrote that queer theorists are especially excited in what *cannot* be said, “There is an unremitting emphasis in queer theoretical work on fluidity, uber-inclusivity, indeterminacy, indefinability, unknowability, the preposterous, impossibility, unthinkability, unintelligibility, meaninglessness and that, which is unrepresentable or uncommunicable” (p. 8). Queer theory then seeks to open the door for complexity and uncertainty, acknowledging that some things cannot be explained or known and that this is okay by even encouraging experience and presence over comprehension, dissection, and categorization, “Queer must remain that which it is, in the present, never fully owned which also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively” (Butler, 1993, p. 228).

### *Challenges in Doing*

Queer theory itself, in its own dynamism experiences the complexity of its function and its associated politics within these structures; Halperin (2003) questioned the implications of the massive success of institutionalizing queer theory in academia,

There is something odd, suspiciously odd, about the rapidity with which queer theory- whose claim to radical politics derived from its anti-assimilationist posture, from its shocking embrace of the abnormal and the marginal - has been embraced by, canonized by, and absorbed into our (largely heterosexual) institutions of knowledge, as lesbian and gay studies never were. Despite its implicit (and false) portrayal of lesbian and gay

studies as limber, assimilationist, and accommodating of the status quo, queer theory has proven to be much more congenial to established institutions of the liberal academy (p. 341).

Halperin explained that part of the wide acceptance of queer theory in academia was the reasoning of the term “theory” to reign over the term “queer” where “queer” would only come to qualify a theory that is an extension of already understood standard practice in literary and cultural studies without challenging the structure and practice of academia itself. “Queer” then becomes a general term of subversion and political opposition. Halperin argued that this abstraction of queer theory allows any discipline the option of its application in their respective practices by “queering” them, just as deconstruction would have been used previously. Halperin also noticed the complexity of queer’s academic institutionalization, “It is after all what many of us have struggled for - to make it possible for queer students, and others, to integrate the analysis and critique of gender and sexuality into their professional lives, into their identities, into their scholarly practices” (p. 343). However, Halperin warned about queer theory being a matter or subject for study rather than as an agent that can renew its radical potential by continuing to reinvent its ability to “startle, to surprise, to help us think what has not yet been thought” (p. 343).

Berlant and Warner (1995) similarly acknowledged the recent use of queer theory and speculation of its popularity, however stated that the inclusivity of queer theory had allowed for greater critique and deconstruction of structures:

The solicitation of identities in a gay and lesbian, feminist, or queer studies course is one of its most powerful pedagogical opportunities. It de-links students from the identities that have been overconsolidated in the world they occupy; it allows for experimental

thinking, historicizing, and theorizing the relations between the sex acts they do or imagine doing and the public contexts that might provide less alienated relations to their bodily contexts. (p. 52).

They further wrote, “Gay and lesbian history constantly shows that sex practices and sex cultures have been exorbitant to sex identity categories” (p. 52). Berlant and Warner (1995) argued then that the significance of understanding these histories should not assume that such study would simplify the relationship between complex sex practices and identity. Instead, they stated that this concern should be held and informed,

The question here, it seems to us, is whether we aspire to reproducing those scenes of identity and domination, or whether, in our pedagogy and our sense of the public conditions of sex definition and practice, we want to imagine the world into which we want to translate ourselves. (p. 52)

Warner (1991) discussed the significance of exploring histories in preventing the reproduction of overwhelming oppressive systems:

Social theory, moreover, must begin to do more than occasionally acknowledge the gay movement because so much of the heterosexual privilege lies in the heterosexual culture’s exclusive ability to interpret itself as society. Even when coupled with a toleration of minority sexualities, heteronormativity has a totalizing tendency that can only be overcome by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world” (Warner, 1991, p. 8)

Clarke (1994) in a forum on the political implications of using the term ‘queer’ stated that the very engagement of queer is often in the hope of articulating the political possibilities of sexual non-conformity. “To my mind this has the potential advantage of uniting people of many

different sexual tastes and inclinations in opposing the damaging and brutalizing aspects of enforced “normality” (Berlant et al., 1994, p. 52). Queer theory argues that when something becomes descriptive, it often becomes prescriptive, rather than transformative. Sedgwick (1993) illuminated the motivation of engaging in queer work and theorizing:

I’m uncomfortable generalizing about people who do queer writing and teaching, even within literature; but some effects do seem widespread. I think many adults (and I am among them) are trying, in our work, to keep faith with vividly remembered promises made to ourselves in childhood: promises to make invisible possibilities and desires visible; to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled and, with the relative freedom of adulthood, to challenge queereradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged. (p. 3).

Queer theory allows the availability of questioning, to notice what is not being identified in what is being identified, and to rebel against what is assumed to already be understood. As such, queer theory allows further exploration about what is already understood to be, how it is thus internalized, and reproduced. Queer theory speaks to how systems, specifically gender and sexuality impose oppressive norms and how identity politics, the mobilization for equality through assertion of equality through identity reinforces presupposed categories, which itself becomes our language for understanding each other. Queer theory appears to call for another language of understanding sexuality and being or doing than what the current discourse on sexuality and gender provides. Finn (2010) questioned whether postmodernism as an intellectual movement has distanced theoretical underpinnings of love in social justice work. Queer theory, by questioning and deconstructing the idea of identity categories as useful ways of understanding ourselves, might present more of the possibility for love, as understood through my exploration

of love in the previous chapter. I make this connection particularly from how Butler (1990) framed gender as not part of one's ontological core but rather performed. Full self-determination is not possible under such categories of identity and in systems of oppression. In the following chapter I will discuss how social work may perform a professional identity and how this may contribute to its own struggle for full self-determination, the very value it seeks to provide individuals in our society.

## CHAPTER VI

### Discussion: Social Work, Practice and Doing

#### *Social Work and Knowing/Unknowing*

Queer theory has shown through the work of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1979) how a knowledge production based scientific model has in effect produced a power system over others through the defining and organizing of bodies by how they look and what they do. By defining and constructing sexuality as a science, sexuality was removed as an experience of pleasure and desire and instead defined solely as a mechanism for biological reproduction, and eventually all sexual activity was organized around such categorization. Any sexual activity that was not engaged in reproduction became understood to be socially deviant and thus such bodies were subject to biological and social pathologizing. A parallel analysis can be examined within social work; in this analysis, the field of social work can be viewed as a body, and professionalism can be viewed as an oppressive system like heteronormativity. Interestingly, social work has engaged in the scientific mode of knowledge production – the very structure that has categorized bodies and constructed identities – as part of being held to a standard of professionalism, or coming into being as a profession. Reamer (1993) stated that the debate among social workers about the nature and methods of social work practice and research is an extension of a long-standing epistemological controversy; in other words, a controversy of how one defines and knows knowledge.



Reamer (1993) discussed the significance of a philosophical exploration of the core issues in social work to deepen the field's understanding of its central aims and conceptual anchor. He stated that epistemological theories are generally divided into two groups: rationalist theories, which view knowledge as a function of reasoning, and empiricist theories, which argue that knowledge is attained through sensory experience. For most of social work history, as well as with mainstream social science disciplines, a positivist tradition that incorporates the application of the scientific method and its principles to investigate social phenomena has been dominant. As such, empirical studies in social work abound in the form of case studies, controlled experiments, single-subject designs, program evaluations, and social surveys (Orcutt, 1990). Reamer (1993) explained how the 1980s saw a questioning of this method as a foundation of knowledge for social work with a controversial critique of the empirical method and positivist tradition and noted an argument by Heineman (1981) on this issue:

Like physics, genetics, and mathematics, social work and the other behavioral sciences must accept that reality cannot be perceived either directly or in its full complexity and, therefore, that science represents our best efforts at solving important problems for which there can be no guaranteed or permanent solutions. (Heineman, p. 391; as cited by Reamer, 1993, p. 128)

Correspondingly, Heineman (1981) argued that logical empiricism is fundamentally flawed because human empirical observations are fallible since the situation and perception of data gatherers naturally influence what they observe, focus on, and how they interpret the phenomena that they are investigating. Heineman (1982) also critiqued how the valuing of a positivist orientation has structured a subsequent implementation of faculty tenure, research based employment opportunities, and allocation of research funds oriented around a value of empirical

study and publication. Heineman's (1981) critique was met with condemnation in the social work discourse and sparked a controversy over the field's research orientation. Heineman's critics challenged the notion of social work being centered wholly around logical empiricism, stating that social work's research base is much more dynamic and integrative than she purported. However, Heineman defended her position stating that:

...a perusal of dissertation abstracts and the articles selected for publication in research journals indicates not only the continued hegemony of positivist assumptions and prescriptions but also a distressing absence of critical and analytic discussion of the foundations of social work research. (1982, p. 312)

Heineman (1982) did state that empirical research had value and significance in practice but maintained her concern and caution of what she felt was the growing value base of a positivist tradition.

Reamer (1993) highlighted another article published within the same year by Fischer (1981) that was equally seminal and argued for an increasing need for social work to move more toward an empirically validated practice. Fischer's article was titled "The Social Work Revolution" and observed what he perceived as a positive paradigm shift:

In essence, the practice of social work appears to be moving away from the use of vaguely defined, unvalidated, and haphazardly or uncritically derived knowledge for practice. In its most salient characteristics, the paradigm shift appears to involve a movement toward more systematic, rational, empirically oriented development and use of knowledge for practice. For want of a better phrase, this could be termed a movement toward *scientifically based practice* in social work. (Fischer, 1981, p. 200; as cited by Reamer, 1993, p. 133)

Fischer envisioned a “new breed” of social workers as “scientific practitioners.” This practitioner is one who:

- (1) systematically monitors and evaluates the progress he or she makes with each case;
- (2) ground his or her practice to the extent possible in empirically based knowledge, particularly making use of the numerous interventive techniques already available that have evidence of effectiveness, and using those without such evidence only with due caution; and (3) has the skills and attitudes-the commitment-to keep learning and searching for new and more effective approaches to intervention. (Reamer, p. 133)

This debate in the field during this period of time highlighted the tension around both the strengths and weaknesses of empirically based practice in social work that in many ways is present today. In both heteronormativity and positivism is the focus on “production” in some sense. In heteronormativity, the focus is on reproduction that regulates bodies in a fashion that feeds into a growth economy and in empirically based practice is the focus on “knowledge” production based on evaluation of observable outcomes that feeds into a pool of publication and research funds.

Reamer (1993) stated that part of the complication of empirically based research in social work practice is their notorious limitations related to concept formation or research design, relevance, and potential dehumanization in practice. He argued that a practical consequence of limited understanding of complicated social problems and interventions means that often empirical inquiries are based on and generate simplistic research models or frameworks.

“Although we may have an intellectual understanding of the need to investigate etiological and intervention factors as they occur in their complex, multivariate contexts, our research methods may force us to focus only on artificially segmented portions” (p. 136). Reamer (1993) stated

this challenge of initial concept formation is related to the difficulty of translating human meaning and experience in a positivist paradigm, “When we deal with phenomena as complex and mysterious as human relationships, we have considerable difficulty identifying in the first place the concepts that may warrant empirical investigation” (p. 136).

Reamer (1993) showed how this inadequacy of the concept formation of empirical research is connected to the subsequent limited relevance that social work practitioners experience in the field. Since many research designs are unable to tap into the core values and concepts of social work, practitioners have complained that the results of such research have been of marginal value:

...quantitative methodology cannot adequately examine the interpersonal, social, and cultural dimensions that social workers must consider in practice; these factors are “too elusive, unpredictable and multi-faceted to be captured by social science theory and methodology...Many theories, hypotheses, or generalizations that hold under artificially...controlled experimental conditions...fall apart...when applied to ...confounding situations which social workers encounter in professional practice.”

(Brennan, 1973, as cited by Reamer, 1993, p. 141).

Epstein (1986) in “Science and Social Work” argued that the practice of social work itself is not coherent within this scientific standard, “Yet even if quasi-experimental and single-subject designs were consistently employed to test therapeutic social work interventions, the results would probably still be weak and remain indeterminate” (p. 154). Epstein called for social work to abandon psychotherapeutic interventions altogether and instead explore and strengthen its ability to supply “surrogate services,” which are “concrete services that are patterned after

customary social institutions” (p. 145). Epstein argued that social work is incompatible in this way with other established professions:

Some professions enjoy relatively objective determinants of practice—the physiology of the body for medicine or law’s reliance on court precedents. The lack of any clear social or political determinant that would give functional coherence to social work appears to be the source of much of its internal confusion. If social work’s arms are wide enough to embrace all the broad social goals (independence, adjustment, happiness, equity, equality, justice, insight, power) for all people...[it] would recall Wootton’s critique of social work for its pretense of infinite applicability. Choices must be made, preferably on the basis of demonstrable capacity. Psychotherapeutics are not yet demonstrable; surrogate care is. (p. 158, 159)

However, in order to make this argument Epstein had to rely on the understanding of medicine and law as being “determined” and fixed rather than amenable to changing societal structures and values as he does not express a view of profession as a construct in relation current social and political forces. Epstein failed to recognize the significant historical inadequacies and the application of medical “knowledge” (e.g. eugenics) and how precedents in law come into being in the first place and how many of them have come to be redefined or are a source of constant contestation (e.g. *Roe v. Wade*). What Epstein did illuminate is what may occur when bodies do not fit into predefined categories of experience or existence that they are meant to define. The result is confusion, struggle, and a system that does not work for everyone, or in this case, a particular “profession.”

Reid and Edwards (2006) argued that social work’s professionalization is central to its relationship to academia and that it would not have any role within the educational system if it

were a non-profession. This ability to produce knowledge and thereby practice autonomously is what Larson (1977) argued is part of the power of professions in her exploration of professionalism itself as a phenomenon. Larson stated that professions vary on specific qualities of what is understood as an ideal profession, but each becomes “real” or comes into being through the organizing of representative institutional structures. Such affiliations provide a sense of membership in a professional identity, common sets of interests, and other loyalties. Larson emphasized that this particular feature is one that many occupations with professional ambitions can “imitate” even if they do not hold other qualities of an identified profession. In this sense, an occupation that may not be socially understood to be an established profession can still “look like one” just as a body can imitate certain gender expressions or sexuality in order to fit within the system of gender and sexuality and make themselves coherent within their cultural context though this system may not reflect their actual ontological core.

Professionalism is also a social construct that has an established system in attaining professional identity that mostly fits within the medical-industrial complex. As discussed in the phenomenon chapter, Larson (1970) stated that there is particular significance in a profession’s ability to produce knowledge and determine what knowledge is, thus increasing its value in societal structures and its autonomous capacity. Weick (1987), in an examination of the development of professional social work, illustrated the complexity of this relationship with science or knowledge production and social work:

The legacy of humanism gave to social work its wisdom about the worth of individuals and fostered a commitment to the importance of values in the practice of social work. At the same time, the fledgling profession was influenced by the concepts and methods of the natural sciences, which emphasized knowledge as it was gained from the observation

and measurement of quantifiable phenomena. In a way that is characteristic of later trends, social work accepted a difficult duality by embracing the importance of both knowledge and values in teaching and practice of social work. The balance between these two elements was, however, an unequal one. As social work struggled to develop a coherent practice, it became increasingly aligned with the social sciences, whose orientation was shaped by a nineteenth-century physical science model...As a result there is an inherent disparity at the foundation of social work. The knowledge developed under the rubric of classical science has overshadowed and in many ways usurped the domain of values. Values have become subordinated to knowledge as evidenced by the ubiquitous maxim of “knowledge-guided practice.” (p. 218-219)

By engaging in scientific empirical inquiry, social work itself has historically reproduced the very power of defining that oppresses the experiences of the people it seeks to empower. Saleebey (1979) argued that the scientific method itself may have within it the “seeds of dehumanization” since the experimental paradigm requires a degree of manipulation, deception, and control and understands such to be fair in the service of “human ends” (p. 201).

Just as gender functions to move individuals away from accessing their own internal expressions of themselves and perform what is expected of them based on a binary understanding of the anatomical structures of their bodies (even though there may be variance within those very structures), I question whether a system of professionalism has functioned similarly with social work. As previously mentioned, social work in its effort to define and understand itself within the current social, political, and cultural context has become increasingly focused on evidence-based practice. Though this is the case, Borden (2010) argued that a diverse array of thoughts have actually been the origination of social work:

Pluralism has been an irrepressible feature of social work from the start of the profession. A divergent range of thinkers, intellectual traditions, and theoretical perspectives have shaped the course of practice...even so, theoretical concerns receive surprisingly little consideration in the broader literature of the field as practitioners seek to strengthen the empirical foundations of the discipline and negotiate the demands of an applied profession. (p. xi)

Social work, a profession that has aligned and identified itself as motivated toward the empowerment of the individual, would thus require such pluralism in its own practice and orientation in consideration of the diversity of experience and situations of any individual. Bertha Capen Reynolds elegantly pointed out the complexity in social work practice that necessitates creativity:

Social work becomes dynamic only when it goes out through relationships of real meaning to people. All the arts demand a freedom of expression of the person, which is rare in a society that automatically produces anxiety and tension. Art is the more needed in an age when many people demand escape, and all need creative relaxation. (Reynolds, 1942, p. 231)

Reynolds is clearly drawing a comparison of social work to art, which only comes into being within a relationship where full expression of a person is present. Anxiety and tension is produced in a system that does not allow such expression of fullness and authenticity. The escape is needed from such tensions that these systems impose upon us. I wonder about the tension and anxiety that social work as a field produces in its own challenge of the full expression of its values.



My comparison of social work and the experience of gender and sexuality is in no way meant to equate both situations and experiences of identity; rather, it is meant to provide a useful exploration of how social work may also struggle to make sense of itself within a structure (professionalism) that not only does not allow for such interpretation, but also removes social work from its core values; those values perhaps being love and its fullest expression in practice. Queer theory suggests that systems of oppression function similarly, and, just as one performs gender, one performs what is constructed about race, class, and other systems. As such, similar comparisons could be drawn with other power systems. As Deleuze argued, power does not just exist as its own entity, but rather it is constructed. Power is what we allow it to have or give it. The purpose of this comparison to a system of oppression is to illuminate how a profession or practice with clear humanistic origins may be challenged and struggle within a professional structure based in a system that values capitalism and a false sense of autonomy. This is what Butler may say is the presence or performance of autonomy to conceal the actual underlying interdependence, and what Fromm may argue is based on a societal structure that values capitalism and accumulation of wealth rather than a value ethic of love.

The theory chapter on love highlights the connectedness of humanity and that all humans seek some sense of connectedness to ease the anxiety of separation or sense of isolation as a result of the human ability to reason. There is a striking similarity between the way Fromm (1956) and Peck (1986) have defined love as that which nurtures one's unique individual growth (and the reciprocal nature of that growth), and the professed value of social work of an individual's right to full self-determination. Full self-determination or the nurturing of one's unique self, however, is not possible in the presence of systems that dictate the experience and understanding of one's self and those around one's self, just as Butler (1990) stated that there is

no actual “gender” behind gender identity. Gender (or any constructed social identity) is an idea that is internalized and performed, and thus regulates bodies and self-conceptualization as well as conceptualizations of others based on this system. The outcome is possibly a society of people who do not know who they are and instead perform ideas of that which they are given. In such a society, authenticity, connection, and love become much more challenged.

Fromm and Peck highlighted the significance of love as a process and practice. Despite both offering a definition of love, there are no clear directions on how to do such practice:

Can anything be learned about the practice of an art, except by practicing it? The difficulty of the problem is enhanced by the fact that most people today, hence many readers of this book, expect to be given prescriptions of “how to do it yourself,” and that means in our case to be taught how to love. I am afraid that anyone who approaches (the practice of love) in this spirit will be gravely disappointed...What the discussion of the practice of love can do is to discuss the premises of the art of loving, the approaches to it as it were, and the practice of these premises and approaches (Fromm, 1956, p. 99)

Peck also made a statement about the indefinability of love in concrete terms: “I am very conscious of the fact that in attempting to examine love we will be beginning to toy with mystery. In a very real sense we will be attempting to examine the unexaminable and to know the unknowable” (1986, p. 81). Hall (2003) wrote a similar statement about the nature of queer theory in the introduction to “queer theories.” He states:

anyone who is engaging with the text on queer theory in a desire to master it will be disappointed but it may provide useful information for those willing to allow or even embrace, ‘diversity, partiality, and the impossibility of comprehensiveness.’ (p. 1).

There are no “how to” instructions in social work either. Through education and training one

learns “approaches,” “positions,” and types of “interventions” that are all seemingly meaningless outside the bounds of relation with another, with that unique individual. Queer theory is also positioned relationally, in relation to the “norm” while social work tends to position itself in relation to the “client” – client being an individual, family or community.

There is something particularly challenging and paradoxical about the nature or process of empowerment that queer theory points to in identity politics. Oppressed and marginalized groups of people historically have had to organize and claim their legitimacy for rights within a system and thereby have reinforced that system of legitimacy. Perhaps the problem is that there are not currently any other structures available; perhaps our language has not currently evolved to hold other narratives. That is what seemed so remarkable about queer theory: it invited us to hold the inadequacies of our language, of the structures that do not hold our complexity of our experiences. But where does love fit or play a role in social theory? Warner (1991) introduced queer as being intersectional, as a way of existence and resistance, rather than simply as identity:

Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is intricately with gender, with the family, with notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. It means being able, more or less articulately, to challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means, or what the state is for, or what “health” entails, or what would define

fairness, or what a good relation to the planet's environment would be. Queer to a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer. (1991, p. 6)

What Warner did not question is why resist in the first place? Why challenge the dominating structures of our lives? If you are not one who is identified within the oppressed groups and there is a power structure in place through which you can access such power, why attempt to do something different? Similar to Eisenstein (2011), I am positing that love can offer us this other language, another way of communicating and understanding ourselves in relation to each other and perhaps then also offering us a liberation to the current stratifications of our existence. The reason to challenge is for the possibility of love.

Love however is complicated and is challenged in definition, and as “professionals” we are not supposed to talk about it in academia or in therapy. Bodenheimer (2011) noted the taboo nature of any language of love regarding therapist-client relationships. This fear or insecurity is often due to allusions to sexual indiscretions on the part of the therapist (Baur, 1977, Schamess, 1999). But perhaps it is more complex than such an obvious and sensationalized insecurity; perhaps it is also about revealing or accepting vulnerability by thinking about our work in terms of love. M. Scott Peck (1986) said that to love fully is to suffer. To love fully, be open, and grow as a product of such love, is to fully acknowledge the certainty of pain since truly loving means to be affected, impacted, or impressed upon by another. Love then is taking a risk, perhaps the ultimate risk, and possibly explains why love remains a truly challenging and mysterious experience. Understanding love as thus, has developed my own critical lens and understanding of how things come into being and also what does not come into being (and thereby comes into being in another form).

A review of this literature surrounding the lack of discussion of love reveals a pattern

around power and fear of loss of power in terms of professional legitimacy. It appears that a discussion of love in the practice of social work or therapy has struggled to exist and this makes sense when connected to the current existing power structures that dictate academia, practice, and professionalism. In an article referring to the nature of progressive values in social work, Newdom (1996) spoke to such complexity about the nature of comprehending the role of progressive work within the profession of social work, “Professions, in general, and social work, in particular, were so implicated in the oppressive policies and practices of the welfare state ...Much of the basis for this lies in the very nature of professions under capitalism.” This compels us to question how much full self-determination is actually possible in a money driven economy, specifically when capitalism fuels and feeds into a strong false sense of autonomy, that if you have money, that you do not need others.

There is one consistent theme throughout all of these different questions about the nature and experience of social work as a profession, which is the practice itself relies heavily on a sense of diversity, a variety of experience, theories, practice models, complexity, pluralism and pragmatism. Social work is present everywhere. It draws from numerous theoretical perspectives across disciplines, and it constantly struggles to distinguish itself among professions as a profession. Regardless of the questions, they all point to some inherent quality to what has been phrased as the science of helping others to help themselves. The ecological perspective allowed a lens to perceive the interconnectedness and complexity of an individual’s experience in one’s own unique environment. Joanna Macy, an environmental activist and scholar in general systems theory, speaks of the significance of using Buddhist perspectives in social justice work (Macy, 1984; 2007). Macy showed how Buddhist philosophy understands “all existence as a dynamic, self-sustaining web of relations” (Macy, 2007, p. 31). This statement itself

particularly resonates with the conception of the person-in-environment framework as well as queer theory.

Finn (2010) noted that while postmodern modes of thought have allowed a critical inquiry into the political it has also disavowed a language of love and meaning in its discourse, which I also found present though the possibility for it I believe amply exists. Thomas Merton, a spiritual thinker, poet, and social activist, stated in a letter to James Forest on the inherent contradiction in the relationship between the political and the human:

The basic problem is not political it is apolitical and human. One of the most important things to do is to keep cutting deliberately through the political lines and barriers and emphasizing the fact that these are largely fabrications that there is another dimension, a genuine reality, totally opposed to the fictions of politics: the human dimension. (cited in Shannon, 1993, p. 143)

I remain curious about this human dimension, and specifically about what might be possible if social work were to base its own purpose around a search for meaning and creating love. This does not mean that I am in opposition to empirical inquiry; I recognize the significance of such investigation. What I do want to challenge however, is what such studies means to us and how we interpret them. What would it be like for social work as a presence to approach the work in recognition of the mutual interdependence of coexistence and shared responsibility in the desire to provide what Reynolds called “creative relaxation,” to be able to rest in who you are. Would social work then be able to rest in its own indefinability?

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