Chapter Seven - 'River! that in Silence Windest'[1] – The Place of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Assessment: Sociological Reflections and Practical Implications

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Introduction

This chapter explores the place of religion and spirituality in social work assessment. The concept of 'place' represents a topographic or locational concept that suggests an embeddedness within a physically bounded space, implying here that religion and spirituality are centrally important to the lives of many people and therefore necessarily part of the social work relationship between practitioners and their clients or service users. Here we bring both a sociological and social work focus to bear upon the topic as representing an important area of diversity that continues to be largely ignored and therefore squeezed to the margins of serious consideration in British social work education with concomitant implications for recognition of faith domains as possibly integral to the lives and personal identities of service users.

A range of concepts and implications arising from the idea that religion and spirituality form a necessary part of quotidian social work practice requires some discussion. First of all, we must recognise that religion and spirituality are often seen as synonyms and we must first disentangle this idea and consider discrete definitions of each concept.

We also need to discuss assessment itself in social work, recognising the power

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[1] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *To the River Charles*

relations and potential for the normative imposition of unspoken and taken-for-granted assumptions in making judgements about vulnerable people's ecologies and psychologies. This is problematised further when we consider questions of vulnerability – a contested term in itself. For instance, we need to ask who makes a person vulnerable, is it an internal quality or characteristic or does it reflect something structural, or both? Also, social work may be considered as a locally contextualised set of processes or moral practices that make statements about assumed vulnerabilities. As such it will differ from place-to-place, context-to-context and country-to-country. We are taking this debate slightly further by asking about religion and spirituality as one aspect of this collection of social work processes and practices. The assumption therefore, that social work is homogeneous, transferable and globally understood, is an idea that requires interrogation.

Accepting that all the concepts introduced here may be contested and problematic we move forward to consider ways in which religion and spirituality may be assessed in social work, making reference predominantly to UK and US social work whilst being tentative in making any normative assumptions about this exploration. A number of models will be introduced, drawing out some of the potential meanings and consequences of these for interpersonal relationship and also for people's spiritual perspectives. A case example of the exclusion of religion and spirituality, notably Christianity, from UK social work in the recent past will be provided. This background prepares us for moving towards a sociological analysis of the state of play.

Defining religion, religiosity and spirituality

Classical sociologists have explored the areas of religion and spirituality with great interest. Although there are varying opinions and theories on the magnitude, reach, spread, and even relevance of religion and spirituality, sociological ideas regarding religion and spirituality pertain to social power, social change, social cohesion and disenfranchisement.

It may be suggested that in the main, sociological theorisation has focused upon spirituality, and especially religion, in terms of questioning its place, organisation and 'grip' within society. In an attempt to rationalise the fundamentals of what 'religion' is, Durkheim (1912) suggests that the three imperative facets of religion are: to maintain social cohesion, maintain homogenous societal values and normative rules, and to provide legitimacy to the prevailing mechanism of social control, i.e. political, legal and cultural structures. Durkheim (1912) furthermore explores the fluidity of religion, explaining that religious thought as a construct is designed to withstand societal change. He explains that as old gods die, new gods take their place to maintain order in a changed or adjusted societal context. These ideas may be extrapolated to suggest that religion has been a dualistic driver of both a sense of uniform morality, order and safety, as well as a sense of entrapment, confinement and inhibited social progression.

Wuthnow (1988) indicates that religion cannot be understood as a set of disembodied, abstract ideas and beliefs, but needs to be seen as a lived and social experience that reflects communal bonds and a sense of moral belonging. Religion is functional and it has reflected the socially ordered and legitimated systems of belief and behaviour within particular societies. To illustrate, Malinowski (1954) suggests that belief and

ritual plays a key role in life crises or changes. The birth of a child may be celebrated with the offer of gifts and support. Upon death, funerals serve to honour the dead and help bereaving family members. The purpose of these normalised rituals is for the continuity of a mutually supportive community; showing solidarity in the social group to maintain social function.

The influences of belief and faith, however, are wider. Along with classical sociological theorists such as Marx, the aforementioned Durkheim and Weber, Wuthnow also sees all faiths as concerned with three core elements: ultimate values, sacredness and transcendence. These elements are used in different ways but recognised to be significant in the lives of individuals as well as social and ecological systems. Hervieu-Leger (2000) adds a further element that indicates the centrality of religion in connecting people to a tradition, albeit an evolving one, and creating belonging by evoking a 'chain of memory'. What is clear from these elements is that religion is functional but also concerns core elements of the self in relation to the world and to the ultimate, or God (Robinson 1963). Perhaps, taking up Paul Tillich's theology, it has become for many the engagement with the ultimate, with their ground and depth of being. The usefulness of this conception, whilst deriving from Christian theology is its potential for interfaith application across many traditions. Of course, we do need to recognise as well that the adoption of religion can become a marker of identity with which others can be excluded as much as it can indicate inclusion and connection; the positive and negative aspects of religion in the lives of individuals and communities add much to understanding them.

Taking a more classical standpoint, Durkheim (1915) states that religion is based on a

set of unified beliefs and sacred objects or symbols that unite a community. However, in more recent times across Western Europe and the USA there has been a shift to 'religious pluralism' where religion is now down to a matter of choice and personal preference (Bruce, 1992). Through globalisation and the emergence of the internet there is now a wider access to a range of religious options, which are no longer geographically or nationally/culturally restricted.

Religion has a spiritual function; although it is not the same as spirituality and can be differentiated from it given the latter's position of not encompassing a sacred or supernaturally transcendent element. Indeed, spirituality can be used almost co-terminously with an understanding and experience of the existential self in the world: that which 'makes one tick'. Spirituality may cover a very wide terrain indeed, of course, which is highly permeable, indeed one might say, unbounded and amorphous. Thus spirituality can embrace the depth and ground associated with religious transcendence to a dizzying array of beliefs and practices, including even that normally associated with secular, individual hedonism, such as massage or yoga.

Using Heelas' (1996) ideas of 'self-religion' this may explain how more recently individuals have turned away from organised religions in the search for spirituality and in turn a journey of self-discovery. Particularly in this so-called 'New Age' there is a heightened focus on the individual experience of the journey rather than the end result. This encompasses pluralism, both religion and spirituality can perhaps no longer be divided into separate groups, it has become seemingly a more 'pick-and-mix' culture, in the sense that individuals have their own beliefs, values and moral standpoints that they live by, which may be picked from the different branches of

traditional religions.

Whilst acknowledging that spirituality allows for a more inclusive approach, including those who profess no religion, are agnostic or atheist, it seems also to represent, a 'comfortable' means of acknowledging the deeper needs of all humans that employ the functions of religion without its trappings. This would work equally well by using a focus on the existential self and seems to indicate a religiosity for the non-religious. In this chapter we use both terms ('religion' and 'spirituality') because of the synonymous usage and because it has become commonplace parlance within the literature.

Sociologically, there are functional elements of religion and spirituality. Both help to order, regulate and offer comfort, purpose and structure. There is also something biographical and fluid in developing contemporary religious or spiritual pathways, which adds a complexity to understanding the importance of such constructs within the lived experiences of individuals. It is this, perhaps, that is centrally important in respect of any professional assessment of these issues.

The importance of assessment in social work practice and its problematic status
As will be discussed further, some may argue that the UK has become, in general, a secular society: with the effects of this permeating professional work spheres. However, belief, faith, tradition and ritual still resonate in all aspects of life, as it is integral to the human experience, especially those who hold a religion or spiritual belief. It is therefore the argument that social work professions seek to include these

factors into the care and assessment provided. This can be duly noted by The Children Act 1989 S. 22(5), where

> "in making any such decision a local authority shall give due consideration to the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background".

The 'service user perspective' is regularly invoked as normative good social work practice. However, Milner and O'Byrne (2009) argue that, all too often, assessment is both linear and prescriptive and, as such, fails to deal with the manifold, fluid, and often ambiguous aspects of service users' values, needs and beliefs. Cnaan and Wineburg (1997) suggest that both religion and spirituality has, to an extent, been ignored within social work practice. Pentaris (2012, p.3) supports this, noting:

> "Being religiously competent is an add-on skill and competency for social workers in the UK".

We have argued elsewhere that social work assessment represents an ubiquitous, although differentiated, activity across the world (Parker et al., under review). Assessments are varied, completed with diverse groups of people or clients, and are undertaken for different purposes. Assessments are 'akin to an exploratory study which forms the basis for decision-making and action' (Coulshed and Orme 2006, p.26). Describing social work assessment as 'a focused collation, analysis and synthesis of relevant collected data pertaining to the presenting problem and identified needs' (Parker and Bradley 2014, p.17), portrays it as purposeful and professional, filling the interstices of complex human lives with tasks designed to populate a planned social work process. Assessments such as these may also be driven by social

regulatory frameworks, spoken or unspoken, and promulgate governmental or received societal norms at a practice level. They may also be led by different disciplinary approaches or political purposes, such as helping at individual or community levels, forming various plans for action, and even promoting praxis by participatory involvement.

The need for assessments processes to be critiqued rather than accepted as a given is critical since they weigh and evaluate settings, circumstances, people and/or events as part of a broader discourse of need, power and values, often reflecting a presumed or possible legitimacy or illegitimacy of those assessed.

Because of the ecological, social and political contexts in which social work assessments are undertaken and the many purposes to which they are put, all forms of assessment practice run the risk of inducing normative behaviour: following the rules prescriptively as though they represent unquestionable 'givens'. Therefore, social work assessments need to be 'troubled' and subjected to critical analysis (Parker 2015).

Grouping social work assessments around particular purposes can help illuminate the meanings constructed in the acts of assessment and identify impacts that assessment may have on individuals. The following model clusters social work assessments around the following types: prescribed and political approaches, 'tribal' allegiances fostered by theoretical ideologies, and processes or rituals involved in the 'dance' or inter-relational conduct of assessment, see Figure 6.1 (Parker and Bradley 2014; Parker 2015; Parker et al. under review).

Theoretical

Normative

Relational

Frameworks and regulatory frameworks - (**political assessment**), for example: Common Assessment Frameworks, the Single Shared Assessment process

Procedural assessment - (**ritual – liturgical or prescriptive**)

Understanding and critiquing the assessments employed by agencies and organisations and the ways in which these are conducted

Theoretically-influenced assessment
- (**tribal assessments**):

- Evidence based practice (EBP)
- Psychodynamic assessments
- Cognitive-behavioural assessments
- Person-centred assessments
- Community assessments

Interpersonal assessment - (**ritual – relational**)

Critical reflection on the interpersonal processes involved in assessment – data choice and gathering; data analysis and interpretation; the impacts of relationship

Adaptive

Figure 6.1: Meanings of assessment in social work (Source adapted from Parker and Bradley 2014;

Parker 2015)

It is, therefore, important to recognise that when assessing the place of religion and/or spirituality within those seeking social work services, that the purposes or functions of assessment are brought to the fore and acknowledged, as these will influence how much weight is attributed to these factors and how they are seen. For instance, should the function of the assessment focus on required information for organisational planning purposes, the question of religion and spirituality would be subjugated to the assessment itself. However, should the assessment emphasise partnership and interpersonal relationship, a searching for and co-construction of the truths underpinning a person's life, then the place of religion and/or spirituality would be much higher and valued.

Of course, contemporary social work throughout Europe has multiple purposes and does concern social and political regulation and function, as well as promoting individual wellbeing – it must do so because of the need, at times, to protect individuals from either themselves or from others. However, attention to the place religion and/or spirituality plays in the lives of those being assessed is important if a full understanding of the person is to be gained and appropriate plans are negotiated to effect maintenance or change (core functions of social work) in a given situation. To ensure these aspects of life are accorded the weight they require, and to be able to judge reflexively how these personal constructs are valued within a social organisation or within society, social workers need to grapple with both the functions and philosophies of their organisations and assessment tools and the meanings these construct for understanding and valuing the place of religion and spirituality in individual lives. The case example that we now introduce highlights some of those

issues.

A case study example in education – an example of inverted oppressive practice

A mature student undertaking a Master's degree in social work approached one of us (Parker) in the late 1990s. I had delivered a lecture on social work practice, assessment, power and the potential for oppression and she had been struck that I had mentioned religion and spirituality as areas in which the potential for discrimination was rife. My comments had resonated with her understanding that such matters were generally excluded from discussion in social work at the time, almost being archived under the label of older oppressive constructs. It was interesting to develop the conversation to examine the centrality of respect for diversity, multiculturalism and multi-faith worlds that privileged new age belief systems, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and recognised the toxicity of anti-Semitism but aligned Christianity to the order of oppression. The student was herself a practising Christian and felt under some degree of obligation to keep quiet her beliefs and as though they were something to be frowned upon and, bizarrely, anti-social work.

This example demonstrates an inverted Manichean approach to religion in UK social work at that time. Religion and faith were to be respected in those using social work services as long as this was not a Christian faith, which was assumed to represent the dominant master narrative of religion and therefore to be oppressive to others by default. There was, however, no critique of this master narrative and the potential to deconstruct or revise. Two spheres of oppression result from this approach. Firstly, in patronising those with non-Christian faiths by virtue of accepting these beliefs as a result of rejecting a different form. It appeared to privilege non-theism and non-

religion and to allow the still 'exotic other' to profess their 'superstitions' without prejudice. The second area of discrimination was more overt in the targeting of those of Christian faith. When interrogated further, this shows negative discrimination on the basis of an assumed position in which social work extolled the virtues of religious tolerance except for Christianity, a naïve application of 'good' and 'bad' labels to areas which, at that time were little understood or appreciated. The development of assessment that includes religion and/or spirituality demonstrates a great stride forward. However, the religion and spirituality of social work practitioners and its acceptance, tolerance or otherwise has still to be fully researched for the potential impact on people using social work services, social work organisations and social workers themselves. It is also probably worth asking how social workers in the UK, and perhaps throughout the West react now to contemporary Pagans, Druids and Witches and whether negative assumptions are made rather than an assumption of religious tolerance.

A case study example in social services – inauthenticity and confidentiality in practice

In 2012, one of the authors was the subject of social work intervention. The social worker was asked by the author what (if any) was her religion, but the social worker responded by retorting 'why does this matter?' and refused to answer the question. The author comments in retrospect 'It was interesting to see that the social worker did not want my perspective on her to change because of her beliefs and therefore I assumed she kept that information confidential for the sake of her job. I myself am a practicing Christian, however I would like to point out that the culture of my background is Islamic, and therefore it is commonly assumed that I am a Muslim.'

The author in turn believed that a Muslim background was assumed by the social worker and might be influencing how the author was perceived and therefore treated as a minority group person.

Sorensen (cited by Ahmed 2009), asserts that personal religious practice should be left outside the workplace. However, he states that social workers are employed to help those individuals they work with express their own religious beliefs. The Children Act 1989, states that local authorities have a role of considering the religious beliefs of children under their care. In turn Gilbert (cited by Ahmed 2009), states that professional conflict regarding religion is due to the lack of professional guidance in social work where spirituality is a forgotten and invisible dimension of their thinking. In contrast to the social worker described in the second case study, Ahmed reports that social workers need to be able to analyse when it is appropriate for professionals to state their religion, if such authentic disclosures could be of benefit to service users.

> "Social workers are not robots and should be able to express their beliefs if it helps them to step on to common ground with the people they are trying to help [...]. If someone said they were in a crisis and asked the social worker to light a candle and say a prayer for them, it would be appropriate to do so" (Ahmed 2009).

Similar examples of the tacit exclusion of certain faiths from being legitimised as worthy of exploration and acceptance in social work education are regularly noted. Ironically, this serves to confuse and alienate social work students from diverse backgrounds, as well as those of a White British heritage, given that Christianity, like Islam is a proselytising, global and thereby multicultural religion. Moreover, in

university settings, such as our own (in common with many other institutional settings) sacred spaces set aside for ecumenical worship are then assumed to be and thereby inevitably become prayer rooms for Muslims only, excluding the pious of other faiths. A regrettable feature would appear to be that discourses and practices concerning religion and faith are increasingly associated with minority ethnic groups (Ashencaen Crabtree forthcoming). This therefore disinherits others from being seen to engage positively with the rich heritage of faith that was the traditional foundation of social work – and which still provides impetus and motivation for its enactment in the wide and complex realm of community needs.

The message for social workers is one of continuing reflexivity to assess oneself and one's views when undertaking assessments of those people who may require social work services. It seems that religion and spirituality act functionally but also as a means of demarcating, labelling and constructing differences that can be inlaid with assumptions. These assumptions require analysis before being acted on if social workers are to practise in ways that are respectful of different life choices and belief systems. The different ways in which spirituality and religion might be assessed in social work offer both normative and fluid approaches, with the latter offering some pointers in encouraging a sensitive and reflexive approach. It is to these approaches that we now turn.

Religious and spiritual assessment in social work – an overview
Writing in 2003, in reference to British social work's approach to religion, Gilligan paraphrased New Labour's similar position, as 'We don't do God' (2003, p.76). However, by 2010 Furness and Gilligan (2010, p.2185) were describing an 'explosion

of interest' by social work in the domains of religion, spirituality and belief; although the shock waves of this appear to have travelled slowly beyond academic interest to translate into routine assessment practice. In reference to social work in the US, Hunt (2014) argues for drawing the necessary links between assessment for spirituality and social work values and principles. Equally, however, she notes that the idea of administering spiritual assessments engenders discomfort in students, despite the more religious contemporary context than that of Britain, where a general assumption tends of prevail about the secular characteristic (or at best lukewarm or tokenistic religiosity) of the White British majority population (Ashencaen Crabtree forthcoming).

Internationally, the Middle East provides interesting examples of the convergence between religion and social needs. Focusing on Lebanon, Jawad (2009) notes that assessment of needs and eligibility is carried out by religious welfare organisations (RWO) rather than the Ministry of Social Affairs, which operates as an administrative intermediary only. It is these RWO, such Emdad, Dar al Aytan and Caritas, that are considered the experts in defining problems and deciding how best these should be treated. Assessment is therefore unidirectional rather than participatory, as those who request assistance or services are not considered to have sufficient insight for this process (Jawad, 2009). No doubt there is a gendered perspective to this in that the majority of clients are dependent women. However, as Jawad notes, Caritas at least is changing its philosophy to one of enablement and is becoming somewhat more reflexive whilst still retaining its 'expert' role to define needs. Importantly, however, in Lebanon the RWOs are geographically specific and applicants tend to be religiously homogeneous, meaning that patterns of entitlement are geographical and

sectarian (Jawad 2009).

Returning to the British context, Ashencaen Crabtree et al. (2008), focusing on Islam specifically, acknowledge that although faith is recognised in social work assessments it is still pushed to the margins. A concern with diversity and cultural competence may encourage social work interest in more expansive assessments in respect of religions associated with minority ethnic groups, as opposed to faiths associated with majority groups. This latter group is therefore more likely to find their spiritual needs overlooked, or only addressed in consideration to holistic end-of-life care.

Models for relevant religio-spritual assessment, however, have been offered. For instance, Holloway and Moss (2010) draw upon a wide literature from health and social care and focus on spirituality as a wider concept than religion. They identify four approaches to the assessment of spirituality that are relevant to social work. These comprise:

1. A generic approach that acknowledges the importance of spirituality in a person's life

2. The systematic measurement of the degree and significance of spirituality for the person, including spiritual need and spirituality as a coping mechanism

3. A biographical approach concentrating on personal narratives

4. Holistic approaches including overlapping domains of the person's ecology

Further approaches for assessment of spiritual aspects in the life situation of clients can be identified along the concepts that are described in the following passages.

Generic approaches: recognising spirituality:

This generally includes an open-ended assessment allowing an individual to identify issues of spirituality but it does require the practitioner to be personally aware of their own spirituality (see Thompson 2007). This approach carries some resonance with Hollinsworth's (2013) plea for the social work adoption of an autobiographical approach, which is sensitive to revealing social and cultural priorities in clients.

Measuring spirituality:

These derive from the US and are not often employed in the UK. McSherry and Ross (2002) review a range of these measures and instruments in the context of nursing practice. This approach uses lists of indicators that provide a 'score' of spirituality or religiosity. This somewhat instrumental method appears to offer a different approach to narrative-based ones.

Spiritual narrative:

This approach is recognised in the US and promoted by Hodge (2001; 2005) in particular (Parker and Bradley 2014). Narrative approaches, which carry commonalities with the autobiographical, are qualitative in nature but can move from open-ended approaches through to stage theories reflecting a spiritual journey towards maturity. The approach allows the individual to present a storied approach to spirituality that reflects the importance of spirituality in quotidian and transcendent life. Furness and Gilligan (2010) describe the use of spiritual histories, life maps, ecomaps and ecograms to seek religious narratives from people. Parker and Bradley (2014) add cuturagrams, as a means of mapping ethno-cultural beliefs and narratives to this mix of assessment tools.

The domain approach:

Skalla and McCoy (2006) identify an approach that considers various ecological domains and dimensions presenting the 'Mor-VAST' model, which covers the importance of spirituality in terms of:

- Moral authority – self-management

- Vocational – life purpose

- Aesthetic – beauty and creativity

- Social – relatedness to others

- Transcendent – sense of awe and sacred

Furness and Gilligan (2010) focus on religion primarily rather than spirituality, bringing religion to the fore in UK social work practice. They identify a range of models of cultural competence that set the backdrop from which religiosity and the importance of religion in the lives of clients can be assessed. These include (a) Howell's (1982) four-stage model of development and learning moving from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence; (b) Cappinha-Bacote's (1999) ASKED (awareness, skills, knowledge, encounter and desire) model, promoting sensitivity to one's own beliefs and developing through a reflective cycle to other aspects of sensitivity; (c) the transactional model of cultural identity (Green 1999) seeks to move beyond traits and characteristics to a relational understanding of diversity and complexity; (d) awareness and sensitivity to difference (Papadopoulos 2006) represents a four-stage model to examine own beliefs and the impact of these on others. The four stages of the latter comprise promoting cultural awareness,

gaining cultural knowledge, becoming culturally sensitive, and demonstrating cultural competence.

Furness and Gilligan (2010) also identify a range of models that aid cultural competence when directly assessing religion and religiosity as heterogeneous constructions. Open-ended questioning by social workers is promoted in enabling client groups to express themselves as they wish. The authors recognise the importance of integration into existing assessment frameworks such as the Single Assessment Process (Department of Health 2002) or the Framework for Assessment of Children on Need and their Families, Common Assessment Framework (2006) where cultural and religious differences are acknowledged. Furness and Gilligan's (2010) framework thus includes the following:

- awareness and reflexivity about one's own religious or spiritual beliefs or their absence

- asking whether people have sufficient opportunities to discuss their religious and spiritual beliefs

- asking whether the social worker listens sufficiently

- inquiring where a person's expertise in respect of self is recognised

- questioning whether the social worker is open and willing to revise assumptions

- asking if the social worker is building a trusting relationship that is respectful and willing to facilitate the wants of the person

- probing the capacity of the social worker to be creative in response to an individual's beliefs

- ensuring the social worker has sought sufficient information and advice about religious and spiritual beliefs

Towards a sociological understanding of religious and spiritual assessment in social work practice

After a difficult and somewhat stagnant history, the centrality of spiritual and religious assessment in social work is increasingly acknowledged as important and frameworks are being developed. The rationale employed for this growth in interest, awareness and practice concerns the multi-faith composition of our communities, recognition of difference and acknowledgement that religion and/or spirituality reflects a central component in the lives of many people. However, except for a continued focus on reflexivity there remains little on the centrality of religion and spirituality in the lives of social workers and human service workers themselves.

Sociologically, there are a number of ways we can begin to understand this turn towards religion and spirituality that advances on the functional understandings that we have considered so far. These include concepts of super-diversity, normativity and power, labelling theory, deviance and social problem construction and ideas from sociology of religion.

Super-diversity:

The term 'super-diversity' was used in 2007 by Vertovec (2007a, b) as a summary term in the context of global changing migration patterns, indicating that these changes are wider than simply identifying expanding numbers of ethnicities, languages and countries of origin within a host country, but also include:

"a multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live. In the last decade the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of a range of new and changing migration variables shows that it is not enough to see 'diversity' only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case both in social science and the wider public sphere. In order to understand and more fully address the complex nature of contemporary, migration-driven diversity, additional variables need to be better recognized by social scientists, policy-makers, practitioners and the public. These include: differential legal statuses and their concomitant conditions, divergent labour market experiences, discrete configurations of gender and age, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents. The dynamic interaction of these variables is what is meant by 'super-diversity'" (Vertovec 2007a, p.1025).

The concept has grown in significance as Vertovec (2014) highlights that over 300 publications have employed the term 'super-diversity' since 2007. Use has been global, spanning many different disciplines and used in many different ways from expanding focus on ethnicities to complex and multi-layered concerns with contemporary society. Indeed, at the University of Birmingham there is a research institute, IRiS, dedicated to studies of super-diversity[2].

This multi-layered complex concept of super-diversity helps us in understanding the turn to assessment of religion and spirituality in seeing the culture of social work breaking from a more traditional emphasis on professionalism and single function

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[2] More information on IRiS can be found at:
http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/superdiversity-institute/index.aspx).

approaches that bound it within its own closed system. It helps to offer a path to social work in moving towards a complex understanding of diverse groups of peoples presenting perhaps at a macro and meso level particular religious and spiritual beliefs different to those normatively held, whilst acknowledging multi-layered variations within those beliefs and practices at familial and individual levels.

It shows, furthermore, that social workers are becoming more aware of the impact of religion, spirituality and differences in belief systems that have been dismissed in times when atheistic humanism held sway over assumed outmoded theistic and, indeed, non-theistic faith systems. What the concept of super-diversity also does is to demand awareness of the complex, nuanced aspects of belief that require acceptance, at times, or a lack of – or a requirement for further knowledge of those systems of belief within a context of respect, i.e. acknowledging the importance of those beliefs to the individual and to their daily lives.

The danger, however, of uncritical application of a super-diversity concept occurs when acceptance of complex, varied differences is tolerated without critique when there are dangers for individuals and families. The lack of questioning critique was highlighted, for instance, as far back as the Climbié Inquiry (Laming 2003) in which the failure to challenge dangerous cultural beliefs led to the tragic death of the African-migrant child, Victoria Climbié. Again, the importance of reflexivity on behalf of the practitioner is highlighted to offset such potential problems.

Normativity and power:
The UK is nominally a Christian country although church attendance has decreased in

Anglican and non-denominational churches (Hayes, 2001). Church attendance has increased, however, in Roman Catholic churches reflecting some of the changing patterns of migration in the early years of the twentieth century (ONS, 2015). Judaism was once the second most common religion in the UK, stemming, predominantly, from widespread Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century and less so from people coming in around the time of World War II. Today, Islam is the fastest growing religion and second largest religion in the UK, again reflecting migration trends (Ashencaen Crabtree forthcoming). However, these changes are not solely concerned with migration but with changes in daily practices and associated concern with these belief systems within those communities most likely to be associated with them.

Unspoken, taken-for-granted assumptions are made about the UK being a Christian country, with a prevailing view that, should one be asked about religion, the forthcoming answer would be one of a ubiquitous non-thought-through 'C of E' (shorthand for 'Church of England'), which has almost become a religious monogram for 'no religion'. The accepted and assumed status of the Church of England as a figurehead that commands little respect and devotion acts normatively in influencing many social workers' attitudes and approaches. Of course, the preceding sentence could be construed as reflecting a normative bias in itself suggesting that UK social workers are White British Church of England Christians, whilst the reality is far different and the profession diverse. However, the assumptions of the UK as a nominally Christian country hold and influence many in powerful ways that unless revealed permeate practices and thoughts about those practices, constructing a normative, unspoken approach to social work. Thus it is imperative for social workers

to understand their potential complicity in biased assessment of religiosity and spirituality and therefore the concomitant demand for critical awareness and reflexivity, as called for by Furness and Gilligan (2010).

Labels, deviance and social problem construction:

One of the enemies of critical reflexivity and acknowledgement of the complex intersection of a super-diverse society is a culturally occluded consideration of the characteristics and 'essential' features of various religions and belief systems. Thus, for example, there is great potential for the labelling of all Pentecostal Christians as fervent believers in the importance of violent exorcism in children with ADHD; of all Jews as Zionist Israeli sympathizers; of all Muslims as radicalized terrorist sympathizers, and all Buddhists as sandal-wearing chanters of strange hippy-like mantras. Of course, some people in these religions may reflect exactly those caricatured types but diversity of belief, the intersection of other differences and variation within individuals will quickly disabuse such thinking if an open, inquiring and sensitively questioning mind is fostered.

The labels that reflect some of the assumed stereotypes may result in presumptions of deviance and by some a secondary deviance displayed as a result. For instance, assumptions that the Roman Catholic priesthood in totality is associated with long-standing child abuse and implicated within a conspiracy to hide the 'truth' of this. These assumptions may have such an impact on a social worker that she or he finds it difficult to accept, listen to and work with the priest who sets up and works directly with a youth organization to steer children and young people towards pro-social activities in an area once known for crime.

Surinder Guru (2010) also indicates how the families of, Muslim, men arrested and or charged with terrorist offences have been labelled as deviant themselves by wider society and treated as such. This identifies a social problem construction that reflects some of those unspoken assumptions and influences the thoughts and behaviours of people, including social workers, to the accepted problem. The general public, which it must be remembered is diverse, multiethnic, and multifaith, has been informed of the problem of the radicalisation of Muslim youth. This has been accepted, almost uncritically, leading to Home Office attempts to increase the securitisation of Muslim families in particular. This in itself is something that social workers maybe should challenge in accordance with their commitment to social justice and values. However, not only is this securitisation being accepted but it is something that is beginning to make reporting and monitoring demands on social workers themselves who potentially become complicit in making groups deviant (Ashencaen Crabtree forthcoming). So, an awareness and sensitive approach to understanding a person's religion and spiritual beliefs is something that accords with social workers wanting to retain integrity and promote social justice. It also allows social workers to be part of that spiritual and religious world and to move beyond the atheistic presumptions of late twentieth century social work in the UK.

Sociology of religion:

There has been a growth in approaches to the sociology of religion (Clarke 2009). Whilst religion has fascinated sociological thought since the times of Durkheim, Weber, Marx and so forth it is today, when recognition of the centrality of religious and spiritual beliefs is increasingly accepted, that the sociology of religion offers

much to our understanding of and approaches to the world. This is no less the case for social work practice. The fluid, multilayered understandings of religion signal its complexity and the need for care in assessing and working with people's religious beliefs. There is no room for a complacent unquestioning acceptance that religious belief can be 'essentialised' and understood by reference to known traits and characteristics. There is, however, a call in the contemporary world for observing and understanding how religion and spirituality influences the everyday behaviours, activities and practices of individuals. In social work, this requires critical reflexivity and openness if individuals using social work services are to be responded to with the appropriate respect and sensitivity demanded of a profession boasting its social justice, human rights credentials and value-base.

Conclusion

The task of assessment is central to contemporary social work in identifying issues and aspects of a person's life that require consideration. The power imbalances in social work assessments have been addressed in recent years with a recognition that assessment is best undertaken in partnership and needs to focus on all aspects of an individual's, group's or community's life. This holistic approach encompasses spirituality and religion as a core area of many people's lives and one that is crucial to understanding people in context. This chapter has examined the place of religion and spirituality in people's lives and how social work is responding in terms of assessment. Assessment of spirituality and religion has been critiqued theoretically in this chapter but an emphasis on the importance of reflexivity is necessary for translating this discursive approach into appropriate social work practice.

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