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Assessing identity processes of the traumatised and those attending the traumatised

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How is trauma experienced by the traumatised? Those who rescue the traumatised, who attend to their injuries, who remove them to a safe place, who provide them with shelter from danger, and who care for and counsel them, how do they experience themselves after taking care of the traumatised over extensive periods? These questions are inextricably bound up with people's sense of identity, since people's appraisals of ongoing circumstances express their identities. Their experiences are invested within their continuing redefinitions of identity.

Some clarification of terms and their usage will assist in elucidating these questions. First, there is the meaning of 'trauma' itself. An event is only 'traumatic' when appraised as such, and there are hugely varied circumstances that are traumatic. An explosion is not traumatic except when appraised by people as having devastating bodily and psychological consequences. It took a few moments for most people to appraise the fireball of the first plane crashing into the World Trade Center on 11 September, 2001, as being more than an accident and a Hollywood-kind of spectacle. Then, further moment upon moment passed while the full import of the personal horrors of the unseen victims began to be comprehended, and even longer for onlookers to be able to interpret and give 'meaning' to the events taking place, from bizarre accident to monumental intentional outrage. Traumatic significance is appraised only when events become highly personally involving. In other words, trauma is not *out there* as an event, which has *an impact on* people, as it is so often described (e.g., the effect of *the trauma on* this person was that he fell apart). It is personally experienced, that is, *construed and appraised by* persons as being devastatingly distressing. Furthermore, that particular circumstances may be appraised as traumatic requires a degree of identification with the victims as being of a common humanity. [Reminder that in the case of the World Trade Center atrocity there were instances shown on the media of some people around the world rejoicing in those events. These people's appraisals were from an entirely different standpoint, one that denied a common humanity with the victims and instead construed them as representatives of the 'Great Satan'.]

Individual personal trauma is something quite different as, for example, when a person is subjected to sexual abuse, or a life-threatening attack, or humiliating torture.

The issues we will attend to in this contribution are that 'traumas' experienced by victims are not simply discrete events, but involve personal processes in time, and that the traumatic circumstances of others for those attending the traumatised are likewise not experienced as discrete events but as ongoing features of interpersonal transactions. As has been indicated by the contributions by Charles Figley (1995, 2002), Selwyn Black (2002, Black & Weinreich, 2002, 2002) and Marion Gibson (1998, 2002), the experiences of 'compassion fatigue' and 'vicarious traumatisation' occur as experiential processes over quite extensive periods of time.

Victims' traumatic experiences follow their appraisals of the 'traumatic' circumstances for their bodily and psychological survival, that is, for the threat to their personal integrity in body and spirit. Both appraisal and personal integrity are matters of their *sense of identity*. Their experience of psychological distress often involves complex processes of identification with others, who may share like circumstances or who may be in some way held responsible for their experiences. Processes of identification are also matters of identity. This means that the experience of trauma depends on one's sense of identity as well as on the circumstances that threaten body and spirit. The wellsprings or the foundations of one's sense of identity are crucial features of how self might appraise the critical circumstances and events that are experienced as traumatic. Persons for whom their formative and ongoing identity processes differ will appraise circumstances variously and therefore experience trauma differently. Since identity processes are continually ongoing, their longer term 'coming to terms' with traumatic experiences will also differ substantially from person to person. In other words, persons, who appraise critical circumstances that result in their experiencing trauma and who in time contend with their traumatic experiences, do not interpret the circumstances in the same way, nor experience trauma in the same manner, nor contend with their traumatic experience in quite the same fashion. How they interpret threatening events, experience trauma, and contend with their experiences are features of their prior sense of identity and subsequent processes of redefinition of identity.

Those attending the traumatised will also appraise the traumatic circumstances of others, during which they too engage in complex processes of identification with the victims of those circumstances. Quite evidently, the professional listeners' experience of 'vicarious traumatisation' is not the same as the victims' traumatic experience.

Assessing the identity processes of the traumatised *(How is trauma experienced by the traumatised?)*

The Identity Structure Analysis (ISA) conceptualisation (Weinreich, 1980, 1989, 2002a, 2002b) enables the complexity of a person's identity processes to be assessed. While presentation of the conceptualisation in detail is beyond the scope of this short contribution, I will refer to selected findings using ISA to illustrate how it may explicate the experience of trauma. However, key features of ISA are that it uses:
1) identity instruments that are customised to take into account the individual's personal biography and sense of identity;
2) discourses that are the person's own ways of appraising others and interpreting critical circumstances and events;
3) procedures for estimating the individual's patterns of identifications with other relevant people, and institutions;
4) routines for assessing *core identity aspirations* for the individual on the one hand and *conflicted issues* on the other, the former indicative of the person's mode of contending with the stress of the latter – both of which tend to vary from person to person according to personal biography and prevailing societal culture within which the person functions.

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Henrietta: A case study of sexual abuse

Henrietta (a pseudonym) was a young woman of about twenty-two when she participated in the study briefly reported here. She had a younger brother and a younger sister.

She stated that her father had sexually abused her between the ages of four and eight. Initially she had not been particularly close to him as she had been a bit frightened of him, because she had seen him hit her mother once in a row. His first sexual encounter with her was in her bedroom in the evening when her mother was away at a meeting. She had felt raped and physically and psychologically hurt during an act that was in no way then experienced as natural. This had been a violation perpetrated by a persona she did not like, but against whom she could not struggle, since he would have threatened violence. At the age of four she had no understanding of what was happening to her and afterwards, when she bled, she was frightened. She was terrified of him during the encounter, when he did not behave as if he were her father but as a wild animal, though he tried to convince her that what was going on was normal in its way.

Her father's sexual encounters with her had occurred during her mother's absence from home. They had continued over a period of four years until the birth of the youngest child when her mother had remained at home. She had experienced pain, fear, anger and helplessness during these encounters. However, she had also felt special for him sometimes, because she had thought that she was his "special little girl" and he was her "big strong daddy". But she had sometimes felt that she did not exist as a person for him. Sometimes she had felt dirty, but her predominant experience had been "more confused than anything else". She had feared him. Nevertheless, she reported that she did "entice her father and want his sexual attentions", that "sometimes he asked her to touch his penis so that eventually it became natural – it all seemed natural at the time". The result was that she became sexually oriented towards other men and did not initially want to avoid sexual contact with them, until she was about ten years old when she determined to become non-sexual. Then she tried to shun all sexual knowledge or contact, and she became increasingly ashamed of herself. Her schoolwork and everyday activities had initially not been affected until "on becoming non-sexual, I had to stop my mental processes in order to shut out the memory and to shut out any other unpleasant thought". On first menstruating at thirteen she was anxious about the amount of blood involved. Later on, when she discovered what orgasm might mean, she became frightened and overwhelmed, during which pleasurable experience was associated with a strong sensation of fear. About anxieties of pregnancy, she said "I never thought that I would be able to get married, even though I desperately portrayed myself as a highly artistic and sensitive individual in the hope that someone might appreciate and love me". During all of childhood and adolescence, she did not say anything about her father's sexual abuse to her mother whom she said she always loved. She thought, however, that her mother did not love her, and she was sometimes afraid of her mother who had quite a bad temper. Only after she left home for work was the sexual abuse admitted by her father to her mother.

ISA results

Henrietta systematically appraised her social world by way of an ISA identity instrument whereby she appraised significant others (mother, father, etc.) and herself (me as I am at home, etc.) using various relevant discourses (…has little power to make important decisions/…has important decision-making powers; …feels sex is uncontrollable and

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evil/...feels sex is enhancing). The systematic procedures entailed Henrietta attributing the discourse qualities (as in 26 bipolar constructs) to the significant others and to self (22 entities) by means of rating scales. See Appendix 1 for the identity instrument used by Henrietta. Using the Identity Exploration (IDEX) computer software parameters of her identity, as defined within the ISA conceptual framework, were then computed from her appraisals.

The results indicated that she was mostly intensely ego-involved with her persona on leaving school (5.00) and with a sexually abused child (4.89) (Table 1). Her evaluation of her school-leaving persona was low (0.25), and that of a sexually abused child was negative (-0.35). Table 1 presents her ego-involvement with, and evaluation of, other facets of self and further significant others for comparison.

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Table 1 Henrietta's ego-involvement with, and evaluation of, selected entities

	ego-involvement with (scale 0.00 to 5.00max)	**evaluation of** (scale –1.00 to +1.00)
Henrietta's highest ego-involvement was with:		
'me as I was when I left school'	5.00	0.25
'a sexually abused child'	4.89	-0.35
for comparison:		
'me as I would like to be'	4.72	1.00
'me as I am at home'	3.27	0.51
'me as I am at work'	3.94	0.67
'a person I admire'	4.78	0.85
'a rapist'	4.00	-0.37
'father'	3.83	0.46
'mother'	4.39	0.67
'the caring professions'	3.83	0.27

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Identification processes

Taken in conjunction with her intense ego-involvement with a sexually abused child, the dominance of Henrietta's experience of sexual abuse for her sense of identity was demonstrated by her rather close empathetic identification with this child based in her appraisal of herself as she was when she left school at eighteen (0.58) - not as a four or eight year old or prepubescent girl when the abused had actually occurred (Table 2). Nevertheless, in respect of the school-leaving persona she more closely empathetically identified with her father (0.63), perhaps an initially surprising finding but comprehensible in view of shared qualities.

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Table 2 Henrietta's empathetic identification with selected entities (scale 0.00 to 1.00 max)

	based in *past self*	*current self*	
	'me as I was when I left school' (ego-involv: 5.00)[*]	'me as I am at home' (ego-involv: 3.27)	'me as I am at work' (ego-involv: 3.94)
empathetic identification with:			
'father'	**0.63**	**0.76**	**0.80**
'a sexually abused child'	**0.58**	*0.40*	*0.28*
'mother'	0.54	**0.72**	**0.76**
'a person I admire'	0.54	**0.80**	**0.92**
'my closest friend'	0.54	0.64	**0.76**
'a successful business woman'	0.54	**0.68**	**0.72**
'the caring professions'	0.54	0.52	0.56
'my colleagues in the workplace'	0.52	**0.80**	**0.76**
'my immediate superior'	0.42	**0.80**	**0.92**
'a rapist'	0.42	*0.28*	*0.16*

[*]She was most intensely ego-involved with this past conception of herself
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Henrietta's most noteworthy ongoing identity process was her decreasing empathetic identification with 'a sexually abused child', especially pronounced in her current work context. She had managed to differentiate her father's behaviour as representative of two personas, such that 'father' was 'her daddy', while 'rapist' represented his 'wild animal' persona ("… my father and a rapist - well I might think that they are one and the same"). Her ongoing identity process involved increasing empathetic identification with her 'proper' father and decreasing identification with his 'rapist persona', this being most notable in her current work context. Evidently she felt most secure when at work, where she most closely empathetically identified with the person she admired (0.92) and her immediate superior (0.92), and least with a rapist (0.16) and a sexually abused child (0.28).

The modulation of Henrietta's empathetic identification over time from her school-leaving persona to her current contexts, and currently from her home to work contexts, occurred within the frame of her aspirational identifications. Her idealistic-identifications (aspiring to emulate admired persons) and contra-identifications (aspiring to dissociate from distressing persons) provided the key to her value and belief system (Table 3) in which her positive values were associated with the workplace and negative ones with sexual abuse and rape. While she substantially idealistically identified with her 'proper' father (0.76), she contra-identified with his 'wild animal' persona (0.52). However, she most strongly contra-identified with a sexually abused child.

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Table 3 Henrietta's aspirational identifications with selected entities (scale 0.00 to
1.00 max)

idealistic-identification with:

'a person I admire'	0.88
'my colleagues in the workplace'	0.88
'my immediate superior'	0.84
'my closest friend'	0.80
'mother'	0.80
'father'	0.76

contra-identification with:

'a sexually abuse child'	0.68
'a rapist'	0.52

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The most problematic features of Henrietta's identity were revealed by her conflicts in
identification with specific entities (wherein she empathetically identified with them to a
significant degree, while she simultaneously contra-identified with them) (Table 4). Her
most problematic conflicted identification in respect of her school-leaving persona was
with a sexually abused child (0.63). This represented her empathetic identification with
this child, while wishing to dissociate from her abused characteristics. Henrietta's
school-leaving persona also entailed conflicted identification with a rapist (0.47). This
too was constituted of her empathetically identifying with, or taking to herself the
characteristics of, the rapist (her father's wild animal), while wishing to dissociate from
them. [A theoretical explanation of the processes involved is given in Weinreich, 2002a,
parallels of which are to be found in the processes of 'vicarious traumatisation' of those
working closely with the traumatised (Black & Weinreich, 2001, 2002)].

She was, however, effectively resolving her conflicted identification with a sexually
abused child, decreased in her current home (0.52) and work (0.44) contexts, though
remaining still substantial. Her identification conflict with a rapist - father's 'wild
animal' persona - was becoming much reduced (current home: 0.38; work: 0.29). In her
current work persona, her most problematic identification was with a successful business
woman (0.48) and that with her 'proper' father had become more noticeable (0.44).

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Table 4 Henrietta's conflicts in identifications with selected entities (scale 0.00 to 1.00 max)

	based in *past self*	*current self*	
	'me as I was when I left school' (ego-involv: 5.00)[*]	'me as I am at home' (ego-involv: 3.27)	'me as I am at work' (ego-involv: 3.94)

conflicts in identification with:

'a sexually abused child'	**0.63**	**0.52**	**0.44**
'a rapist'	**0.47**	0.38	0.29
'the caring professions'	**0.47**	**0.46**	**0.47**
'a successful business woman'	**0.42**	**0.47**	**0.48**
'father'	0.39	**0.43**	**0.44**
'mother'	0.33	0.38	0.39
'my closest friend'	0.33	0.36	0.39

[*]She was most intensely ego-involved with this past conception of herself
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Conflicted and core evaluative dimensions of identity

Henrietta, through her identification processes delineated above evolved complex values and beliefs. Some beliefs represented clear-cut identity aspirations whereby her appraisals of significant others were emotionally compatible. These were her *core evaluative dimensions of identity*. Others were subjected to conflicting emotional appraisals, these being *conflicted evaluative dimensions of her identity.*

Issues about which she had *conflicted* appraisals included 'responding to situations on a day to day basis rather than planning in advance' (Structural Pressure[1]: –35), 'feeling very stressed contrasted with not so' (SP: –11), 'putting own ambitions and wishes first rather than obligations to family' (SP: –4), 'working as part of a small team as opposed to working to instructions in a hierarchical structure' (SP: 19), 'finding pleasure and excitement in work rather than in leisure activities' (SP: 32), and 'having warm feelings towards people contrasted with loathing them' (SP: 34). These conflicted dimensions indicated problems about being stressed, being spontaneous, putting self before family, preferring work to leisure, and having mixed feelings of warmth and loathing in relationships, a constellation of conflicted orientations whose origins in her home experience were evident. Her behaviour would likely be erratic or volatile in these respects.

Core evaluative dimensions of her identity – her firm identity aspirations – consisted of 'striving to be the best in one's field' (SP: 84), 'endorsing women as good managers (SP: 83), 'feeling secure with others' (SP: 78), 'developing good relationships' (SP: 78), 'handling power responsibly' (SP: 77), and 'deserving attention and consideration' (SP: 76). These indicated her likely modes of contending with the foregoing problematic

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[1] The *lower* the magnitude of 'structural pressure' on a construct the *greater* the degree of *incompatible appraisals* of the social world in respect of this construct. The *higher* the magnitude the more compatible.

issues. For example, her ambitious striving and support of women's business acumen contended with her tussle over self and family obligations, and her striving to develop good relationships and give attention and consideration to people contended with her vacillating warmth and loathing towards them. With these core dimensions of identity she orientated herself away from home and into the work place.

In summary, the ISA of Henrietta demonstrated that her identity processes incorporated her early childhood traumatic experiences of being sexually abused by her father and that this biographical feature continued to feature profoundly in her current being in the world and to an important extent in her identity aspirations too. Nevertheless, the ISA evidence indicated that she had made considerable progress towards establishing important identity aspirations and a sense of self as striving to implement them effectively, which was most clearly seen in her ongoing resolution of identification conflict and decreasing empathetic identification with a sexually abused child. Her self-evaluation was increasing, especially in her work context (Table 5). Overall, her general identity state at the time of her participation in the study was without major vulnerability, she having incorporated her experience of sexual abuse into a broader constellation of identity aspirations.

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Table 5 Henrietta's self-evaluation and identity diffusion

	Past self	Current self	
	Me as I was when I left school	*Me as I am at home*	*Me as I am at work*
self-evaluation (range –1.00 to +1.00)	0.25	0.51	0.67
identity diffusion (range 0.00 to 1.00)	0.381	0.372	0.377

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In general terms, the results of the ISA demonstrated that Henrietta's distressing and traumatic experience of long term sexual abuse involved realignments of her identifications that took into account broader contexts. Such contexts offered other significant role models with whom, and valued objectives with which, she could identify. Her identity structure revealed that, though her early experience of sexual abuse was a significant and continuing feature of her identity, the totality of her identity encompassed very much more than that experience. As an agentic individual she had the capacity to ponder her dilemmas and to think out new identity aspirations, which she could strive to implement. Henrietta's traumatic experience of sexual abuse, appraised and reappraised, varied significantly over time. She developed a mode of resolving the dilemma over her father's early sexual encounters with her that involved dissociating his 'wild animal' persona from his 'proper' father role. She increasingly empathetically identified with her 'proper' father, from her substantial 'past' identification (0.63) to that within her current home context (0.76) and work context (0.80).

However, her ISA results also revealed that the marks of her early childhood experience of sexual abuse remained as negative features of her current self-appraisal in her *home context*. Here she appraised herself as being *reckless in the use of power*, but with *little*

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power to make important decisions, and *preferring to work to instructions in a hierarchical structure*. She felt that *sex was uncontrollable and evil*. *Working to instructions* carried over into her current *work context* and in this context too she continued to feel *sex to be uncontrollable and evil*. The dominant place that her school-leaving persona had in her identity structure indicated that her past biographical experience of sexual abuse remained present. Hence, she might from time to time, when stressed and unable to progress with her identity aspirations, regress to this persona that more closely represented the earlier abuse.

The case study of Henrietta represents one person's traumatic experience and identity processes in biographical development. Evidently, other individuals who experience sexual abuse will have profoundly different experiences, such that no straightforward generic explanation is likely to be possible of identity processes incorporating experiences of trauma. ISA can provide the conceptual and methodological tools for elucidating the immense variety of identity processes that might be present.

Assessing identity processes of those attending the traumatised. (*How do they experience themselves after taking care of the traumatised over extensive periods?*)

Quite often children in residential care have experienced various kinds of trauma, these often being the reasons why they are in residential care. Residential child-care social workers provide care and attention to disturbed individuals according to rosters that involve often intense and demanding interactions with their clients during the day and at night too. Compassion fatigue or burnout is hazard of their work. Hilary Reid's (1990) research using ISA was carried out with the entire population of residential child-care social workers (N = 305; females 227, males 78; 63% 30 years or under) in Northern Ireland. She used the Maslach & Jackson (1981) inventory to differentiate those social workers who were experiencing high levels of *depersonalisation*, low *sense of accomplishment*, and high *emotional exhaustion* from those that reported low levels of depersonalisation, high sense of achievement, and low emotional exhaustion. She thereby aimed to delineate how the identity processes differed between those reporting experiences of burnout and those who did not. Her findings in respect of reported *emotional exhaustion* are summarised here. See Appendix 2 for the 'emotional exhaustion' items of the Maslach & Jackson inventory, and Appendix 3 for the identity instrument used in the study.

That emotional exhaustion represented problematic issues of identity was immediately apparent. Those who were emotionally exhausted had far greater problematic conflicts in identification with others in the social world than those not so exhausted, as represented by their greater identity diffusion (Table 6).

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Table 6: Residential child-care social workers: Emotional exhaustion and identity diffusion

	Emotional exhaustion:		
	Low (N:71)	**Medium** (N:152)	**High** (N:75)
identity diffusion (range 0.00 to 1.00)	0.33	0.40	0.42 (F = 14.339, p < 0.001)

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Specifically, the more emotionally exhausted social workers identified with certain people in conflicted and problematic manner, empathetically identifying to an extent while simultaneously contra-identifying with that person to a degree (Table 7). They identified in a more conflicted manner with their staff team, their supervisor and their most preferred co-worker in the immediate work context. In addition, indicating the spill over into the domestic context, the more emotionally exhausted social workers' identification with their closest family member was more conflicted, and this was also evident for those in the medium category of emotional exhaustion. Evidently, the experience of emotional exhaustion was a phenomenon of identity in which social workers' identifications with significant others were conflicted.

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Table 7: Residential child-care social workers: Emotional exhaustion and conflicted identifications with specific others

| | **Emotional exhaustion:** | | |
	Low	**Medium**	**High**
identification conflict with: (range 0.00 to 1.00)			
the staff team (F = 7.034, p<0.001)	0.38	0.44	0.47
my supervisor (F = 5.237, p<0.01)	0.35	0.37	0.43
most preferred co-worker (F = 9.571, p<0.001)	0.27	0.36	0.39
member of the family I'm closest to (F = 5.863, p<0.005)	0.26	0.34	0.31

Other persons with whom no significant differences were found: least preferred co-worker, field social workers, senior management, and best friend.
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In ISA terms, alienation from the social world would be instanced by the individual having low empathetic identification with others. The findings for the residential child-care social workers demonstrated that the greater their emotional exhaustion the less they empathetically identified with particular significant others (Table 8). While their empathetic identification with their most preferred co-worker remained high (0.81), this was lower than for those reporting low and medium exhaustion. They empathetically identified less with their senior management and supervisor, and less with field social workers, indicating a degree of alienation from the work context. Furthermore, they

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empathetically identified less with their intimates as represented by their closest family member and their best friend.

Table 8: Residential child-care social workers: Emotional exhaustion and empathetic identifications with specific others

| | **Emotional exhaustion:** | | |
| | **Low** | **Medium** | **High** |

empathetic identification with:
(range 0.00 to 1.00)

member of the family I'm closest to (F = 8.931, p<0.001)	0.74	0.64	0.62
best friend (F = 9.145, p<0.001)	0.77	0.65	0.64
field social workers (F = 5.654, p<0.005)	0.69	0.59	0.60
senior management (F = 6.098, p< 0.005)	0.62	0.53	0.50
my supervisor (F = 4.042, p<0.05)	0.75	0.68	0.66
most preferred co-worker (F = 3.136,p<0.05)	0.86	0.83	0.81

Other persons with whom no significant differences were found: least preferred co-worker, staff team.

Evidently, the more emotionally exhausted child-care social workers exhibited a greater degree of vulnerability in their identities. They had more problematic identification conflicts and lesser empathetic identification with significant others who were primarily work based, but also with those in the more domestic and intimate arena.

Further evidence revealed that they were not effectively progressing towards fulfilling their identity aspirations (Table 9). Whereas those reporting low emotional exhaustion appraised their current selves more favourably than themselves in the past (0.58 cf. 0.38), those more highly exhausted retained their low self-evaluation (0.31 cf. 0.33).

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Table 9: Residential child-care social workers: Emotional exhaustion and comparison of 'past' with current self-evaluation

	Emotional exhaustion:		
	Low	Medium	High
'past' self-evaluation (range –1.00 to +1.00)	0.38	0.24	0.33
current self-evaluation (range –1.00 to +1.00)	0.58	0.44	0.31
	(F = 21.70, p<0.001)	(F = 33.35, p<0.001)	(F = 0.17, not sig)

The latter's static self-evaluation did not mean that their identities were unchanging, quite the contrary, they were empathetically identifying much more closely with a work context (Table 10) wherein their identifications were more highly conflicted (Table 7 above). *As well as being to a degree alienated from others, they were also becoming more enmeshed in their work.*

Table 10: Residential child-care social workers: High emotional exhaustion and comparison of 'past' and current empathetic identifications with specific others

Based in:	*'past' self*	*current self*	
empathetic identification with: (range 0.00 to 1.00)			
field social workers	0.52	0.60	(F = 13.80, p<0.001)
senior management	0.44	0.50	(F = 3.77, p<0.05)
staff team	0.53	0.72	(F = 54.43, p<0.001)
my supervisor	0.52	0.66	(F = 27.78, p<0.001)
most preferred co-worker	0.60	0.81	(F = 60.56, p<0.001)

Other persons with whom no significant differences were found: family member, best friend, least preferred co-worker.

Aspects of the manner in which individuals appraised their social world differentiated the more from the less emotionally exhausted (Table 11). Considering the more emotionally exhausted social workers, their shared aspirations to *make people comfortable, rather than being threatening*, were undermined by their greater degree of incompatible appraisals of features of their social world. Also their aspirations to *have power in important decisions* were associated with appraisals of even greater degrees of incompatibility than was the case for their less exhausted counterparts. Even though in respect of their aspirations to *not be stressed* all social workers' appraisals were incompatible to a very high degree, this was more the case for the more emotionally exhausted.

Table 11: Residential child-care social workers: Emotional exhaustion and use of particular discourses or constructs to appraise their social world

| | **Emotional exhaustion:** | | |
	Low	**Medium**	**High**
structural pressure on: (range –100 to +100)			
…makes people feel comfortable/…is threatening 　　　　(F = 5.05, p<0.01)	75.8	66.3	65.4
…has little power in important decisions/ *…has power in important decisions* 　　　　(F = 3.23, p<0.05)	49.9	39.0	37.7
…does not feel stressed/ …feels very stressed 　　　　(F = 5.31, p<0.01)	28.7	11.7	15.1

Note 1: The lower the magnitude of 'structural pressure' on a construct the greater the degree of incompatible appraisals of the social world in respect of this construct.

Note 2: The poles of the constructs in italics represent the social workers' aspirations.

Note 3: A total of twelve bipolar constructs were incorporated within the identity instrument.

These results clearly demonstrated that the experience of emotional exhaustion was a feature of the residential child-care social workers' identity processes, which differentiated those working *in the same kind of stressful working environment* who experienced greater emotional exhaustion from those who experienced rather less. The ISA classification of identity variants provided a summary confirmation (Tables 12 and 13) whereby 24% of those reporting *more* emotional exhaustion were in *identity crisis* (Table 12) compared with 1% of those indicating *less* (Table 13).

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Table 12: Residential child-care social workers: High emotional exhaustion and identity variants

	Identity diffusion:			
	low	*moderate*	*high*	
	Foreclosed variants	*In-between*	*Diffusion variants*	
Self-evaluation:				
high	0% defensive high self-regard	3% confident	0% diffuse high self-regard	3%
moderate	**3%** defensive	35% indeterminate	**31%** diffusion	69%
low	0% defensive negative	**4%** negative	**24%** crisis	28%
	3%	42%	55%	

36% mildly vulnerable (31% diffusion and 3% defensive) **and 28% moderately vulnerable** (24% crisis and 4% negative) **identities**
_____

A further finding was that a relatively high proportion of those less emotionally exhausted exhibited a generally defensive identity orientation (*less* exhaustion, Table 13: 26% defensive c.f. *more*, Table 12: 3% defensive) (see also findings by Black, 2002). For some, a defensive orientation appeared to be protective against emotional exhaustion, but nevertheless many without reported exhaustion exhibited an open orientation as shown by the high levels of identity diffusion (32%). High identity diffusion more frequently characterised the more emotionally exhausted (55%). *A further conclusion was that residential child-care social workers as a professional group were generally skewed towards more conflicted identifications with others and greater identity diffusion compared with the general population, and therefore prone to experiencing emotional exhaustion.*

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Table 13: Residential child-care social workers: Low emotional exhaustion and identity variants

Identity diffusion:

	low	*moderate*	*high*	
	Foreclosed variants	*In-between*	*Diffusion variants*	
Self-evaluation:				
high	**6%** defensive high self-regard	4% confident	**1%** diffuse high self-regard	11%
moderate	**20%** defensive	35% indeterminate	**30%** diffusion	85%
low	0% defensive negative	**3%** negative	**1%** crisis	4%
	26%	42%	32%	

57% mildly (30% diffusion, 20% defensive, 1% diffuse high self-regard, 6% defensive high self-regard) **and 4% moderately vulnerable identities** (1% crisis and 3% negative)
_____

Finally, observe that, despite the systematically different identity processes demonstrated between the high and low criterion groups delineated in accordance with Maslach and Jackson's *emotional exhaustion* scale, the summary of the social workers' identity variants indicated that people's experiences of exhaustion is not solely an issue of identity. For example, 35% of the *more*, and the same percentage of the *less*, emotionally exhausted were classified as *indeterminate*, meaning that irrespective of their experiences of exhaustion the same proportion of each had no global distinguishing characteristic, and no overall vulnerability of identity. Case-study analyses, of the kind reported for sexually abused Henrietta - whose overall identity state was also classified as *indeterminate* - would be required to understand their particular identity processes. The study of residential child-care social workers using ISA demonstrated that complex differences in identity processes, including defensive and open orientations, featured in their experiencing or not experiencing emotional exhaustion when working with demanding and often distressed clients. Individual identity analyses using ISA with professional care-workers would assist them in gaining additional insights about their potential vulnerabilities and possible compassion fatigue when working with the distressed and the traumatised.

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Appendix 1

Henrietta's identity instrument: 20 entities

Facets of self

current self 1	me as I am at home
current self 2	me as I am at work
ideal self	me as I would lie to be
past self 1	me as I was when I left school
metaperspective 1	me as my contemporaries see me

Others

a person I admire
a person I dislike
mother
father
my closest friend
spouse/partner
the caring professions
my colleagues in the workplace
my immediate superior
a successful businesswoman
a successful businessman
a responsive client
a difficult client
a sexually abused child
a rapist

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Henrietta's identity instrument: 12 of 26 bipolar constructs

…can be trusted	…can't be trusted
…prefer/s to have a reasonable income in a safe job	…would take a short-term or risky job for a high income
…feel/s secure with others	…has/have little trust in others
…has/have qualms about constant change	…adapt/s to a culture of constant change
…believe/s women are better in the caring professions than in business	…believe/s women are as good in business as in the caring professions
…is/are beyond redemption	... deserve/s all the attention and consideration possible
…feel/s it's important to strive to be the best in one's field	…see/s no merit in pursuit of excellence for itself
I have warm feelings towards…	I loathe…
…look/s to be set free from family ties	…look/s for security and protection in family
.think/s men are better as managers than men	…thinks women can be good managers
…need/s firm handling	…require/s sensitive support and protection
…handles power responsibly	…is/are reckless in the use of power

Appendix 2

Maslach Burnout Inventory: Emotional Exhaustion

Scoring: Frequency (How often?) 0 - 6 Never - Every day
*   Strength (How strongly?) 0 - 7 Never - Major, very strong*

- I feel emotionally drained from my work

- I feel used up at the end of the work day

- I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day

- I feel burned out from my work

- I feel frustrated by my job

- I feel I'm working too hard on my job

- I feel like I'm at the end of my tether

- *additional item not in the original scale*

- My job is a source of unacceptable stress

Appendix 3

Residential child-care social workers: Identity instrument

Entities:

self	*others*	
me as I am now…(*current self*)	my supervisor…	field social workers
me as I'd like to be… (*ideal self*)	the staff team…	senior management…
me as I used to be… (*past self*)	most preferred co-worker…	best friend…
	least preferred co-worker…	member of the family I'm closest to..

Bipolar constructs:

…does not feel stressed	…feels very stressed
…thinks in straightforward terms	…sees complexity in things
…can be trusted a little	…can be trusted a lot
…has a relaxed approach to work	…takes work very seriously
…feels protected if things should go wrong	…feels unprotected if things should go wrong
thinks working with well thought out concepts is best	…thinks intuitive approach is best
…gives more attention to less important things	…has the right priorities
…makes people feel comfortable	…is threatening
…likes to follow detailed guidelines	…likes to use own initiative
…has unrealistic expectations	…understands the limits
…is not professional	…is professional
…has little power in important decisions	…has power in important decisions

A page from an identity instrument

	…has unrealistic expectations	4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4	…understands the limits
least preferred co-worker…	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
the staff team…	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
me as I used to be… (*past self*)	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
my supervisor…	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
member of the family I'm closest to	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
most preferred co-worker…	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
me as I am now…(*current self*)	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
field social workers…	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
me as I'd like to be… (*ideal self*)	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
senior management…	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	
best friend…	.. ..	_ _ _ _ 0 _ _ _ _	

The participant uses the bipolar construct to appraise the degree to which each 'entity'
'has unrealistic expectations' or 'understands the limits'.