Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care
2016 – Vol.15, No.3

Love: Recognising relationships in work with vulnerable youth

Hilde Marie Thrana

Abstract

The article focuses on the role love can play in professional child welfare services (CWS). It is based on participant observation and interviews with 14 young people in contact with the CWS in Norway. The youths are followed from a time when they were rebelling and in conflict with the environment through their experiences of entering into a partnership with social workers supporting them in their school, work, family and leisure. The youths' perspectives on what love is in professional relationships is discussed in light of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, where love can be seen as a foundation for the development of identity and self-esteem. The article finally discusses what love can bring to social work practices and, specifically, to work with vulnerable youth.

Keywords

Youth participation, recognition, love, identity, relationship

Corresponding author:

Associate Professor, Department of Social Work of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway.

Hilde.m.thrana@ntnu.no

Thrana, H.M. (2016). Love: Recognising relationships in work with vulnerable youth. [Joint Special Issue, Love in Professional Practice] *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care, 15*(3) and *International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 5*(1), 71-89. doi: https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2017.06
Available online www.celcis.org/journal and http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/uclpress/ijsp. SJRCC is published by CELCIS, ISSN: 1478 – 1840. IJSP is published by UCL Press. ISSN: 2051-5804

Introduction

For many years, love has been ignored as a concept in the discussion within social work and child welfare services (CWS), until recently when the child protection panel in Norway (2011) and the previous Minister in The Children and Family Department, argued that love should be an important dimension of child welfare services (Dagsavisen, 2013)[1]. Love is mentioned by the authorities as an important factor for the first time and it is proposed that it be embedded in the CWS Act. However, children and young people who are in contact with CWS have for years pointed out the importance of being met in a 'loving way' by adults showing that they love them and becoming involved in their lives in a credible way (Chapman, Wall, & Barth, 2004; Follesø, Hjermann, Bunkholdt, Larsen, & Storø, 2006; Mevik & Larsen, 2012). Organisations and initiatives in CWS, which are based on children's own participation and involvement, also express the view that love is essential if CWS are to succeed in their work with vulnerable children and youth (e.g. CWS groups and the Association for Children in Care). Love as part of a professional practice raises many questions and challenges to the professional role. Neumann (2012) discusses this issue and calls it a 'demand for love' that CWS workers are expected to meet and handle. She calls for a discussion of the context of this demand for love, and what it can mean for the ethical framework of CWS workers.

In this article, the concept of love in a professional relationship is discussed by considering what love might involve in work with youth in care based on their own experiences of close relationships with social workers. The article asks the questions 'What is love in professional practice?' and 'What relevance does love have in work with vulnerable young people?' The article is based on an understanding of love as a recognising relationship based on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition.

The importance of love and relationships in CWS

Taking a brief look at the history of CWS in Norway, we see different traces of love in CWS practices, particularly in the discussion of care placements of children. In Per Olav Tiller's studies of CWS history, the term 'educational love' was the remedy that could benefit children from difficult backgrounds. He refers to the book, 'Parents and Children' from 1902, which says, 'it is precisely this love that neglected and delinquent children have missed'. This implies that when parents neglect the child's upbringing, which involves hygiene, obedience and being industrious, the upbringing fails and the parent fails the child. Society must then remedy this deficiency in the parents' 'educational love' (Tiller, 2000, p.78). Yet, love for children other than one's own is also described as difficult

[1] Norwegian daily newspaper, Oslo. Article from 6th April, 2013.

and challenging for foster parents or other care practitioners in CWS because love in such circumstances is understood to be a 'parent-like' love that has an expectation of an emotional attachment to the child (Bunkholdt, 2004; Ericsson, 1996, p.67; Tiller, 1998). The concept of love in CWS has largely been understood as 'parental love', which is related to private/familial relationships and rarely to professional childcare. This may also be why love is rarely used in professional settings and research in social work and CWS.

The importance of relationships in working with children and youths, however, has been the subject of research in the field of CWS. In studies in which the relationship between staff and youth is the theme, two different aspects emerge. On the one hand is the challenges professionals experience in entering into close relationships with youth, where the relationship between proximity and distant professionalism is the theme (Edvardsen, 1998; Freado, 2007; Hall & White, 2005; Harper, 2007; Henriksen, 2006; Sagatun, 2005). On the other hand are children and young people's experiences of relationships with staff in child care and what they consider essential elements in the relationships between them and the staff (Chapman et al., 2004; Duun, Culhane, & Taussig, 2010; Follesø et al. 2006: Helgeland, 2007; Horneman, 1996; Sagatun, 2007; Thrana, 2008). What is repeated in most studies, in which children and young people are participants, is a desire to meet adults who are willing to enter into close relationships and being seen for what they are. In Elliot Currie's (2005) study of middle-class youth in USA, we meet young people who are at odds with the norms of society in terms of crime, drugs and 'death games'. The young people talk about pressures and expectations from the environment that they are not able to meet, and their experience of not being loved and recognised as they are. What they want is to be met by adults who spend time with them and are engaged in their lives.

In this study and several international studies, we find the use of the concept of love in the context of professional work with vulnerable children and youth. In England for instance, there has been an on-going discussion where the concept of 'tough love' is discussed in the context of a disciplining practice that makes more demands of users, and where specific objectives control the practice and how interventions are performed (Bradt & Bouverne-De Bie, 2009; Jordan, 2001; Stepney, 2006). Here, love is connected to the 'educational love' that we recognise from Tiller's description of children's upbringing from the beginning of the 19th century. Pieper and Pieper (1992) criticise this approach and promote as an alternative 'tender love' in which compassion, warmth and understanding are factors that 'work' for teenagers with different problems. The importance of the relationship between youth and social worker is also a central theme in resilience research (Saleebey, 2006; Stepney, 2006). Benard (2006) who has investigated strength factors among vulnerable youth, highlights caring relationships and love in work with youths with behavioural problems as a 'key strength factor' that helps promote positive development. This applies to both

short-term and long-term relationships. To show compassion and love signals that you want to look beyond the behaviour and allow young people who have a difficult time in their lives to be seen (Benard, 2006, p.200; Redmond, 2004). This article contributes to a deeper exploration of what love might be in a professional relationship and the significance it has from the young person's perspective.

Love as compassion and recognition

Something that complicates the use of the concept of love in professional relationships, is that it is often not clarified what love is or what concept of love is applied when love is being promoted as important in a relationship. However, in helping relationships, historically, it has been care through caritas, which has been the central love concept that means 'compassionate love'. This love is not founded on emotional family ties, but exercised because people have an intrinsic value as human beings. Therefore, there is also a responsibility 'to love one's neighbours as oneself' regardless of who people are (Christoffersen, 2008; Froggett, 2002; Fromm & Schultz, 1986; Løgstrup, 2000). It is not, then, dependent on an emotional bond between the parties in order to work. Compassionate love is relevant to CWS work because it fills the ethical domain that points to the responsibility of the social worker to show love, unconditionally and independently of requirements for changes in the behaviour or attitude of the person, which in general is an obvious focus in CWS work (Marthinsen, 2003). Undoubtedly, for many CWS families, their life circumstances do not change permanently for the better. In Clausen and Kristofersen's report (2008) on the progress of children in care, the results show that children in care are particularly prone to developing mental and physical illness and experiencing violence as adults, and many depend on government benefits to survive. To give compassionate love can be included as a moral competence of the social worker that involves meeting the other with respect and understanding regardless of whether or not the person is able to change their life situation (Banks, 1998).

In contrast to compassionate love, the concept of love as a form for recognition goes deeper into the person's self-esteem and development (Honneth, 1995). His thoughts have received increasing interest in social research work, where his theory has helped to describe the human social struggle for respect and recognition in the community (Froggett, 2002; Hooper & Gunn, 2012; Humerfelt, 2012; Høilund & Juul, 2005; Marthinsen & Skjefstad, 2011). Central to his theory is that recognition is understood through three basic forms: love, rights and solidarity (see Figure 2). He also presents three forms of disregard caused by lack of recognition in these three areas that involve physical violations, social violations such as social exclusion, and violation of the person's dignity and honour (Honneth, 1995, p. 139).

Love has its basis in private/familial relationships, which means that the person is recognised as an individual for the unique person they are, regardless of their behaviour. This creates confidence in the person (Winnicott, 1995; Winnicott, Shepherd, & Davis, 1997). Honneth makes the point that love does not only belong in familial and private relationships, but as he says: 'the experience of being loved is for every entity a necessary prerequisite to participate in public life' (Honneth, 1995, pp.47-48). This statement can be understood when he explains that love is related to the following forms of recognition: rights and solidarity. Rights involves being recognised as a citizen who holds certain rights but is also required to exercise particular duties in society. This promotes self-respect in the person. The third form of recognition through solidarity means that the person has a place in the community with their individual peculiarities. This provides an experience of self-appreciation and the experience of belonging in society. This quest for recognition and inclusion in society is described as a struggle for human beings on these three different levels.

This is a particularly relevant perspective for understanding young people's struggles to be recognised by their environment both in close relationships among family and friends, and on the community level where they seek to be included in a community. The forms of disregard that Honneth presents can show young people's experiences of physical rejection from their families and how they experience being excluded from groups such as school and their local community, where they can feel offended because they are not valued as individuals (Høilund & Juul, 2005). Many of the children and young people who are in contact with CWS have not established the basic recognition that one gets through love and that will be essential in gaining recognition as a citizen by right and through participation in community. Honneth's theory of recognition can help to understand children's life cycle, what went wrong for them during a certain period of life, and how love in a professional relationship can contribute to their participation and restoration of broken relationships; whether you are talking about school, work or different social/cultural communities.

Completion of the fieldwork

The study of 'Love in professional relationship' is based on a PhD project (Thrana, 2015) involving interviews and participant observation of 14 young people, focus group interviews with social workers, and a survey among 385 parents in contact with CWS in Norway (Fauske, Lichtwarck, Mathinsen, & Willumsen, 2009). The findings of the focus groups and the parent interviews are discussed elsewhere (H. Thrana & Fauske, 2013; H. M. Thrana, 2013), and are not the focus of this article. This article is based on the interviews with young people aged 14 to 21, who have been in contact with CWS over time and who at the time of the interview were associated with the CWS project Newpage (Winsvold & Falck, 2011, p.66). This programme is a home-based project where

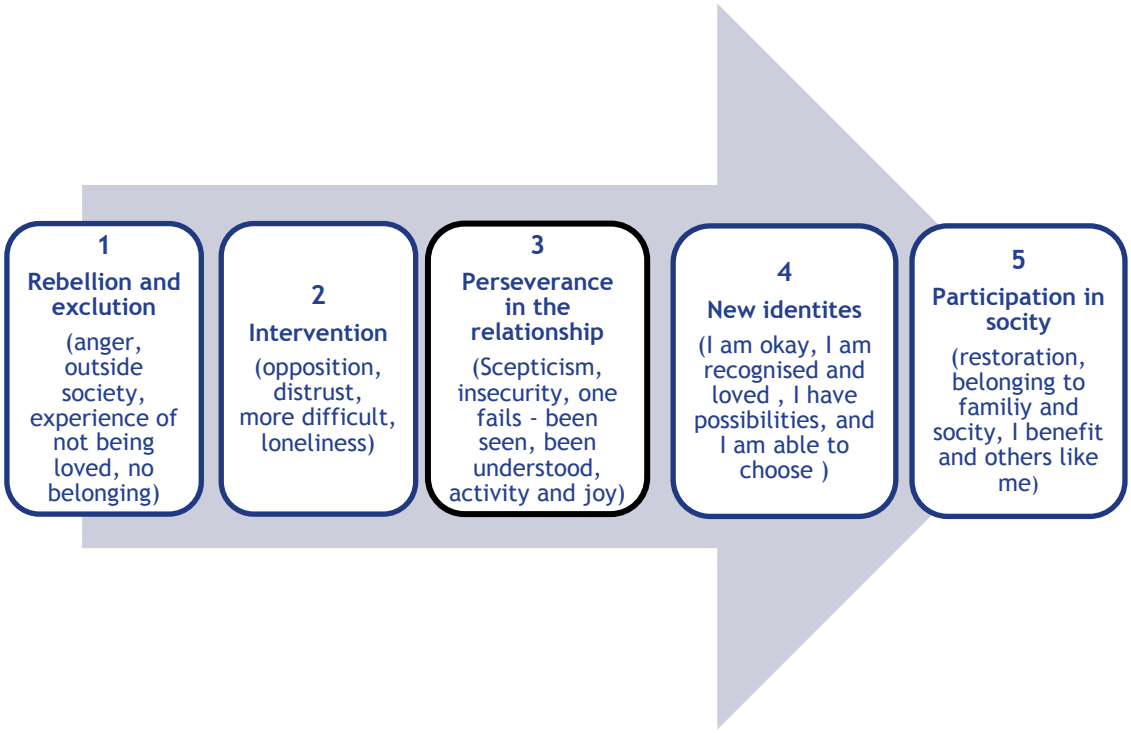
every young person has a social worker who follows them through their life in school, work, leisure, family, or in their meeting with the support system. In addition to individual support, the programme had a facility where regular activities were held, such as cooking dinner, crafts, games, hobbies and exercise a few days per week. This programme was chosen because it emphasised close relationships between the youths and social workers, and would therefore be appropriate to explore the youths' perspectives of love in professional relationships in social work.

The fieldwork began with participant observation, which involved attendance at summer camp with 40 youth and 30 staff from the project and in various monitoring situations with the youth and social worker, for a period of six months. That included waking the young people up in their homes, monitoring them through activities, and participating in conversations between the young person and the social worker. Participant observation was used to supplement what the youth said in interviews and to get a broader perspective on their everyday life in the project, which helped to obtain a more complete picture of their situation by meeting them in different settings (Fleer, Hedegaard, Bang, & Hviid, 2008). Becoming familiar with youth and the staff through participation in the follow-up influenced the design of the interviews because the questions were often taken from everyday life events. The participant observation therefore features both directly and indirectly in the analysis.

The interviews had as their main objective to examine youths' experiences of relationships in CWS, which in a phenomenological sense implies that it is their own descriptions of events as they remember them that are key (Skirbekk, 1972). The theme of the interviews was their stories starting from before they encountered CWS, to their experience of being followed up by the programme, and their thoughts about what love can be in professional relationships. Young people were recruited for interview through independently reporting interest in participating. The young people were very interested in talking about their experiences, and the issues that concerned them and engaged them.

In the analysis of the text material, it was important to present the young people's stories as coherently as possible, indicating a narrative analysis that is to find a meaningful structure and continuity in the subject of study (Polkinghorne, 1988). The analysis examined the youths' stories from before they came into the project and looked into what has been important in the follow-up throughout their time there. This is visually represented through Figure 1 which shows the main features of the young people's stories. In addition to the narrative analysis, a thematic analysis of texts was conducted in which subjects were categorised into different groups according to content (Silverman, 2001). This analysis brought forth various experiences and variations in material and contributed to a formulation of how love was expressed. This is presented as quotes from the participants.

Figure 1. The youths' development and the significance of love in practice. The five phases show the steps from of the progress in the young people's life. The text in the parenthesis shows the youth experience in the different phases. Phase 3 is framed as a turning point.



This approach, based on participant observation and interviews, has highlighted key features of youth life history and the significance love has in their contact with CWS. According to Polkinghorne, narrative analysis may have an analytical generalisability, by the overall story possibly illustrating a structure and a pattern that will be recognisable and transferable to similar settings (Polkinghorne, 1988). The results of this study may therefore be recognisable and have some transfer value for general work with children and youth who are in need of follow-up services.

Love in professional practice as youth see it

The young people's stories had some clear similarities in how the way forward developed for the individual. I have chosen to divide this pattern in their life history into five phases (see Figure 1). The first stage is when the young person is in conflict and rebellion against institutions such as schools, local environment or family. The second stage is when the community responds by CWS or police taking action and intercepting the youth, through either emergency placement or by the youth being 'forced' to meet with CWS. The third stage is when the

programme starts working with the youth. Relationship building is central in working with the young person's specific problems. The fourth phase focuses on the importance of safety in and during the relationship, in which youth identity is central. The fifth and final phase is about restoring broken relationships and establishing new ones with parents, school, friends and public systems.

Rebelling and exclusion

The youths had many stories about how it felt not to fit in or the experience of being on the outside the society, and not being recognised or loved. Understanding their starting point also pointed to why experiencing recognition, affirmation, care and love also was important when they were to receive help from CWS. Tanita was one of the girls who told about being in a turmoil where the 'fight' against institutions such as school, CWS and police dominated her life (phase 1).

> I would skip school more and more and go into town instead of being at school. Yes, it was so bad that I stopped school completely in the eighth grade .... One weekend I didn't come home, I was reported missing to the police and CWS authorities became involved. When child protection services came in my life, it all got worse, for six months I kept not coming home and stuff, but ran away. Then they got very serious and threatened to send me to an institution. That was when I came to their office to meet them.

Tanita's story describes a part of the rebellion against school and home that was similar to most of the youths in the study. The reasons why they ended up in this situation were composed of many individual events, such as experiencing betrayal and insecurity of adults and lack of belonging and adapting to their school/environment. The situation of youth in this phase is complex and chaotic, and they find themselves on the outside of important institutions such as school, work and family. In addition, they feel that adults do not like them. The youths' reactions to this were to break with the school, run away from home and explore new avenues, such as substance abuse and crime, together with other young people with similar experiences.

Intervention

The youth went on to explain what happened when society intervened, either through detention by the police or through CWS, based on reports from police, school or parents. During this period (phase 2), several of the youths spent a great deal of energy trying to escape from parents and CWS, as in Tanita's case. They described a strong scepticism and distrust of adults, and they did not believe anyone could help them. Their ties to gangs and friends being broken

could in this phase amplify the feeling of loneliness that they already experienced. In addition, they were often very frightened and unsure of how CWS could help them. Most interviewees saw the first meeting with CWS as very difficult. 'The child welfare had no positive things to say about me. She had just read my case and did not take the initiative to ask me how I felt now'.

The youths pointed out that the formal setting of papers and reports was daunting and difficult in the meeting with CWS. This girl is looking for someone to understand her feelings in this meeting. Despite the burden of being in CWS, most accepted that they had to be in child care, since many things had gone wrong for them.

Perseverance in the relationship

The youths told us what happened when CWS started to implement the specific programme (phase 3). In the beginning, they thought it was strange that a social worker should follow them every day, from when they woke up in the morning and through their leisure activities in the evenings. Most of the youths had a 'testing phase' in the beginning in which they refused in different ways to co-operate and they tested if the social worker could be trusted. This was particularly seen when trying to wake them up in the morning when the social worker came to their home to get them off to school or work.

> Nora (social worker) sat outside the room every morning at seven to wake me up. First, as we argued a lot, I didn't want to, but then eventually I got sick of it. I knew that even if I quarrelled she wouldn't go... but then when it didn't help, I had to be up before she came because when I spend less time screaming and hitting, I get more time to fix myself up and stuff.

This girl points out how she experienced the persistence of the social worker. She started collaborating when she realised that the social worker stood their ground and was there no matter what behaviour she showed. Several of the youths told similar stories about how important it was for them not to be given up on when they fought against change. Some of the young people put this perseverance in the context of love.

> When I see how much they struggled with me, I see that all this is love ... when I think about the time they spent, all those days when I was cross and hard and still was not given up on.

The importance of the social worker showing emotions and standing firm in difficult situations came up repeatedly through the interview material. The youths experienced being seen not only through their behaviour, but also for the

person behind the behaviour. It was only after several such situations that the youths began to trust the adults and the relationship was established.

Another important aspect of the relationship was bodily contact and physical acknowledgement. Several of the youths said that being met with smiling eye contact, hugs and embraces showed that the staff loved them and cared for them. Physical contact was frequent through sports, games and fun activities. The physical contact was for some of the youths also a confirmation of acceptance and love in the community. 'To put it simply, there is a lot of love here. They show that they care for real, yes they both say it and show it by hugging the youths and each other'.

Several of the youths talked about how important it was that the staff showed that they had a genuine care for them. Michelle explains this by using the terms 'to be wholehearted' and 'half-hearted'.

It is most common for those who work with young people to create programmes and methods, but the youth do not want that. They can be nice, but they are not wholehearted. They are half-hearted, because they do not dare to come too close to the young person in case they get a too close contact and find that they are unable to help the young person.

She goes on to the characteristics of a relationship characterised by love: 'It is when the love comes mutually from both parties. Then you want to be together, and then you are seen. Yes, she does her job, her work, but she does it from the heart'.

These examples point to a distinction between a relationship consisting of a wholehearted and real commitment and a more half-hearted relationship where distance and non- involvement characterise the relationship. To be wholehearted is connected to love in that the relationship is reciprocal and the staff gets involved in the youth even if they are unable to help with his/her problems. Could this girl have an important point that could explain why proximity and involvement can be difficult for many in a professional role? This describes the protection of the professional's own feelings as a justification for being 'half-hearted'. This engagement from the social worker, both in enduring relationship and being wholehearted led to a turning point for the youth, from insecurity to being met and seen (see phase 3).

New identities

Several of the young people spoke about the importance of their relationship with their social workers lasting over time, so that it was not only the external behaviour that changed, but that they began to change internally by seeing

themselves in a different way. They begin, in other words, to find themselves (phase 4).

> The most important thing is that she (the social worker) managed to calm me down, by pulling out me out, finding myself in me who I was and what I wanted. She helped me to start reading and painting. It was something new that I found. I got challenges, without being forced. This made me stronger, and thus I could work on myself.

This girl speaks of a profound change that is about finding one's identity and one's true self. It was through this new interest that she gained confidence and a new view of herself. For this girl, it appears that the inner and outer changes are inter-related and this together gives her the necessary confidence to work further on herself.

This highlights the importance of working consciously with identity, parallel to the external behaviour change (Brown, 2005; Mevik & Larsen, 2012). This identity change is meant to provide young people with experiences which give them a new sense of self, and that it was possible to be someone other than a 'school loser', 'troublemaker', or 'difficult youth'. For them, it was essential that they figured themselves out, by being seen and recognised by the social workers.

Participation in community

Although the relationship and confidence between youth and the social worker was important in itself, the young people were concerned that something had to happen in their life situation so they could continue their education, gain employment, establish new friendships or restore broken family relationships (phase 5). The community that youths experienced in the follow-up programme was an important measure in the period where they lost a sense of belonging to their family and/or friends and school environment. This gave them positive experiences of being part of a community and they could be able to start a life independently of the CWS.

> It's been nice to have someone to come home to when I have been in trouble. He's like a big brother that I relax with. I have eventually gained a lot of support from my family. It's a good thing that happened.

Several spoke about the community in the programme as a family, as Ismael is doing here by calling his social worker a big brother. To experience this fellowship could provide them confidence and strength to restore broken relationships at various venues outside of CWS. Help to improve the relationship with the family was a key element here.

The young people's stories from before CWS intervention, from being followed up in the programme, and on to participation in society, are illustrated in Figure 1. These five phases show the outer process consisting of the impact of the environment and the internal process whereby youth's experiences and feelings are clearly defined in the various phases. Gradually we can see from their stories that trust in the adults is established and they begin to see the possibilities in their surroundings, where they previously used energy to fight their surroundings.

The young people's stories show a correlation between the different phases, in which persistence of the relationship over time is the necessary framework for the youths to be able to see themselves as people who master the environment in a positive way. It was the recognition of them as people who are worth something in themselves that was important to establish enough confidence that they took the plunge into new arenas such as school and work.

What can young people's perspectives and love as a form of recognition contribute to child welfare practice?

To investigate what love can bring to work with vulnerable youth, we look at youth experiences in light of Honneth's concept of recognition, through the three forms: love, rights and solidarity (Honneth, 2008). Honneth's model of recognition (Fig. 2), shows love through emotional confirmation where the need and affection dimensions are met. For young people, this will mean that the recognition they receive through love is necessary to develop the self-confidence 'to continue on their own', as Honneth expresses it. This does not mean to be left to oneself, but is based on a dual process that consists of both an affective trust in others and a liberating process in which the person has developed independence to join in solidarity with others in communities (Honneth, 2008). For young people, this means in practice that they are met at an emotional level by having the social workers meet their feelings, but also to show their feelings towards them. Moreover, love is expressed through physical verification and physical proximity such as being hugged and squeezed, and through physical contact in sports and play.

The third and particularly important component of the practice of love is that young people experience being tolerated regardless of their behaviour and demeanour. This persistence is often the ultimate test of whether you really are worth loving. Absence of love may be linked to periods when they experienced being outside the family and a close emotional community that can be connected to Honneth's concept of disregard. This is because the youths did not experience physical security and protection from their surroundings.

Figure 2. Honneth's model of recognition and CWS follow- up programme with vulnerable youths. The figure shows the youth's development based on the three forms of recognition, love, rights and solidarity.

Form of recognition	Love	Rights	Solidarity
Characteristic of ways of recognition	Emotional confirmation and affection for the person	Morally accountable individuals. Recognised as a citizen with rights	Participation in society, appreciated in social relationships
Development of	Self-confidence	Self-esteem	Experience of self-appreciation
Disregard	Absence of physical security and protection from their surroundings	Not being recognised as a citizen on equal footing with others	Exclusion from the community and not being treated with dignity and respect
Recognition in CWS	- Being seen as an individual with needs - Physical confirmation, hugs, holding, play and activity - Endurance in the relationship	- Structure - Guidance - Participation school or work - Developing of an attitude of responsibility for others	- Inclusion - Restoration - Participation in the community with the youth's skills and competence

In the next form of recognition, rights, youths are held accountable for their actions and they are considered to be morally accountable individuals in society. In work with youths, this may involve guiding the youth in relation to their own behaviour towards their surroundings. It will involve adapting oneself to social norms and being recognised as a citizen with rights. This may be through a commitment to completing school, which helps to create self-respect in youth. Disregard in this area will, for young people, involve not being recognised as a citizen on equal footing with others. Often because they have broken the norms of society through crime, violence or substance abuse, they can thus be considered as morally irresponsible.

For young people, the third form of recognition, solidarity, means the experience of being seen as a person with qualities that are needed in a work or a social/familial situation. This provides an experience of self-appreciation for the person. An example is the girl who discovered that she had the ability to paint pictures, which gave her an experience of coping and a feeling of being valued for her skills. Disregard in this area may mean being excluded from the community where they feel they fit and therefore not being treated with dignity and respect by the majority. Solidarity has many similarities with love, where

the difference is, that it is the community that 'embraces' and includes the individual and not primarily one individual who gives emotional recognition.

Considering the youths' stories in light of Honneth's theory of recognition can show love as a prerequisite for the youth to experience recognition through law and solidarity. This shows up some of the differences to relational research, which focuses on the content in relationships between individuals (Aubert & Bakke Inger, 2008; Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 1999; Røkenes, Tolstad, & Hanssen, 2006). Honneth's theory extends this perspective and creates a link from relationships between individuals, to also include human participation in society. Interviews with young people can point to such a relationship in which love helps the youths build the self-confidence necessary to further participate in society as citizens who possess certain rights and as such take their place in the community.

For young people in need of assistance from CWS, to have this is very relevant, as the starting point for many is that they have not established the necessary confidence that is created through relationships consisting of love in their immediate family. As we can read in their stories, recognition through love is a factor in changing the young people's outer actions as a result of changes to their inner-self perception. To begin to understand who they are and what they want is often the springboard for wanting to change, because the youths see the purpose of their participation in various social communities. 'The main thing was to find myself in me, who I was and what I wanted', said one girl who was interviewed.

The significance of Love in child welfare practice

The demand from the youth in this study for a 'loving' approach challenges much current practice both at individual and systems levels. Primarily, it challenges the social worker in encounters with youths, to enter into close relationships where love appears through both physical acknowledgement and emotional closeness. In addition, the ability to 'hang-in' in enduring relationships, regardless of the youth's behaviour and opposition is vital. These challenges of the professional role, may give reasons to question whether a 'requirement for love' for CWS workers can undermine professionalism, as Neumann (2012) argues. Is this conception of the social worker role too close to parenthood and a demand of 'parental love?' Beckman (1981) discusses 'the love paradox' in welfare services. He refers to the paradox that official welfare services have taken on the responsibility for several of the care tasks which belongs to the family, without having emphasized how professional employees can perform tasks within the care and love dimension. This dilemma is particularly relevant in CWS, because the work is extensively about intervention in 'the love relationship' between children and parents. The question to be asked is not if

love shall be taken into account in professional social work, but what kind of love is expected from the social workers, and how love can be encompassed in social work practice.

The interviews showed that the youths did not expect 'parental love' from the social workers. They experienced love through small signs and through 'the little extra', as a hug when you needed it, a warm smile from the social worker, or that the social worker spend extra time when the youth need someone who can stay by their side in different situations. In this sense love understood as compassionate love and Honneth's theory of recognition can provide a different perspective on how love can be understood and practised in a professional approach.

The significance of love as an ethical approach is rarely mentioned in CWS. It is nevertheless an important dimension in light of CWS's intentions of changing people's circumstances and behaviour. As the young people said, love also has significance when they failed and did not achieve the goal of changing their behaviour. This describes the meaning of forgiveness and the importance for the young people to be accepted as they are, independent of their external behaviour. This is a crucial view taken into account by Clausen and Kristofersen's (2008) survey, which shows that many of the children in care remained in difficult condition and in exposed situations also as adults. Compassionate love shows this dimension of love where people are worth being treated with respect and compassion by the support system even if they have not achieved success in society's expectations of change. This dimension of love has many simultaneous characteristics with Honneth's concept of solidarity, which talks about the importance of being included in the community even though one is different and does not belong to the majority of the population who have succeeded in family and community institutions, such as schools and the workplace.

Receiving recognition of themselves as people, expressed through an experience of feeling loved, can help young people see themselves with new eyes and may help strengthen their confidence to move forward on their paths of development. This also involves a view of the professional role that will require emotional commitment, involvement and a high degree of persistence on behalf of the social workers (Thrana, 2013). It is also important to take seriously the challenges social workers are facing by going into close relationships with the youth. Love does not necessarily have to be viewed as a requirement, but rather as part of the ethical competence of the social worker role. Listening to young people's life stories in light of Honneth's recognition perspective reminds us that it can be just as professional to see love as meaningful for the development of youth identity and participation in society.

About the author

Hilde Marie Thrana has a background as a social worker for several years in child welfare services in Norway. Her research interests are vulnerable children and youth, child welfare and drop-out from school. Her PhD thesis is entitled 'Social Work and Love: The significance of Love in child welfare practice'. Today she is an Associate professor at the Department of Social Work, of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, where she is involved with education and research in child welfare and social work.

References

Aubert, A.-M., & Bakke Inger, M. (2008). *Utvikling av relasjonskompetanse: Nøkler til forståelse og rom for læring*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

Banks, S. (1998). Professional ethics in social work: What future? *British Journal of Social Work*, *28* (2), 213-231.

Barnevernspanelet. (2011). *Barnevernspanelets rapport*. Retrieved from http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/BLD/Barnevern/2011/barnevernpanelets_rapport.pdf

Benard, B. (2006). Using strengths-based practice to tap the resilience of families. In D. Saleebey (Ed.), *Strengths perspective in social work practice,* (pp.197-220). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bradt, L., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2009). Social work and the shift from welfare to justice. *British Journal of Social Work*, *39* (1), 113-127. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcm072

Brown, S. (2005). *Understanding youth and crime: Listening to youth? Crime and justice* (2nd ed.) Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Bunkholdt, V. (2004). *Fosterhjemsarbeid: Fra rekruttering til tilbakeføring*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

Chapman, M.V., Wall, A., & Barth, R. (2004). Children's voices: The perceptions of children in out-of-home care. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *74* (3), 293-304.

Christoffersen, S. A. (2008). Knud Ejler Løgstrup. In J. K. Stole & R. Svein (Eds.), *Moderne Teologi* (pp.135-146). Farnham: Ashgate.

Clausen, S.-E., & Kristofersen, L. B. (2008). Barnevernsklienter i Norge 1990 – 2005: *En longitudinell studie* (Nova rapport 3/2008). Oslo: Norsk institutt for forskning omoppvekst, velferd og aldring.

Currie, E. (2005). *The road to whatever: Middle-class culture and the crisis of adolescence*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Edvardsen, Ø. (1998). Hva gjør en miljøarbeider til en dyktig miljøarbeider? Hun er gull og grønne skoger for meg. *Norges Barnevern*, *4*.

Ericsson, K. (1996). *Barnevern som samfunnsspeil*. Oslo: Pax.

Fauske, H., Lichtwarck, W., Mathinsen, E., & Willumsen, E. (2009). *Det nye barnevernet: Et forsknings- og utviklingsprosjekt i barnevernet: Barnevernet på ny kurs?* Bodø: Nordlandsforskning.

Fleer, M., Hedegaard, M., Bang, J., & Hviid, P. (2008). *Studying children: A cultural-historical approach*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Follesø, R., Hjermann, R., Bunkholdt, V., Larsen, E., & Storø, J. (2006). *Sammen om barnevern: Enestående fortellinger, felles utfordringer*. Oslo: Universitetsforl.

Freado, M. (2007). I can't hold it in forever: Connecting with a youth in pain. *Reclaiming Children and Youth: The Journal of Strength-based Interventions*, *15* (4), 5.

Froggett, L. (2002). *Love, hate and welfare: Psychosocial approaches to policy and practice*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Fromm, E., & Schultz, H. J. (1986). *For the love of life*. New York: Free Press.

Hall, C. & White, S. (2005). Looking inside professional practice: Discourse, narrative and ethnographic approaches to social work and counselling. *Qualitative Social Work 4* (4), 379-390. doi: 10. 1177/1473325005058624

Harper, E. (2007). Making good choices: How autonomy support influences the behavior change and motivation of troubled and troubling youth. *Reclaiming Children and Youth: The Journal of Strength-based Interventions*, *16* (3), 6.

Henriksen, J.-O. (2006). *Nærhet og distanse: Grunnlag, verdier og etiske teorier i arbeid med mennesker* (3rd ed.). Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hooper, C.-A., & Gunn, R. (2012). Recognition as a framework for ethical participatory research: Developing a methodology with looked after young people. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *17* (5), 475-488. doi: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13645579.2012.753980

Humerfelt, K. (2012). *Brukermedvirkning i arbeid med individuell plan: Anerkjennelse og krenkelse* (Vol. 2012:334). Trondheim: Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet.

Høilund, P. & Juul, S. (2005). *Anerkendelse og dømmekraft i socialt arbejde*. København: Reitzel.

Jordan, B. (2001). Tough love: Social work, social exclusion and the third way. *British Journal of Social Work*, *31* (4), 527-546. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/31.4.527

Løgstrup, K. E. (2000). *Den etiske fordring*. Oslo: Cappelen.

Marthinsen, E. (2003). *Sosialt arbeid og symbolsk kapital i et senmoderne barnevern*. Trondheim: Barnevernets utviklingssenter i Midt-Norge.

Marthinsen, E., & Skjefstad, N. (2011). Recognition as a virtue in social work practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, *14* (2), 195-212. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691451003744317

Mevik, K., & Larsen, E. (2012). *Miljøterapeutisk praksis: fortellinger fra arbeidet med utsatte barn og unge*. Oslo: Universitetsforl.

Miller, S. D., Hubble, M. A., & Duncan, B. L. (1999). *The heart & soul of change: What works in therapy*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Neumann Basberg, C. (2012). Omsorgsetikk i barnevernet. *Sosiologi i dag*, Årgang *42* (3-4), 104-124.

Pieper, M.H., & Pieper, W.J. (1992). It's not tough, it's tender love: Problem teens need compassion that the 'tough-love' approach to child-rearing doesn't offer them. *Child Welfare, 71* (4), 369-377.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Redmond, M. (2004). *The goodness within reaching out to troubled teens with love and compassion*. Paulist Press: New York.

Røkenes, O. H., Tolstad, O., & Hanssen, P.-H. (2006). *Bære eller briste: Kommunikasjon og relasjon i arbeid med mennesker*. Bergen: Fagbokforl.

Sagatun, S. (2005). *Vanlig og uvanlig: Miljøarbeid hjemme med 14-18 åringer* (Vol. 2005:220). Trondheim: Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet.

Saleebey, D. (2006). The strengths perspective in social work practice: Extensions and cautions. *Social Work*, *41*(3), 296-305.

Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage.

Skirbekk, G. (1972). *Politisk filosofi 2*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Stepney, P. (2006). The paradox of reshaping social work as tough love in the Nordic welfare states. *Nordisk Sosialt Arbeid*, *26* (4), 293-305.

Thrana, H., & Fauske, H. (2013). The emotional encounter with Child Welfare Services; the importance of incorporating the emotional perspective in parents' encounters with child welfare workers. *European Journal of Social Work*, *17* (2), 221-236. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2013.798628

Thrana, H. M. (2013). Kjærlighet - en kjernekompetanse i profesjonelt barnevernsarbeid? *Tidskriftet Norges barnevern*, *1*, 5-14.

Thrana, H. M. (2015). *Kjærlighet og sosialt arbeid (Love and social work). En studie av kjærlighetens betydning i barnevernets praksis* (Doctoral dissertation). Lillehammer University College, Lillehammer, Norway.

Tiller, P. O. (1998). *Bysamfunnets omsorg for barn: Barnevern i Trondheims historie*. Trondheim: Strindheim trykkeris forl.

Tiller, P. O. (2000). *Studier i barndom*. Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget

Winnicott, D. W. (1995). *The family and individual development*. London: Routledge.

Winnicott, D. W., Shepherd, R. & Davis, M. (1997). *Spædbørn og deres mødre.* København: Hans Reitzels forlag.

Winsvold, A. & Falck, S. (2011). *Modeller for å sikre medbestemmelse og medinnflytelse blant utsatte ungdomsgrupper*. (Notat NR. 5/11). Oslo: Nova, Norwegian Social Research.