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'Slave labor and mastery':
A psychoanalytic study of professional burnout

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"Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire?
I have no precious time at all to spend,
Nor services to do, till you require."
(Shakespeare, Sonnet LVII)

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH QUESTION

In 1974 Herbert Freudenberger – a New York psychoanalyst of German-Jewish origin, analyzed by Freud's pupil Theodor Reik – first used burnout as a psychological construct. Although an analyst first gave burnout its psychological meaning, the concept was hardly studied from a psychoanalytic point of view. This is precisely what we aim to do in this thesis.

The question we investigate is: 'How can we frame professional burnout in care-giving professions, using Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic theories as our point of departure?'. We pursue this question through both our own qualitative research and a study of the conceptual literature.

In this introduction we will first give an overview of the separate chapters that comprise this thesis. These chapters are all papers that have been published in scientific journals, accepted for publication, or submitted. Throughout the overview we will present the thread running throughout the different chapters, indicate the link between chapters and signal overlapping parts between chapters. We will then address the qualitative research methodology we applied. Finally, we will discuss a preliminary issue that aims at contextualizing this thesis.

Conceptually, our study starts from the Lacanian-Freudian psychoanalytic tradition. While examining the different chapters, or even just upon reading the research question, the critical reader might have the impression that our topic does not easily fit within the Lacanian-Freudian psychoanalytic tradition. That is why later in this introduction we address as a preliminary issue how the framework we start from relates to the topic of professional work. In elaborating this issue, however, we do not aim at giving an exhaustive account of these interrelations, but rather at formulating a workable framework for our own study.

A curious fact about Lacan's conceptual thinking is that he never developed a systematized theory (cf. Miller, 2002). His oeuvre rather consists of what he calls 'a teaching', in which he progresses similarly to the way an analysant progresses during his/her psychoanalytic cure, i.e. in a free associative manner (e.g. Lacan, 1962-1963). One could say that this peculiar oeuvre (seminars and writings) has to be studied with the same attentive and patient attitude that characterizes a psychoanalyst's approach to his/her analysants. At least, this is what we tried to do. The effect of such a study is that one infers a logic that works for oneself, and

it is this particular systematization that one puts on/in the original work. Throughout this thesis we don't aim at giving a meticulous overview of Lacan's thinking, but rather at elaborating our own interpretation that is operational within the field of our study.

1.2. OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

In this section we provide the reader with an overview of this thesis. Since this dissertation consists of a collection of articles, the reader might have the impression that the link between chapters is not always clear or that information is unnecessarily repeated. This overview aims at addressing these concerns.

The second part of the thesis ('Professional burnout: a literature review from a clinical psychological perspective') studies existing literature with a dual focus[1]. On the one hand, we examine the concept of burnout critically from a clinical psychological and a psychoanalytical point of view, and link it to research findings concerning care-giving professions.

In this second part, we search for the precise meaning of the concept 'professional burnout' and explore the factors with which it is associated. Arguing that in current literature the concept is conceptualized in a rather static and fragmentary way (a vague notion, the definition is rather a list of symptoms), and concluding that studies are mainly quantitative and that hardly any clinical and qualitative studies are available, we look for alternatives from a clinical psychological point of view. As we then discuss the factors associated with professional burnout, we also give an overview of current clinical and qualitative research findings. You will notice that most of the introductions in the following chapters are highly based on the review provided in this second part of the thesis.

At the end of this second part we outline some alternative paths for theorizing and research, whereby we suggest that Lacan's discourse theory and concept of fantasy are possibly relevant notions that could guide such research. In the later parts of our study we effectively pursue this idea. This is most obvious in chapter 3.1., where we discuss Lacan's appropriation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic and the mechanism of recognition that both constitute the basic relation between 'agent' and 'other' in the discourse theory, and in chapter 3.2., where we go into the disjunctions ('impotence' and 'inability') of the discourse theory (cf. Lacan, 1991). Since we consider burnout, more broadly, as a process occurring within the structural relationship between subject and Other that forms the basis of the subject's identity, these ideas constitute the very basis of this

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[1] This part has first been published as an article in Dutch: 'Vanheule, S. (2001). Burnout: literatuurexploratie vanuit een klinisch psychologisch perspectief. *Tijdschrift voor Klinische psychologie*, 31(3), 132-154'.

study and traverse all our writings in this thesis. In chapters 4.1. and 4.2. the implications of professional burnout at the level of subjective identity and the Lacanian theory on identity are discussed most explicitly. In chapter 4.2. we make a link with the already mentioned concept of fantasy.

In chapter 4.3. we return to the classical definition of professional burnout and attempt to give a dynamical explanation of the three dimensions implied in the definition. Hereby we link 'reduced personal accomplishment' to the activity of the super-ego, 'depersonalisation' to inhibition and address 'emotional exhaustion' as the energetic consequence of both processes and as a possible indication of the work of mourning due to the loss of an ego ideal.

The third and the fourth part of the study consist of a qualitative investigation on burnout in a group of special educators who work within mental handicap care or special youth care. Part three ('A differentiation between high and low scoring respondents: imaginary versus symbolic functioning') examines the observed differences between high and low scoring respondents on a burnout questionnaire. Part four ('Three mechanisms of professional burnout') more specifically addresses the intra-group differences among those interviewees with a high burnout score.

Part three consists of two chapters.

Chapter 3.1. ('Professional Burnout and intersubjectivity: a psychoanalytic study from a Lacanian perspective') examines the intersubjective process connected with professional burnout and aims at differentiating between high and low scoring respondents on a burnout-questionnaire[2]. Starting with their accounts of how they deal with colleagues and superiors, we then discuss these accounts in relation to the Hegelian master and slave dialectic, which Lacan comments on throughout his oeuvre.

In this chapter we first outline Lacan's theory of intersubjectivity through a discussion of the dialectical master-slave relationship and by indicating the difference between imaginary and symbolic interactions. Lacan's model on intersubjective recognition is highlighted and three stages in intersubjective interaction are sketched out. Lacan's ideas on identity are later elaborated more fully in chapter 4.2.. In the preliminary issue on professional work, to be discussed later in this introduction, we situate Lacan's discussion of the master-slave dialectic in a broader context (cf. supra 'Lacan and Hegel: the master-slave dialectic'). We then indicate the roots of Lacan's thinking (Kojève), the relevance of this model

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[2] Chapter 3.1. is a published paper: 'Vanheule, S.; Lievrouw, A. & Verhaeghe, P. (2003). Burnout and intersubjectivity: a psychoanalytical study from a Lacanian perspective. *Human Relations*, 56(3), 321-339'.

in studying work relations and the difference between the Lacanian and Hegelian interpretations of the notion of 'intersubjectivity'.

After applying the master-slave dialectic to the context of professional work, this model is then tested against the interview material. We found that Lacan's distinction between imaginary and symbolic functioning allows us to differentiate between high and low scorers. High scorers function mainly in an imaginary way. Among these, two subtypes can be distinguished: a group that fights the master, whom they equate with his imaginary role (type 1), and a group that submits itself to this imaginary master (type 2). Among low scorers we also found two subgroups. On the one hand, we discerned a group that interacts on a symbolic level and that considers interrelations from a meta-perspective. On the other hand, we discerned a group that interacts in an imaginary way, but in which case environmental factors are found to have a protective function. In the discussion we briefly go into the Lacanian theory on causation, which is more fully discussed in the discussion and conclusion of our thesis (cf. supra 'Lacanian psychoanalysis versus qualitative research').

In chapter 3.2. ('The experience of impossibility in residential youth and handicap care professions: a qualitative study from a Lacanian framework') we explicitly link our research findings to the aspect of impossibility that Freud discerns within the so-called impossible professions – which we will more broadly introduce later in this introduction (cf. supra 'Freud: work and sexuality')[3]. Whereas in chapter 3.1. we examine how the interviewees experience their interrelations with colleagues and superiors, in this chapter we address their accounts of their relations with clients. We look for any common factors in the way burnt-out professionals typically regard their relations with clients; the precise nature of the relational position they experience as difficult or impossible; and the subjective meaning they attribute to difficulties with clients experienced within this relation. In our interpretation of the empirical material, we start from Lacan's conceptual model of the three registers of mental experience: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. We consequently first highlight this three-part structure. We found that we can discern three general recurring themes in the special educators' accounts (position vis-à-vis the other; way of dealing with problems; attitude towards speaking), which enable us to differentiate between the high and low scoring respondents. Throughout the chapter we elaborate these themes and illustrate them with case-material.

We discuss how high scoring respondents want to do everything for the other, but finally experience their dedication as a burden for which they either blame themselves or the other (cf. supra 'they don't want', 'they are

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[3] Chapter 3.2. is submitted for publication: 'Vanheule, S. (submitted). The experience of impossibility in residential youth and handicap care professions: a qualitative study from a Lacanian framework'.

not capable'). They feel absorbed by the problems they are confronted with and, as they try to deal with these problems, they moreover observe that the problems tend to expand. Interviewees within this group feel inhibited or unable to speak freely and during the interview we observed chaotic storytelling. In terms of the master-slave dialectic we introduced in chapter 3.1., we could say that these high scoring respondents identify themselves entirely with their role of being the master. In chapter 3.2., we establish a link between the account of the high scoring respondents and the notion of 'surplus value'. This is a concept Marx (1999) elaborated extensively and one Lacan, in his turn, commented on in his later works. Later in this introduction (cf. supra: 'Lacan and Marx: surplus-value') we will go into this concept, and link it to Lacan's own complicated notions of 'object a' and 'plus-de-jouir'. The mechanisms and the relationship to the Imaginary we describe for this high scoring group can be understood more fully as they are linked to the first half of chapter 4.3. – i.e. the sections 'The problems inherent in altruism: Eros versus Thanathos' and 'What about care-giving professions'. In these sections, based on a review of Lacan's writings on this topic, we discuss the implications and deadlocks of imaginary altruistic care-giving from a conceptual point of view. The general imaginary and narcissistic position we discern in chapter 3.2. is linked to the discussion in chapter 4.3. on the imaginary supposition that is at work as one wants the good for the other. The problem of surplus value and the peculiar relation towards punishment we situate in chapter 3.2. can be understood more fully, as these are linked to the problem of 'jouissance' elicited by unruly clients, which we discuss in chapter 4.1. and especially in chapter 4.3..

The low scoring respondents, on the other hand, maintain a symbolic distance between themselves and clients. In working with their clients they don't give the other what they suppose the other needs, but rather they start from the signals that clients give on what they need. These respondents construct a symbolic meta-perspective on the job and have a reflective attitude. They spontaneously spoke about their problems and during the interview we observed coherent storytelling. When considered in light of the dialectic described in chapter 3.1., it could be said that these interviewees start their job from the position of a master vis-à-vis their clients, but without strongly identifying themselves with the role implied.

Part four consists of 4 chapters. In these chapters we examine the intra-group differences among those with a high burnout score. In interpreting our data we examine, on the one hand, the psychoanalytic conceptual explanations that have thus far been given to the concept. Drawing upon our research-data, we then propose other possible explanations and contexts working within a Lacanian-Freudian framework.

In chapter 4.1. ('The dynamics of professional burnout in the relationship between subject and Other: a combined Freudian-Lacanian interpretation') we report on our study of the interview-accounts of those special educators we situated within the high scoring group[4]. While analyzing the data we observed three patterns in the way people describe their interrelations with others and the problems experienced in this relation. We conclude that these correspond to three dynamical subtypes/sub-processes of burnout. Since our insight into these patterns/dynamical subtypes grew dialectically, based on the interaction between our data-analysis and a review of the psychoanalytic literature on this issue, we opted to frame these characteristic traits by describing each dynamical subtype via a combination of relevant conceptual insights and clinical vignettes drawn from our data. Note that this approach implies that the Lacanian-Freudian framework from which we begin this study is directly put in a perspective relative to other psychoanalytic conceptualizations.

Firstly, burnout is considered to be the result of a gradual exhaustion-process, for which narcissistic idealization or masochistic submission are found to be the underlying processes. In terms of chapters 3.1. and 3.2., persons in this group identify strongly with their imaginary goal and role, which is submissive/serving or dominating/narcissistic. This strong identification without compromise is closely connected to an overwhelming feeling of absorption, loss of individuality and exhaustion. Since most psychoanalytic authors outside our own framework discuss the concept of burnout along the dynamical outline we situate within this subtype, we especially discuss relevant authors from outside the Lacanian-Freudian framework. In particular, we present and critically examine Freudenberger's conceptualization in our discussion of this subtype in the first half of chapter 4.2. In that chapter we also discuss the concept of idealization and contrast it with sublimation.

Secondly, we frame burnout as a result of the invalidation of an ego ideal that causes a loss of identity in relation to others. In terms of chapter 3.1., the attack experienced by group members that we describe, is directly linked to the conflict-escalation common to those with a rebellious imaginary reaction in relation to the other (type 1). The conflict gets blown up and is acted out interpersonally; finally resulting in the invalidation of an ego ideal. The basis of this conflict in relation to clients is discussed based on our data in chapter 3.2., and conceptually in chapter 4.3. (in the section 'The problems inherent in altruism: Eros versus Thanathos'). The problem of 'enjoyment' or 'jouissance' we discuss in this subtype is situated briefly in chapter 3.2., and also explained conceptually in chapter 4.3.. In chapter 4.2. we go into this subtype, but purely from a conceptual point of view. In

[4] Chapter 4.1. is submitted for publication: 'Vanheule, S.; Verhaeghue, P.; Lievrouw, A. (submitted). The dynamics of burnout in the relationship between subject and Other: a combined Freudian-Lacanian interpretation'.

that chapter we highlight the concepts of the divided subject, the ego ideal and ideal ego, and the idea of losing an ego ideal.

Thirdly, burnout is considered as the effect of inhibition due to impulses that are experienced as incompatible with the subject's identity. The processes we discuss for this group can be linked to the dynamics of the submissive subgroup (type 2) described in chapter 3.1., yet are characterized by the additional problems of imaginary caring (cf. chapter 3.2. and the links we made to chapter 4.3.). In this subtype, the basic conflicts described in chapter 3.2. are avoided and expressed only indirectly. The notion of inhibition has not been addressed frequently within Lacanian thinking. In chapter 4.4., the concept is discussed systematically and in-depth, starting from the Freudian and Lacanian literature. At the end of chapter 4.3., we present an illustrative vignette ('Tom') that indicates in more detailed terms how inhibition works in a case of burnout.

We conclude that professional burnout often consists of a combination of the mechanisms described. The first subtype described particularly seems to be linked to both other subtypes, although this is not necessarily the case. This link is not surprising, for this first mechanism can be read as a blown-up variant of the general imaginary orientation vis-à-vis the job that characterizes all burnt out interviewees (cf. chapters 3.1., 3.2., 4.3.).

In chapter 4.2. ('Burnout and psychoanalysis: a Freudo-Lacanian perspective') we approach at a purely conceptual level the underlying mechanism of losing an ego ideal[5]. There we also discuss the dynamics of exhaustion from a Lacanian-Freudian perspective. This is the first article we wrote on the problem of professional burnout that aimed at discerning possible underlying mechanisms. In this text we indicate the three mechanisms discussed in chapter 4.1.. However, at that time we still thought that subtype 1 could not result in burnout independently of subtype 2, which we considered to be the true mechanism at work in cases of burnout. We moreover differentiated this mechanism from inhibition, stating that the latter did not result in burnout. It was only later, as we progressed in our analysis of the data, that we concluded that the three mechanisms co-exist in the accounts of the interviewees. This chapter is still relevant in the context of this thesis, since it discusses at a more conceptual level some of the issues that we just highlighted in chapter 4.1..

Chapter 4.3. ('Caring and its impossibilities: a Lacanian perspective') examines the problematic question of care-giving from a

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[5] Chapter 4.2. is a published paper: 'Vanheule, S. (2001). Burnout and psychoanalysis: a Freudo-Lacanian point of view. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society,* 6(2), 265-271'.

Freudian and Lacanian perspective[6]. We analyze how both general and professional caring attempts to negate or reduce the sexual and destructive tendencies of the subject. Yet as Freud indicates, the act of care-giving itself evokes these tendencies, thereby causing certain subjective difficulties. We show how, from a Lacanian perspective, the problem revolves additionally around the carer's own polymorphously perverse enjoyment ('jouissance'). Caring paradoxically evokes one's own tendency to enjoy at the expense of the other, especially in cases when the other is experienced as radically different from the self. Such jouissance is not only ethically unacceptable but, from a Lacanian standpoint, it fundamentally destroys the narcissistic basis of the caregiver's identity. In such cases, doing good might itself be considered an attempt by the subject to defend against this problematic enjoyment. Finally we suggest that professional burnout can be understood as an effect of the subjective paradox caused by care giving. This paper elaborates at a conceptual level how an imaginary attitude toward care-giving (cf. chapters 3.1., 3.2. and 4.1.) can result in a fundamental deadlock that renders the job impossible for the caregiver.

In chapter 4.4. ('Inhibition: 'I am because I don't act') we examine the mechanism of inhibition, which is not often addressed in Freudian and Lacanian thinking[7]. We first indicate that the term is used to refer to both an economic process, a stagnancy in ontogenetic development, and to a neurotic process of defense. Focusing on this last process we discuss Freud's and Lacan's dynamical explanations. The explanation we provide in this chapter should be read as an in-depth supplement to the explanation we give of this concept in chapter 4.1..

In this paper we link inhibition to the structure of obsessional neurosis. A nuance that could be added is that, at a phenomenological level, inhibition is not limited to obsessional neurosis, but also works in hysterical neurosis. Nevertheless, in the case of hysterical neurosis the structure of causation is fundamentally different, for it there appears as a side-effect to the basic mechanism of repression.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

In this section we provide an overview of the methodology we applied in our qualitative research. The articles we present in chapters 3.1., 3.2. and 4.1. also address this methodology, but the explanations provided in those chapters are only partial when compared to the overview

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[6] Chapter 4.3. is a published paper: 'Vanheule, S. (2002). Caring and its impossibilities: a Lacanian perspective. *Organisational and Social Dynamics,* 2(2), 264-284'.
[7] Chapter 4.4. is a published paper: 'Vanheule, S. (2001). Inhibition: 'I am because I don't act'. *The Letter,* 23, 109-126'.

provided in the next section. In the discussion and conclusion of the thesis we further discuss the methods we applied.

The sample was composed on the basis of a burnout screening with the Flemish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Vlerick, 1993). Internationally, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is the most frequently used scale for measuring burnout. The MBI consists of 22 items and it describes burnout as a three-dimensional syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion (9 items), depersonalization (5 items) and reduced personal accomplishment (8 items) (see table 1 for sample items). All items measure frequencies and are scored on a seven-point rating scale with fixed anchors that range from 'never' to 'every day'. The three dimensions of the scale have not been deduced theoretically, but were labeled after a factor analysis of an initial set of 47 variables. Multiple research indicates the validity and reliability of the MBI (cf. Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Since the scale has been found to be clinically valid (Schaufeli et al., 2001), we can trust that each of the respondents within the high scoring group is marked by a clinically-relevant pattern of personal distress.

Table 1: Sample Items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (source: Maslach & Jackson, 1982, p. 229):

• Emotional Exhaustion subscale:
    o   'I feel emotionally drained from my work'
    o   'Working with people all day is really a strain for me'
• Depersonalization subscale:
    o   'I've become more callous toward people since I took this job'
    o   'I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally'
• Personal Accomplishment subscale:
    o   'In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly'
    o   'I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work'

A total of 1,317 questionnaires were sent to special educators from the (residential) special youth care and mentally handicapped care sectors. We received 992 questionnaires back (response rate: 75.6%) through mailboxes we installed at all institutions concerned (n = 47)[8]. Questionnaires with missing values were removed from the sample. This resulted in a final sample of 765 special educators (212 from the special youth care sector and 553 from the mentally handicapped care sector). During the burnout screening the respondents were asked whether they were willing to participate in an interview. In the final sample, 185 people were willing to do so. From this group, the 15 highest- and the 15 lowest-scoring respondents on the burnout questionnaire were selected. In line

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[8] Via the 'Vlaams Welzijnsverbond', the major Flemish umbrella organization for special youth care and mentally handicapped care, we personally contacted all member institutions from the provinces of Limburg and Oost-Vlaanderen to participate in our study. Forty-seven homes decided to do so.

with our research question, these extremes were chosen because of their contrasting position on the burnout continuum (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 27-29).

The interviews were conducted by two trained interviewers who had professional experience, respectively in special youth care and mentally handicapped care. In order to get acquainted with the topic studied and in order to design the interview, both interviewers first conducted two trial-interviews. Interviewees were contacted by telephone and interviews were held in the institutions were the interviewees worked or at the interviewees' homes. All participating institutions agreed that the interviewees could participate in the interview during their working hours. As an incentive, all participating institutions received a particularized report on burnout in their institutions and two free tickets for a symposium on burnout, organized by the researchers. All interview participants received an additional free ticket. In recruiting participants for the interviews, we told the special educators that the interview dealt with job-experiences. In two debriefing sessions (one in Limburg and one in Oost-Vlaanderen), held after all interviews were finished, we told the interviewees that our actual focus was professional burnout.

The interviews were semi-structured. The following questions were asked in each interview:

- "What does your job consist of? What are the tasks that you have to fulfill? What problems do the clients you are working with have? Who are your colleagues? Who is your direct superior?". This question was asked to get general information on the interviewee and his/her professional intersubjective work-context.
- "How do you generally feel in your job?". This question was asked to get a clinical indication of burnout complaints
- "What is the major difficulty you meet with in your job? In relation to whom do you experience this problem: clients/colleagues/superiors? Can you give an illustrative example? Can you give another illustrative example?". This question was developed with the intent of getting an indication of problems experienced in the intersubjective context. The question was made operational by asking for two critical incidents.
- "You have given two examples of problems in relation to clients/colleagues/superiors (whereby the category discussed was indicated). Can you now say what the major difficulty is that you experience in relation to clients/colleagues/superiors (whereby those two categories that were not yet discussed, were presented)? Can you give an illustrative example? Can you give another illustrative example?".
- "You have given examples of problems in relation to clients/colleagues/superiors (whereby those two categories that were discussed, were indicated). Can you now say what the major difficulty

is that you experience in relation to clients/colleagues/superiors (whereby the categories that were not yet discussed, were indicated)? Can you give an illustrative example? Can you give another illustrative example?".

- "Did you experience similar problems in the past?". This question was asked in order to get an indication of the extent to which repetition was at work.
- "What is the most satisfying aspect of your job? In relation to whom do you experience this satisfaction: clients/colleagues/superiors? Can you give an illustrative example? Can you give another illustrative example?". This question was developed with the intent of getting an indication of satisfaction experienced in the intersubjective context. The question was made operational by asking for two critical incidents.
- "You have given two examples of satisfying aspects in relation to clients/colleagues/superiors (whereby the category discussed was indicated). Can you now say what the most satisfying aspect is that you experience in relation to clients/colleagues/superiors (whereby those two categories that were not yet discussed, were presented)? Can you give an illustrative example? Can you give another illustrative example?".
- "You have given examples of satisfying aspects in relation to clients/colleagues/superiors (whereby those two categories that were discussed, were indicated). Can you now say what the most satisfying aspect is that you experience in relation to clients/colleagues/superiors (whereby the categories that were not yet discussed, were indicated)? Can you give an illustrative example? Can you give another illustrative example?".
- "Are there aspects of your job that you want to avoid explicitly? How do you deal with these?". We asked this question in order to get an indication of taboos that were experienced in intersubjective relations.
- "How do you think special educators can persevere in their job?". We asked this question in order to get an indication of coping styles.

In designing these questions and conducting the interviews, the interviewers followed the methodology established by Kvale's (1996) psychoanalytically-based research interviewing. By providing our subjects with only general cues to respond to and by asking them to report critical incidents, we aimed at installing an associative discursive situation that resembles psychoanalysis proper. In line with Hollway & Jefferson (2000, pp. 34-36), we designed the interview situation such that questions were as open as possible, stories were elicited and respondents' ordering and phrasing would be followed. Subjects were given the freedom to answer to cues the way they wanted to, assuming that what they would say would contain an inner logic that we could discern later. We gave our

interviewees the freedom to answer the questions the way they wanted to. In the discussion and conclusion of our thesis we will return to the issue of interviewing and link it to Lacanian thinking.

The interviews took between 1.5 and 2 hours and were recorded on tape. Each interview was typed out verbatim.

The analysis of our data was based on the systematization Miles and Huberman (1994) added to the methodology of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990). Every interview was analyzed in detail and coded by each of the two interviewers, using the Atlas-ti software. First, both interviewers read the interviews thoroughly and listened to the tapes. During the process of coding, only the researcher that conducted the interview knew in advance if the case that had to be coded concerned a high or a low scoring respondent. After the initial reading and coding the researchers met to discuss each case in depth, to review the coding of all 30 cases and to resolve any discrepancies in interpreting passages of the interview and in coding. The tactics we used in interpreting this data were those described by Miles and Huberman (1993, pp. 245-262). The researchers wrote down insights that evolved out of these discussions in a separate file for each case. More general insights were written down in a co-ordinate file that differentiated between high and low scoring respondents. All notes one researcher wrote down, were double-checked by the other researcher. Based on these insights – and in line with the Lacanian structuralistic approach (cf. supra: the section 'Lacanian psychoanalysis versus qualitative research' in the discussion and conclusion of the thesis) – codes were grouped in coordinating patterns, and finally in conceptual matrixes that aimed at discerning trends across cases. These matrixes, on the one hand, aimed at differentiating between high and low scoring respondents and, on the other hand, at typifying high scoring respondents. Via the matrixes we combined elements, such that their interconnections and the patterns implied were clear.

Concerning the reporting on our data, we – in line with Miles & Huberman (1994, pp. 298-306) – used a combination of text and displays. We chose to report on crucial insights via vignettes and to link up observed patterns with metaphors, which in our case was based on Lacanian thinking.

We chose this methodology for three reasons: firstly because it enables us to develop a conceptualization based on observed data in an exploratory way, secondly because it enables researchers to base their investigations on (the lack of) an existing theory ("qualitative data … help researchers … to generate or revise conceptual frameworks" [Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1]; "Qualitative studies are often mounted to explore a new area and to build or 'merge' a theory about it. But they also can be designed to confirm or test an existing theory" [Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 90] [see also: Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58]); and thirdly because it aims at incorporating elements of existing technical literature if these

prove to be useful, and because it gives researchers relative freedom in reporting on data.

1.4. A PRELIMINARY ISSUE: LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS VERSUS PROFESSIONAL WORKING

In the remainder of this introduction we will discuss a preliminary issue that aims at contextualizing this thesis. We aim at situating the psychoanalytic conceptualizations on working, which we present throughout the chapters of this thesis, in the broader context of both Freud's and Lacan's oeuvre. Throughout our discussion we moreover introduce some fundamental Lacanian concepts used in the later parts and chapters. We don't pretend to give an exhaustive overview, but rather aim at formulating an operational framework for our own research and at outlining the context of this study.

As working is a pivotal human activity, it is no wonder that several psychoanalysts, starting with Freud himself, reflected on this topic. Lacan never elaborated a theory on labor and professional work. On the other hand, he did reflect on working, but only addressed the concept by linking it to the work done in the psychoanalytic cure and/or at the level of the unconscious. When Lacanians discuss Freud's theory on working, they usually focus on Freud's use of the term as a synonym for psychic and analytic activity. Green, for example, states: "Travail, le mot est dans Freud, travail du rêve, travail du deuil, travail de la cure" (André Green in: Lacan, 1966-1967, session 15/3). In each case the concept of work refers to mental processing or the mechanisms of the cure. Lacan himself described the psychoanalytic situation as a place where work is going on. Free association "really is a labour" (Lacan, 1956, p. 41) and working-through is the job to be done. In line with this, he referred to an analysant as someone who works with him (Lacan, 1962-1963). Lacan radicalized this Freudian idea even further by stating that "language is work" (Lacan, 1962-1963, session 12/12) and that "the unconscious … is the ideal worker" (Lacan, 1990, p. 14).

In elaborating a concept of working, Lacan based his own theorizing to a large extent on others' reflections on this topic, especially those of Freud, Hegel and Marx. In discussing this preliminary issue, we will first briefly sketch Freud's considerations on working in general, and on the so-called impossible professions in particular. Then we will go into Lacan's comments on the concept of working in Hegel and Marx, such that we can make a dialectical move in the later part of the thesis back to our research question. We argue that Lacan's considerations on these theories of working provide us with rich metaphors for analyzing our data.

Freud: work and sexuality

In Freud's works, the concept of working has a broader meaning than it does in Lacan's oeuvre. In this section we will highlight two aspects: the (im)-possibility of sublimation in professional work, and the problem of exhaustion linked to professional work. The discussion of these aspects is relevant for our thesis and is intended to supplement the later chapters. After all, the classical psychoanalytic discussions of professional burnout use 'exhaustion' as the main interpretative concept (cf. chapters 4.1. and 4.2.), and we later use the notion of the impossibility associated with certain professions to differentiate between high and low scoring respondents on the burnout questionnaire (cf. chapter 3.2.).

In 'Civilisation and its discontents' (1930) Freud considers how work can function to sublimate drives. In the process of sublimation, libido is displaced from its spontaneous instinctual aims to other aims "in such a way that they cannot come up against frustration from the external world" (Freud, 1930, p. 79). Therefore drives "are induced to displace the conditions for their satisfaction, to lead them to other paths" (Freud, 1930, p. 97). This displacement has a double effect. On the one hand drives are gratified and, on the other hand one gains a place in the cultural constellation which required the renunciation of direct satisfaction. In sum, "the possibility it offers of displacing a large amount of libidinal components, whether narcissistic, aggressive or even erotic, on to professional work and to the human relations connected with it lends it a value by no means second to what it enjoys as something indispensable to the preservation and justification of existence in society"[9] (cf. Freud, 1930, p. 80). In following this line of reasoning, however, Freud focuses his considerations concerning sublimation on only psychical and intellectual work, namely the creative work of the artist and the research of the scientist. As one displaces his libido to these aims "fate can do little against one" (Freud, 1930, p. 79).

In order to fully understand this remark, we must return to the three directions (discerned earlier in the text) from which people are threatened with suffering. The first source of suffering is our own body, "which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals" (Freud, 1930, p. 77). The second source is the external world, "which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction" (Freud, 1930, p. 77). The last source, which seems to be the biggest source of suffering in human life, comprises our relations to other people. According to Freud it causes the

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[9] Even though Freud stresses work as a unique means of sublimation, he also puts this consideration into perspective. On the one hand the satisfaction that can be derived from sublimation is always a bit soft. Concerning this satisfaction Freud (1930, pp.79-80) writes: "…their intensity is mild as compared with that derived from the sating of crude and primary instinctual impulses; it does not convulse our physical being".

most sorrow and "it cannot be any less fatefully inevitable than the suffering which comes from elsewhere" (Freud, 1930, p. 77). In psychical and intellectual work one seems to be protected, if we follow this reasoning, from the last two sources of suffering. In these professions the mental activity of the subject is pivotal. Satisfaction is sought in internal processes and the connection with reality is loosened. The external world and relational aspects are only present in the background. Yet even this provides "no impenetrable armour against the arrows of fortune, and it habitually fails when the source of suffering is a person's own body" (Freud, 1930, p. 80).

As we turn our focus to those professions in which work with interpersonal relations constitutes the core of professional activity, we can suppose that they will imply a surplus of trouble for the worker. In these cases libido displacement to work-related aims will not necessarily imply protection from the respective sources of suffering. After all, in these professions human relations, which Freud (1930) considers as the main source of suffering, are pivotal. We think this is why Freud (1937) in 'Analysis terminable and interminable' returns to these professions and concludes rather pessimistically that governing, educating and psychoanalyzing – or, more broadly, curing (in German: 'Kurieren') (Freud, 1925) – constitute impossible professions.

In chapter 3.2. we study this idea based on our interview-accounts.

Apart from the (im)-possibilities of sublimation that Freud associates with professional work, exhaustion through work in itself can be considered a factor contributing to a general vulnerability to psychic conflicts.

In his early writings Freud considers the influence of overwork on cases of neurasthenia to be nil (cf. Freud, 1898). But he does consider overwork and exhausting exertion (e.g. 'night-watching', 'sick-nursing') as possible etiological factors in the causation of anxiety neurosis (Freud, 1895a). Freud understands anxiety neurosis as an actual neurosis, in which anxiety is pivotal. This anxiety corresponds to an accumulated excitation of somatic and sexual origin: that is, from internal factors. The accumulated excitation could not appropriately be mastered by the psyche and is transformed into somatic symptoms. An anxiety neurosis, then, is the result of an imbalance between a quantity of excitation and the psyche's capacity for mastering this quantity. In contrast to a psycho-neurosis, the symptoms of anxiety neurosis do not have a psychical origin. Their causation is mainly physiological.

According to Freud (1895a), exhaustion and overwork as such are not enough to cause an anxiety neurosis. They can, nevertheless, be considered as concurrent or auxiliary causes (Freud, 1895b). These causes are not always present in the etiology of anxiety neurosis, nor are they able to produce an anxiety neurosis on their own. Yet if they are present, they have a double contributory effect.

On the one hand, Freud argues that auxiliary causes such as overwork lower the psyche's ability to react adequately to somatic tension (Freud, 1895b, p. 137). They make the psyche more vulnerable, since the threshold of excitation that can be dealt with is lowered[10]. In 'Analysis terminable and interminable' Freud (1937) returns to this impairment of psychic mastering and loosens its specific link with anxiety neurosis. "If the strength of the ego diminishes, whether through illness or exhaustion, or from some similar cause, all the instincts which have so far been successfully tamed may renew their demands and strive to obtain substitutive satisfaction in abnormal ways" (Freud, 1937, p. 226). In a footnote he adds: "Here we have a justification of the claim to aetiological importance of such non-specific factors as overwork, shock, etc." (Freud, 1937, p. 226, n2). In an early text on hypnosis and hysteria Freud makes the point that in an exhausted state, repressed ideas and intentions "that are excluded from […] the chain of associations of the normal ego" more easily return into consciousness (Freud, 1892-93, p. 126). Excessive work can thus be considered a predisposing factor for psychic trouble, since the ego's capacity to deal with excitation and already repressed material is lowered.

On the other hand, work itself produces an excitation that can be understood as sexual. In this way, (over-)work contributes directly to the quantity of somatic excitation that the psyche has to deal with. If the psyche is no longer able to master this quantum of excitation, an anxiety neurosis may arise. In this case we have a neurosis which, "although it exhibits no sexual aetiology, nevertheless exhibits a sexual mechanism" (Freud, 1898, p. 111). Later, he reaffirms this mechanism (Freud, 1905, p. 204) when he states that intellectual work produces a concomitant sexual excitation, and that this excitation is the only justifiable basis for understanding the effect of overwork. Overwork, in other words, results in a quantum of dammed-up libido.

Taking into consideration the combined force and influence of these two factors, we conclude from Freud's theory that the causal effect depends on "the relation between the quota of libido in operation and the quantity of libido which the individual ego is able to deal with" (Freud, 1912, p. 236)[11].

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[10] Freud (1895b, p.137) writes: "In another class of borderline cases the specific cause is contained in a contributory one. This is when the psychical inadequacy […] is brought about by exhaustion and such causes".

[11] It could be argued that in his earliest writings, Freud adds that people engaged in "sick-nursing" are subject to an additional and aggravating factor. In the context of the case Elisabeth von R., Freud claims that intensive care-giving as such makes a person vulnerable to psycho-neurotic problems (in: Breuer & Freud, 1895). This cause, too, can be considered an auxiliary one. The causal mechanism would be double. On the one hand, sick-nursing is accompanied by "a habit of suppressing every sign of his [sic] own emotion" (Freud, p.161 in: Breuer & Freud, 1895). On the other hand, the caretaker's attention to his or her own emotions is easily diverted when 'sick-nursing', "since he has neither time nor strength to do justice to them. Thus he will accumulate a mass of

Summarizing, we can say that – in addition to the Lacanian idea that mental activity implies labor – Freud highlights two aspects of professional work that are particularly relevant for our study of burnout. On the one hand, working in general produces excitation that can be qualified as sexual; this excitation gradually becomes more difficult to deal with the greater the extent to which the ego is weakened, and can eventually result in exhaustion. On the other hand, jobs with an interpersonal focus imply an additional source of difficulty, since a major source of discontent, i.e. the human interrelation itself, constitutes the essence of the job.

Lacan and Hegel: the master-slave dialectic

In this section we situate the broader context of Lacan's discussion of the master-slave dialectic. In chapter 3.1. we apply this dialectic in discussing the difference between high and low scoring respondents on the burnout questionnaire. We will now indicate the Hegelian roots of Lacan's thinking on working, the relevance of this model in studying work relations and the difference between the Lacanian and the Hegelian interpretation of the notion 'intersubjectivity'.
In France, Hegelian thinking on the dialectical master-slave relation and the meaning of work within this relation was popular during the 1930's. For several years the Marxist philosopher Alexandre Kojève taught in Paris on Hegel's 'Phenomenology of the spirit' (Kojève, 1947) to an audience of young intellectuals, such as Bataille, Sartre, Queneau and Lacan (who in fact considered Kojève as his 'master' [cf. Lacan, 1991, p. 197]).
In line with Hegel and Marx, Kojève (1947) considers labor as the essence of humanity[12]. He situates its function via a quasi-mythological account on the nature of the master-slave relation, in which the slave labors in the service of the master. Hereby, two main issues are placed in the forefront: a struggle for power and a possibility for self-realization. Kojève's general thesis is that anthropogenic desire essentially longs for something non-material; it is a desire to be recognized and to be desired by the other. This makes men restless and pushes them to action. In relation to others, their desire for recognition results in a struggle since both want to impose themselves and both want to be recognized: "l'homme n'est humain que dans la mesure où il veut s'imposer à un autre homme, se faire reconnaitre par lui" (Kojève, 1947, p. 19). As a consequence of this fight, one (the master) dominates the other (the slave), who anxiously submits. From now on the slave has to work for the

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impressions which are capable of affect, which are hardly sufficiently perceived and which, in any case, have not been weakened by abreaction" (Freud, p.162 in: Breuer & Freud, 1895).
[12] In situating Kojève's interpretation of Hegelian theory on working we limit our purpose to those parts Lacan comments on as he discusses working and intersubjectivity.

master and work itself will function as a protection against anxiety (cf. Kojève, 1947, p. 32: "l'angoisse reste interne-ou-intime et muette"). In fact, the master who has the slave in his grasp doesn't work and just enjoys the products of the slave's labor (cf. Kojève, 1947, p. 23: "Pour le maître, … la rapport … à la chose se constitue … en tant que jouissance"). For the slave, this process of submission and servitude indicates the negative side of working. On the other hand, working has an emancipating value as well. Due to his labor, the slave gradually masters and transcends the surrounding world; he creates an oeuvre in which he can recognize himself, and which provides a basis for others to recognize him. Work both transforms and civilizes the world as it educates and humanizes the worker: "Le travail est Bildung" (Kojève, 1947, p. 179). In other words: the human ideal the master dreams of – being fully recognized by the other – is not realized by the master. After all, he is only acknowledged by the slave he disdains and since he doesn't work, progress is not within reach. Living in this impasse is his destiny. In contrast, the slave – who is working, who has a project and who produces an oeuvre – is really the one who can gain recognition from others. This results in social inclusion, which protects him against 'madness and crime'. In line with Hegel, Kojève states that history will be realized the moment the slave backs out of slavery and becomes a civilian. In order to realize this, the slave has to give up his "auto-suppression" (Kojève, 1947, p. 300) by overcoming his own submission to the master and by fighting the latter. Within this line of reasoning, working has no intrinsic value. It primarily is a means to gain recognition by another in a context of inter-subjective dialectics.

Early on in his own writings (cf. Lacan, 1950), Lacan introduced the master-slave relationship as an allegorical model of thinking. Lacan took up this idea and used the master-slave dialectic as a metaphor for the process going on during an analysis. After all, the neurotic is a person who has a problem with gaining recognition (e.g. via his work; see: Lacan, 1979).

In the Hegelian model, the master-slave relationship functions as a metaphor that clarifies people's relation to their work, to the project and ideals they realize via their labor and to the balance of power implied in work-relations. Zizek (1988) indicates that within Hegelian thinking, the activity of work always implies the intersubjective conjuncture described and that within all work-relations it functions as a fantasmatic scenario. Throughout this thesis we will examine the implication of these ideas for the Freudian 'impossible professions', in which the intersubjective relation is pivotal, and more specifically for the professions that specifically take care of those who are excluded from our general social interrelations (cf. chapters 3.1., 3.2., 4.1. and 4.3.).

In commenting on Hegel and Kojève, Lacan also criticizes their interpretation of human interrelations and places the master-slave relationship within a broader perspective. From Lacan's perspective, they were much too focused on the imaginary side of the process and on its

metaphysical implications, which led them to ignore structure (Lacan, 1950; Zizek, 1988). Lacan (1962-1963, session 21/11) states that desire, when considered from a Hegelian point of view, implies an unmediated relation to the other. In this case, recognition implies a relation between two conscious beings who both take the other as an object and who want exactly the same thing, i.e. to be recognized. According to Lacan, the supposition of two strictly similar desires invariably ends up in violence. After all, the recognition the other can give one will never be sufficient. One will feel frustrated and deceived by its deficiency and this elicits violence (cf. Lacan, 1962-1963, session 27/2). Within this view, aggressiveness is inherent in human ontology (Lacan, 1948). In Lacan's opinion, desire is much more open to mediation: the other is not just a similar consciousness, but someone who – just like the subject – is marked by the signifier. A central void constitutes both subject and other. Within Lacanian thinking humans are considered as beings that attempt to signify the Real[13] of their being (which Lacan calls 'jouissance'). In doing so they make use of the signifier, or more broadly, of what Lacan calls the symbolic order. This process, however, fails since it is impossible to symbolize the Real entirely. The subject, in the Lacanian sense of the word, is the effect of this impossible attempt toward symbolization; consequently, it is marked by a central void ($\exists$). The real remainder of being that remains un-signified in this process, the residue of the division by language, is called the object a or the 'plus-de-jouir'[14]. This object a is a non-subjective residue of jouissance that at once guarantees the otherness of the Other (subject and symbolic Other don't have to struggle since both are engaged in something radically different) and structures subjective desire. Within this context, desire does not simply concern an object that can be materialized or be socialized, but the non-signified object a. The subject's fundamental fantasy, which Lacan considers to be the support of desire, is nothing but a relation to this ungraspable object a ($\exists \& a$).

In Lacan's opinion, the imaginary relation to the other indeed exists, but this is only one side of the coin. Human relations are chiefly structured by the signifier, and that's the Other side of the coin. Whereas from a Hegelian point of view nothing links me more fundamentally to the other than the similarities of our desire, the inverse can be said from a Lacanian point of view (to the extent that it focuses on structure). At the level of fantasy, nothing separates me more from the Other than the object of our desire (object a). This is the case, not in the least because the signifiers a

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[13] Throughout his teaching and work, Lacan attempted to conceptualize psychoanalysis along three registers of mental experience he discerned: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. In the introduction of chapter 3.2. we briefly discuss this three-part structure.

[14] While the concept of 'plus-de-jouir' indicates that jouissance is permanently lost ('ne plus') through the introduction of the signifier, it also indicates that within the economy of the desiring subject this ungraspable object is seen as the ultimate object that could create a surplus of enjoyment ('en plus') and that could suture the subject's lack.

subject is divided by constitute a combination that is peculiar and unique to that subject. As a consequence, in the Lacanian model the Imaginary has a more limited status. It is limited to the frame (&) through which the subject considers the object (Lacan, 1962-1963, session 28/11).

Summarizing, we can say that Lacan takes the master-slave metaphor from Hegel and via Kojève. It is used as a metaphor to define human interrelations in general. In this thesis we apply it to work-relations in specific. Lacan departs from the Hegelian model by claiming that interrelations are chiefly symbolically structured. In our use of the term 'intersubjective' throughout this thesis, we refer primarily to this symbolically structured relation between subjects.

Lacan and Marx: surplus-value

Lacan engaged with Marx's work in very much the same way that he dealt with the work of Hegel and Kojève. He didn't aim at commenting on the social or political value of Marx's work, for such a use of psychoanalysis is considered unfruitful ("la psychanalyse n'a pas le moindre droit à interpreter la pratique révolutionnaire" [Lacan, 1966, p. 9]). What Lacan did aim at by studying and using Marx's concepts was a clarification of his own field of work, i.e. psychoanalysis. In this section we will briefly address the concept of 'surplus value' and the way Lacan interprets it and relates it to working. This section is meant as a supplement to chapter 3.2., in which we link the notion of surplus value to our interview-data.

In Marx's 'Capital', the notion of surplus value is defined as the difference between the exchange value of products of labor (commodities) and the value that coincides with the effort of producing these products, i.e. the means of production and labor power (cf. Marx, 1999, p. 139). In our market economic system, Marx says, money is the pre-eminent criterion to measure the amount of the value that is realized. For the capitalist, i.e. the one who possesses money, commodities are nothing but equivalents of money. "His person, or rather his pocket, is the point from which the money starts and to which it returns" (Marx, 1999, p. 98). The subjective aim and sole motive of his operations is "the appropriation of ever more and more wealth" (Marx, 1999, p. 98), thus profit-making and the expansion of his current capital are the motives that drive the capitalist within the capitalistic system. This pocketing of surplus value is only possible by selling commodities for a price that is higher than the value attributed to productive labor. If equivalent values would be exchanged, no surplus value would be realized.

Marx indicates that the realization of this aim depends on a trick. In the market the capitalist meets with the free laborer and buys the latter's labor power in order to produce things. The cunning trick put into practice in this process is that he pays the laborer as much as the latter needs to

survive, but much less than the value the laborer actually produced. In other words, the capitalist makes the laborer work much longer than would have been strictly necessary for the money he gets from the capitalist. Behind the back of the laborer the latter puts this surplus money that is realized via non-paid labor into his pocket and acts as if he too worked hard during the process of production. In dishing up this explanation, Marx says, the capitalist has to hide his smile: "after a hearty laugh, he re-assumes his usual mien" (Marx, 1999, p. 126). The cause of this laugher is that the value which is created during a day is much higher than what he pays the laborer. Marx (1999, p. 149) expressively defines the capital produced in this manner as "dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks". Indeed, the capitalist can be typified by his passion for capital; by his "limitless draining of labour-power" (Marx, 1999, p. 152).

Whereas Hegelian thinking is interesting to Lacan to the extent that it indicates a fundamental relation of servitude and/or subordination in all labor (cf. chapter 3.1.), Marxist thinking is interesting to the extent that it accentuates the role of the object in working. In Marxist thinking Lacan accentuates the creation and pocketing of surplus-value as the secret truth that determines work. In the process of production Marx describes, human interrelations are strictly instrumental; the value of intersubjectivity seems to be nil. In comparison to the Hegelian model, human interrelations are de-valued and de-idealized. Surplus value as such, embodied in commodities and money, is what becomes overvalued or fetishized. Fetishized incarnations of surplus value function as the ultimate object of desire within the subject's fantasies (in contrast with the Hegelian model, where intersubjective recognition is for the subject the sublime object to obtain) (see also: Zizek, 1988). When Lacan comments on 'surplus value' in 1968, he links this notion to his own concept of the object a and to the lost but still attractive jouissance, 'plus-de-jouir', it entails. With his concept of 'plus-de-jouir', Lacan indicates that for the speaking subject jouissance is irremediably lost ("le sujet … ne jouit plus mais quelque chose est perdu qui s'appelle le plus-de-jouir" [Lacan, 1968-1969, session 13/11]), and that all pursuit of jouissance only leads the subject further away from it ('ne plus'). On the other hand, the activity of fetishization at the level of this objectal dimension suggests that a better enjoyment indeed is within reach ('en plus'). In Lacanian thinking the object a functions as the ungraspable but sublime object of desire that is erected in fantasy.

At the imaginary level, the capitalist is seen as a robber who deprives the other and who secretly enjoys the surplus value he pockets. Through the act of appropriation, the lost objects gain, for the deprived, the brilliance of a supposed surplus enjoyment. Quite similar to the imaginary reaction of the slave in the Hegelian model, this supposition easily results in the sufferers' vengeance against the one who embodies evil, and in fantasies of a revolution. We think this is why Lacan links

Marx's logic of capitalism to his own concept of frustration[15] (Lacan, 1968-1969, session 20/11). For within the logic described, we have an imaginary act of installing a lack (robbery) that is operated by a symbolic agent (the capitalist) and which concerns a real object (surplus value/object a).

From Lacan's point of view, both the capitalist's laughter and the laborer's vengeance are an indication of the system's truth. As this troubling truth emerges the capitalist literally laughs it away. Both the capitalist's laugh and the vengeance indicate the secret behind capitalist pocketing, i.e. that both the laborer and the capitalist are just toys within the system. Both of them are just a link within the chain of production and neither really enjoys the surplus value that is produced. In Lacanian terms, both are just divided subjects inhabited by the symbolic order. Both's relation to this 'plus-de-jouir' is marked by suffering: there is no 'good enjoyment' left. What Lacan accentuates in Marx's line of reasoning is that latter's approach detects the hidden structure that founds the system. Lacan (1991) detaches Marx's line of reasoning from the romantic idea that a revolution could change the system. What he indicates, rather, is that the signifier is the structuring factor at work and that its increasingly complex organization determines proportionally the importance attributed to the object. In other words, the more jouissance is lost because of the signifier (cf. 'ne plus'), the more the object will obtain the status of promising enjoyment (cf. 'en plus'). Moreover, if the surplus value/object a indeed comes within the divided subject's reach, the latter can not enjoy it, but rather is overwhelmed by an excitation that makes the situation unbearable. The capitalist's laugh indicates this kind of subjective dissolution that results from being too closely associated with the plus-de-jouir (incarnated by accumulating capital).

Just as Lacan's Hegelian model enables us to study the intersubjective dimension in working (servitude and subordination in relation to an other), we think that Lacan's Marxist model enables us to situate the objectal dimension: through which working people relate to a sublime object at the level of fantasy (object a/surplus value). In this thesis we go into the implications of this relational activity for the practice of the Freudian impossible professions. In these professions, surplus value of course will receive a different imaginary representation than it does in the Marxist interpretation, where it is represented as money or goods of consumption. We think that experienced self-realization, the realization of an aim that one designed for another or even perceived gratitude (see also chapter 4.3.), function as potential representations of surplus value in these care-giving professions. The central characteristic these representations share with the Marxist representations is that both

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[15] In his fourth seminar, Lacan (1994) discusses three consequent stages in the Oedipus-complex that he names as: privation, frustration and castration. These categories all concern a specific form of lack, an agent and an object which Lacan each time links to his categories of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

concern 'something valued' that one can derive from or obtain via the exercise of the job, something that one precisely does not receive. In the Hegelian model, all accent was on something radically non-objectal, i.e. the other's recognition.

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2. PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT: A LITERATURE REVIEW FROM A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

As of the beginning of the new millennium, 'burnout' has been studied for about 25 years. During the last years it became a pop-psychological and proto-professional concept. Several popular publications by leading figures within the field of burnout-research (e.g. Freudenberger, 1980; Maslach & Leiter, 1998) have contributed to this state of affairs. As a result of this popularity, burnout has become a generic term for all kinds of discontent on the job and in the organization and oneself (Meier, 1983; Starrin et al., 1990). The ambiguity of the concept in everyday language seems to reflect the fuzzy state of affairs in scientific literature, where we find a mass of disconnected and mainly quantitative data, anecdotal information on cases and the lack of a consistent theory.

Even if they haven't experienced it themselves, most professionals know colleagues who are or were burnt-out. Although it is not always called burnout, the phenomenon of being stuck at work seems to be quite prevalent.

Most authors (e.g. Schaufeli, 1990; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Papadatou et al., 1994; Glass & McKnight, 1996) in the field of burnout agree that the current meaning of the concept can be traced back to the work of Freudenberger[16] (1974, 1975; Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980). Through his job in alternative American health-care, Freudenberger observed that after having worked with demanding and severely ill patients, many caregivers (including himself) gradually became emotionally exhausted and lost their motivation. This expressed itself in several mental (e.g. feelings of frustration) and physical (e.g. fatigue) symptoms. He classified the state of these caregivers with the term 'burnout.' According to Freudenberger, this concept was already commonly used to refer to the defective state eventually experienced by chronic users of drugs. It was only a little later that Maslach (1976) started to study burnout academically from a social-psychological perspective. So, whereas the problem of burnout was first observed in a clinical context, it later was studied from a mainly social-psychological point of view (cf. Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

It seems, however, that the novelist Graham Greene first used the term burnout in 'A Burnt-Out Case' (1960) to refer to a mental condition. In

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[16] In 1999 the American Psychological Foundation awarded Freudenberger with the 'Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in the Practice of Psychology', for his work in the field of burnout (American Psychological Association, 1999).

that novel he links up the mental state of the main character, an architect who gives up his professional career and withdraws into a leprosarium, to the severely mutilated leprosy sufferers whose status is called 'burnt-out'.

As we checked international scientific publications on burnout (via Psychlit, Eric and SocioFile), we concluded that serious clinical-qualitative studies on burnout are relatively scarce. While first the clinical approach was predominant, it quickly was replaced by social-psychological and organisational-psychological approaches. (Schaufeli, 1990; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Most studies we find nowadays on burnout are quantitative, a-theoretical and mostly based on questionnaire-research. Compared to the mainstream writings on burnout, clinical-qualitative studies only occupy a minor position.

In this article we will review the dimensions of burnout that have been studied empirically. We don't aim at providing a systematic review of current research findings. These reviews can be found in other publications (Schaufeli, 1990; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, Schaufeli et al., 1993a; Vlerick, 1994; Vachon, 1995; Glass & McKnight, 1996; Leiter & Harvie, 1996; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Our purpose, rather, is to check clinical-qualitative studies[17], based on the dimensions we will indicate. We furthermore will explore those aspects that could be studied more profoundly from a psychoanalytic perspective.

What is burnout?

The concept 'burnout' seems to be a metonymical indication of the associated phenomenon: first one is on fire in relation to the job, then the flame simmers and finally it burns out.

Despite the primitive explanatory mechanism the concept implies, burnout has usually been defined as a syndrome consisting of several symptoms.

Burisch (1993) studied the symptoms associated with burnout and concluded that some 130 were associated with the phenomenon. Several authors tried to cluster these symptoms (e.g. Kahill, 1988; Schaufeli, 1990, Burisch, 1993; Vlerick, 1994). Kahill (1988), for example, discerns the respective categories: physical symptoms (e.g. fatigue and headaches), emotional symptoms (e.g. emotional exhaustion, anxiety and feelings of guilt), behavioral symptoms (e.g. rigid attitude towards rules, absenteeism and substance misuse), interpersonal symptoms (e.g. distant attitude in communication and withdrawal from clients) and symptoms at the level of one's attitude (e.g. negative attitude towards clients).

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[17] We mean interview-studies that are carried out along the methodological constraints of qualitative research. We don't take into consideration case studies (e.g. Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980).

Based on factor-analysis, Maslach and Jackson (1986) reduce this multitude of symptoms to a three-dimensional structure. They arrive at the following definition (Maslach & Jackson, 1986, p. 1): "Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind". Emotional exhaustion can be understood as a dysphoric feeling of being down, depersonalisation refers to taking an impersonal attitude in relation to the people with whom one works and reduced personal accomplishment indicates a reduction in the feeling of being competent (Maslach, 1993). Several factor-analyses confirm this three-dimensional structure (e.g. Byrne, 1991; Cox et al., 1993; Schaufeli et al. 1993a; Vlerick, 1993; Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 1994, Vlerick, 1995). According to this definition (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) burnout is a typical phenomenon in the context of people-oriented professions, professions in which interpersonal relations are pivotal (such as psychologists, teachers, nurses, etc.) (see also: Cox & Leiter, 1992; Leiter & Harvie, 1996). This description is the most widely accepted definition of burnout (Schaufeli, 1990, Cox et al., 1993; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Schaufeli et al. 1993a; Wisniewski et al., 1997). Based on this definition a questionnaire has been developed: the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). There are two Dutch versions of this questionnaire (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 1994; Vlerick, 1995), however, neither of these can be used in individual diagnostics (Maslach, 1993; Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 1994).

Recently researchers have questioned if burnout also occurs in other professions (for an overview: Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Some authors agree with this idea (e.g. Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 1994; Maslach & Leiter, 1998). To the extent that explanations are linked to organizational or general psychological variables, this generalization is unproblematic. Some authors (e.g. Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 1994) believe that burnout will appear differently in these professions, e.g. via cynicism in relation to the products one makes or in creativity that gets lost. We think that Graham Greene's 'A burnt-out Case' is particularly relevant in this context. Querry (the architect) as well as Rycker (a journalist) both seem to be burnt-out. The difference between them is that Querry attempts to escape from this condition, while Rycker seems resigned to it. Still others (e.g. Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980; Pines & Aronson, 1988) use the concept outside professional contexts (e.g. marriage). Nevertheless, we think that by applying the concept to such a multitude of contexts it becomes more and more difficult to define burnout operationally (cf. Starrin et al., 1990).

By equating burnout with the indicated group of symptoms and by applying the concept to diverse interpersonal contexts, its meaning expands problematically. Burnout is often seen as the pathological continuation of stress (Kyriacou, 1987; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Vachon, 1995; Wisniewski, 1997). We think

this is not feasible. A definition has to be more than a description of associated symptoms. Moreover, the difference between burnout and adjoining concepts such as depression is unclear (Meier, 1984; Shirom, 1989; Burisch, 1993; Hallsten, 1993). Despite the valuable efforts to discern concepts like depression and burnout on an empirical basis (e.g. Glass et al., 1993; Glass & McKnight, 1996), we think the essence of the problem can be situated elsewhere. Burnout is a concept that has been studied a-theoretically, and up to now research has been focused on the easily observable phenomena that accompany burnout. This has resulted in classification and in a mass of quantitative studies. The impasses of such an approach are well known (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Verhaeghe, 1995; Ashforth & Lee, 1997). We think that what is needed is a theory that gives us a framework that enables us to situate the dynamics of burnout, and upon which interventions can be designed. This theory has to be consistent with current research findings and with the clinical picture of burnout. To date, attempts to arrive at such a theory have been only fragmentary (e.g. Hallsten, 1993). We think that in the future, clinical psychological theories and clinical-qualitative studies can contribute to the construction of such a theory. We plan to make a contribution starting from the theory of Lacan.

Some authors have attempted to differentiate burnout from other concepts. Fischer (1983), for example, has differentiated between 'burnt out' professionals and 'worn out' professionals. He uses the concept of burnout solely to refer to the group of persons who consider their job as the only source of their narcissistic satisfaction, whereby failing is similar to personal failing. The concept 'worn out' refers to the (much bigger) group of professionals who see themselves as victims of negative working conditions (cf. Pieters, 1984). Later publications have hardly discussed this differentiation.

Meyerson (1994) (see also: Burisch, 1993) moreover argues that many authors implicitly start from the idea that burnout is pathological, that it is an illness. This is what terms like 'syndrome' and 'symptom' suggest. Golembiewski et al. (1993) explicitly consider burnout to be an illness. According to Meyerson's (1994) research, medical explanations of burnout prevail over psycho-social interpretations (which, for example, consider burnout as a condition that is inherent to working with people). No wonder that for many professionals burnout seems to be a taboo (Huberman, 1993).

Which factors are linked to burnout?

Many investigations have utilized questionnaire-research to study the relation of burnout to other variables (cf. Schaufeli, 1990; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Schaufeli et al., 1993a; Vlerick, 1994; Vachon, 1995; Glass & McKnight, 1996; Leiter & Harvie, 1996; Ashforth & Lee, 1997; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Most studies are cross-sectional in nature; as a result no causal connections can be made. Longitudinal research and research in which statistical models are studied are increasingly popular (e.g. Greenglass & Burke, 1988; Cherniss, 1995; McKnight & Glass, 1995, Drake & Yadama, 1996; Glass & McKnight, 1996). Qualitative studies, too, can help us to clarify this issue (Swanborn, 1994). In the next sections we will give an overview of research-findings, based on published reviews. Where possible, we will relate these quantitative results to clinical-qualitative research[18] and our own considerations, which start from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Biographical variables

The relation between burnout and several biographical variables has been studied intensively. Although some authors do not observe any relation between both factors (e.g. Papadatou et al., 1994; Leiter & Harvie, 1996), most conclude that youngsters have more severe burnout-scores (Schaufeli, 1990; Vachon, 1995). Married people (Schaufeli, 1990) and people who have children report lower burnout-scores (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Furthermore, burnout has been observed to be more prevalent among men than women (Schaufeli, 1990; Golembiewski et al., 1993). Vachon (1995) contradicts this finding.

Personality traits of the caregiver

In the search for the causes of burnout, many studies take into consideration personality variables. Most studies are based on cross-sectional research and come across the problem that caregivers and teachers might already be a selective group concerning their personality traits. Papadatou et al. (1994) (in contrast with Glass & Mcknight [1996]), for example, conclude that most burnt-out persons have an external locus of control. These persons have the impression that they have little or no influence on the course of events. We could question whether this is a cause or an effect of burnout, but, as we already indicated, we can't draw causal conclusions based on cross-sectional research.

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[18] We make our own selection based on articles and books that are included in Psychlit, Eric and SocioFile.

Other studies indicate the link between burnout, on the one hand, and the factors introversion, egocentrism and competitiveness from the five-factor model on personality (Huebner & Mills, 1994). Limited resilience, an external coping style, as well as a passive orientation in resolving problems, are strongly connected to burnout (Schaufeli, 1990). Extremely devoted persons, those whose feelings of self-satisfaction are strongly related to what they can do in relation to others, are also more susceptible to burnout (Vachon, 1995). Frequently, burnout is linked to type-A behaviour (Schaufeli, 1990).

Iacovides et al. (1997) studied burnout in relation to personality and a complex amount of other variables. They concluded that individuals who have a high score on the Psychotism subscale of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire as well as a low score on the 'personal accomplishment' subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory are especially vulnerable to burnout. Differentiating based on age, they conclude that especially youngsters (age < 35) with a non-aggressive character and a high score for self-control and emotional control on the one hand, and older employees (age > 35) with an impulsive character and only a little patience on the other hand, are vulnerable to burnout.

In qualitative studies too, interesting conclusions were drawn that can help us in arriving at a more global typology. Based on in-depth interviews, Hallsten (1993) concluded that persons with a high burnout-score highly value positive outcome as a result of their own efforts. Their feelings of their own identity strongly depend on the results they realize. It seems as if they only are what they achieve; they want to prove their competence via their achievements and they feel obliged to help others. Quite often they consider their job as means to avenge for earlier failing. Both Firth (1985) and Forney et al. (1982), starting from psychoanalytical and rational-emotive perspectives respectively, arrive at similar results.

A strong but unsatisfied desire for recognition from others is another important theme in burnt-out persons' discourse (cf. Firth, 1985; Reagh, 1994; Whitaker, 1996).

Characteristics of job and organization

Many burnout-scholars study the relation between burnout and characteristics of the job or the organization.

Researchers conclude that burnout is linked to ambiguity concerning the professional role, role conflict, lack of variation in the job and incongruence between job-demands and one's own capacities (e.g. Schaufeli, 1990; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Quite often (Browner et al., 1987; Schaufeli, 1990; Cherniss, 1995; Leiter & Harvie, 1996; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), but not consistently (Cranswick, 1997), burnout has been linked to bureaucracy and

powerlessness in the organization. A major case-load also has been associated with burnout (Maslach, 1982; Schaufeli, 1990; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Some studies contradict this conclusion (e.g. Leiter & Harvie, 1996) or suggest that case-load poses a problem only if the cases are forced on the caregiver without choice (Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992). It has also been observed that the risk of burning out is greater for caregivers who spend more time with clients (Maslach & Jackson, 1982; Schaufeli, 1990).

Troubled relations with colleagues or superiors also seem to correlate significantly with burnout (Browner, 1987; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). A perceived lack of support by superiors is especially experienced as troubling. Social support, on the other hand, is negatively correlated with burnout (Schaufeli, 1990; Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Leiter & Harvie, 1996; Jenkins et al., 1997). Examining these studies we wonder which specific aspects and dynamics of difficult interrelations and social support are related to professional burnout.

In the domain of clinical-qualitative studies, Firth (1985) indicates that beyond vague complaints of having too heavy a workload, role-ambiguity, role-conflict, etc., other meanings can be found. She concluded that excessive engagement in over-work, uncertainty about others' expectations or excessive worrying on the job coincides with the idea that one is only loved for what one achieves. These people are preoccupied with the idea that they have to please significant others. She moreover found that beyond conflicts with colleagues, one can frequently observe an anxious preoccupation with the idea that one will be fooled as one comes too close to the other. This is an interesting track for future research (see also: Hallsten, 1993).

Several qualitative studies have concluded that troubled relations with colleagues and superiors are linked to the experience of burnout (Firth, 1985; Browner et al., 1987; Reagh, 1994; Bennett et al., 1996; Whitaker, 1996). In this context, the feeling that one is insufficiently valued for the work one does is pivotal (Firth, 1985; Reagh, 1994; Whitaker, 1996). Friedman (1991) observed that burnt-out people perceive a lack of confidence in their professional competence. Persons that are not burnt-out, on the contrary, feel that they are appreciated in their jobs (Bennett et al., 1996).

Kahn (1993) studied patterns in troubled relations vis-à-vis colleagues and superiors and discerned five typical patterns. For future research, it would be interesting to study these patterns. We think it would be particularly interesting to start from the theories of Bion (1961) and Kets de Vries & Miller (1984).

Client-characteristics

In several studies, a link between client-characteristics and burnout in employees has been observed. There is a positive link between burnout among personnel on the one hand, and clients' aggressive behaviour (Browner et al., 1987; Kandolin, 1993; Leiter & Harvie, 1996; Wisniwski & Gargiulo, 1997), challenging behavior (Male & May, 1997; Wisniwski & Gargiulo, 1997), and severity of mental retardation (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Wisniwski & Gargiulo, 1997) on the other hand. Professionals working with chronic schizophrenics or demented elderly have more severe burnout complaints (e.g. Schaufeli, 1990). The degree of burnout seems to be proportionally related to the degree of difficulty associated with the clients' problems (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

These conclusions can be put in perspective. In an interesting study, Jenkins et al. (1997) indicate that subjective perceptions of difficulty in particular are related to burnout, rather than objective client-characteristics that could be measured with questionnaires or that could be indicated by experts (cf. Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Other studies (e.g. Chung et al., 1995) didn't observe any relation between client-characteristics and burnout.

In a qualitative study on burnout in teachers, Huberman (1993) concludes that pupils are the main source of professional burnout. Problems in enforcing discipline, hostile confrontations, lack of progress and sabotage by pupils are seen as the main sources of burnout. Based on an interview-study, Kalekin-Fishman (1986) indicates that the relation with pupils is of primary importance to teachers and that teachers especially feel attracted to the idea of helping pupils. Others (Reagh, 1994; Cherniss, 1995) indicate that professionals need to believe that their influence is substantial and that they want pupils to pass exams (Whitaker, 1996). Bennett et al. (1996) indicate a negative relation between burnout and experiencing gratitude.

The relational position, in which the caregiver or teacher is forced to function during his/her work with difficult clients or pupils, is not obvious. Further qualitative research could study this relational position, and examine how it relates to the type of relation the professional would like to realize.

Exaggerated expectations

Several studies indicate that burnt-out professionals once started their job with idealism and exaggerated expectations (Cherniss, 1993, 1995). These expectations concern, on the one hand, the organization and, on the other hand, the idea that as caregivers they would be able to have a substantial influence on negative situations. The moment it

becomes clear that such expectations are based on illusions, the consequence seems to be burnout. This elementary relation between burnout and unrealistic expectations has been confirmed in several studies (cf. Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Glass & McKnight, 1996), but the relation between both variables is not always that strong (Schaufeli, 1990). Papadatou et al. (1994), for example, demonstrate that nurses who have high expectations the moment they start their job are significantly more vulnerable to burnout than nurses with moderate expectations. Several explicative models on burnout are based on this gap between aspiration and achievement. Edelwich and Brodsky (1980), for instance, consider burnout as a state, whereby one in a phase of idealism is confronted with tough reality. This confrontation evokes feelings of helplessness and finally results in frustration and apathy. Several qualitative studies confirm the negative effect of such a gap (Forney et al., 1982; Firth, 1985; Kalekin-Fishman, 1986; Huberman, 1993).

In this context burnout is sometimes seen as learned helplessness (e.g. Jackson et al., 1986): since one repeatedly has the impression that one's actions don't result in the effect one desires, one stops attempting to have an influence.

Cultural factors

Both societal context and organizational culture prove to be related to burnout.
At an organizational level, it has been observed that those who work within the context of a harmonious ideological community (e.g. a religious community) are less vulnerable to burnout (e.g. Schaufeli, 1990; Cherniss, 1995). We can situate this phenomenon based on Freud's theory. Freud and other researchers on mass-psychology (cf. Freud, 1921) have observed that primary masses (such as care-giving institutions) can achieve edifying results. Freud claims that the basis of this phenomenon lies in that fact that the members of such groups "have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego" (Freud, 1921, p. 116). In other words, the members of the group take as an example the same idea, wish or person, and make it their model. The common relation to a person or an ideal results in a major similarity between, and identification amongst, group-members. As a result of this identification the members of the group will behave in a similar way, and this has a reinforcing effect on the others. In this respect, a shared object or ideal results in group-behaviour that exceeds individual behaviour. The risk of contagion, that has also been linked to burnout (e.g. Schaufeli, 1990), can also be understood along this same line of reasoning. If one member of an affectively-coherent group (i.e. a group that consists of members with similar identifications) shows signs of professional burnout, the chance

that other group-members will show similar signs is substantial. Based on Freud (1921), this phenomenon can be interpreted as a kind of psychical infection, one that starts from an observed similarity and the identifications accompanying this similarity.

Several trends in the broader societal context have been considered as contributory to burnout. Some authors (e.g. Schaufeli, 1990; Cherniss, 1995) highlight the link between burnout on the one hand, and the empowerment ethos that has stimulated people to stand up for their own rights on the other hand. Through this movement the caregiver was moved to the background, whereas the sometimes difficult or ridiculous demands of clients came to the fore. A decline in professional status and increasing rationalization in the care-giving sector also (increasing attention for efficiency...) have been associated with burnout. In a qualitative study, Friedman (1991), for example, found a relation between burnout on the one hand, and organizational culture in which school-management imposes measurable goals to teachers, on the other hand.

Other factors that could contribute to burnout are increasing individualization and the increasing value people attach to their jobs. Often, a job is seen as a means to realize and to develop oneself (Lasch, 1979; Veyne, 1987). However, the more important a job is in one's life, the greater the chance one will be disappointed in the end. Starting from Lasch (1979), we can also argue that our culture is increasingly oriented toward controlling our environment (e.g. via science and technology). We think that within this cultural context of omnipotence, the uncontrollable subjective dimension is increasingly difficult to bear. In this context, we advise that concepts such as efficiency and efficacy, which enter into care-giving via quality-management, be dealt with cautiously. Aspiring after efficacy implies a belief in the verifiable nature of care-giving. In the context of interpersonal professions, however, the radical non-verifiable dimension of interventions is a major issue one can't just neglect.

Framing the impossibility

We believe the question of whether burnout-research has a future within the domain of clinical psychology highly depends on whether we will be able to arrive at a global theoretical model based upon which research and intervention can be designed (see also: Schaufeli et al., 1993b).

We propose that in such framework the concept of impossibility, by which we suggest that humans are fundamentally impotent in influencing one another, must be pivotal. In order to elaborate this issue, we find some interesting points of departure in Lacan's theory. We think it is possible to frame the elementary burnout-dynamics based on Lacan's discourse-theory (e.g. Verhaeghe, 1996). After all, it seems that situations

in which burnout occurs always imply an agent (e.g. a care-giver) who attempts to influence another (e.g. a client or a superior), and that this attempt invariably involves a kernel of impossibility. Lacan's discourse-theory is interesting since it precisely brings into relation these elements. The Lacanian 'fantasy'-concept also seems to be useful. After all, this concept, too, implies an intersubjective relation between a subject and another (Zizek, 1998). In professions within the human services this intersubjective dimension is pivotal. These are some first ideas that need to be developed.

Concerning the issue of impossibility, research (Glass et al., 1993; McKnight & Glass, 1995; Glass & McKnight, 1996) indicates the existence of a kind of burnout-realism, parallel to depressive realism. For example, it seems that nurses with a high burnout-score have more realistic ideas on the aspects that one has or does not have under control in the job, than do nurses who don't have a significant burnout-score. To state it differently: nurses without burnout have the impression that they can influence more than they effectively do.

Based on this observation, we could reverse the classical questions on the cause of burnout. Instead of asking ourselves why some care-givers burn out, it would perhaps be more fruitful to ask why some of them believe in certain illusions (i.e. the illusion that uncontrollable factors are indeed under their control). Starting from the idea of burnout-realism, it furthermore is remarkable that up to now, most psychotherapeutic interventions start from a directive and cognitively restructuring framework (e.g. Schaufeli, 1990; Hoogduin et al., 1995; Schaap et al., 1996). We wonder how these therapies deal with this burnout-realism. On the other hand, it can be noticed that analytic psychotherapeutic schools of thought have hardly paid any attention to burnout…

Concluding remarks

In addition to the conclusions we drew in the course of this paper, we will make some general concluding remarks.

Since burnout has mainly been studied based on organizational psychological and general psychological perspectives (e.g. social psychology), we conclude that it would be useful to study burnout from a clinical psychological point of view as well. As such, we think that the mainly static explanations of burnout (e.g. as a defective-state or as a consequence of negative working conditions) need correction. It is clear to us, that to date the symptomatic side of burnout has been the main object of study. We think that within this field of research a more fundamental description of burnout-dynamics is needed.

If we want to construct such a model, we think it is important to drop the a-theoretical approach to burnout. If we don't take into consideration

existing clinical psychological theories (such as psychoanalysis or systems-theory), it will be hard to formulate a global framework.

We furthermore think that in addition to a theoretical framing of burnout, a differential study of the concept (i.e. research of the difference between high and low scoring respondents) needs to be developed. Attention should not (solely) be focused on fragmentary variables but on testing global models and relations. We think clinical-qualitative studies are most appropriate in this context. These studies could function as a basis for constructing and validating theoretical models. Since it has been observed that burnout is linked to problematic relations within the peer group and to difficult relations with superiors, we think it is a good idea to take these relational dynamics as a focus of research.

Based on comprehensive models, more comprehensive and methodical prevention and intervention could be designed.

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3. A DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW SCORING RESPONDENTS: IMAGINARY VERSUS SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONING

3.1. PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY FROM A LACANIAN PERSPECTIVE.

Introduction

Quantitative research shows that professional burnout is connected with conflictual perceptions of work relations and the receipt of little social support (Browner, 1987; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Jenkins et al., 1997; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Leiter & Harvie, 1996; Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

However, there is little qualitative research in the literature that systematically examines the connection between burnout, on the one hand, and typical patterns in the perception of interpersonal relations on the other, in a methodologically stringent way (Vanheule, 2001). Previous qualitative research (Bennett et al., 1996; Browner et al., 1987; Firth, 1985; Friedman, 1991; Hallsten, 1993; Reagh, 1994; Whitaker, 1996) shows that burnout and pathological stress are coupled with a problematic perception of work relations, but these interrelations have not been taken as the specific focus of investigation. An additional methodological problem confronting several qualitative researches is the lack of a control group. Interesting from our point of view is Firth's conclusion (1985) that behind vague stress complaints lies the idea that one is loved only because of one's performance, or that behind problems in collegial relations lies a frequent fear of being fooled.

Nor has past research used Lacanian psychoanalytic theory for empirical studies in the relation between burnout and social relations. However, for this field of research Lacanian theory is deeply relevant, since for Lacan the intersubjective relation – called the relation between subject and other– is central.

In this paper we examine, from a Lacanian perspective, the way people with burnout enter into an intersubjective relation. Beginning with a discussion of Lacan's theory of intersubjectivity, we use his intersubjective model to interpret research data gathered from a qualitative investigation into the way educators (whether suffering burnout or not) live social relations within their work group. We further determine how our intersubjective model enables us to differentiate between people suffering from burnout and others not suffering from this complaint.

Lacan's intersubjectivity model: imaginary versus symbolic relations

We see throughout Lacan's work a constant attempt to understand the essence of human interrelations. In developing his theory of social relations, Lacan often makes reference to the master and slave relationship. At first sight this seems a remarkable choice, not only given the historically dated character of this relationship but also its problematic current political implications. For our contemporary context, we can translate this relation into the terms "superior" and "inferior." By the master/slave relation Lacan intends a metaphor to characterise typical human relations which are distinguished by a relation of subordination and/or servitude.

Through his readings of classical philosophers Plato, Aristotle and Hegel, and particularly through the work of Kojève (1947), Lacan typifies the singularity of human relations in these terms. In the following, we will first examine the master/slave dialectic. Then we will apply Lacan's ideas to the relation between employees and their professional work context.

Master/Slave Dialectic

Lacan treats the master/slave relations as a paradigm for mapping the logic of intersubjectivity. Structurally, he distinguishes two types of relations: imaginary relations and symbolic relations. Furthermore, three stages in the development of relations may be identified. (see Figure 1).

1: primordial symbolic recognition

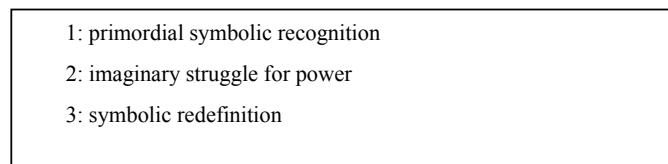2: imaginary struggle for power

3: symbolic redefinition

Figure 1: 3 intersubjectivity stages

Throughout his work, Lacan begins from the premise that human beings do not have an inherent or 'true' identity. For Lacan, human subjectivity is characterised by an original and radical lack of identity. Nevertheless, we try to comprehend ourselves and to grasp who we are.

Lacan talks about a typical human "want-to-be" (Muller & Richardson, p. 22). Identification is a means to acquire a greater subjective completion. In order to acquire an identity, one must appeal to someone else. Only by entering into a relation with another person is one able to claim an identity. Consequently, having an identity is not a natural condition. It is a social construction (cf. Lacan (1979, p. 306, my translation) "people humanise in relation to their equals" and Lacan (1977, p. 80): "identity is realised as disjunctive of the subject … this is what leads me to object to any reference to totality in the individual").

For Lacan, acquiring an identity involves a fundamental process of recognition which he elucidates through reference to the master/slave relation. According to Lacan, this relation is characterised in essence by mutual recognition: "it is the recognition of man by man that is involved" (Lacan, 1977, p. 26). Although the master/slave relation in the present cultural context is associated in the first place by the unilateral exercise of power and repression, according to Lacan this relation is primordially based on a mutual symbolic recognition. An actual master/slave relation is only created when person x and person y implicitly agree to take up, respectively, the position of 'slave' and 'master'. They enter, so to speak, into a symbolic pact that defines them as 'slave' and 'master'. This recognition is crucial because it determines the identity of each and the nature of their relation. Because of their mutual recognition of each other in these positions, their interactions as master and slave can proceed. According to Lacan, such symbolic recognition is the foundation of intersubjectivity. Only because they are recognised by other people can human beings acquire a place in a social network. Subjectivity is "something produced by the position taken up by the subject in the circuit of exchange" (Frosh, 1997, pp. 236-237). Lacan (1977, p. 58) adds to this that "man's … first object of desire is to be recognised by the other". Without intersubjective recognition human beings, socially speaking, do not amount to anything and have no identity of their own.

Crucial to this reasoning is the idea that the subjective position of a person is determined by the place he/she ascribes to the other. Human beings do not so much acquire an identity by assuming certain characteristics but by ascribing characteristics to someone else and by positioning themselves with regard to such characteristics. This can be illustrated by means of the master/slave relation. Such relation can take shape only if the slave (x) recognises the other (y) as his master. After all, only by characterising person y as 'master' can x implicitly assume the position of 'slave'. Schematic (see Figure 2):
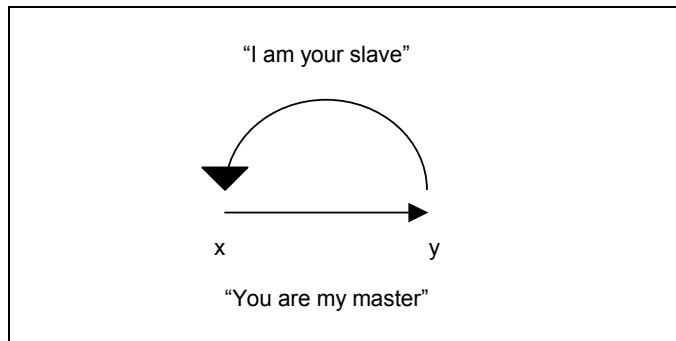
"I am your slave"

x   y

"You are my master"

Figure 2: Scheme master/slave relation

By recognising the other in a certain way (y = master), one also determines the position taken up by oneself (x = slave). According to this reasoning, people determine their own identity by the way they define other people. The glasses through which we watch the world implicitly determine our own place in the world, independent of our conscious intentions. So the message 'you are my master' given by person x to person y makes it clear, conversely, that x is the slave of the other (cf. the returning arrow in Figure 2). According to Lacan (1988b, p. 324) the subject receives his own message back from the other "in an inverted form", with as a final conclusion 'I am your slave'. This inversion implies that 'I' and 'your' replace the pronouns 'you and mine', and that the noun 'master' is replaced by its semantic opposite 'slave'. By inversion, the sentence 'You are my master' becomes 'I am your slave'.

Summarising, we can say that a symbolic recognition takes place in the first stage of intersubjectivity. This recognition assigns a position to people ('slave' and 'master') and results in a relation structure ('slave – master'). In the next stage, this structure acquires meaning.

Lacan tells us that the master/slave relation is typified by a struggle for power. The slave who recognises person y as his master challenges the latter's superiority with this recognition (Lacan, 1988a). The master is regarded as an oppressor, as a frustrating authority who deprives his slave of freedom and is the cause of the slave's discomfort. The slave rebels from the idea that the master unjustly takes advantage of the work done by the slave.

Whereas in the first stage of symbolic recognition, positions were traced out (x = slave, y = master), in the second stage roles are taken up. Master and slave are opposed to one another as a couple with conflicting interests. On the basis of the original relation structure, an implicit scenario is generated in which they adopt roles as competitors or duelling protagonists. In this stage, they identify with their positions of slave and master.

The struggle originates at the level of being: the slave no longer wants to be a slave nor wants the master as his master. Lacan calls this struggle imaginary, because it is based on an assumption: "the slave assumes that the master is a master, and that when he has something precious within his reach, he grabs it" (Lacan, 1988b, p. 187). From his inferior position, the slave fantasises about the master's easy life and his exploitation of slavery. The slave becomes dissatisfied. Lacan describes how slaves "will consider themselves wretches, nobodies, and will think – how happy the master is in enjoying being master?" (Lacan, 1988b, p. 72). In this stage of the relation, the creation of an image is central. The slave and the master each have an image of the other and depart from that image at the moment they enter into interaction. According to Lacan, such a formation is coupled with misjudgement because the relativity of their own assumption is not taken into consideration. The slave, for instance, is fixated on his belief that he is exploited by the master and that the master secretly enjoys at his expense, "whereas, of course, he [the master] will be completely frustrated" (Lacan, 1988b, p. 72). Because of his fixed idea about the master, the slave does not take this last possibility into consideration.

The slave's impression that he is being wronged is based on the image he has of the master. He regards the latter as a threatening body, as someone who unjustly takes advantage. This provokes a feeling of frustration and aggression toward the master whom the slave supposes to be deliberately frustrating him. As a result, they become rivals. "Aggressivity … becomes the beam of the balance on which will be centred the decomposition of the equilibrium of counterpart to counterpart in the Master-Slave relationship" (Lacan, 1977, p. 308). In the master/slave relation, a hostile power struggle begins in which the competitors will fight until death if necessary.

The slave does not realise that, by reasoning in terms of power and conflict, he only reconfirms his inferior position. From his perspective, there are two ways of reacting, both of which maintain his subordinate relation to the master. Both when he submits to the master and when he chooses to fight for freedom, in each case the slave finds himself in a type of relation in which the master dominates. According to Lacan (1993), all protest based on the idea of emancipation is ineffective for truly realising freedom. By fighting for and dreaming of freedom, the slave reconfirms once more that he is oppressed. Through his protest against the master, he maintains the existing balance of power from which, at a certain level, he wants to escape (Lacan, 2001). In this sense, it is the imaginary formation itself that is the actual master that keeps the slave imprisoned.

To summarise so far: in the first stage of intersubjectivity, positions are exclusively traced out. Person x is defined as a slave and person y as a master. In the second stage we shift to the dynamics of the relation, in

which the primordial symbolic structure is filled in through roles. This relation has a self-sustaining meaning since the slave and the master act as rivals.

This meaning does not appear out of the blue. The historical and cultural background of persons x and y colours the master/slave relationship. As Long puts it (1991, p. 390) "cultural signifiers provide the context for the individual". In this situation "a law is imposed upon the slave, that he should satisfy the desire and the pleasure (jouissance) of the other" (Lacan, 1988a, p. 223). The surrounding discourse (Foucault, 1975) tells person x and person y how they should behave with regard to each other. If they actually enter into interaction according to the chalk lines of this agreement, they opt for routine (Miller, 1999). In this case, the slave is subordinate to the master.

A possible way out indicated by Lacan is the redefinition of the primordial symbolic positions. This brings us to a third stage of intersubjectivity which consists of a return to the relation structure and opens possibilities to test other ways of relating with each other. After all, "the pact is everywhere anterior to the violence before perpetuating it, and what I call the symbolic dominates the imaginary" (Lacan, 1977, p. 308). For a slave to escape the ever-escalating conflict with the master, in other words, it is essential to return to the basic relation and to develop a meta-perspective on the relation structure. By understanding that it is the context that instructs x and y to interact as slave and master, x or y may conclude that its assigned role is relative and that it is possible to go beyond the contours of the prescribed role. In such cases, creative ways are opened to enable the subject to enter into a relation in another way and to develop another identity. Such a changeover is not, however, easy. By throwing himself into the imaginary struggle with the master, the slave has, so to speak, gone blind as regards to the structure by which their relation is determined. Lacan shows how another position is possible but it can only be reached by assigning another place to the other: the slave can shake off the yoke of slavery solely by no longer defining the master as master.

The step by which one chooses to leave the programmed agreement of the relation is not obvious. After all, if person x does choose to see the relation with person y through other glasses, something that was previously secure about his own identity disappears. The redefinition of the other's identity implies a redefinition of oneself. In this case, the former routine no longer suffices to interpret the mutual relation, which will result in fear and uncertainty. But the gain of such choice is found in the number of creative paths that will be opened both in the field of relation and in the field of identity.

This symbolic reinvention of the relation stands or falls with the decision to behave no longer as a product or creature of the relation. As long as the slave regards himself as someone dominated by the master –

a situation which may be welcomed or regretted – he remains imprisoned in an imaginary sham fight (Lacan, 1966). Only by regarding oneself as the producer or creator of a relation, one can realise something new.

A deduction[19]: Intersubjectivity in a professional context

Before we can test this model against our research data, we must examine how we can translate the ideas from the master/slave relation model into interrelations within a professional team.

According to the theory of intersubjectivity described above, a group can be regarded as a network of relations, in which each member takes up a position (see stage 1 of Lacan's model) and consequently acquires an identity. The nature of these positions and relations is determined by the discourse surrounding the group. Both the group members and people outside the group determine the functioning of the group through their accounts of it. We assume that a group or a team's discourse about its own functioning and its own past defines laws for the interrelations among its members. It determines do's and don'ts for the position of each teammate (see Kaës, 2002). A new teacher for instance, who fills a vacancy of a colleague who has been harassed out of his job does not start simply with a clean slate. The past events at the school determine the position into which the new teacher is placed. The "history of the group acts as a constraint on future significations, and also acts retrospectively by influencing member's accounts of the past" (Long, 1991, p. 399). In this case it is not so much the actual events that have such a determining influence on the way of entering into a relation but the narrative structure within which these events acquired a place. In the same way, the wider cultural discourse (for instance the current social attitude towards teachers) determines the place someone occupies in the job context. The narrative structure constitutes the tradition that tells how the relation between person x and person y ought to be.

It is on the basis of this structure that people relate to one another. An important question Lacan's theory enables us to ask is: do people identify themselves with the role outlined in the narrative scenario (an imaginary reaction) or do they try to fill in their relation in their own way (a symbolic reaction). Crucial in a symbolic reaction is the change a person effects in the relation through a different positioning of the other.

Qualitative investigation into burnout

Our question is to ask to what extent this theoretical model helps to account for the way people take up relations at work. More specifically, we

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[19] When Lacan discusses the master/slave relation, the main purpose of his discussion is to get a better insight into the transference relation during psychoanalysis. So he for instance concludes that in the transference relation the obsessional neurotic acts as a slave who is afraid of the struggle with the analyst who is regarded as the master. The obsessional neurotic submits to the master and seems to postpone the arising of his own longing until the master's death. On the other hand, within hysteria it is typical that in a first stage the analyst is raised to master and then there are complaints about his failure (Lacan, 1977).

wonder in what ways attitudes towards work relations differ between people suffering from burnout and those who do not. To discover this, we address the described model with research data gathered through combined qualitative and quantitative research.

Sample

The sample was composed on the basis of a burnout screening with the Flemish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Vlerick, 1993). A total of 1317 questionnaires were sent to special educators from the (residential) special youth care sector and from the mentally handicapped care sector. We got 992 questionnaires back (response rate: 75.6%) through letterboxes installed by us in all homes concerned (n = 47). Then questionnaires with missing values were removed from the sample. This finally resulted in a random sample of 765 special educators. (212 from the special youth care sector and 553 from the mentally handicapped care sector). The subgroup of educators from the special youth care sector was composed of 70% women with an average age of 33.2 years (SD: 8.6 years) who had been working in the sector for 9.8 years on average (SD: 7.9 years). The random sample of educators from the mentally handicapped care sector was composed of 70% women with an average age of 34.4 years (SD: 8 years) who had been working in the sector for 12.2 years on average (SD: 7.7 years).

During the burnout screening the respondents were asked whether they were willing to participate in an interview. In the final random sample, 185 people were willing to do so. From this group, the 15 highest and the 15 lowest scoring respondents on the burnout questionnaire were selected. Their score formed respectively part of the highest and lowest 10% of the random sample.

Measures

The burnout screening was carried out by means of the Flemish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Vlerick, 1993). The Maslach Burnout Inventory is internationally the most used scale to measure burnout.

The interviews were semi-structured. The respondents were asked to specify the major difficulties they experienced at work in their relations with clients, colleagues and the executive staff and how they dealt with such difficulties. This was done each time by means of two critical incidents. In the same way they were asked to specify the factors which satisfied them most. The interviews took between 1.5 and 2 hours and were recorded on tape. Two trained interviewers conducted the interviews.

Analysis

Each interview was typed out verbatim. They were methodologically processed on the basis of Glaser & Strauss (1967), Miles & Huberman (1994), Strauss & Corbin (1990, 1997) and Vanheule (2002). Each interview was analysed in detail and coded by each of the two interviewers who made use of the Atlas-ti computer programme. After the initial coding, the researchers met to review the coding of all 30 cases and resolve any discrepancies. With a view to a comparison with the Lacanian intersubjectivity theory, the codes were grouped in co-ordinating codes and matrixes. Attention was paid to the difference between high and low scoring respondents, in the way they relate towards colleagues and executive staff.

Results

Applying Lacan's theory of intersubjectivity to our research data, three types of relations can be distinguished. Each of these types can be typified by a central catch phrase. This catch phrase constitutes the basis of the script, so to speak, that determines the method of interaction (see Figure 3).

Burnout score	Reaction type	Catch phrase of script
High (type 1)	Imaginary	'I refuse to accept that you are my master'
High (type 2)	Imaginary	'My master's will is my law, but I get caught up in it'
Low	Symbolic	'Departing from this structure, I am creative'

Figure 3: differentiating catch phrase connected with the burnout score

Below are descriptions of these three types of interactions. Each is illustrated with a case.

High burnout score type 1

In this first reaction type – characterised by people with a high burnout score – a hostile imaginary tension is at the centre. The person is dissatisfied, he or she holds someone else responsible for what goes wrong at work or in their mutual relation, and challenges the other because of this. This results in conflict escalation. With regard to Lacan's

theory, this reaction type corresponds with the slave who challenges the master.

This is coupled with a feeling that one is personally targeted by the other and wronged. Such a person will rebel against this wrong by denouncing the shortcomings of the other. The person concerned is convinced that he is right and has the idea that the other is hiding in a position of convenience. By identifying oneself as the other's opposite, a relation is created whereby people act as opponents. Typical affects experienced in the interaction include: feeling oneself wronged, disappointment, envy, aggression.

One of the respondents puts it as follows:

'I was working in a community and my direct superior was an older colleague whose approach was actually quite different from mine. She was very direct and she had something dominating. I really felt that. At the beginning I did not mention anything about it to her… I felt somewhat uncertain when I had to work together with her. I wondered whether I was doing well. She knew it and in my opinion I was not given much credit… I had the impression that she did not really care about the kids. She did things that were actually not relevant and other things that were really important she did not do. So I found that we needed a microwave to heat up leftovers. She did not reserve money for it. After a year I had to see the manager for an evaluation talk. He told that I criticised everything. I think that she had yet not been criticised by anyone. It was time that someone told her what he thought. This is mentioned in my file… That older colleague went to the manager to complain behind my back, without showing anything… This is unbelievable. I was enormously shocked. At the centre they are talking all the time about assuming responsibility towards the kids. And I am treated like this. I have invested a lot in my job. I really wanted to do things with the kids and then I am met by a wall of complete incomprehension… The more hypocritical you are, the higher you get in hierarchy.' (Respondent 20).

This way of entering into a relation is the perfect breeding ground for conflict escalation. One ends up in a vicious circle, convinced of being in the right, on which the battle is based. This swallows up the energy of the person concerned; the more he/she worries about the problem, the deeper he/she sinks away in it. He/she does not realise that his/her own reaction may perpetuate the relation complained about. No meta-perspective is formed on the relation with the other. This reaction appears during the interview itself in the way the respondent goes on about the problem endlessly, without being able to create structure in the way it is talked about.

We noticed that this type of conflict occurs when a person is confronted with a group tradition against which he or she rebels by identifying him or herself with the position of the opponents. This protest

results in a (threatening) expulsion from the group (cf. respondents 20, 22, 27).

Another context in which we found a similar type of reaction is the case in which a person finds himself attacked by someone else and joins battle on this basis. Typical conflicts we noticed are: battles with colleagues or superiors about who is right in judging critical situations (respondents 18, 19, 31, 25) and battles among colleagues about who gets a positive evaluation from his superiors or deserves one (respondents 19, 32).

High burnout score type 2

People in the second type of reaction are characterised by their attempt to efface themselves for the sake of the other. They feel that the other wants something from them, and they try to satisfy that wish. They try to be what the other lacks by incarnating as far as possible the role they suppose the other expects of them. We noticed that these people are perfectionists and are not satisfied with partial answers. They are convinced that it is their duty to satisfy the wishes of other people. In Lacan's terminology this way of entering into relation corresponds with the slave who tries to serve his master as properly as possible, through identification with his role as servant.

One of the effects of this positioning is that people get the impression that their work is weighing heavily on them. After all, the answer they provide to the question posed by the other is never sufficient. We noticed that these people take their work so seriously that the rest of their lives threatens to collapse under it. When things are not going as expected, these people are inclined to feel themselves personally responsible. Professional difficulties are interpreted as signs of personal failures. Most try to keep the burden they experience at a distance through rationalisation.

The story below is an illustration of these dynamics:

'I love my job. I do not want another job, but sometimes the pressure of work is too high. Actually I am someone with a great sense of responsibility. If my colleagues or my superiors do not have enough time or are unable to do something alone and ask to me to help, I think: this is in the interest of our work, I do it. Or also if there is a problem at the centre, for instance someone gets aggressive or in the event of open house, I help them. Sometimes it is too much. Actually, I should draw my lines better, because my own work is not done and before you are aware of it, you are always dealing with the most complicated problems… I do not stand up enough for what I find important myself… I always feel pity for other people,' (respondent 21)

We noticed that the tendency to sacrifice oneself leads to an attempt to model one's own wishes and impulses in the service of the other. One tries to eliminate impulses that are contrary to the other's supposed expectation. This tendency was evident in the interviews by the fact that these people did not bring up negative feelings or that they rationalised them away (cf. respondent 24: 'it's like I have a button in my head, when I have too much problems I just switch it off').

Psychoanalytically speaking, each attempt to efface oneself is doomed to fail. On the one hand this attempt is problematic because, by doing so, one's own identity threatens to disappear into the other's. On the other hand, effacing oneself will always fail since every defence against an unwanted impulse will result in an indirect expression of this impulse. Respondents suffering this type of burnout give the impression of doing everything in order to avoid drawing this conclusion. So as not to have to question their self-effacing way of entering a relation and to escape its consequences, these people seem to run away from contacts with the other when they cannot cope with it anymore.

They do this for instance by staying home from work because of overstrain or physical complaints (respondents 23, 24, 26, 30) or by adopting a stand-offish attitude or being unreachable at work (respondent 21).

Low burnout score

Compared with high scoring respondents, people with a low burnout score and a symbolic interaction style attract attention because of their clear meta-perspective with regard to work relations and its ensuing problems (respondents 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15). As far as relations are concerned, these people always seem to begin from what the Lacanian perspective calls the determining symbolic structure. They reflect on how people relate to each other and are sensitive to how various positions are assumed. In connection with this meta-perspective they mainly reflect strategically on interrelations. They take the sensitivities of the others into account and discount their own share in the way things are going.

In comparison with high scoring respondents, these respondents pay a lot less attention to issues of power or to the question of how the others see them. Their identity seems to be anchored to such an extent that they do not pay much attention to these questions. If there are problems, they keep to the facts of the incident in discussions and try directly to find a solution. When consulting with others they are not inclined to feign; people they are critical towards will know this directly from them. If challenged by others in such extreme ways that conflicts result, they do not feel personally targeted and are inclined to make an appeal to a mediating third party (for instance a hierarchical superior). These respondents will not just sit there. They couple actions to their

conclusions. The coherence between what they conclude from their meta-perspective and their way of acting is striking.

One of the respondents puts it as follows:

'If the co-operation gives rise to conflicts, I am someone who raises this matter immediately, who provides feedback. I say what I think, what is wrong with me. I try to do this as directly as I can… At the centre there was a substitute head of department who always tried to impose all kinds of rules on our team in a very authoritarian way. She has a strong own idea about how we have to organise things. The risk to lock horns with her on that matter always exists, but I have found a tactic to handle it. If you tell your own opinion to her, if you stand up for yourself, she reacts by taking advantage of your emotions. I have learned not to get hit anymore. I have found a style to deal with that kind of situation since we are here to work together. I am someone who is always very open and spontaneous, but with her I associate differently, more task and duty oriented. We enter into clear agreements, and if she does fulfil them, I tell her. I know what I am talking about.' (Respondent 12)

They seem to do their work based on what they desire and based on a wider view of life. Taking the situation of the conventions in the group into account, they try to fill in the relations in their own way. They succeed in creating something else from a clear awareness regarding the place they have. By looking at relation patterns in a different way, they manage to have a refreshing outlook on their work. Others are often surprised by their creativity and become enthusiastic themselves.

This way of interacting is also actualised during the interviews. There are few speculations on the intentions of others. They develop a clear and all-embracing view of problems and are able to communicate and discriminate things about their job in a short period of time. Unlike high scoring respondents, their story is stable and logically ordered.

Discussion

Beginning from Lacan's intersubjectivity model, we distinguished three types of interrelations that allow us to differentiate between people with high and low burnout scores. By means of our research data, we identified the style of interaction of respondents with a high score as imaginary (among which we found two subtypes) and that of low scoring correspondents as symbolic. We conclude that the imaginarily-functioning, high scoring respondents generally identify themselves with a role (rebellious / submissive) with which they completely merge and that is complementary with the role assumed by the other. Precisely as a result of this complementarity, an escalation is created by which both roles are

reinforced. Symbolically-functioning low scoring respondents, on the other hand, succeed in creatively changing the narrative structure in which imaginarily-functioning respondents remain imprisoned. These low scoring respondents accomplish this through acquiring a meta-perspective achieved through a primarily symbolic intersubjective relation. The connection between our research data and the Lacanian intersubjectivity model implies a confirmation of the theoretical model. Some differentiation, however, is necessary.

In theoretical terms, the distinction between an imaginary and a symbolic interaction is very clear. Empirically, however, we noticed that the difference is not so clear-cut and that it manifests itself in terms of general tendencies: high scoring respondents interact mainly imaginarily and low scoring respondents mainly symbolically. Moreover, the difference between the two groups reveals itself best in the way they describe conflicts and the way they deal with them.

We concluded that we could place the 15 respondents with a high burnout score within types 1 and 2, but also found that not all respondents (5 out of 15) with a low score could be placed within the above typology of low scoring respondents. This is a sub-group which enters largely imaginarily into relations but in whose work context a number of protective factors exist to prevent such people from running into a conflict escalation (cf. high score type 1) or from getting entangled in their dedication (cf. high score type 2). The effect of the protective factors is to enable such people to put difficult situations they encounter into perspective. They prevent the person from losing him or herself in the imaginary. Each of the respondents within this group seemed aware of the risk of 'spontaneously' getting into such situations. Among such protective environmental factors we observed were: working in a team environment which induces people to articulate the difficulties they experience in relation to others (respondents 1, 4, 3, 16), using clear rules for themselves and others (for instance refusing to do overtime) (respondents 13, 16), finding a channel to express one's anger (respondents 13, 16) or doing part-time another job in which co-operation with others is less central (respondent 4).

Through applying Lacanian theory to our qualitative research data, our investigation discloses the intersubjective dynamics of burnout, a topic that up till now has received little attention. The advantage of this approach lies in the connections it forges between burnout and the various modes of entering into relation (symbolic versus imaginary), on the one hand, and the intersubjective process by which identity is acquired on the other. Our proposed model (cf. figure 3) can be used to differentiate people suffering from burnout from others not subject to this complaint. Further investigation is necessary to validate the described model. Special attention must be paid to the group of low respondents functioning

imaginarily, as must the role and the functioning of the protective environmental factors.

While, from a methodological point of view, such research as ours is strictly unable to address questions of the teleological causation of burnout – our particular research design has little to say about the influence of psychological, group-dynamic, organizational or cultural determinants, for example – nevertheless, our research has enabled us to study the logic of how people perceive their work-relations and to map the structure by which they make sense of their experiences.

Lacan himself, from his psychoanalytic perspective, was quite uninterested in resolving questions of teleology. Where he did address the question of causation, he inverted its classical logical and scientific meaning by claiming that it is the Freudian 'Ichspaltung' or what he calls the division of the subject, that should be considered the basis for all thinking on the cause (cf. Lacan, 1966, pp. 855-877). For Lacan, this 'Spaltung' or division is the "material cause" of all (inter-)subjectivity (Lacan, 1966, p. 875). Although, on the one hand, this concerns the determination of the subject by the signifier and the aforementioned primordial symbolic recognition, this cause also pertains to the subject's inherent in-determination, its absence of tangible determination. We can connect this latter aspect of causation to the Lacanian category of the 'real', which refers primarily to the dimension of the bodily drive that all subjects try to master by way of their symbolic and imaginary representations and relations but towards which, because of its incongruous nature, all representations necessarily fall short (cf. Zizek, 1988). "The Real is un-Imaginable and un-Symbolizable. It just is" Grotstein (1995, p. 300). The ways people relate in the imaginary and the symbolic reflects a positioning with regard to this real and consequently a form of 'enjoyment' (concerning this idea of 'enjoyment' or 'jouissance': see Miller (1999)) or attachment to the real.

We find that, because of its emphasis on intersubjectivity, our model is particularly relevant for interventions. However, since people's places in the imaginary and the symbolic reflects a position taken towards the real, intervention has to involve more than merely stimulating people into making a mental or cognitive shift. Intervention needs to focus primarily on people's attachment to their style of interaction and consequently this must be designed from the basis of the psychoanalytic concept of working through. Further investigation into the implications of interventions and into the effective process of intervention that takes this model as its starting point is required.

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3.2. THE EXPERIENCE OF IMPOSSIBILITY IN RESIDENTIAL YOUTH AND HANDICAP CARE PROFESSIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY FROM A LACANIAN FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In his late essay, 'Analysis terminable and interminable', Freud (1937/1964) concludes rather pessimistically that governing, educating and psychoanalyzing – or, more broadly, curing (in German: 'Kurieren') (Freud, 1925/1961) – constitute impossible professions. According to Freud, in none of these professions can one predict one's ultimate success, owing to the large number of uncontrollable factors that pertain to them. At any rate, one "can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying results" (Freud, 1937/1964, p. 248). Freud's focus here is of course on psychoanalysis, and his essay accentuates the unresolved and troubling factors that persist in the relation between the analyst and the analysand, as well as in the psychoanalytic technique.

After Freud, a number of authors have returned to his pronouncement and discussed the question of impossibility within psychoanalysis. Some reject Freud's cynical conclusion, arguing that it no longer reflects the actual status of psychoanalysis (Bornstein, 1995; Cooper 1986). Others consider it to be still appropriate (De Urtubey, 1995; Lothane, 1996). While only a few authors have thoroughly considered the concept of impossibility and its clinical roots (e.g. Berenstein, 1987; Cooper, 1986; Lacan, 1970/2001; Novick, 1980), fewer still have discussed the consequences of Freud's utterance for the (special) education profession. Those who do stress the difficulty of working with disturbed youngsters (Aarons, 1970; Novick, 1980).

Lacan (1970/2001, p. 444) is prudent in his pronouncements on the professions that Freud qualifies as impossible, defining them as "gageurs", which we can translate as 'hazardous undertakings' and 'challenges.' With regard to impossibility he indicates that we should avoid premature conclusions. The least one can do, he says, "is to produce evidence of it" (Lacan, 1970/2001 p. 444, own translation).

Indeed, there has been very little empirical investigation into these three professions. None of the authors cited have yet engaged in a systematic empirical research into impossibility. An interesting line of thought, however, has been opened up by Cooper (1986) who links impossibility with professional burnout.

Classical burnout-research concludes that burnout coincides with difficult interpersonal relations between professionals and their clients (among other factors such as personality, organizational characteristics, etc.) (Maslach et al., 2000; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Researchers have found a significant link between professional burnout and the

aggressiveness, the challenging behavior and the severity of disabilities of clients (Leiter & Harvie, 1996; Male & May, 1997; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Wisniewski & Cargiulo, 1997). The degree of burnout seems to increase proportionally to the client's difficulties, although this relationship could not always be confirmed (e.g. Chung et al., 1995). More interesting, from our point of view, is the discovery that the professional's subjective appreciation seems to be an important intermediate variable. Jenkins et al. (1997) found that people's subjective perception of difficulties is more closely connected to burnout than objective client characteristics (measured by rating scales or expert opinions) (see also: Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Huberman, 1993).

What remains unclear from these studies is whether there are any common factors in the way burnt-out professionals typically regard their work relations; the precise nature of the relational position they experience as difficult or impossible; and the subjective meaning they attribute to difficulties with clients experienced within this relation. At this point we decided to go back to the narratives of the professionals working in special education and counseling, and to their processes of attributing meaning to events.
What the so-called impossible professions clearly have in common with one another is the pivotal nature of what Lacan (1970/2001) calls the relation or the dimension of intersubjectivity (Horwitz, 1999; Stolorow et al., 1983). According to Lacan (1970/2001; 1991), the professional acts as an agent who addresses an other. Lacan locates intentionality on the side of the professional and designates the social bond as the medium that is used to effect change. Impossibility is thus experienced at the level of the relation. The subjective experience of the relation, we concluded, should therefore be the focus of our research attention.

In what follows we present the results of our explorative study into the experience of impossibility through a comparison of two groups of special educators/counselors. One group experienced the job as impossible (indicated by a clinically significant burnout-score), the other group didn't. The study was conducted methodologically along the guidelines established by Grounded Theory.

In our interpretation of the empirical material we start from Lacan's theoretical model of the three registers of mental experience: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Throughout his teaching and work, Lacan attempted to conceptualize psychoanalysis along this three-part structure. The concept of the Real refers primarily to the dimension of the drive and its incongruous nature, in relation to which our mental representations always fall short. It is the dimension we mentally try to deal with, but in relation to which all representational efforts fall short (cf. Grotstein (1995, p. 300): "The Real is un-Imaginable and un-Symbolizable"). Anxiety is considered to be its clinical manifestation. The concept of the Imaginary refers to the activity of identity-building and to subjective images which are

primarily acquired through the so-called mirror stage, where the subject-to-be identifies with an image presented by another in order to cope with his own drive. The basic characteristic of these imaginary identifications is their tendency towards fixed meanings, which extends to verbal material as well. Hence, the Imaginary encompasses the assumptions people have of themselves and others. According to Lacan, imaginary constructions are on the one hand formative, since they stimulate people to be in certain way (e.g. to be like or unlike the other). They consequently function as Gestalts. On the other hand, imaginary formations are coupled with misjudgement and (self-)deception since they are fundamentally biased. They fix people's attention, fail to take into account the relativity of assumptions and simplify complex reality. Lacan situates emotions like love and hate in this domain, but also people's impressions, intuitions and prejudices. The Symbolic supersedes the Imaginary and refers to the structure at the basis of every reality; to the organizing context of the phenomena we experience. Lacan interprets this structure in terms of the oedipal triangle: the original dual mother-child relationship is replaced by a triangular structure. The Symbolic always takes into account the influence of a third element outside direct experience and thus results in a mediated and detached stance towards pure facts. For Lacan, the mediating oedipal factor is the paternal phallus, being the ultimate signifier. 'Signifier' is a term borrowed from linguistics that refers to the undetermined nature of words; a word has no definite signification and only obtains meaning within a context of other signifiers. The effect of the Symbolic on identity-formation is that it enables a subject to obtain distance from the preceding imaginary identifications, eventually making choices of his/her own. By this change, the originally dual and fixed meanings are replaced by signifiers (cf. Verhaeghe, 1998).

Method

Sample

The research sample was created on the basis of a burnout screening. A total of 1317 questionnaires were sent to special educators who do counseling work in residential special youth care or in residential mental handicap care in Flanders, Belgium (10% of the total population in this profession)[20]. We got 992 questionnaires back (response rate: 75.6%) through letterboxes installed by us in all institutions concerned (n = 47).

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[20] These all are what Freud (1925/1961) and Aichhorn (1925/1951) call 'Erziehers'; professionals who guide, counsel and bring up people in special youth care and mental handicap care. All of them work on the interface between 'curing' and 'educating'.

Removing questionnaires with missing values from the sample cleaned the data. This finally resulted in a sample of 765 special educators (212 from the special youth care sector and 553 from the mentally handicapped care sector). The subgroup of educators working in residential special youth care (mean age of 33.2, SD = 8.6) was composed of 70% women who had been working in the sector for 9.8 years on average (SD = 7.9). The random sample of educators working in residential mental handicap care (mean age of 34.4, SD = 8) was composed of 70% women, working in the sector for 12.2 years on average (SD = 7.7).

During the burnout screening the respondents were asked whether they would be willing to participate in an interview. In the final sample, 185 people were willing to do so. From this group, the 15 highest and the 15 lowest scoring respondents on the burnout questionnaire were selected. Their score formed respectively part of the highest and lowest 10% of the random sample.

Measures

The burnout screening was carried out by means of the Flemish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Vlerick, 1993). The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) is internationally the most commonly used scale for measuring burnout.

The interviews were semi-structured and methodologically based on Kvale's (1996) psychoanalytically-based research interviewing. The respondents were asked to specify the major difficulties they experienced at work in their relations with clients, colleagues and the executive staff and how they dealt with such difficulties. This was done each time by means of two critical incidents. In the same way they were asked to specify the factors which satisfied them most. The interviews took between 1.5 and 2 hours and were recorded on tape. Two trained interviewers conducted the interviews.

Data-analysis

Each interview was typed out verbatim. They were qualitatively analyzed according to the guidelines established by Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1997) and its further elaboration and systematization by Miles & Huberman (1994). Each interview was analyzed in detail and coded by each of the two interviewers who made use of the Atlas-ti computer program. After the initial coding, the researchers met to review the coding of all 30 cases and to resolve discrepancies. Codes were grouped in coordinating codes and matrixes. Attention was paid to the difference between high and low

scoring respondents on the burnout questionnaire, with regard to how they describe their relation with clients.

We chose these methodologies because they allow us to develop a conceptualization based on observed data in an explorative way (cf. Wechselblatt et al., 2000), and because these methods proceed very thoroughly in examining data (Vanheule, 2002). They enable researchers to base their investigations on (the lack of) an existing theory and to incorporate elements of existing technical literature if these prove to be useful (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Our mixed use of research-data and existing literature (psychoanalytic and qualitative studies on burnout) is intrinsic to the Grounded Theory methodology.

Results

Based on our research data, we discerned three general themes recurring in the special educators' accounts, which enable us to differentiate between the high and low scoring respondents (cf. Table 1). We will elaborate these themes and illustrate them with case-material.

Table 1: General themes in high and low scoring respondents' accounts.

General Theme	High scoring respondent	Low scoring respondent
Position vis-à-vis the other	Want to do all for the other, but experience it as a burden; blame themselves or the other ('they don't want', 'they are not capable')	Give the other what the other needs; maintain a distance
Way of dealing with problems	Feel absorbed by problems; problems expand	Construct a symbolic meta-perspective; reflective attitude
Attitude towards speaking	Feel unable to speak freely; chaotic storytelling	Speak about their problems; coherent storytelling

High scoring respondents

A first characteristic typical of high-scoring respondents lies in their general imaginary and narcissistic position towards the clients they work with. Such respondents really long to affect clients and fantasize about having clear results in working with them. Beginning with a definite image of their clients in general, and of their own specific work, they want to direct the other. This image is clearly a cultivated personal construction. It is as if they have a stereotype in mind with which their clients should comply. This observation tallies with other research which indicates that people with high burnout scores feel, on the one hand, obliged to help others (Hallsten, 1993) while demanding, on the other, that things should run the way they want them to (Forney et al., 1982). Such people tend to be very committed workers whose personal mission involves a genuine attempt to do good (see also Cherniss, 1995). But in some cases, this intent is over-shadowed by feelings of exhaustion. The problem they experience is that many of their day-to-day interactions with clients don't fit with their image of how these interactions ought to be. This evokes a feeling of unease. One of the respondents puts it as follows:

"I work with moderately retarded adult women who have a personality disorder … I direct a workshop and they come working over there every day, for 6 hours. What I want, is that all of them have a significant daily occupation and that they can experience the workshop as a place where they can be themselves… I do much more than just supervising their work. What I want is to offer them the full scope to develop and express themselves… But at the end of the day I always think 'it's enough'. It really is a burden, you continuously have to be attentive, you're always busy with their lives and you haven't a second to take a break…E. is someone who is quickly agitated if she doesn't understand things, then she starts yelling and abusing. So, one has to be attentive. At the same time A. starts complaining that she doesn't find her underwear anymore and K. starts crying for something else. Sometimes it's too much for me, but one has to consider their complaints…Take for example A. and her remarks on the lost underwear. One can't just say that she should search for it. For her, it's a problem of vital importance, so if we can't solve it, she doesn't feel well and then I would be wrong… In fact, she really is a pathological case and she makes me feel a bit like I'm going to explode. I'm not exaggerating, she can ask me the same question 60 or 70 times a day, and each day she has another question… I hope that at least she will feel understood, it's a kind of therapy for her … at the end of the day I just want to yell at her and shout that she should shut her stupid mouth, but that would not be fair" (Respondent 28).

From a Lacanian point of view (cf. Lacan, 1970/2001, 1991), each (work-related) interaction between an acting agent and another always results in a product. The problem high-scoring respondents experience as unbearable is that the product they obtain doesn't correspond with what

Lacan calls the moving truth behind their actions – which in this case is constituted by the images they cherish prior to any interaction. According to him product of work entails what Marx called surplus value. The surplus our high scoring respondents want to attain (e.g. praise and gratitude for the good things one did) doesn't arrive, which creates an experience of being deceived. The resulting product of the interaction consequently has a negative connotation for them. Alluding to Lacan and Marx, we can say that a negative surplus value is realized (indicated by a feeling of unease or discomfort). This inevitably evokes a destructive attitude. The destructiveness that is normally sublimated in people's professional striving (Menninger, 1942) gets released by this feeling of being deceived, but it can't easily be acted upon since it is incompatible with the whole project of taking care of the other (cf. Ansermet & Sorrentino, 1991; Lacan, 1992). We observed that our respondents are disturbed by their destructive feelings and that, as a defense against them, they blame themselves, the other or both themselves and the other for this negativity. Situations with extreme experiences of this conflict are often a trigger for sick leave. The following example (high scoring respondent who blames himself) illustrates this:

"The problems we are confronted with are all very complex. One can't just say do this or do that. Then it stays on my mind and I keep on brooding. The emotional things, you take them home. You try to find a solution but you can't find one… I have the impression they do want an answer from me, for they keep on asking, they continuously return to it. In fact, they ask more than we can give… They undoubtedly see and feel that I can't give an answer. Now it's too much, I reached the limit, I can no longer stand it. I always take things very personally" (Respondent 24).

Other high scoring respondents blame the other. Those who do so seem to have a peculiar relation towards punishment. In the context of the conflict they relate, they don't seem to consider it as a therapeutic or pedagogical measure, but as a kind of compensation for the injustice done to them. Moreover, we found that, in case of clients with mental retardation, people tend to attribute the trouble to the clients' limited capacities; 'they are not capable of change'. In case of clients with behavioral and psychical problems, people tend to attribute the trouble to clients' bad intentions; 'they are not willing to change'. The story of respondent 30 illustrates this:

"I work at a ward for youngsters with a severe character disorder. We now have a guy who really gets under my skin … he really hunts me. One day there was a quarrel during diner. I said something to him; that he should calm down, and then he charged at me. He wanted to beat me, but then I took him by his throat and I pushed him to the wall. He said that he would bring his older brothers and they would wait for me when I go home in the

evening… Later that week I was at his school and I saw him with a couple of friends. They were laughing at me. It was really too much for me, I immediately went to the director and I said that they should suspend him temporarily from the institution and that the guy should apologize personally. I told the director that he was lucky that I didn't react. I am like that, I hit back when they hit me… I respect them, what I want, is that they respect me in return".

We detected that high scoring respondents describe problems in work-interactions as situations they become entirely absorbed by. They tend to take conflicts that are going on, and appeals that are made to them, very personally. They have difficulties in maintaining subjective distance. When they feel challenged they are liable to respond. In this way, they lose their grip on the situation and merge themselves with their problems with clients.

These high scoring counselors act like those the psychoanalytic pioneer Aichhorn (1925/1951, p. 138) called "unskilled workers" who don't recognize the importance of transference and who don't understand the metaphorical value of clients' acting out. We observed that this is not so much connected to skills in the academic sense, to years of experience (cf. Cherniss, 1995) or to specific scripts on the other (Forney et al., 1982), but to the absence of a general tendency to start one's reflections from the perspective of the other. High scoring respondents judge situations according to their own standards and take everything that goes on very literally. A comment of respondent 27 illustrates this:

"One day, one of the kids said that my mother is a whore and that she has a fat ass. I said that she shouldn't say things like that. She didn't know my mother and had never even seen her… I come from a decent family, imagine that my mother heard that".

We observed that problems high scoring respondents experience tend to expand to problems with colleagues, executives or clients' relatives. According to De Soria (1996) and Menzies-Lyth (1988), this is the result of psychic defense. Unease experienced at the level of the client-professional relation in this case is projected upon others.

Finally it appeared that high scoring respondents experienced free speaking as a discomfort. Some described themselves as bad talkers or indicated that talking about their personal experiences is not of their habit. Respondent 21 e.g. said that during team meetings he thought his part, but also that he wouldn't say that much, even if things trouble him: "I sometimes go home more stressed than I arrived". A highly imaginary fear of disclosing, of being attacked or of losing the others' love seems to be determinate of their keeping silent (see also: Forney et al., 1982; Firth, 1985). After describing a conflict with a client, one of the respondents puts it as follows:

"What I want to avoid is the wretched feeling that they don't love me anymore or that they don't appreciate me anymore. That's really terrible. It makes me feel low… That's why I avoid talking about it. It's because I'm afraid of having that feeling again" (Respondent 17).

This tendency to keep silent about troubling experiences was repeated during the interview, for, compared to low-scoring respondents, these people had difficulties in describing compromising problems they experience. After having begun talking about a troubled situation, they easily go on with defensive fillers like "but we deal with that professionally" or "but in the evening I switch over the button and don't think about it anymore". Moreover, in talking about their problems they often tended to lose themselves in details. Their stories tended to be rather chaotic and often contained internal contradictions. Respondent 20, for example, first criticizes her colleagues for regarding clients as "poor souls" yet half an hour later she herself describes them with the same words.

Low-scoring respondents

Low-scoring correspondents maintain a subjective distance in their interactions with the other and with events. They, too, often find their expectations regarding their profession do not match their experience. Indeed, Lacan finds a dimension of 'real' inability inherent in all relations that people use to try to influence another (cf. Lacan, 1970/2001, 1991; Verhaeghe, 2001). Yet compared to high scorers the experience of this contradiction was less powerful. It was not perceived as conflicting and it didn't result in the idea that their job is impossible (as it did for high scoring respondents). We suggest that this is because low scorers have a less crystallized imaginary fantasy of the product they aim for (i.e. fewer pre-established fantasies regarding the result, fewer expectations concerning reward) and maintain a symbolic distance towards their job-reality. They tend to have more moderate and flexible expectations of what one can realize. In their relations with clients, they begin not so much from the perspective of their own point of view, but from that of the other. They too want to transform their clients so that things will be better, but have less of a fixed image of what that improvement should look like. Their commitment starts from a much more 'empty,' less narcissistic desire. Low-scoring respondents' primary frame of reference for judging progress remains with the other and not with their own ego. They perceive the difficulties they are confronted with as challenges. These professionals are willing to experiment and have an inquiring approach to difficulties (see also: Cherniss, 1995). The story below illustrates this:

"I always say that we should approach clients in their humanity. Helping is giving them the opportunity to grow. It's contributing to their

development… We have a psychotic and very compulsive woman at the ward. When she just came here, we had a lot of trouble with her and we discussed her case with the psychiatrist for many hours. Now we found an interaction style that proves to work. We told her that in her bedroom she could do what she wants but that outside the bedroom she should adapt to the group. It worked wonderfully well. Now she closes her door and she screams, she puts her hands in her mouth and she goes crazy. But when she opens the door, she functions in the group. It's peculiar, but it's okay for me if is works for her to divide her world the way she does. Outside her bedroom that she's a charming woman and inside of it she can do what she wants. She clearly feels well. It's great like that… We have other psychotic people at the ward. What we want is an interaction-style that is each time adapted to the case" (Respondent 11).

Low-scoring respondents go beyond immediate problems to consider them from a reflective distance. They create a meta-perspective towards difficulties and thus their attitude is marked by a symbolic detachment from the actual situation and creativity. They think about problems strategically and see their job as a kind of social lab in which relations are the chemicals to work with. They realize that a lot of the problems they experience are provoked by the position they take towards their clients, but also take into account their own part in the problem (see also Novick, 1980). Although none of them expressed it these terms, the low scoring respondents take into account the transferential dimension in their work. As a consequence of this attitude, they are not as easily provoked by clients as the high scoring respondents. This results, finally, in a considerable reduction of the feeling of being swamped by the job and in fewer displacements of problems to other areas.

We observed that all of the low-scoring respondents were eager to speak about their extant problems. They verbalized spontaneously. Compared to high-scoring respondents, they dealt differently with incriminating emotions and situations (cf. Zapf et al., 2001). Respondent 5 expresses it as follows:

"Sometimes you are confronted with situations that make you feel powerless, so many things happened in the past and I can't always get a grip on it. You don't always find a way out… but then I have my team and that's an essential condition to cope with it. I think that one is wrong when you take things home. You have to solve your work-problems at work. We have a weekly team meeting and we also have a psychologist we can consult for supervision. But one has to take the initiative. No one is going to ask you what's on your mind. You must say it yourself, you must look for a solution. Those people are paid to help you… The biggest disease in our job are unspoken problems. It only causes misery… By sharing things with others we spread our responsibility. You can't just do it on your own".

At a formal level we found that the low scoring respondents' storytelling was coherent. They spontaneously highlighted diverse facets of the problems they were confronted with and developed a complex story line. At the same time, the examples they gave were limited in extent and time. These respondents were more able to develop a discourse and made creative moves in their thinking. For example, concerning verbalization, respondent number 5, said: "The question one can ask is not: why do I speak with my colleagues about the difficulties I experience, but rather why should I not do it?"

Discussion

This study examined the narratives of low- and high-scoring respondents on a burnout questionnaire. We found that both groups experience a dimension of inability and unpredictability in their professional activity. The job in each case seems to contain a 'real' kernel that can't be grasped. The difference between high and low scoring respondents lies in the way they deal with this structural inability. Low-scoring respondents primarily deal with it in a symbolic way, whereby they take into account the structural context of the events they are confronted with. This detaches them from the events around them and keeps them from narcissistic absorption. They consider the inability they are confronted with as a challenge and on the whole maintain a symbolic distance towards their clients. They consider their job from a meta-perspective and are inclined to explore and to speak about things going wrong. High-scoring respondents deal with the real inability in a different, imaginary way. They cherish a defined and optimistic fantasy of what they want to reach, feel uneasy about the results they achieve and dwell on the reason and meaning of why things don't run the way they imagined. They clash with their job, feel overwhelmed by impossibility and attribute its cause to themselves or to the other. They are easily absorbed by negative events, and unwilling to speak about what's on their mind.

This research has been explorative and indicates the usefulness of the Lacanian theoretical model on the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary for investigating burnout in the caring professions. We believe further elaboration in two directions is necessary. First, the clinical validity of our results should be checked in psychoanalytic practice. Secondly, research in larger populations and in other sectors will be necessary to allow for generalization.

In this study we also observed that groups can have a mediating effect in some cases of burnout. Although we didn't examine this variable systematically, we found indications of how this influence works, whose exact nature nevertheless remains to be investigated. From various accounts we infer that the professional team generates certain taboos for its members by enforcing behavioral do's and don'ts. The case of

respondent 22 illustrates this. Respondent 22 is a young man recruited to assist the personnel of an existing ward for youngsters with severe aggression problems. Up to then, the majority of the personnel working at the ward were women. Last year several of them were seriously attacked and this caused unrest in the team. Youngsters' menacing pronouncements caused anxiety (e.g. "I will lie in wait for your kids coming from school"). In this context of instability a new counselor was recruited. Hoping that this would pacify the ward they chose a man. This example shows how someone can be recruited into a pre-existing narrative. What the team wanted was a man who could control the aggression and in this way temper anxiety. The past incidents in the group determined the position he was to take. In this case the new counselor's own anxiety became a taboo: he was supposed to be strong and brave. We observed how this respondent did indeed identify with the team's wish and, as a consequence, some of his personal experiences became taboo to himself. In his case, free speaking was inhibited, but it is clear that the group stimulated this attitude.

We believe our findings have relevance for clinical practice. Freud (1925/1961, p. 274) once said that everyone in such fields as the special educators we interviewed, "should receive a psycho-analytic training, since without it children, the object of his endeavors, must remain an inaccessible problem to him". We don't propose to go that far, but we do think our results indicate the importance of individual and collective psychoanalytic supervision. High-scoring respondents indeed experienced their clients as inaccessible and strange, giving them a feeling of unease which low-scoring respondents didn't appear to have. We think this is partly because they were in the habit of speaking freely and were able to maintain a symbolic distance from the immediate situation in the intersubjective space between them and their clients, and thus demonstrated a less narcissistic style of approach to their work. Psychoanalytic cures and psychoanalytic supervision are useful because both stimulate the process we observed low scoring respondents to engage in spontaneously.

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4. THREE MECHANISMS OF PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT

4.1. THE DYNAMICS OF PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBJECT AND OTHER: A COMBINED FREUDIAN-LACANIAN INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Herbert Freudenberger, in 1974, first gave burnout its psychological meaning. Although the problem was originally approached from a clinical point of view, the study of the phenomenon remained mainly academic and quantitative in nature (cf. Schaufeli, Maslach and Marek (1993); Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998)). The most often cited definition defines burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur in individuals who do 'people work' of some kind" (Maslach and Jackson 1986, p.1). The application of the label burnout is restricted to individuals who used to function at adequate levels (Schaufeli and Enzmann 1998).

Classical burnout research abounds with certain difficulties: for example, the discriminative validity of the concept is low (e.g. its difference from depression remains problematic) and the quantitative research results yield almost no starting points for intervention. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in research that is more clinically (Schaufeli et al. 2001) and conceptually based (Cordes and Dougherty 1993; Ashforth and Lee 1997). The move we need to make in burnout research now is the same one originally performed by Freud (cf. 1920), i.e. a move away from a symptomatic and descriptive picture to a study of causal dynamics.

Psychoanalytic conceptualizations of burnout are relatively scarce (e.g. Berger 2000; Cooper 1986; Fischer 1983; Freudenberger and Richelson 1980; Garden 1995; Grosch and Olson 1994; Smith and Steindler 1983; Vanheule 2001), but have always tried to grasp the dynamics of the process by which burnout occurs. In this paper we focus on these dynamics, trough a review of the literature and through an analysis of the results of our own qualitative research. Our conceptual guideline is a combination of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic frameworks. The central questions are: 'which are the core dynamics underlying professional burnout? and how can they be understood in the light of our conceptual frameworks?'

Our thesis is that the underlying dynamics can be understood as a particular failure in the relationship between the burnout subject and the Other with respect to the way in which the subject tries to answer the desire of this Other. As such, burnout affects the identity of the subject. We describe three dynamics. Firstly, we consider burnout as the result of a gradual exhaustion-process, based on narcissistic idealization or

masochistic submission; secondly, as the result of the invalidation of an ego ideal in relation to a significant Other; thirdly, as the result of inhibiting incompatible impulses. The three may act in combined ways. Based upon our research we conclude that a one-dimensional depiction of the burnout process is too simplistic (cf. Friedman 1996; Farber 2000). Several mechanisms can lead to a similar burnout symptomatology, and a particular burnout problem is often the result of the interplay between mechanisms. In our discussion, we highlight the implications for treatment.

Research Project

Research population

The research-sample was composed on the basis of a burnout screening. A total of 1317 questionnaires were sent to special educators from the (residential) special youth care sector and from the mentally handicapped care sector (47 institutions). 992 questionnaires were returned to us (response rate: 75.6). The questionnaires with missing values were removed from the sample and this finally resulted in a random sample of 765 special educators (212 from the special youth care sector and 553 from the mentally handicapped care sector). This represents a 10 % of the total group of this kind of educators in Flanders (Belgium). The subgroup of educators from the special youth care sector consists of 70% women; the average age is 33.2 years (SD: 8.6 years); job experience in the sector is 9.8 years on average (SD: 7.9 years). The random sample of educators from the mentally handicapped care sector consists of 70% women; the average age is 34.4 years (SD: 8 years); job experience in the sector is 12.2 years on average (SD: 7.7 years).

During the burnout screening the respondents were asked whether they were willing to participate in an interview. In the final random sample, 185 people agreed. From this group, the 15 highest and the 15 lowest scoring respondents on the burnout questionnaire were selected.

Measures

The burnout screening was carried out by means of the Flemish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Vlerick 1993). The Maslach Burnout Inventory is internationally the most frequently used scale for measuring burnout. Multiple research indicates the validity and reliability of this scale (cf. Schaufeli and Enzmann 1998). Since the scale has been found to be clinically valid (Schaufeli et al. 2001), we can trust that each of

the respondents within the high scoring group is marked by a clinically relevant pattern of personal distress.

The interviews were semi-structured and had a double focus. The respondents were asked to specify the major difficulties they experienced at work in their relations with clients, colleagues and the executive staff and how they dealt with such difficulties. This was done each time by means of two critical incidents. Along the same lines, respondents were asked to specify which factors satisfied them most in these relations. By offering our subjects only general cues to talk about and asking them to report critical incidents, we tried to create an associative discursive situation that resembles psychoanalysis proper (cf. Hollway and Jefferson 2000). Subjects were given the freedom to answer cues however they wanted to, with the assumption that their speech would contain an inner logic that we could discern later. The interviews took between 1.5 and 2 hours and were recorded on tape. Two trained interviewers, who methodologically based themselves on Kvale's (1996) psychoanalytically-based research interviewing, conducted the interviews.

Analysis

The interviews were typed out verbatim. They were methodologically processed on the basis of the systematization Miles and Huberman (1994) added to the methodology of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Every interview was analyzed in detail and coded by each of the two interviewers, using Atlas-ti software. After the initial coding, the researchers met to review the coding of all 30 cases and to resolve any discrepancies. Taking our cue from Lacan's structuralist approach to science (cf. Glynos and Stavrakakis 2002), our aim was to discern the implicit patterns and elementary structures in the raw material of the data at hand.

We chose this methodology because it enables us to develop a conceptualization based on observed data in an exploratory way (cf. Vanheule 2002; Wechselblatt et al. 2000), and because these methods proceed very thoroughly in data analysis. They enable researchers to base their investigations on (the lack of) an existing theory and to incorporate elements of existing technical literature if these prove to be useful.

In order to answer our questions, we focus on the 15 high scoring respondents. In other publications (e.g. authors, in press) we focus on the differences between high and low scoring respondents.

Results: The dynamics of burnout

Analyzing our research data we observed three patterns in the way people describe their interrelations with others and problems experienced in this relation. We conclude that these correspond to three dynamical subtypes/sub-processes of burnout: 1. Burnout as the result of exhaustion through narcissistic idealization or masochistic submission; 2. Burnout as the result of the invalidation of an ego ideal in relation to a significant Other; 3. Burnout as the result of inhibition due to incompatible impulses. In this section we will highlight these patterns/dynamical subtypes. We will first give a schematic overview of central traits that are characteristic of each pattern/dynamical subtype:

Pattern / Subtype burnout	Exhaustion through narcissistic idealization or masochistic submission	Invalidation of an ego ideal in relation to a significant Other	Inhibition due to incompatible impulses
Characteristic traits	• Experience of absorption • Feeling overwhelmed by the other / the job • Inability to take distance from the job / the problem • Inability to draw bounds • Experience of insistent necessity to comply with exigencies formulated by oneself or the other • Comments of others are seen as critiques • Thinking in extremes / inability to make compromises	• Radical change in relation to the other / the job • Former engagement and motivation disappeared and feelings of emptiness • Fundamental feeling of being deceived • Suspicion towards and fear of the other • Strong complaining on the job / the other • Inability to narrate in a structured way	• Strong experience of difficulties but problems in explaining what these problems are • Rationalization • Fleeing from / disinterest in problems • Strong (tendency to) withdrawal from the job • Narrated problems concern aggression and strangeness of the other • Difficulties in framing problems

Given that our insight into these patterns/dynamical subtypes was a dialectical process that was based on the interaction between our data-analysis and a review of psychoanalytic literature dealing with this issue, we opted to frame these characteristic traits by describing each dynamical

subtype through a combination of relevant conceptual insights and clinical vignettes drawn from our data. This combined use of research data and existing literature reflects a common approach in qualitative research (cf. Strauss and Corbin 1997).

Burnout as the result of exhaustion through narcissistic idealization or masochistic submission

The characteristics found in the first dynamical subtype are partially consistent with Freudenberger's classical view of burnout that considered it as a chronic condition caused by exhaustion as a result of over-commitment. He accentuated the narcissistic nature of the process. On the other hand, our data also confirms contemporary views that stress the influence of external cultural factors, in combination with masochistic defenses. The implication, therefore, is that these two perspectives can be read together.

According to Freudenberger (1986, p. 247), "Burnout is a process that comes about as a consequence of a depletion of energies, as well as feelings of being overwhelmed with many issues that may confront an individual". Burnout candidates are "personal strivers and achievers" (Freudenberger and North 1985, p. 9), who don't admit their limitations and who tend to set impossible tasks for themselves. The typical burnout victim is described as "charismatic, energetic, impatient and given to high standards, throwing himself into whatever he does with all his might, expecting it to provide rewards commensurate with the effort spent" (Freudenberger and Richelson 1980, p. 103).

According to this classic view, burnout is the result of a gradual process and can be considered the pathological continuation of job stress (Freudenberger and North 1985, p. 20). Denial in order to be able to persist in current habits is a major characteristic of the problem, expressed by rigidity, inflexibility and over-involvement in the job (Freudenberger and North 1985, p. 50). The underlying desire seems to be one of proving oneself in relation to others.

Freudenberger situates the kernel of the problem at the level of the ego. The patient has suppressed and denied his or her "real self" for too long while molding himself/herself according to an externally imposed standard. As a result, he or she loses touch with his/her "own authentic voice and feelings" (Freudenberger and North 1985, p. 62). Pivotal to this process, from a dynamic point of view, is an illusion of narcissistic grandiosity (Fischer 1983). Both Fischer and Freudenberger consider a fear of inferiority in comparison to others to be at the basis of this striving. These patients exhaust themselves in denying their own frailties, and invest a great deal in their job in order to find a sense of identity (Freudenberger 1982, p. 178).

Along the same lines, it is frequently observed that caregivers – the most predominant professional subject group in burnout research – look to their job to satisfy a narcissistic longing to be appreciated. Grosch and Olsen (1994) state from a Kohutian perspective that people prone to burnout tend to treat their patients as self-objects, who are there for them and whose autonomous self is not recognized. In this way, a basic fragility of the self is compensated for through contacts with patients. By means of the self-object, a caregiver tries to satisfy a basic need such as the need to be liked or admired. "Burned-out [sic] professionals may be exhausted by the efforts … to recreate consistently self-object experiences" (Grosch and Olsen 1994, p. 147). A typical complaint in this subtype of burnout is the feeling that work consumes the worker (Farber 2000). Fusing the self with work, the person runs the risk of losing his/her own individuality. This causes anxiety.

In our data we could clearly discern this dynamical subtype. The clinical vignette of John illustrates it in the relation to the clients he wants to help.

> John, 49 years old. He is a social worker who complains about work suffocating him. It occupies him too much. Some years ago, while having a full-time job in youth-guidance, he and his wife used to take care of drug-addicts and ex-prisoners at home. 'Helping is in my blood' he tells. Driven by what he calls 'Christian ideals of loving ones neighbor' they started an alternative assistance-project. John: 'We had the feeling we really had something that we wanted to share with others … But after a while we got a double life. I worked as a social worker and gave assistance at home. It was too much. I bit off more than I could chew and the situation was no longer bearable. At last you have a breakdown. Your marriage is under pressure, you hardly have time for each other and your kids get in the background. I'm still religious, my ideas are still important to me but I cannot function as a social worker anymore. I could not give assistance anymore'.

Whereas classical burnout-research especially, but not exclusively (cf. Freudenberger and North 1985), accentuates the narcissistic nature of the burnout process, contemporary authors stress the influence of external cultural factors in combination with masochistic defenses. Meissner (1997) highlights how changes in gender roles and patterns of job involvement result in conflict and stress. Aubert and de Gaulejac (1991) stress the compulsory influence of the search for excellence that dominates contemporary business. This may easily result in an exhausting fusion of the employee with the organization, stimulated by the profit-seeking firm[21].

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[21] In order to survive in the global economic marketplace, management focuses on improving anything possible, thus stimulating people to excel and exhaust themselves.

Berger (2000) adds a dynamic dimension to this discussion by observing a troubling interplay between the demanding environment and the self-punishing and punishment-fearing tendencies in psychoanalytically treated burnout patients. Self-punishing individuals are easily seduced into exhausting themselves in relation to their job. No matter how hard they work, their super-egos, mirroring the demands made by the employer, will always tell them that what they do is never good enough.

Based on a study of burnout in psychoanalysts, Cooper (1986) and Horner (1993) combine classical and contemporary views. They conclude that people who rely heavily on masochistic and narcissistic defenses are most prone to burnout. Narcissistically inclined individuals are prone because of the idealizing relation they possess toward objects that tends to make them to fall short (cf. the dynamics described by Freudenberger). Masochistically inclined individuals are prone to burnout to the extent that they adopt the role of victim in conditions where they feel chronically bored and angry (cf. the dynamics described by Berger). These individuals are self-pitying and "willing to doom themselves to a relatively pleasureless professional existence, for the sake of the deflection of the inner reproach against their talent or skill" (Cooper 1986, p. 445). Consequently, masochistically organized individuals are easily seduced into exhausting themselves in their job.

This kind of exhaustion was clearly reflected in our research population. The clinical vignette of Rose indicates this pattern in the way she relates to her colleagues.

> Rose, 31 years old. Rose is a head-nurse working with mentally disabled kids and coordinating the team of nurses as well. Her main complaint is 'that pressure of work is too high'. At the same time, she says she 'rather has a sense of responsibility'. 'If colleagues don't have time to do something, I say to myself I will do it in a hurry … I usually have a lot of mercy for others'. Rose says she has difficulties in asserting herself. 'I'm not like that … asserting yourself is always at the expense of someone else'. E.g., she once planned to do the spring-cleaning with a colleague during a weekend when the kids would not be in the institution. She even changed working hours with a third colleague, in order to be there for the cleaning. 'In the evening, I realized that during that particular weekend I planned to go away with my husband … On top of that, later that week it seemed that the kids would not go home, so that we would not be able to do the spring-cleaning. I thought, in fact, that I could change hours again with my colleague, so that I could indeed go away for

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Employees are continuously confronted with the objectives they are expected to reach and all their mental energy is channelled in attaining goals and improving their performance.

the weekend with my family. But I left things as they were, while I could have asked. I kept thinking I should ask, but I'm easy to get on with and I always postpone things. If I had claimed my weekend, the colleague I changed hours with would have had to arrange baby-sitting. I should have asked earlier. I always get carried away'.

Unlike with narcissistically oriented individuals, this exhaustion is not due to attempts to install a glorious self-image. Rather it is the effect of unlimited devotion and slavish submission to demands and whims made in the context of the job (by the boss, clients, i.e. by the Other). These patients feel unable to withdraw from the demands of others but simultaneously know that what they are doing is unreasonable.

Cooper (1986) considers narcissistic and masochistic pathology closely intertwined. In the context of burnout, we do see indeed some remarkable parallels. In both instances, the patients devote themselves unlimitedly and their devotion is a matter of fulfilling a kind of 'vocation'. For Freud, such a one-sided libidinal choice implies a subjective danger. "Just as a cautious business-man avoids tying up all his capital in one concern, so, perhaps, worldly wisdom will advise us not to look for the whole of our satisfaction from a single aspiration" (Freud 1930, p. 84). Through narcissistic idealization and slavish submission, people prone to burnout fall into precisely this trap. They expect gratification from a single domain in life (work) by being exclusively and stubbornly attached to their jobs and to an idea of what they want to realize (cf. Hallsten 1993). In both cases, this can lead to exhaustion, because they take their ideas for reality. This tendency becomes obvious in their relation to others, since they tend to interpret interactions in what we call an imaginary[22] way. Critical or negative remarks by colleagues, seniors or clients are easily experienced as painful criticism, a personal attack or as a tactical power game.

From a Freudian and Lacanian point of view, we can recognize two mechanisms at work in the processes described: idealization and exhaustion. In every case, these mechanisms are embedded in the relation between subject and Other[23].

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[22] Lacan's concept of the 'imaginary' refers to the activity of image building and to the realm of subjective images. It encompasses the assumptions and representations people have of themselves and others. According to Lacan, imaginary constructions are on the one hand formative, since they stimulate people to *be* in certain way (e.g. to be like or unlike the other). They consequently function as Gestalts. On the other hand imaginary formations are coupled with misjudgement and (self-)deception since they are fundamentally biased. They don't take into account the relativity of assumptions and simplify a complex reality. Lacan situates emotions like love and hate in this domain, but also people's paranoid impressions.

[23] The Lacanian expression 'Other' stands for the significant others, usually the parental figures, and for language as such, because the significant others convey their demands and desires by way of language. In this way, the concept of the 'Other' is a very dense

The dynamics described repeatedly imply a person idealizing an image of him/herself in relation to their job. By means of idealization, an object is cathected and overvalued in order to overcome a narcissistic lack. According to Freud (1914), idealization is possible with regard to ego-libido as well as object-libido. People vulnerable to exhaustion through narcissism seem to take their own ego as their object. They promise themselves a great future in order to conquer their daily misery. As such, they aim at restoring narcissistic completeness. Moreover, they tend to use their work (e.g. contacts with patients) in creating narcissistically gratifying experiences (see also: Cooper 1986; Grosch and Olsen 1994). The people vulnerable to exhaustion through masochistic submission seem to idealize the other as an object. From a Lacanian perspective, they want to fulfill what the Other is supposed to desire, by being the solution for the Other's lack. This choice thus implies an idealization at the level of the subject as well: he or she is what the Other lacks.

Freud (1921) indicates that idealization increases the claims made by the super-ego. Since the super-ego tells the ego that a gap between the actual ego and the ideal ego remains, exhaustion is to be expected when someone excessively idealizes himself/herself by means of his/her job and accordingly tries to resemble this idealized picture (cf. the vignette of John). Exhaustion is problematic since in a state of exhaustion, latent psychic conflicts may come to the fore (Freud 1937).

From a Lacanian point of view, idealization is an imaginary process (Lacan 1992) through which a subject identifies with an object (such as the image of oneself in one's job), in order to cope with an inner lack. The object is first exalted, and then the exalted object is expected to mirror an image of completeness back to the subject. In this way, the subject anticipates a feeling of completeness. But for Lacan, the inner lack at the core of subjective identity is structurally determined, and obliges the subject to turn to the Other for an answer[24]. As a consequence, an "authentic voice" or a "real self" does not exist, and every solution has to reckon with the irrevocability of the original lack. This is precisely what is denied through the processes of idealization and masochistic submission described above, hence the exhaustion. These processes illustrate how the identity of the subject is formed through interaction with the Other. This is even more important in our next subtype.

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one. It denotes the (words of the) parental others, and of all those who follow in their wake and who we trust in. On a more abstract level, the Other amounts to the discourse of our socio-cultural group, of the cultural messages we receive.

[24] As this is a very central idea in Lacan's theory, it is impossible to elaborate it here exhaustively (see Verhaeghe 2001). Suffice it to say that it is quite close to Freud's early conceptualization on the formation of the ego (Freud 1895). Recent research has confirmed the idea of a lack of an original identity (Fonagy et al. 2002).

Burnout as the result of the invalidation of an ego ideal in relation to a significant other

The characteristics found in the second dynamical subtype can be formulated by relating them to the psychoanalytic idea concerning an ego ideal that loses its mediating function between subject and Other. The relationship between such a loss and depression is classical (cf. Freud 1917). The link to identity-formation in relation to the Other is, however, less classical. We believe that by such a loss, the subject loses its certainty about its own identity in relation to the object. From an economic point of view, the original investment in the ego ideal has to be withdrawn. The result is a painful mood, quite close to depression but, as we will show, burnout and depression are not the same things. This idea of a painful mood puts the Lacanian notion of enjoyment into the foreground. In order to explain this we need to make a brief detour into Lacan's theory of the formation of the subject and the ego ideal.

For Lacan, human identity is acquired through a process of identification and separation in relation to the Other (cf. note 4). The subject-to-be identifies itself with the desire of the Other, as expressed by his or her words.[25] At the same time, the subject takes its distance (separation) from certain parts of the messages coming from the Other. The net result is the formation of a divided identity, called the subject (cf. Fink 1995; Patsalides and Patsalides 2001; Verhaeghe 1998). Every identity comes from the Other, meaning that there is no original 'true' identity. It is for this reason that Lacan interpreted the Freudian process of identification as alienation.[26] For Lacan, the core of subjectivity is empty. It is only through identification with signifiers[27] coming from the Other that a subject starts knowing and even being who he/she is.

In this context, the ego ideal is to be understood as the core signifiers a subject identifies with and invests in (e.g. the demand of the Other: "be helpful", is translated into the ego ideal of helping others). The

[25] For Lacan, man's most fundamental desire is to be recognized by the Other. Without intersubjective recognition human beings, socially speaking, have no identity of their own. The subject desires to be desired, and as such it tries to mould itself in relation to the perceived desires of the Other.

[26] It is because the identifying subject always adopts an instance that was originally *alien* to the subject, that Lacan equalizes identification to 'alienation'. The term alienation is mainly used in social thinking and refers to feelings of estrangement in modern society. Lacan interprets the concept differently and gives a more positive meaning to it, linking it to the nature of relatedness between the subject and the other (cf. Lacan 1966, p.181, "It's with the other the subject identifies, and it's in the other the subject first feels unified," our translation). Since the subject doesn't have an original identity, identification with fundamentally alien elements of the other (i.e. alienation) enables the subject to acquire identity and relatedness with the other.

[27] The term 'signifier' is a concept Lacan borrowed from linguistics. It refers to the ambiguous dimension of a word; a word has no definite meaning and only obtains meaning within a context. Hence, during communication, every signifier has to be interpreted by the receiver of the message.

ego ideal is a representational point of view situated in the Other from which the subject moulds himself/herself, and upon which basis he or she feels loved by others (cf. Lacan 1977). What the subject does here is provide an answer to the desire of the Other (Lacan 1966), since the main thing the subject wants is to be recognized by the Other (e.g. 'I aim at being helpful since I have the impression this is what the other wants from me'). This ego ideal has a structural function: by means of identifying with the signifiers expressing this ego ideal, a subject starts knowing who he/she is (e.g. I am 'helpful').

Originally the subject acquires its identity through interaction with the parental figures but it does not stop there. Later on, other authority figures take up the position of the Other, thus continuing the process on a larger social scale (Lacan 1977). Whenever a subject meets with a desire of the Other, he will either identify with it by taking in the signifiers of this Other, or he will refuse them. Every identification has a symbolic as well as an imaginary dimension. On the one hand, identification is symbolic, because the subject identifies with a signifier or a symbol that has to be interpreted by the subject itself (e.g. the signifier 'helpful' has to be filled in). But on the other hand, identification is also imaginary since a subject anticipates a self-image (e.g. 'I am helpful'). In Lacanian terms, a successful ideal ego is anticipated through an ego ideal (Lacan 1988). Psychoanalysts generally agree that working is related to fulfilling ideals and realizing identifications (Blum 1997).

Based on the interviews that fit within this second dynamical subtype, we conclude that burnout can arise when, in the context of work, a subject gets the impression that someone placed in the position of the Other from whom the subject expects appreciation, invalidates and attacks the subject's ego ideal. In this process the idealized message emitted from the Other, with which the subject once identified in order to answer to desire of the Other, is suddenly put into question and loses its mediating function. The investment the subject made in the ideal appears to be ridiculed. Since it is by means of an ego ideal that subjects obtain a feeling of unity, the questioning of the ego ideal brutally confronts the subject with its original lack of identity. According to Lacan (1966, p. 680), the net results are feelings of depersonalization and subjective disintegration whenever the subject can no longer hold on to his/her ego ideal. In this case, the subject suffers a loss of identity since he/she literally no longer knows what the Other wants from him/her and what he/she ought to do. Even more so, he/she does not longer know who he or she is in relation to the Other (cf. Vanheule 2001).

In this dynamical subtype, the main cause of burnout can be considered indirect[28]. Burnout in this case occurs if a subject has the

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[28] The burnout process will be *stimulated directly* if, at a cultural level, once highly valued identificatory signifiers are put into question. Through the cultural devaluation of the message conveyed by these signifiers, the subject attached to it loses his or her desired relation to the Other (be it an authority figure, an organization or even society in general),

impression – it is a matter of interpretation – that a significant Other (boss, client…) radically invalidates or attacks the role the subject aspires to in relation to this Other. In this case the ego ideal, mediating between the subject and the Other, is invalidated. At the same time, the subject loses part of its identity in relation to this Other, and becomes confronted with feelings of emptiness.

Our next clinical vignette indicates such a loss in the relation of an employee to her boss.

> Cindy, 34 years old. Cindy is a social worker, working in a guidance-center for youngsters. Last year, she temporarily worked as a family-counselor replacing a pregnant colleague. Cindy: 'I invested a lot in it. I worked for hours and hours and hours'. Recently, the regular family-counselor left the institution. The manager decided to recruit someone else and published an ad in a major newspaper. 'I found out they were looking for a new family-counselor via the newspaper. My colleagues had already told me that the publication of the ad was on its way, and that it would cost more than a month's salary, but I didn't believe them. I considered it possible he would advertise in a newspaper, but I didn't believe for one moment that he wouldn't tell me about it in advance, that he wouldn't inform me. When I saw it in the newspaper, I thought they don't take me into account, not at all, not at all. I could have understood him giving the job to someone else. But I couldn't understand why he handled the matter the way he did it. I became suspicious and I started seeing things that were not there. I thought the management was not satisfied with me as a social worker and that they would fire me or that suddenly someone else would replace me. I had no self-confidence anymore. I started to question myself why I had worked myself to death. Finally, I couldn't stand it anymore and saw no way out but leaving, I said no, I won't stay here. This is bad'. As a reaction to the situation, she became totally disillusioned and decided to leave the institution.

Through the invalidation of the ego ideal in the relation between the subject and the Other, the strange dimension of what Lacan calls

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or at least is unable to gain the same amount of satisfaction from his or her attachment to the idealized signifier. For example, some thirty years ago in European society, headmasters and teachers were highly esteemed. Their title alone used to fill others with awe. Nowadays, however, this is considerably less so. The effect of this on people who base their identity on these signifiers is considerable; they feel this devaluation at the level of their identity. Especially those who really strove to be respected via their position feel particularly degraded. We don't mean to suggest that this kind of degradation can cause burnout on its own by bringing about a loss of the ego ideal, but it is without doubt an important factor.

enjoyment[29] comes into the foreground. The Other, formerly viewed as a favorable Other one could trust in, now suddenly takes the shape of a threatening agent. This can be seen in the vignette of Cindy as she starts getting suspicious about the manager. The Other appears as a cruel person who is acting at the subject's expense and who is supposed to enjoy in an impermissible way. Zizek (1998) argues that the dimension of enjoyment destabilizes the relation between subject and Other, in contrast to the ego ideal that stabilizes this relation. These dynamics provide an explanation for this remarkable observation: when one's ego ideal is radically questioned, the Other one relates to appears as a threatening agent[30].

During our research interviews we frequently observed this dimension of the enjoying Other as seen in the following clinical vignette.

> Karen, 42 years old. Karen works with mentally disabled youngsters who have behavior problems. Karen: 'I'm despondent. You try to give them a chance, to offer them opportunities, to trust them and all they do is lie and cheat. You invest a lot of time in these kids but they always trick you. They deceive you whenever it is possible. They pretend friendliness when they need you. They really use you; they exploit you. And do you think they show any consideration? Never'. Karen says she feels resentful and indifferent, and that she made the wrong choice in wanting to work with these kids. 'Take last Sunday for example. I was alone in the house with two kids. They came to wake me up, they like doing that. I tried to have a pleasant day with them. We made chocolate pudding, I know they like it for dessert. I told them we would go to the flea market, but that I first had to finish a report. I switched on the television and asked them to watch cartoons quietly for half an hour. But two minutes later they are teasing each other and fighting with cushions. I intervene and five minutes later they are fighting again. They really cannot take into account my point of view. This goes on continuously. It's the most important breaking point to me. Those

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[29] Following Zizek (1998) we use the term enjoyment as a translation of the French term 'jouissance'. The concept was introduced by Lacan in the early fifties and evolved throughout his work, changing its meaning relatively. For us, in this context, it indicates a polymorph perverse enjoyment beyond ('*jenseits*') the moral distinction between good and evil. It is a concept aligned with Freud's ideas on the radically mal-adjusted nature of the drive. The drive doesn't 'know' anything about what is good and bad; it just strives for satisfaction. Jouissance indicates man's enjoyment in transgressing the law by acting out his drives. By its lawless nature, jouissance is to be distinguished from pleasure (Freud: "Lust").

[30] We find this destabilizing dimension in research showing that people with burnout perceive others as a source of threat and interpret other's critical opinions as an indication of their own failure (Forney, Wallace-Schutzman and Wiggers 1982). Other studies show that, in pathologically stressed people, negatively experienced work relations often go hand in hand with a fear of being brought down and humiliated if one moves too close to others (Firth 1985).

kids really mentally hurt me.' Actually, Karen is looking for another job: 'I don't want to work as a social worker anymore. It doesn't interest me anymore. It's hopeless anyway. What I want to do now is to go into graphic design…'. Karen's initial enthusiasm to help the youngsters turned into aversion towards the idea of working with them.

This dimension of enjoyment is important for two reasons. First of all, it permits us to differentiate between burnout and depression. Secondly, it opens a perspective to a third subtype.

Depression can be provoked – just like burnout – by a loss at the level of the ego ideal (Lacan 1988, p. 3; Cottet 1985). As an ego ideal is invalidated, the lack in both the subject and the Other is pushed to the fore. This lack is a troubling emptiness in the symbolic with which the subject has to deal, both in burnout and in depression. But our research cases indicate that in cases of burnout, unlike depression, the Other as an enjoying entity is always predominant. The burnout subject largely projects its experienced discontent onto the Other which is blamed for causing the loss at the level of the ego ideal. We thus observe a typically dual imaginary relation wherein the subject opposes the Other in whose image all of the experienced strangeness and aggression become crystallized.

In depression the opposite is true, for the depressive subject tends to blame himself/herself for things going wrong (Freud 1917). In this case, the subject attributes the experienced strangeness to him/herself; he/she is troubled because of a strange enjoyment within him/herself. Consequently, at the imaginary level, we observe diminution in self-regard and disintegration of the previous self-image. Moreover, as a consequence of the typical projections, burnout is more localized to one domain of life, while depression is more general (cf. Maslach and Schaufeli 1993). The burnt-out subject can blame one specific Other in one specific context (cf. Cindy versus the manager and Karen versus the difficult youngsters), thus protecting him/herself in other areas. This is not the case in depression.

The invalidation of an ego ideal may emerge gradually as well as suddenly. In Cindy's case burnout was sudden, while in Karen's it was gradual. The gradual loss of one's ego ideal is described clearly by Farber (2000) in his study of the worn-out type of burnout. This type is characterized by a clinical picture in which a person stops "attempting to succeed in situations that appear hopeless" (Farber 2000, p. 678). They gradually lose their dedication "by the cumulative effects of dealing with situations that they perceive as beyond their control" (Farber 2000, p. 678). People who gradually lose their ego ideal have the impression that their former motivation was based upon an illusion. What they once did seems now to be irrelevant.

If we compare this subtype to the first described above, we can say that patients of the first type still cling to their ego ideal, and become exhausted because of their attempt to realize the impossible. In contrast, patients in the second subtype have given up; it is the ego ideal itself that loses its function. Hence this subtype has more serious effects on the subjective experience of identity, albeit restricted to the professional area. Hence, too, the confrontation with the lack in the symbolic and the ensuing enjoyment. For Lacan, the latter has always to do with the drive, and especially with that part of the drive that is considered to be incompatible with the subjective identity. This brings us to the third subtype.

Burnout as the result of inhibition due to incompatible impulses

The characteristic traits of the third dynamical subtype we discerned can be related to the mechanism of neurotic inhibition. Psychoanalysts have already developed this model in order to understand troubled work relations (cf. Socarides and Kramer 1997). Nevertheless, the concept has not commonly been brought to bear on burnout.

We will discuss the inhibitory mechanism with a case study by Schwartz and Will (1953). Miss Jones works as a nurse with highly disturbed patients. After a brief absence from the ward, she seemed to function less well than before. In an environment of low morale among the personnel, she interacted less effectively with the patients. She had the impression that patients withdrew from interaction. Many were negativistic and resistant, and their negative characteristics were exaggerated: aggressive patients were more aggressive; demanding patients were more demanding… These negative traits in the patients led Miss Jones to feel hostile, angry, and resentful towards them. However, she couldn't bear her own hostility: "My hostility towards them was most disturbing" (Schwartz and Will 1953, p. 340). As a consequence, she had the impression that she couldn't fulfill both her own and the institution's expectations, and felt guilty. In order to avoid negative interactions, she tended to withdraw from patients. Moreover, she felt fatigued, uninterested and indifferent towards them and she was sporadically ill. As a consequence of this avoidance her anxiety was reduced and she prevented herself from experiencing discomfort. "If I make no effort to move towards patients, I won't fail. If I don't get involved with them, I won't be uncomfortable" (Schwartz and Will 1953, p. 343).

The inclination to deal with patients in an impersonal way and to avoid closeness by treating them as objects are examples of inhibition, characteristics that are also often observed in people with burnout (Maslach and Jackson 1986; Maslach and Schaufeli 1993; Zagier Roberts 1994). By acting in this way, a situation of relational closeness that could elicit the impulses to be avoided, is in itself avoided. Indeed, working with other human beings presents a particular difficulty for the professionals

concerned since it provokes ideas and experiences that are experienced as unbearable, and that contradict the ideals of caring. Psychoanalysts from the Tavistock tradition, who studied burnout in human service professionals by institutional consulting, describe this duality as a substrate of burnout (Obholzer and Zagier Roberts 1994). The reality of caring places a dimension that the caregiver prefers not to be confronted with into the foreground, such as feelings of helplessness, inadequacy or feelings of aggression and hatred (Moylan 1994; Mawson 1994). Other incompatible feelings are disgust and sexual impulses towards clients (Menzies Lyth 1988), and the tendency to identify professional situations with situations in private life (Zagier Roberts 1994). The ideals of caring, on the contrary, imply a denial of one's own destructive and sexual impulses (Ansermet and Sorrentino 1991; Lacan 1992; Menzies Lyth 1988). Since the appearance of these antithetic tendencies resembles a situation of transgression, their presence may result in psychic conflict, anxiety and shame. They will nourish the subjective feeling of guilt and can result in a flight from the situation. The more distressed the client group (Moylan 1994), and the more a client group appeals to a dimension the professional denies, the more difficult will it be for the latter to deal with these impulses.

We observed that all of the professionals interviewed spontaneously defended against these antithetic tendencies but also discovered that those who fit within this third dynamical subtype were unable to tolerate their own ambivalence. We conclude that this results in inhibition. By means of this defense mechanism, the situation that would elicit the uncomfortable feelings is avoided.

From our conceptual perspective, inhibition has to be understood as a specific operation through which the subjective identity in relation to the Other is kept intact. This is the main difference with the previous subtype. On the other hand, the attempts to realize the ego ideal stop. Unlike in the first subtype, here the subject's striving in relation to the Other comes to a stop.

According to Freud, a neurotic inhibition is "the expression of a restriction of an ego-function" (Freud 1926, p. 89; 1933, p. 83). Working is one of those ego-functions. On a phenomenological level, a variety of disturbances in the exercise of a function can be considered as inhibitions. Examples Freud gives include a decrease in the pleasure of a function, a reduction in the ability to carry out a function or negative reactions (such as anxiety) in carrying out a function. In the case of Miss Jones, inhibition is observable in her withdrawal from interactions with patients, in her illness and in her fatigue.

Inhibitions are typically based upon a dynamic process of defense, namely renunciation. Freud explains how the inhibiting ego renounces a function in order to avoid a psycho-neurotic conflict. This conflict concerns

a contradiction between two inner tendencies: a tendency within the ego and a contradicting impulse. The latter is described classically as sexual and/or aggressive (Freud 1926; Fenichel 1932), i.e. the drive. The inhibited person chooses to shun this conflict and limits the associated ego-function. In other words: an impulse at the level of the drives presses in through a function, but contradicts the ideational context of the ego, i.e. the subjective identity. The ego is unable to stand this pressure and renounces the function in order to be able to maintain the subjective identity. This self-imposed limitation consequently serves as an indication of an underlying conflict. Hence, the identity as such is kept intact, the loss concerns the functioning.

Lacan discusses the inhibitory mechanism by stating that inhibition produces an arrest in the relation between subject and Other: the expected exercise of a function towards the Other doesn't arise. There is a block at the level of movement,[31] a dimension that is (at least metaphorically) present in all functions (Lacan 1962-1963). Job performance could, for example, be hampered by it. Lacan further elaborates the Freudian position that conflict lies at the basis of inhibitions. For Lacan, an inhibition is the consequence of introducing a desire into a function that is different from the desire that function normally satisfied (Lacan 1962-1963). Inhibition results from a defense process against this secondarily-introduced desire and especially against the accompanying enjoyment. The subject tries to have nothing to do with it and renounces the function altogether. In Miss Jones' case, this secondarily-introduced desire concerns her anger and hostility toward the patients. This has to do with the dimension of enjoyment, as described in our second subtype. There it was handled by ascribing it to the Other. Here, in contrast, the subject attempts to avoid it through inhibition, thereby preventing the formation of symptoms, which would be the symbolic expression of that conflict.

Since inhibition is expressed by restricting the ego's functioning and avoiding psycho-neurotic conflict, it is difficult to present an illuminating vignette from our research. What caught our attention in cases of inhibition during the interviews were precisely the lack of psychic elaboration and a tendency to run away from things bothering them (cf. Schwartz and Will's Miss Jones who was initially not willing to talk). The following case illustrates this.

Frank (46) is a social worker, working with severe mentally disabled adults. He presents himself and talks to us in a very indifferent and

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[31] When Freud (1926) discusses inhibition, he particularly refers to *functions* that – when uninhibited – imply a *progressive course* (Freud discusses eating, locomotion and working). In his discussion, Lacan (1962-1963) especially focuses on locomotion. Inhibition brings about an inability to move and Lacan takes this block of movement as a paradigm for all inhibitions. He states that the dimension of movement (cf. the progressive course inherent to functions) is metaphorically present in all functions.

unemotional way. The interview we had flagged continuously. Although he feels work flags too, he almost can't give an account of it. Frank: 'It is rather difficult for me, I don't feel that happy in my job. I still want, but things don't work anymore … It is difficult to express, but it becomes more and more difficult to put myself into the clients … The daily problems are bothering me, I can't put a stop to them. The problems I'm confronted with are complex. They are emotional problems.' Because of the interviewer's insistent questions he finally gives an example of problems with clients. 'I know someone in the group who always tried to be the center of my attention. At a certain moment I took notice of it. But it escalated and then I started yelling and screaming and things like that. I tried to know why, and at a certain moment I thought her yelling was a matter of attracting attention'. Frank has the feeling work became too difficult and wants to flee: 'It is a small-scale institution, so it is difficult to hide away or to do something else. My career in this sector is over. I will now take special leave and afterwards I won't go on much longer'.

In this vignette, only slips of the tongue give an indication of the disturbing dimension Frank defends against, i.e. his underlying aggression towards clients. Aggression is indirectly indicated by his 'I' substituted for 'she' when Frank talks about a client's yelling: 'I know someone in the group who always tried to be the center of my attention … it escalated and then I started yelling and screaming and things like that. I tried to know why, and at a certain moment I thought her yelling was a matter of attracting attention'.

Discussion

Presented here are three burnout-dynamics. We don't pretend to be exhaustive, nor are the three dynamics exclusive.[32] Based upon our research and clinical practice we assume that in many cases burnout is the result of an interplay between the mechanisms described. Our results demonstrate that the most likely combinations are 1 and 2 or 1 and 3. We never observed a combination between 2 and 3. The following clinical vignette illustrates the interplay of dynamics 1 and 2.

Illustration clinical vignette: Tina, 29 years old. Tina worked with mentally disabled youngsters but was recently dismissed. The problems she describes are due to a combination of exhaustion (dynamics similar to vignette John) and an indirect loss of her ego

[32] For example, we did not describe other subtypes discerned in the context of burnout, such as the under-challenged or bored employee (Farber 2000), nor the worn-out employee who is vaguely dissatisfied with his or her working conditions (Fischer 1983).

ideal (dynamics similar to vignette Cindy). Brief example of exhaustion: 'I really did my very best and really, I'm all in, I'm exhausted I'm tired. I had no private life anymore. I was always and continuously at work and besides work there was almost nothing. I gave everything. A bit too much in fact.' Brief example of loss ego ideal: 'I was recruited to do ergotherapy, although I'm not qualified to do this work, and they knew it. Right now, as I was getting the feeling things were going well, I got fired. My direct chief never commented on my work but behind my back she went complaining to the manager. I heard it in the manager's voice. It's a dirty trick … my contacts with the youngsters were really good. I guess my direct chief was jealous of me. She's very dominant … I really didn't get a chance … I'm really disappointed … I can't stand it. Is this the way they deal with employees in social work?'

It would be interesting to study the nature of this interconnectedness and the characteristics of the combinations observed more thoroughly. Research into the nature of the transference relation during psychoanalysis of burnt-out persons could be especially illuminating. Our insight into interconnectedness could conceivably guide us when focusing on interventions.

For us, intervention should not focus solely on the pressures of work or fatigue as such, but also on the position a person repeatedly takes in relation to others through his/her job. Analysts should concentrate on the subjective meaning work has in the relation between subject and Other. Treatment, for example, might focus on a person's tendency toward excessive libidinal investment in the job, on the tendency to relate results in the job to oneself in a narcissistic way or on a person's tendency systematically to flee situations of aggression and to defend strongly against ambivalence. The central characteristics of the position that someone takes in relation to the Other in a work relationship will be repeated in the transference. The specificity of a Lacanian intervention is that it will focus on the core signifiers the person uses to relate on the job and with others. These signifiers constitute the frame of one's identity. By unraveling and working through the structure of these signifiers, subjects can break the repetition they are involved in and make new choices in relation to the Other and to work.

Further research needs to be taken to determine whether the tripartite structure we have explored proves consistent, whether our insights are clinically valid and whether the results are generalizable to other professional settings. Our research project draws on research-interviews based on a representative sample and on a limited amount of interviews. Compared with the richness of information gathered during psychoanalytic sessions, these are necessarily superficial. In order to gain further in-depth insight into the nature of burnout, a study of it within a classical psychoanalytic setting would be illuminating. While our

interpretations start out from a combined Freudian-Lacanian framework, the inherent limitation of doing so is that scholars departing from other traditions would perhaps discern other mechanisms in the data or accentuate other aspects in the material at hand.

Conclusion

On the basis of this analysis, we can reach two important conclusions. Firstly, in every subtype/sub-process described, burnout has to be understood as a problem arising within the relationship between the subject and the Other, and thus affecting the identity of the subject. Secondly, therapeutic interventions need to focus on this problem of identity within the relation subject-Other, and especially on its repetition during the transference.

The first subtype considers burnout as the result of a gradual exhaustion-process caused by a clinging to the supposed exigencies of the Other in order to be able to maintain an ideal ego and to deny the inner lack. The second subtype is caused by the invalidation of an ego ideal, resulting in a loss of identity in relation to others on the work-floor. Moreover, this loss places a dimension of enjoyment into the foreground. Finally, we considered burnout as the result of inhibition of certain impulses that are experienced as incompatible. Through inhibition the patient avoids the confrontation with the dimension of enjoyment. The subject can maintain its subjective identity, but the ego is restricted in its functioning.

While these dynamics can be considered separately, burnout frequently develops as a result of an interplay between these dynamics. As our findings suggest, in cases of burnout intervention and treatment should not focus solely on the pressure of work as such. Indeed, one of the main problems to be addressed has to do with the meaning that work possesses for the subject's identity in his or her relation to the Other.

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4.2. BURNOUT AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: A FREUDO-LACANIAN PERSPECTIVE

Introduction: The Study of Burnout

Epidemiological research concerning burnout in educators (Wisniewski and Cargiulo) concludes that half of all teachers will leave the profession within 7 years. Yearly attrition rates among general educators have been estimated at 6 to 8% per year. Among special educators these yearly attrition rates are even higher. On average, special educators remain in the classroom for approximately 6 years. Needless to say, burnout is a major problem in educators and maybe in education in general.

In the mid 1970s a systematic interest began to be taken in the phenomenon of burnout. Burnout began to be studied both clinically (Freudenberger, "Staff") and academically (e.g., Maslach). The flood of scientific publications that have since appeared is mainly of a quantitative and correlational nature. Much attention was paid to the connection between burnout on the one hand and many individual variables on the other hand. Integral conceptual models as well as systematic qualitative studies and longitudinal research data were relatively scarce. In the last decade a change has set in, however. There is now a wish to integrate burnout into wider theoretical frameworks and to apply theory-driven research.

In 1974 Herbert Freudenberger, a New York psychoanalyst, was the first to give burnout its psychological meaning[33]. Freudenberger ("Staff", "The Staff"; Freudenberger and Richelson) considered burnout as a kind of mental exhaustion caused by the effort to impose one's will in order to reach a goal. According to him it is a chronic condition caused by a gradual depletion of energy as a result of over-commitment. He observed that people prone to burnout are idealistic persons who don't want to give in to limitations. He states, "It is the overly dedicated and the excessively committed individual who will suffer" ("The Staff" 75). "They're burning out because they've pushed themselves too hard for too long. They started out with great expectations and refused to compromise along the way" (Freudenberger and Richelson 12). According to Freudenberger, persons working in the human service professions are especially prone to these forms of exhaustion. They expect to have an impact on the lives of

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[33] Fifteen years before Freudenberger, however, it was the novelist Graham Greene who first used the concept burnout to refer to a mental condition. In his novel *A Burnt-Out Case* he tells the story of Querry, a famous architect who renounces his career in the western world and goes to live among lepers in Congo. In this book burnout gets a metaphorical meaning in referring to the mutilated body of lepers.

others, but what they are confronted with is primarily their own powerlessness.

In Freudenberger's view, the kernel of this problem is to be situated at the level of the ego. Thoughts that contradict the exalted self-image (e.g., thoughts of one's own failure, anxiety, ageing, death, etc.) don't get access to the ego and are overcompensated. Freudenberger thinks that a person who is burned out has suppressed and denied his or her real ego for too long. All energy was invested in realising an unrealistic image of oneself. This unrealistic image was once imposed from outside. In this sense, Freudenberger blames modern society, which killed its gods, neglected community life and so on. His therapeutic advice is consequently that persons must be helped to return to their real ego.

From a Lacanian point of view, such an advice is a bit strange. Zizek argues that this imperative to "be yourself", to disregard the pressure of your surroundings and achieve self-realisation, will ultimately lead to an identity crisis (Ticklish 373). Subjects that really assume the imperative will feel radically unsure. The only thing they can do is to jump from one mask to another, since what is behind the mask is ultimately nothing. According to Lacan alienation in a symbolic network is a pre-condition to achieve a minimum of identity.

Freudenberger, however, makes some sharp clinical observations. As such he indicates that people who are burned out often attribute an excessive personal meaning to their work. Their over-commitment implies "a total emotional or intellectual bondage to a certain idea or course of action" (Freudenberger, "The Staff" 74). Fischer states that this is taken to be a documentation of their own importance. The self-sacrificing and self-aggrandising ego trip they are on thus aims to deny something "negative" about themselves. From Fischer's point of view these people, who are working beyond reasonableness, are trying to ward off something that appears to them even more terrifying. They are doing their very best to feel special and superior and they are afraid that they will be revealed to be a "sham", incompetent.

These clinical observations are at least partly confirmed by interview-studies concerning burnout. Hallsten, for example, who selected 17 human service professionals for depth interviews, found that their job is often seen as "a possibility to avenge oneself for earlier critical experiences or failures" and that they tend to identify strongly with clients (Hallsten 105). He argues that there is a "motive structure of absorbing commitment for professionals" (Hallsten 105).

Typical for Freudenberger's and Fischer's conceptualisations is that burnout is considered as a gradually caused form of exhaustion. The burned out person seems to be a workaholic who finally gets disappointed. My hypothesis is that while this process describes the conditions favouring burnout, the problem will only become apparent at a moment of conflict.

The Subject as a Conflicted Entity

In what follows, I will sketch a Freudo-Lacanian frame to consider burnout. The notion of conflict is pivotal in Freud's conception of the psyche (see Laplanche and Pontalis). Even in his studies on hysteria, a conflict constitutes the kernel of the psychopathology process. This centrality is maintained up to the end of his theory construction. The notion of conflict is central, for example, to his conception of symptom formation: a symptom is a compromise between two conflicting trends.

Lacan reprises this central place of conflict and places it at the core of his conception of the subject: the subject is essentially divided: ∃. As a consequence of this non-unity, identity is not inherent in the subject: "identité se réalise comme disjoignante du sujet" (Lacan, Ecrits 292). The subject is only the effect of a signifier referring to another signifier and as such is ever changing. The core of subjectivity is a lack around which conflicting signifiers are turning. The same applies to the Other, whose core is also an undetermined void. There is no Other of the Other, no meta-language that can function as an ultimate guarantee.

The ego ideal has a structural function in remedying or filling up the gap in the midst of subjectivity (Lacan, Ecrits 677; Selection 306). According to Lacan the ego ideal is a signifier or unary trait that the subject received from the Other (Ecrits 679). A signifier starts functioning as an ego-ideal if the subject has the feeling that it in some way or another indicates what the Other wants. For it is only as a consequence of the Other's response that a signifier becomes an orientating mark. The ego ideal is a kind of nominator that not only embeds the subject but even gives it substance: "le sujet . . . s'hypostasie dans l'Ideal du moi" (e.g., Lacan, Ecrits 680). In other words, what the neurotic subject does is to translate the lack in the Other into a perceived question. The enigmatic desire of the other is identified with a demand (Lacan, Selection 321).

The installation of an ego ideal has a double effect. On the one hand its installation determines the way the subject relates to other persons (Lacan, Seminar I 140-141). The ego ideal is an abstract point "from which the subject will see himself, as one says, as others see him" (Lacan, Four 268). "From there he will feel himself both satisfactory and loved" (Lacan, Four 257). It is the point in the Other "from which the Other sees me, in the form I like to be seen" (Lacan, Four 267). The subject attempts to install a certain relationship with the Other via the ego ideal. From this point of view the ego ideal has a purely structural place in the relationship subject—Other. It's the subject's answer to the question "What does the other want from me?" and consequently to the question "Who am I in relation to the other?"

On the other hand the ego ideal has effects on the imaginary level since it is through the ego ideal that an ideal ego can be anticipated (Lacan, Seminar I 185). In his comment on Daniel Lagache, Lacan metaphorically illustrates this by means of the double mirror installation. It

is via ego ideal, I, that the mirror, A, is directed in such a manner that the mirror-image of the ideal ego can be produced (Lacan, Ecrits 679-680). This ideal ego is to be understood as the succeeded version of oneself. The anticipation of it will always be accompanied by some jubilant effect (Lacan, Selection 2). It will cause feelings of totality or being in love (Lacan, Seminar I 194). Self-satisfied feelings will be evoked if a person is able to fulfil or to reach the ego ideal (Lacan, Seminar I 136; Freud, "Narcissism" 100). This feeling counterbalances the ego's lost primary narcissism.

The Subject at Work

Applying these ideas to the relation of subjects to their work, we assume that a subject will only engage in a certain job in a lasting way if this job promises to realise the ego ideal. A job has an attractive value only if this job is presumed to have the potentiality to realise the desired mode of relation toward a big Other. This sought relation is the relationship as wished from the ego ideal's point of view. The attraction to a job will be determined by a signifier (e.g., "teacher" or "manager") that promises a certain way of being. Psychoanalytic case studies (Noël; Aubert and de Gaulejac; Kets de Vries) indeed show that it is mainly a sought relationship that is pivotal in the passion of managers and entrepreneurs. When a person succeeds, the imaginary feeling of being what one wants to be is fortified.

There nevertheless seems to be a difference among subjects in the way they relate to their work and consequently in the way they relate to their ideals and the lack these are supposed to fill up. This difference can be understood as the difference between idealisation and sublimation.

From a Freudian point of view a person's ideals are to be understood as "his ideas of a possible perfection of individuals, or of people or of the whole of humanity, and the demands he sets up on the basis of such ideas" (Freud, Civilisation 94). These ideals are substitutes for the narcissistic completeness of his childhood, which was lost by the castration-complex (Freud, "Narcissism"). As such the ideal is an answer to a narcissistic wound.

In this idealisation is radically different from sublimation. Whereas sublimation concerns the mechanism of drive-satisfaction—namely, the object-libido and the direction of it to other aims—idealisation concerns the object itself. Idealisation is the process in which an object "is aggrandised and exalted in the subject's mind" (Freud, "Narcissism" 94). The object is overrated, overvalued.

In his first seminar Lacan typifies idealization as imaginary and sublimation as symbolic (134). He later returns to this distinction (Lacan, Seminar VII 111-112). In the process of idealisation an object is interesting and attractive only as long as it reflects an image of

completeness toward the subject. As matter of fact, an object always has narcissistic roots. The subject identifies (imaginarily) with the mirroring object and anticipates along this way a feeling of completeness. The object is to reflect the subject's desired self-image. As such the idealising person is ambitious; he wants to be "it" and wants to assume a subjective situation of completeness. He's a builder of castles in the air. By means of idealisation a person will get the impression that his ideal ego is within reach. He will feel unified and self-assured, for a glorious future is awaiting him. In this imaginary process we will always find a dimension of self-deception[34]. The subject deludes himself since the subjective lack remains in the background. No matter how imaginary this process of idealisation may seem, the support of it is always a signifier (Lacan, Four).

The dynamics of sublimation are different, for in sublimation one aim is substituted for another. In this Lacan recognises the mechanism of signifying substitution (Seminar VII 110). It is the satisfaction of a drive that is inhibited from its aim (Lacan, Four 165). Moreover, he argues that the drive as such—for which sublimation offers another aim—concerns not the object but the Thing (Lacan, Seminar VII 112) or what he later calls the object a. Sublimation nevertheless implies satisfaction. As such the sublimating person is passionate. He does the things he does because he likes them, because they are interesting.

Sublimation and idealisation imply different positions toward the lack of the Other. Whereas sublimation is the process of circling the fundamental lack of subjectivity, idealisation is an attempt to fill this gap, to suture it.

If we now compare these theoretical remarks with the aforementioned clinical and empirical findings, we can tentatively conclude that the persons who are prone to burnout are persons who excessively idealize their work.

Clinical-empirical material suggests that these persons excessively engage in their work and want to do their work perfectly in order to reach the wished for self-image of being perfect or being the best. In this we recognise the imaginary anticipated completeness of the ego. Moreover, in their striving these persons seem to have a clear view on how things should run. They want to determine others (by saving them or curing them) the way they see it. In other words, they dispose of an imaginary scenario in which they as well as the other are playing a specific role. With regard to others they want to be the best, number one, the one that is preferred to others. Therefore they need the assurance that they are the ones that are loved and appreciated. In people who are engaged in this dynamic of idealisation, exhaustion is to be expected, for one's mirror image can never be reached.

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[34] See Lacan, *Ecrits* 668: 'le Moi y soit . . . une fonction de méconnaissance."

The Burnout Dynamics

However, burnout is more than a situation of exhaustion. As we conceive burnout from a Lacanian point of view, we consider an underlying conflict between subject and Other to be the basis of it. Conceptually, we assume that burnout will be evoked as a subject gets the impression that a big Other, from whom the subject expects recognition, invalidates the subject's ego ideal. In this process the idealised signifier of the Other, which the subject once isolated as an answer to the perceived question in the Other, is suddenly totally beyond question. The ego ideal loses its value in the relation between subject and Other. As such the burnout process resembles the dynamics of depression as conceptualised from a Lacanian point of view (cf. Cottet).

Since it is via the ego ideal that the subject gets a feeling of unity, the questioning and disappearance of the ego ideal confronts the subject with his own and the Others' lack. Clinically we can expect feelings of depersonalisation (Lacan, Ecrits 680) and anxiety.

Following this line of thought, the main cause of burnout can be considered to be indirect. Burnout will primarily be evoked if on an interpersonal level a significant Other (boss, patient, the firm, etc.) radically invalidates the role the subject aspires to play. Burnout will thus be evoked in situations where the big Other doesn't recognise the subject in the way this subject expected to be recognised. The role the subject plays, as a supposedly sensible answer to the Other's desire, suddenly seems ridiculous. In this case the ideal is indirectly invalidated via the role ascribed to the big Other. Burnout can't simply be linked to situations of social conflict or quarrel. It is the perceived symbolic value of acts from a significant other (big Other) that has a causal value. This process is clearly illustrated by Aubert & de Gaulejac's description of a woman who suffers a depressive breakdown the moment she concludes that her idealized firm doesn't allow her to play the role she wants to play, the role she thought the firm wanted her to play (184-190). As such, the idealising person who heavily invested in work is more prone to this, because the more a person idealizes her work, the more she is engaged in playing a certain role in relation to the Other. The burnout process will be evoked or stimulated directly if on a cultural level (organisational as well as societal) a signifier once highly valued (e.g., "teacher" or "headmaster") is now questioned. Through the cultural devaluation of a signifier, the subject attached to it loses her desired relation to the Other, or at least can't gain the same amount of satisfaction from her attachment to this signifier.

We wonder if burnout can be evoked along an imaginary path. According to Lacan the imaginary relation "always bears the mark of a fundamental instability" (Lacan, Seminar III 93), since it readily turns in a situation of concurrence and jealousy toward the (little) other. All imaginary relations contain an aggressive tension that can be summarised in the saying "it is either him or me" (Lacan, Seminar III 93, 95, 315).

Aggression is to be expected the moment the subject's anticipated narcissistic completeness is touched or the moment the other has a different view of how things should run. Lacan writes that these tensions can even be observed "in a relation involving the most Samaritan of aid" (Lacan, Selection 6). This evoked aggression is precisely incompatible with the ideals of caring. The result of this dualism is that an ideal breeding ground for psycho-neurotic conflicts is created. Concerning this problem Freud writes that "the formation of an ideal heightens the demands of the ego and is the most powerful factor in favouring repression"[35] (Freud, "Narcissism" 95). Moreover Freud claims that people's ideals "proceed from the same perceptions and experiences as the objects they most abhor" (Freud, "Repression" 150). The idealisation of an object is always closely connected to the repression of one of its dimensions. Lacan affirms the role of repression in the formation of ideals and states that an ego ideal is formed through the repression of a desire: "L'ideal du moi . . . se forme, avec le refoulement d'un désir du sujet" (Lacan, Ecrits 752).

Whereas these imaginary conflicts stimulate repression and neurotic troubles, they will never radically question the ego ideal. Consequently, they can't be considered as provoking burnout such as described above. On the other hand, it is possible that inhibition in work will be the consequence of the conflict between tendencies perceived as incompatible (cf. Freud, Inhibitions). Inhibition in work is definitely different from the mechanism of burnout.

Throughout the process of burnout, the subject will get the feeling that the once trusted Other deceived him. We recognise this in the research finding that persons with burnout perceive that others are a source of threat and interpret others' critical opinions as an indication of their own failure (cf. Forney et al).

In order to understand this dynamic, we have to turn to the Lacanian theory of fantasy. Globally we can state that the basic fantasy of the subject has a structuring function for the subject because it provides him with a story (Zizek, "Seven" 193, 196-200), a scenario of life (Laplance & Pontalis), and as such points a certain direction. It contains a multitude of subject positions, which always imply a certain relation to the Other (Zizek, "Seven" 193-196). Via the ego ideal the subject attaches to some of these positions. Thus fantasy has a stabilising dimension because it provides identity. This stabilising dimension always implies the beatific side of fantasy, "which is governed by the dream of a state without disturbances, out of reach of human depravity" (Zizek, "Seven" 192). On the other hand fantasy implies a destabilising dimension as well. This is the dimension of jouissance or enjoyment. "It encompasses all that irritates me about the Other, images that haunt me about what he or she is doing when out of my sight, about how he or she deceives me and plots

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[35] Sublimation, on the other hand, "is a way out, a way by which those demands can be met *without* involving repression" (Freud, *Narcissism* 95).

against me, about how he or she ignores me and indulges in an enjoyment that is intensive and beyond my capacity of representation" (Zizek, "Seven" 192).

Since in the process of burnout the ego ideal loses its structuring value, fantasy consequently looses its stabilising function. As a consequence, the destabilising dimension is placed in the forefront. The subject will get the impression that the Other enjoys in a strange and impermissible way at the expense of the subject. Lacan links this dimension of enjoyment to a desire that the ego ideal repressed (Lacan, Ecrits 752). The supposed jouissance in the Other will therefore resemble the subject's repressed desire.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sketched a Freudo-Lacanian frame to consider burnout. Starting from Lacan's conception of the subject and the problem of identity, I considered two mechanisms through which impaired functioning at work could occur. I described burnout as the consequence of an ego ideal losing its value in the relation between subject and Other. The loss of subjective consistency and the appearance of the other as an enjoying entity were interpreted as two main consequences of this loss. Burnout was differentiated from inhibition. Since a theoretical model is often seen as a good basis for qualitative research (cf. Strauss & Corbin) and since further qualitative research is necessary to acquire a better understanding of the burning out process, this model is to be tested in a scientific research project.

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4.3. CARING AND ITS IMPOSSIBILITIES: A LACANIAN
     PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

        Social scientists observe that the rate of burnout in the care-giving
professions is substantial (cf. Schaufeli & Enzman, 1998), representing a
clinically significant problem (Schaufeli et al., 2001). For Schaufeli et al., a
number of different factors contribute to this problem. These include the
leadership style in the organisation, the personal characteristics of the
caregiver, societal factors, etc. Similarly, in psychoanalytic circles,
professional burnout is discussed but psychoanalytic models concerning
the nature of burnout are relatively scarce (e.g. Berger (2000); Cooper
(1986); Fischer (1983); Freudenberger & Richelson (1980); Garden
(1995); Grosch & Olson (1994); Horner (1993); Osofsky (1996); Smith &
Steindler (1983); Vanheule (2001a)).
        In this paper we will suggest that, psychoanalytically speaking,
professional care giving is inherently problematic. Hence a psychoanalytic
perspective can give us insight into the difficulties and paradoxes
attending the question of professional care-giving, and may provide a
model from which we can better understand the professional withdrawal
from work known as burnout. We will approach these problems from both
Freudian and Lacanian theoretical perspectives. First we will discuss the
question of loving one's neighbour and its attendant problematic
consequences. Next we will relate this to the mechanisms of professional
burnout in the care-giving professions. Finally we will discuss these
mechanisms through reference to a clinical vignette. Our core claim is that
caring causes a subjective conflict in the caregiver because it evokes
desires and tendencies that are irreconcilable with his or her best
intentions. The way in which the care-giving subject deals with this conflict
determines the likelihood of his or her withdrawal from work through
burnout.

The problems inherent in altruism: Eros versus Thanathos

        Throughout his oeuvre, Freud is critical both of the idea that man
possesses an altruistic love for one's neighbour and of the ensuing ideal
of caring for others it entails. Freud highlights the universally sexual nature
of this ideal and indicates the subjective problems that it causes once
aggression comes into play. Sexual and aggressive tensions are highly
tabooed in care.

        In his "Observations on transference love," Freud (1915/1958)
comments critically on furor sanandi or the passion for curing people.

Denouncing this kind of fanaticism, he contrasts it with the analyst's ethical attitude of abstinence. Freud claims that from both an ethical and a therapeutic point of view, the analyst must maintain his or her distance from the love the treatment elicits in an analysant. He (1915/1958, pp. 160-161) states that the analyst must know that a "patient's falling in love is induced by the analytic situation and is not attributed to the charms of his own person". This love is, rather, a consequence of transference, which the analyst must beware of in his/her own reactions elicited by the patient's love. Freud thus puts a different aspect on caring. Before Freud, Nietzsche already indicated that altruism implies an attempt to dominate the suffering other. For Nietzsche, a so-called 'Wille zu Macht' inflects people's best intentions. What Freud adds to this is a sexual dimension. The question we must ask, then, is how the caregiver deals with this dimension. Does he/she concede to the patient's transference love or not? Clearly Freud prefers the latter as the ethically more responsible option, which is represented for him in the idea of abstinence. Conceding to the transference love, on the other hand, implies the choice to enjoy the attributed position. In this case, caring becomes a passion.

From a cultural perspective, Freud condemns the socially valorised approach to care-giving implied in the idea of altruism. But more importantly for our purposes is his questioning of the nature of that altruism by indicating its sexual origin. A general rule that Freud (1930/1961, p. 103) puts forward concerning this kind of relation is that the aim-inhibited love, expressed in kindness, masks "fully sensual love". Freud states that, in man's unconscious, aim-inhibited love is nothing but fully sensual love.

Discussing the (aim-inhibited) love of one's neighbour Lacan affirms this hidden dimension of sexuality in caring, and adds something to this side of things that usually remains veiled:[36] at the level of a passionate caregiver's ego, sexuality in caring is totally negated.

According to Freud the problem of aggression and destructiveness is even more troubling for the care-giving attitude. Commenting on people's general interrelations, he states that the optimistic portrayal of mankind implied in the central dictum of charity – 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Du sollst den Nächsten lieben wie dich selbst) – negates our own and our neighbour's aggressive nature. Freud himself characterises this neighbour as someone with selfish motives who enjoys

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[36] For example, in his seventh seminar he links sexuality to the acts of two extremely self-sacrificing women; Angela de Folignio and Mary Alacoque. Angela de Folignio is a thirteenth-century Italian mystic who drunk the water she first washed the feet of leprosy sufferers in. Mary Alacoque is a seventeenth-century mystic who ate the vomit of a sick man (Lacan (1986/1992) erroneously says she ate the sick man's excrement (cf. De Kesel, 2001)). Concerning their apparently unselfish acts Lacan stresses that "the erotic side of things remains veiled" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p.188).

dominating the other[37] and who could possibly harm me. These stubborn characteristics fundamentally contradict the best intentions one can have regarding the desire help the other. Freud (1930/1961) goes further and states that people as such have a strong aggressive tendency. Consequently, the caregiver, too, is endowed with aggression. He or she is equally selfish and wants to harm and exploit the other. Such aggressive inclinations contradict the humanitarian ideals one might have. Nevertheless it is a force that – according to Freud – we can detect in ourselves. The realisation of this drive would produce a strong narcissistic satisfaction but would also disturb our well-meant relation with others.

Thus is not only sexuality but also aggression generally denied and defended against in acts of charity. Freud mocks how "'little children do not like it' when there is talk of the inborn human inclination to 'badness', to aggressiveness and destructiveness, and so to cruelty as well" (Freud, 1930/1961, p. 120). People have problems with the conflict due to an ambivalence in their relation to others. As a consequence, the denied aggression is introjected, and directed towards the ego. "There it is taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego, and which now, in the form of 'conscience', is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals" (Freud, 1930/1961, p. 123). By way of a one hundred and eighty degree turn, external destructiveness is transformed into an internal destructiveness that manifests itself in the super-ego's confronting the ego with the fact that the adopted ideals are beyond him. What we see in this destructiveness are the drive-impulses of the id. For Freud, the origin of this transformation lies in the fear of losing the other's love. The super-ego condemns certain actions as 'bad' since their performance would result in a loss of love. But by taking the perspective of the other on board, an individual succeeds in abandoning the narcissistically satisfying aggressive tendency and at adopting the moral law of loving one's neighbour.

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[37] Cf. Freud (1930/1961, p.110): "He seems not to have the least trace of love for me and shows me not the slightest consideration. If it will do him any good he has no hesitation in injuring me, nor does he ask himself whether the amount of advantage he gains bears any proportion to the extent of the harm he does to me. Indeed, he need not even obtain an advantage; if he can satisfy any sort of desire by it, he thinks nothing of jeering at me, insulting me, slandering me and showing his superior power; and the more secure he feels and the more helpless I am, the more certainly I can expect him to behave like this to me." And: Freud (1930/1961, p.111): "their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him'.

Like Freud, Lacan (1986; 1986/1992) discusses the troubled relation between aggressiveness and the love of one's neighbour. He broadens the discussion by linking these up with his concept 'jouissance'.

According to Lacan, on the one hand we wish to do our neighbour good. This in itself is not troubling. It is nevertheless noteworthy that, in doing the good, we tend to interpret and give content to what we think the other wants. Lacan observes how, in wanting the good for my neighbour, "I imagine their difficulties and their sufferings in the mirror of my own … what I want is the good of others in the image of my own" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 187). People tend to interpret what the other wants by assuming a similarity between themselves and the other; 'what the other wants is what I would want if I were in his/her case'. This assumption is a typical imaginary supposition. We suppose we know what the other wants before this other could ever have indicated what he/she desires. "We are, in fact, at one with everything that depends on the image of the other as our fellow man, on the similarity we have to our ego and to everything that situates us in the imaginary register" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 196). Lacan illustrates this through the story involving the fourth-century Christian, Saint Martin, who, as an officer in the army, once ripped up his cape to share it with a beggar. Lacan draws attention to the way Saint Martin shared his cape with the ragged beggar by imagining what this distressed other wanted. Lacan stresses how the need that Saint Martin believed himself to be observing is an interpretation that could just as easily be wrong. Consequently, "perhaps over and above that need to be clothed, he was begging for something else, namely, that Saint Martin either kill or fuck him" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 186). People's interpretations of what the other wants typically neglect the subjective voice of he/she who is in a perceived state of need.

This kind of imaginary supposition is similarly typically reflected in caregivers' rescue-fantasies, which are nothing but scenarios concerning how others can gloriously be rescued by oneself, the rescuer[38]. As such, these fantasies reflect what Freud calls 'furor sanandi'. The Latin term 'furor' designates the three stages of sacred madness. It refers indeed to the passion of the lover, but also to the poet's enthusiasm and the trance

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[38] The cartoon Popeye is a typical illustration on how a rescue-fantasy is organised. First something evil happens out of the rescuer's sight. Usually, Bluto is kidnapping Popeye's girlfriend Olive Oyl. Then our hero hears her cry for help and comes to action. As Popeye first starts fighting Bluto it always seems that he will taste defeat. Evil Bluto seems to be much stronger. But then good-hearted Popeye eats a tin of spinach to pep him up and gains magical powers. He invariably beats Bluto and rescues his girlfriend. The problems Popeye first experienced in beating Bluto magnify the final victory. In short, this cartoon always shows how Popeye is able to enact his rescue-fantasy. The same kind of omnipotence can be found in caregivers' rescue-fantasies. The main difference between cartoons and rescue-fantasies nevertheless is that in reality caregivers tend to suppose that they don't need spinach; that they have magic enough to enact their rescue-fantasies. At the level of fantasy people think their goodwill and efforts suffice to rescue others and to gain others' appreciation for saving them (parallel to Olive Oyl's admiration of Popeye).

of the prophetess (cf. Vereecken, 1986). In the state of 'furor' one is a hero, a warrior who is related to a greater good. A rescue-fantasy is an imaginary mental scenario of how a caregiver's help can save someone else. A rescue-fantasy implies a relation between a fantasised imaginary other (someone in need, who I think will be better off with me) and a caregiver's ego. Structurally, this fantasy enables the caregiver to define his or her ideal ego. From a Lacanian point of view, the ideal ego is an idealised image of oneself which the ego strives to resemble. It is an image of the ego as a whole, reflecting unity and certainty (cf. Lacan who defines the ideal ego as the "successful version of oneself" and "an ideal image the subject identifies with" (1998, p. 288, my translation))[39]. People tend to use inter-subjective relations so that they will know how others consider them and that their desired self-image will be reflected in the interaction. In this case the social relation is used in an imaginary way, i.e. to obtain a reflection of the impression they want to make. Lacan (1973/1994) explains this tendency by stating that it is essentially through others that a subject imagines and constitutes him/herself as ideal and tries to find an "opportunity for an essential integration" (p. 159). Lacan (1963) adds that the sense of dignity associated with a profession nevertheless always masks a fundamental misery and impotence. It is as if the glory of the professional ethos reflected, for example, in rescue-fantasies, is in inverse proportion to the actual constraints the exercise of the profession implies. In other words: the grandiosity of fantasy is used as escape route from the degree of impotence one is confronted with.

On a general level we propose to define a benefactor as someone to whom the image of another in a state of lack appeals (which is expressed, for example, through a demand), and who interprets this state of lack in terms of need. The potential carer creates an image of the other and concludes that, compared to himself, the other is needy. He feels, in addition, attracted by the idea of compensating this observed need, as if a complementary relation between the good he's willing to give and the other's lack exists. The example of Saint Martin shows that the latter's compassion and his projecting of himself into the beggar's situation actually silences the beggar. A universal concept of the good is imposed at the level of the subjective voice of the one in penury ('the object I consider as good is indeed good for the other'). What Lacan makes clear is that the other's subjective voice, in its essence, radically concerns something totally different from the good offered, namely, something that concerns the subject as a bodily and sexual being. So, what Saint Martin really covers with his cloak is the kernel of the beggar's subjectivity. By interpreting the other's lack as a need, the latter's lack gets arrogantly

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[39] People differ in the degree to which they worry about their own ego and the perceived gap between ego and ideal ego. Those who are highly concerned tend to worry and to fantasise about how others consider them ('How do others *see* me?' 'Who do they think I am').

materialised and his desire becomes obscured (for the distinction between need, demand and desire: see Lacan, 1998).

The trouble begins when the other doesn't go along with the caregiver's best intentions, when he/she doesn't remain in the mental scenario the caregiver wants to impose on their social relation (imagine the beggar refusing the offered half of Saint Martin's cloak). In this case, the other appears as recalcitrant and strange in relation to the goodwill-hunting caregiver. The imaginary altruistic relation implies a relation of power (cf. Lacan, 1986/1992). By giving the deprived the good I dispose of, I confirm my own wealth. So, if I give others my wise advice I narcissistically confirm the superiority of my own wisdom. Within the same line, the other's refusal of my good wounds my narcissism and disturbs the relation of power I aimed to install via my good advice. It is predictable that the insulted and scolded benefactor will feel inclined to restore the disturbed balance of power.

In terms of Lacan's first seminars, the other in this case appears as 'real'. The other is real to the extent that he/she appears different from me; as someone who can deceive me and can lie to me as he/she doesn't resemble the view I have of him/her (Lacan, 1978/1988, p. 244). It indicates the other-ness of the other. Here the concept of the real indicates a dimension of unreasonableness, strangeness and unpredictability that people can experience in their contacts with others (cf. Grotstein (1995, p. 300): "The Real is un-Imaginable and un-Symbolizable. It just is!"). We experience the other as real, to the extent that he/she is someone beyond comprehension.

A benefactor, confronted with the other's other-ness, will easily interpret this other-ness as unruliness. The other who interferes with the benefactor's best intentions is seen as disturbing and aggressive. This attribution of meaning to the situation, along with the construction of an image of another, reveals the imaginary character of the interaction. This imaginary interpretation will elicit a parallel aggressiveness: "aggressivity is provoked in a subject when the other subject, through which the first subject believed or enjoyed, does something which disturbs the functioning of this transference" (Zizek, 1997, p. 113). For Lacan, this kind of aggressivity (i.e. an intention toward aggression) is unavoidable. Such tensions can be observed "in a relation involving the most Samaritan of aid" (Lacan, 1966/1977, p. 6).

Through this confrontation with the other's other-ness, the do-gooder begins to wonder what the other wants from him or her. This confrontation with the other's other-ness disturbs one's own fantasy as to what the other needs. It destabilises a caregiver's established preconceptions about caring as reflected in his or her rescue-fantasies. The confrontation thus disrupts the routine structuring of the caregiver's world. Since the other doesn't want the good the philanthropist offers, the latter will get suspicious. The philanthropist gets the impression that the

other is someone of bad-will who has evil intentions toward the caregiver; in such cases, one believes one has become an object of the other's enjoyment. According to Julien (1995, p. 58) this elicits hate, and one's hate appeals to one's own jouissance, to the "fundamental evil" and the "unfathomable aggressivity" that oneself desires (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 186).

Already in his seventh seminar, Lacan names the essence of the other's other-ness, his/her jouissance. The concept of 'jouissance' (sometimes translated as 'enjoyment') is one Lacan used frequently but never sharply defined. The concept was introduced in the early fifties and evolved throughout Lacan's work, changing its meaning relatively (cf. Miller, 1999). By Lacan's seventh seminar – the period we are focusing our discussion on – it indicates a polymorph perverse enjoyment beyond ('jenseits') the moral distinction between good and evil. It is a concept aligned with Freud's ideas on radical mal-adjusted nature of the drive. The drive doesn't 'know' anything about what is good and bad; it just strives for satisfaction. Jouissance indicates man's excitement in acting out his drives, regardless of the existing law. In his seventh seminar Lacan (1986/1992) links it to the kind of enjoyment the primal father in Freud's myth 'Totem and Taboo' is familiar with. By its lawless and polymorph perverse nature, jouissance is to be distinguished from pleasure and lust. Jouissance can coincide with feelings of lust (i.e. to the degree that it is civilised) but with feelings of displeasure, suffering or disgust as well. Jouissance always moves the subject intimately, and the latter is attached[40] to it in a paradoxical way. Like Freud's ideas regarding evil, Lacan attributes this jouissance to both benefactor and neighbour. According to Lacan, the other's jouissance is fundamentally problematic; "my neighbor's jouissance, his harmful, malignant jouissance, is that which poses a problem for my love" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 187).

The confrontation with the other's other-ness places the lack of the social bond to the fore; a dimension of disharmony, or 'non-rapport' (sic. Lacan) co-existent with jouissance (Miller, 1999). Along this way a corner of the veil that used to hide the evil the benefactor desires for his/her neighbour is raised. This is problematic, since the desire for one's neighbour's evil was avoided precisely through neighbour-love. One's destructive drives towards those one cares for are difficult to bear. Most troubling, is that beyond the imaginary dialectics of aggressiveness and suspicion, the benefactor is confronted with his/her own jouissance, hidden behind his or her best intentions. "Freud's use of the good can be summed up in the notion that it keeps us a long way from our jouissance"[41] (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 185). So, jouissance is a dimension of

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[40] Jouissance e.g. finds its expression in people's symptoms. People suffer their symptoms, want to get rid of them but nevertheless remain fixated to them. The bond between subject and symptom expresses jouissance.

[41] In developing this line of reasoning, Lacan nor Freud refer to Stekel who earlier on developed similar ideas by stating that in choosing for a pious, caring of pedagogical

other-ness and strangeness both inside the benefactor and the neighbour. It is an unknown and uncanny dimension that the ego would rather know nothing about.

For a benefactor, the problem posed by the other's jouissance is broader than the problem met with when confronted with behaviour that is fundamentally different from what one expected. For the other's body as such is problematic. It is problematic because its working and pulsing nature by definition escapes one's control. The Real-ness of the body is disturbing. This is obvious in cases where one is confronted with death and physical disintegration, but what Lacan indicates is that the other's body is fundamentally peculiar to oneself. The 'logic' the body obeys is different from, and often contradictory to, the logic of one's intentions (Lacan, 1986). It obeys laws that are different from one's plans and conceptions.

What these two confrontations with jouissance (via the other's unruliness and the working of other's body) have in common is that first of all they place the caregiver in a position of relative impotence. In each case, the process contradicts the caregiver's ideas regarding how things should run, but he or she is unable to influence the course of things. Things just don't run they way one would want them to. In both cases the Freudian drive (in both caregiver and other) is the central troubling factor. In Lacanian terms the disturbing aspect is the other's jouissance or 'being' (Verhaeghe, 2001), which constitutes the Real in the inter-subjective situation. The other in both cases appears as a being that escapes how I imagine people to function or ought to function. This confronts the caregiver with his or her own dimension of unruliness, and hence with the drive and a dimension of unimagined being within him/herself.

Whereas Freud described the fear of losing the other's love as the motor for the withdrawal from aggressiveness, Lacan accentuates its origin in the imaginary identification between subject and other. But for both Lacan and Freud, this withdrawal feeds the internalised cruelty of the super-ego.

Lacan distinguishes two forms of identification: imaginary identification and symbolic identification. Here we will focus on imaginary identification. Imaginary or narcissistic identification is the process through which one adopts a self-image based upon the image of the other (cf. Lacan, 1966/1977, pp. 1-7 & 16-25). In this case, the image of the other is treated as if it were an object which is considered attractive to the extent that it reflects an image of completeness back towards the subject. The object is first exalted, only then to reflect back to the subject an idealised image of its ego. In other words, considering the image of the other as its own mirror image, the subject in this way obtains a self-image. Through introjecting the image of the other, a person acquires a subjective

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profession, people flee from their own criminal and sadistic impulses (cf. Stekel (1910) in: Nunberg & Federn (1974), meeting 117).

consistency and the integration of its original disarray. For Lacan (1966/1977, p. 19), this identification results in a truly "erotic" and passionate relation to the image that one considers one's own.

Let us return to the question of why this kind of identification enables us to withdraw from our enjoyment at the expense of the other, since really complying with one's tendency to enjoy (at the expense of) the other would of course destroy the other. "We retreat from what? From assaulting the image of the other, because it was the image on which we were formed as an ego" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 195). By inflicting my jouissance onto the other, I would destroy the image I have of him/her. Naturally, this is highly problematic since I base(d) my self-image on the image of the other, by treating it as a mirror image. So, if I decide to destroy my neighbour I would consequently destabilise my own narcissistic self-image. This is a consequence one can't but be afraid of, since it would annihilate the narcissistic consistency acquired via imaginary identification. A subject ultimately recoils from enacting his or her aggression in order to avoid self-damage.

Lacan claims that the desire to do good is a barrier, an arrest that restrains the subject from complying with its inclination to jouissance and radical abuse. As such he considers doing-the-good as "a phony science" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 218) since it veils our radical evil. Altruism is "the pretext by means of which I can avoid taking up the problem of the evil I desire, and that my neighbour desires also" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 187). According to Lacan, our best intentions are nothing but a defence against the dimension of the unadjusted drive that disturbs us from within. Excluded, this dimension gets replaced by the function of caring. This exclusion meanwhile sexualises the excluded dimension (cf. Lacan, 1973/1994, p. 155 for the link between prohibition and sexualisation). Like all psychic defences, this defence inevitably fails. Consequently, the intention to do good is always ambiguous and contaminated with polymorph perverse tendencies. People defend against this contaminating dimension in order to maintain their subjective consistency. All manifestations of it will elicit the experience that something obscene was manifested. Reaction-formation (e.g. a flight into doing the good) can be one strategy to deal with it. In this case, the intention to do good will take on magnified and frenetic proportions and become a passion: the passion to do good (cf. Freud, 1915/1958). Hence passionate or excessive attachments to doing good reflect the subject's jouissance[42].

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[42] The fundament of this line of reasoning can be found quite early in Lacan's work. In 1948 he e.g. stated: "do we not point out the aggressive motives that lie behind in all so-called philantropic activity?" (Lacan, 1966/1977, p.13) and in 1949: "we place no trust in altruistic feeling, we who lay bare the aggressivity that underlies the activity of the philantropist, the idealist, the pedagogue, and even the reformer" (Lacan, 1966/1977, p.7).

Elaborating Lacan's line of reasoning, we conclude that the feeling of charity towards a sufferer is largely an attempt to restore the injured image of the other. Another person's unruliness is troubling since it disturbs my familiar image of the other and this has profound effects on my own feeling of unity. An other who behaves strangely destabilises my subjective consistency. Not only is this troubling, it is the reason that the other has to remain in the image of my own. By enforcing the other to remain within the image of my own, I attempt to impose my image on people. Passionate caring is an effort to make the other resemble the mirror image I have in mind, such that he/she resembles me. Lacan (1966/1977, p. 22) expresses this idea when he describes how "the passionate desire peculiar to man to impress his image in reality is the obscure basis of the rational mediations of the will". By healing another's wound, by suturing the other's lack, a benefactor attempts to confirm his or her own narcissistic self-image. Man's altruism reflects his amour-propre (Lacan, 1986). Consequently, healing another's wounds or excesses is an attractive strategy to heal one's own narcissistic injuries. Dealing with other's problems can be an appealing activity for those who unconsciously want to restore a problem of their own, without having to approach it directly.

To sum up, we can state that according to Lacan and Freud the nature of the love directed towards one's neighbour via altruism and charity is ambiguous. On one hand, the aim-inhibited love is truly erotized, while on the other, it masks the destructiveness and jouissance inherent in the relation between the benefactor and beneficiary. These dimensions are (normally) hidden and imply a central problem for the benefactor's ego: he/she can't stand them. In response, destructiveness is hidden and introjected. This interiorisation coincides with the harshness of the super-ego.

What about care-giving professions?

Freud's and Lacan's comments regarding neighbour-love and altruism are directed towards a general attitude rather than professional care giving. We suggest the same mechanisms especially apply to professional care giving (cf. Ansermet & Sorrentino, 1991; De Soria, 1996).

People engaged in the helping professions are often driven by strong and sometimes idealised ideas about charity. Many start their jobs with a rescue-fantasy, wanting to remedy other's problems. What appeals to them is the lack they perceive in the person needing help which they long to suture in one way or another. The ideal of care giving is thus an ego ideal for most caregivers. It has a strong narcissistic value (cf. Grosch

& Olson, 1994) and is rooted in the personal oedipal history (cf. Freud (1910/1957), Ferenczi (1955)).

But in the reality of caring, professionals are often confronted with a so-called 'difficult' clientele that contradicts this ideal. Their clients, especially those who stay in institutions because of a severe pathology, often cause problems that offend professionals' best intentions and their ideas on how problems should be solved (e.g. due to specific object relatedness and a peculiar position in transference). As we indicated above, in such cases a strong appeal is made to caregivers' jouissance, destructiveness and/or sexuality. Since the everyday love of one's neighbour already causes subjective contradictions, we can assume that the contradictions caused in those who are engaged in professional care are manifold. Consequently, working in health-care professions tends to elicit strong ambivalence conflicts. Caregivers who are wrapped up in rescue-fantasies will experience this as especially problematic. After all, the more grotesque one's ideas on caring are, the more shocking the other's otherness will be and the more ambivalent and contradictory one's own impulses will be[43].

Professional burnout

We hypothesise that the problem generally known as professional burnout is connected with this contradiction. Burnout seems to be an effect of the ego's refusal to face and tolerate ambivalent impulses.

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[43] The table below refers to passages in Ansermet & Sorrentino (1991) and De Soria (1996) that validate the theoretical ideas formulated from a clinical and institutional point of view.

Dimension	Confirming source
One's own destructiveness and drive-ridden nature are denied	Ansermet & Sorrentino 7, 16, 18, 36; De Soria 33, 225
Disturbed patients have a disturbing influence and this is generally denied	Ansermet & Sorrentino 11, 17; De Soria 34-35, 40, 225
Sexuality is denied	Ansermet & Sorrentino 12, 28
Denial of the first three dimensions results in subjective defensive measures, Such as Furor Sanandi	Ansermet & Sorrentino 20, 42; De Soria 225 Ansermet & Sorrentino 8; De Soria 9, 10, 28, 51, 99, 222, 225
This denial results in a harsh super-ego	Ansermet & Sorrentino 37
Care-givers aim at repairing, driven by an ideal to realise a situation of subjective completeness for the clients	Ansermet & Sorrentino 9, 27, 28, 44; De Soria 28, 87, 159, 225
Furor Sanandi has narcissistic roots	Ansermet & Sorrentino 43; De Soria 87, 225

Maslach and Jackson, the two psychologists who introduced the concept of burnout in the academic world, define it as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind" (Maslach & Jackson, 1986, p. 1). This definition is widely accepted (Schaufeli & Enzman, 1998). According to this definition, burnout has three underlying dimensions. Emotional exhaustion is a dysphoric feeling of being used up and tired of working. Depersonalization[44] is understood to mean the attitude whereby one tends to withdraw from contacts with clients and addresses others in an impersonal way. Reduced personal accomplishment indicates that one feels less competent than before and that one has failed. We believe these three dimensions of subjective complaints are linked with the mechanisms described. We will first discuss the theoretical elements of burnout-dynamics and then illustrate these briefly with a clinical vignette drawn from a research-project on burnout[45].

As we saw, for Freud and Lacan the harshness of the super-ego becomes stimulated by an attempted renunciation of one's own destructiveness. "The effect of instinctual renunciation on the conscience then is that every piece of aggression whose satisfaction the subject gives up is taken over by the super-ego and increases the latter's aggressiveness (against the ego)" (Freud, 1930/1961, p. 128). Following our line of reasoning that a strong appeal is made to care-giving professionals' destructiveness and jouissance and the observation that these tendencies are usually defended against, we assume that the harshness of the super-ego will indeed be stimulated. In this case, successful caring will become a bounden duty that one almost cannot but fail to neglect. Feelings of incompetence and failure are to be expected as a consequence of this denial and the resulting severity of the super-ego (cf. reduced personal accomplishment in the definition of burnout). After all, the main thing the super-ego does is to confront the ego aggressively with the fact that the ego ideal is not attained. Note here that a similar mechanism is at work in what Freud calls melancholia. The self-denigration prominent in this disorder too, is nothing but internalised aggression: "self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego… Their complaints are really 'plaints' in the old sense of the word" (Freud, 1917/1963, p. 248). In this, precisely the aggressive elements are turned into a sense of guilt (Freud, 1930/1961, p. 139).

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[44] Depersonalization defined by researchers on burnout differs from the more common psychiatric definition as estrangement from self and other.

[45] Based on a screening on burnout in a population of 1317 professionals in care for mentally handicapped persons and youth care (with the Maslach Burnout Inventory), we selected those 15 professionals who had the highest burnout score and those 15 who had the lowest score. We had a clinical research interview for 2 hours with each of them. The raw interview-material was analysed via methods for qualitative research (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In depersonalization or the physical and/or mental retreat from contacts with patients, a person renounces doing what he or she used to value or still consciously values. From a Freudian point of view we can qualify this kind of withdrawal as inhibition (cf. Freud, 1926/1959, Vanheule 2001b). Freud defines the main origin of inhibitions as the avoidance of sexual and hostile impulses. A person renounces an activity since the execution of it would express impulses one wants to escape from. Inhibition is a strategy to avoid the psycho-neurotic conflict that would be evoked by non-inhibited activity. The conflict concerned is a conflict between two inner tendencies: on the one hand we have a tendency within the ego (e.g. the desire to do good) and on the other hand a contradicting impulse (e.g. the desire to ill-treat the other). The subject chooses to shun this conflict and limits the associated ego-function. This self-imposed limitation consequently serves as an indication of the underlying conflict one wants to avoid. Depersonalization can be understood as an effect of inhibition, whereby a professional withdraws from being confronted with his/her evil tendencies towards clients. Lacan did not link Freudian inhibition to the withdrawal from caring, but he indicates similar mechanisms: "The resistance to the commandment 'Thou shalt love they neighbour as thyself' and the resistance that is exercised to prevent his access to jouissance are one and the same thing … I retreat from loving my neighbour as myself because there is something on the horizon, that is engaged in some form of intolerable cruelty. In that sense, to love one's neighbour may be the cruellest of choices" (Lacan, 1986/1992, p. 194). If the activity of caring is contaminated with cruelty, caring as such will most probably be inhibited. We find the same mechanisms apply to the influence of sexuality. If sexual arousal enters too much in one's aim-inhibited love, this love regains its sensual dimension and will contaminate caring too. Inhibition is to be expected if the ego can't stand this ambiguity.

Emotional exhaustion can be understood as the energetic consequence of the two other mechanisms. On the one hand, continually subjected to the ever-increasing commands of the super-ego, one gets used up, since it is inevitable that, despite one's best efforts, the ideal will never be accomplished. This may result in the feeling of powerlessness and usher in an attitude of resignation. On the other hand, exhaustion may be expected as a consequence of suppressing contradicting tendencies via inhibition. According to Freud, suppressing affects that are incompatible with the ego exhausts the ego. In this case the ego "loses so much of the energy at its disposal that it has to cut down the expenditure of it at many points at once" (Freud, 1926/1959, p. 90). Continuous defence consumes psychic energy.

Similar exhaustion is to be expected as a result of the radical contraction of an ego ideal resulting in the loss of this ideal (e.g. the ideal of caring) (Vanheule, 2001a). According to Freud such a loss will result in the work of mourning that absorbs the ego: "all libido shall be withdrawn from its

attachments" (Freud, 1917/1963, p. 244). This work of mourning also exhausts a person since much of the available psychic energy is consumed. Following this line of reasoning it is no wonder that, once a work of mourning has been concluded, one may lose interest in the activities first linked up to the ideal (e.g. professional care giving). After all, once one's ideal is lost, nothing any longer binds a person to the activity implied.

Let us now turn to the clinical vignette. Tom, 29 years old, is a social worker, working in a ward for mentally disabled adults with a psychiatric disorder. Tom describes himself as burnt out along the three dimensions of burnout described by Maslach & Jackson. During the interview he appears nervous and anxious and has difficulties in verbalising. At the end of the interview he seemed as though he wanted to throw off his yoke and literally run away from us. While interviewing, we focused on the problems he experienced in his job. Whereas he first shied away from talking about possible problems and glossed over negative aspects in relation to clients, toward the end he was more willing to talk. As a consequence his story is rather contradictory. At first he says: 'I thought about quitting my job, not because of the guys (his word for clients he now works with), but because of the team… In my work with the guys everything goes very well. I have the feeling I'm rather objective in relation to them… Now I think I will go on with them. A lot of my colleagues left the job and others just work in a routine… but I go on'. But another dimension gradually showed through: 'We have a lot of problems at the ward. We can't really affect the guys and that makes everything difficult. At last you resign and you think that it's not that easy to change that guy, … Eh, at last you start working in a routine and that gives me a bad feeling… Although it once was a challenge for me… For a long time we had a guy at the ward and we agreed we would intervene if he became aggressive, we said we won't let it happen! But he is so persuasive and so creative that we had the feeling we couldn't win… Some colleagues had to leave the ward because they couldn't stand the aggression. Then you start thinking, never mind… You don't have the energy and the courage anymore… You can't persist in staying optimistic and you start feeling insecure. Then I think, I'm wrong, I did it wrong and you feel unsure… That's hard to stand… The way you look at yourself. You start doubting… Some of our guys are really strange. I know their behaviour is so-called stereotypical, you know the explanations, but at last… I tried to empathise with them… At last you don't even try anymore. They are just bothering, nothing but strange. That gives me stress... Then I think, what are we doing over here… They are a different kind of people. There's no common ground between you and them anymore and that's strange, indeed. As they're only different, yes, that's strange… We want to change them but we can't. That's frustrating, that's powerlessness… I sometimes think we are all wrong over here, what we do is erroneous. But in fact, it is the guys

that are pulling the strings.' After our request for an illustration and his statement it is difficult to give examples of difficulties, Tom describes the following situation. 'Eh, … We have a manic-depressive youngster at the ward and it really drives you crazy. He continuously has periods of heavy laughing, turning into periods of heavy walking around and not laughing anymore… It's the same story over and over again. At last you resign trying to change it. I'm not manic-depressive, I don't understand him... There are moments that you think, boy don't fool with me, don't you even try to… But then again, you get fed up with it if you try to change him. You try to force the matter. Most often attempts to change his behaviour end up in the isolation cell, for him. He gets aggressive. Then you start thinking, I'm wrong, I tried to change him but it went from bad to worse. Now he's in the isolation cell and he's wounded… That troubles me'. Concerning his desire to have another job he says: 'I thought about working as a nurse on a normal ward, where the clients give you the information you need to help them and talk normally. Here they don't. A vital link is missing… At a normal ward you can ask them questions about what they are doing. That should be enough to understand them, to empathise with them… I suppose the contacts will be more normal, they are more recognisable human beings'.

In the vignette we notice the super-ego is at work in self-reproaches and self-doubt (e.g. for having tried to change clients and having failed, and for his own routine in working) (cf. reduced personal accomplishment). His difficulties in 'admitting' negative aspects in his relation with clients too, indicate a moral rigor. Withdrawal from contacts is evident in his description of the job as a routine and in his renouncing the attempt to influence clients (cf. depersonalization). Inhibition more generally appears during the interview as Tom has problems with verbalising and giving examples. Exhaustion is reflected in his description of the job as stressing and in the feeling he has no energy and courage anymore. He tends to his work in a disengaged way, like in a routine.

Notice that all the interactions with clients he described begin from an idea of changing them, that is, of modelling clients along his own ideas. He wants them to fit into his conception of how humans are and how help can be given. Aggressiveness towards clients is difficult to admit and is only indicated indirectly. It seems he wants to run away from it and this attitude is repeated during the interview. He has difficulties talking about negative aspects in relation to his clients and at the end of the interview he literally flees from us. Aggressiveness nevertheless seems to influence his attitude in his work. For example, he has the impression that clients are taking advantage of him (cf. his idea that the clients are pulling the strings and that the manic-depressive client is fooling him). This position seems to bother him and stimulates him to intervene harshly himself (cf. his idea he would 'force' the matter, that they shouldn't fool him, that he couldn't win). This interaction ends in a situation of violence he tells almost nothing about (cf. his remark that the manic-depressive client was wounded). It is

indirectly signalled, in the way he introduces his interventions. It is remarkable that all of his attempts to make contact with clients or to change clients end up with the idea that they are radically different from him. He can't empathise and blames this failure as the reason why he retreats from caring. We notice that his insisting ideas about being able to change clients are constantly retracted. By abdicating and retreating from true interaction, he seems to avoid the question of whether his clients are 'really human' like him. He prefers to cling to his ideas about the possibility of changing clients and, like any good neurotic, fantasises about working with an easier population that would fit better with his conceptions.

Conclusion

In this paper we situated burnout as a subjective reaction to the ambivalence evoked by professional care giving itself. Caring confronts the caregiver with psychic antitheses, since an appeal is made simultaneously to sexuality, destructiveness and jouissance. Because they are incompatible with the ideal of caring, these are tendencies the caregiver shuns away from and defends against. This defence results in conflicts between ego and super-ego, inhibition and exhaustion. We found these three mechanisms to explain the three core burnout symptoms: feelings of reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

This paper focused on the function of caring in the basic relation between subject and other. We concentrated on the mechanisms within the primal relation all professional caring is based on. The way professional caregivers deal with the basic conflict discussed undoubtedly determines the functioning of professional organisations and care-giving institutions. We believe that the avoidance of both imaginary conflict and the inherent impotence all caregivers are confronted with, not only results in difficulty at the level of the primal care-giving relation, but that it will be reflected and repeated in the broader organisational context as well.

Based on the mechanisms described, we conclude that intervention, such as psychoanalytic supervision, should concentrate on the ego's experience of antithesis (e.g. the conflicting experience of aggression). Antithesis should be recognised, verbalised and worked through so that it is no longer automatically defended against. This implies that supervisors should break through people's spontaneous tendency to avoid the taboo of aggression and sexuality and the tendency to disown these dimensions. As in psychoanalysis proper, professionals should be stimulated to say what's on their mind and to go into incidents they experience as compromising. In this way, the conflicting nature of contradiction may be diminished to the extent that it no longer seeks

expression via subjective complaints. Intervention should focus on the symbolic roots upon which the imaginary care-giving relation is based (i.e. the caregiver's own oedipal history) and on the real impotence in relation to which it functions as a defence.

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4.4.   INHIBITION: 'I AM BECAUSE I DON'T ACT'

Introduction

        Experience indicates that patients often enter into analysis with the complaint that they can't manage to do the things they want to do; they feel reluctant or unable to act within one or more domains of life, notably in fields such as love and work.   According to Freud in Analysis Terminable and Interminable, analysis often – but not always – results in overcoming these kinds of inertias.
In this paper we will discuss inhibitions as an obsessional strategy for dealing with desire.   Like other obsessional neurotic symptoms, for example compulsions, inhibitions have a structural function in the obsessional strategy of denying desire.   Along this line of reasoning both the absence of activity (inhibition) and excess of it (compulsion) are attempts at avoiding a confrontation with desire.   Desire is an issue the obsessional neurotic puts under a taboo.

        Furthermore, we will contrast inhibitions, which are typical for obsession, with symptoms, which are typical for hysteria.   Symptoms always express a struggle with a desire the subject tries to ignore.   The subject tries to ignore a desire, but this strategy fails since the repressed impulse continuously returns.   Inhibitions are a much more radical attempt to efface desire as such, and at a more fundamental level they are an attempt to erase the drive.   Inhibitions are attempts to nip desire and drive in the bud and as such are exercises in control.

Inhibition and obsession

        It is difficult to find a systematic theory of inhibition in either the works of Lacan or of Freud.   We will firstly, therefore, try to elucidate the meanings both Freud and Lacan gave to inhibition.   Afterwards we will attempt to link inhibition to the structural characteristics of obsessional neurosis.
        Within both Freud's and Lacan's theories we can discern three broad meanings that are given to the concept, in addition to which in both theories there is often a more descriptive use of the concept.   An example of this descriptive use can be found when Freud states that civilisation inhibits aggressiveness.[46]   The three broad meanings Freud and Lacan discern are:

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[46] S. Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). *S.E.*, XXI, pp. 57-146.

1. Inhibition as an economic process,
2. Inhibition as stagnancy in ontogenetic development and
3. Inhibition as the result of a dynamic process of defense.

We will only briefly discuss the first two meanings before proceeding to look at the third category in greater detail since this is what really interests us.

Inhibition as an economic process

When Freud uses the term 'inhibition' in its economic sense (first use of the concept), he considers it as a process at the level of excitation. From this point of view inhibition designates a blocking in the expected course of an excitation.[47] Via inhibition a quantum of excitation is stopped in the course of its development. In his meta-psychological[48] writings he situates inhibition on the economic side of a broader process of repression.[49] Through repression the discharge of an excitation that provokes displeasure is inhibited.[50] Freud states that repression ultimately aims either at inhibiting an instinctual impulse from being turned into a manifestation of affect[51] or at inhibiting and deflecting the excitatory process in the id.[52] The potential beginning of a manifest affect is nipped in the bud;[53] an impulse is prevented from developing into a conscious psychic activity.[54]

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[47] S. Freud. *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895). *S.E.*, I, pp. 281-398.

[48] Freud never really elaborated a meta-psychological theory on the mechanism of inhibition. An economic theory on inhibition was never worked out. Consequently, certain aspects concerning this inhibition remain rather vague. It is as such not clear what happens with the impulse once it has been inhibited. Does the silenced impulse still exercise an influence?

[49] S. Freud. *The Unconscious* (1914). *S.E.*, XIV, pp. 159-216.

[50] S. Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). *S.E., V.*

[51] S. Freud (1914) op.cit.

[52] S. Freud. *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926). *S.E.*, XX. pp. 75-172.

[53] In other texts inhibition also concerns the activity of fending off, but Freud was not always clear in distinguishing the described inhibition (the level of excitation) from repression at the level of mnemic images. Especially in his early writings Freud often uses inhibition as a *synonym* for defence. (S. Freud. *Sketches for the 'Preliminary Communication' of 1893* (1892). *S.E.*, I, pp. 147-154; S. Freud. *A Case of Successful Treatment by Hypnotism* (1892-1893). *S.E.*, I, pp. 115-128; S. Freud. *Preface and Footnotes to the Translation of Charcot's* Tuesday Lectures (1892-1894). *S.E.*, I, pp. 129-143).

[54] Freud implicitly refers to this point of view in many of his writings. As early as draft A from the correspondence between Freud and Fliess, inhibition concerns the sexual function in its economic sense. Inhibition is also used to refer to the blocking of the development of wishful sexual impulses derived from childhood (S. Freud (1900) op.cit.) or as a process that has to do with one's emotional activity (S. Freud (1900) op.cit.), feelings (S. Freud (1910) op.cit.) or incompatible affects (S. Freud (1910) op.cit.). In his later writings a connection is still made between inhibition and the repression of an affective impulse (S. Freud. *Construction in Analysis I (1937)*. *S.E.*, XXIII, pp. 255-270).

Notice that according to this point of view, inhibition concerns the drive as an economic factor that is always present in repression. According to Lacan, repression occurs because something beyond is pressing in.[55] This beyond-factor is the drive. When either Freud or Lacan discuss inhibition, the dimension of the drive is always present.

Freud considers the form of inhibition just described as the result of an activity of the ego[56] and the secondary process of psychic functioning.[57] The ego can't bear the presence of a certain idea, intention or impulse and wards it off in order to avoid displeasure.[58]

Inhibition as stagnancy in ontogenetic development

In his consideration of inhibition as stagnation in ontogenetic development (the second use of the concept), Freud uses the concept of inhibition to refer to a stagnancy in the total picture of mental development.[59] The reason for inhibition is based on the fact that the 'libido has never left its infantile fixations'.[60] This stagnancy functions as a predisposing factor to neurosis. A part of these developmentally inhibited persons' psychical material has remained infantile and has been repressed. As such it constitutes the core of their unconscious.[61] This aspect of inhibition implies a subjective attachment to a certain way of striving for pleasure and is manifested in what Freud calls 'the many sorts of disturbances in sexual life'.[62]

Here again inhibition concerns the drive and the blocking of its development. What Freud calls a fixation is the attachment of the subject to a specific and peculiar way of gaining pleasure, and consequently to a specific object a.[63]

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[55] J. Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (1977). London, Penguin Books.

[56] S. Freud (1895) op.cit; S. Freud. *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). *S.E.*, 8.

[57] S. Freud (1900) op.cit.

[58] The described economic inhibition can be lifted in jokes (S. Freud (1905) op.cit.) and in dreams (S. Freud. *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940). *S.E.*, XXIII.). By means of a joke the internal resistance against an impulse can be lifted temporarily. In, for example, an aggressive joke an aggressive tendency can find its expression. The yielded pleasure corresponds to the psychical expenditure that is saved. Lacan also considers this kind of inhibition but he stresses the inhibitory influence of the imaginary relation between subject and other. In a witicism this inhibition is secondly lifted and a dimension beyond what was expected at the imaginary level, is highlighted (J. Lacan. *Le séminaire 1957-1958, Livre V, Les formations de l'inconscient* (1998). Texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris, Seuil).

[59] S. Freud. *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, part III. General Theory of the Neuroses* (1916-1917). *S.E., XVI.*

[60] S. Freud. *Types of Onset of Neurosis* (1912). *S.E., XII.* p. 235.

[61] S. Freud. *The Claims of Psycho-analysis to Scientific Interest* (1913). *S.E. XIII.* pp. 163-190.

[62] S. Freud (1940) op.cit., p. 155.

[63] J. Lacan. *Le Séminaire, L'angoisse*. (1962-1963)

Inhibition as the result of a dynamic process of defense

A third use Freud made of the concept of inhibition is found in his consideration of inhibition as the result of a dynamic process of defense. This is the use that interests us the most. Especially in his article Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety, Freud attempts to define this kind of inhibition more precisely in order to be able to distinguish it from symptoms and relate it to anxiety.[64] This kind of inhibition is also described as neurotic inhibition and is closely related to the structure of obsessional neurosis.

Before we start our conceptual explanation, we will give an example, which is a variation of a theme found in Lacan's work. In his seventh seminar Lacan comments on courtly love in order to make a point about the essence of sublimation.[65] He links courtly love to a very precise poetic craft whereby a poet sings the praises of a distant and inaccessible Lady. Let's imagine. The poet arrives at the castle, enters, and sings for a Lady in the room. In this case what we find is an aim-inhibited impulse. In other words, one activity is replacing another, while the object stays the same. The poet sings about the lady instead of making love to her. If the poet were neurotically inhibited, he would freeze up in some way and would consequently be unable to meet the object he longs for. For example, it might be impossible for the obsessionally inhibited poet to enter the castle at all, or he might become mute, or he might experience an inability to undo his pants.

Let's now make a shift to the theory. According to Freud, an inhibition is 'the expression of a restriction of an ego-function'[66] or 'a restriction of the ego's functioning'.[67] Examples of ego-functions that, according to Freud, could possibly be affected by an inhibition are the sexual function, eating, locomotion, and the ability to work.[68] Lacan follows Freud by situating inhibitions at the level of functions, but broadens our point of view by claiming that any function whatsoever can be affected by inhibition.[69]

On a phenomenological level a variety of disturbances in the exercise of a function can be considered inhibitions.

Possible inhibitions described by Freud[70] are:

- o a decrease in the pleasure of exercising a function,
- o a decrease in the ability to carry out a function,
- o an interruption of the carrying out of a function by the appearance of anxiety,

[64] S. Freud (1926) op.cit.
[65] J. Lacan. *The Seminar, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-1960). London, Routledge.
[66] S. Freud (1926) op.cit., p. 89.
[67] S. Freud. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1933). *S.E. XXII*. p. 83.
[68] S. Freud. (1926) op.cit.
[69] J. Lacan (1962-63) op.cit; J. Lacan, *Le séminaire 1974-1975, RSI, séminaire 10 décembre 1974*; J. Lacan, *Le séminaire 1974-1975, RSI, séminaire 13 mai 1975*.
[70] S. Freud (1926) op.cit.

- o negative reactions (for example, anxiety) when a person is obliged to carry out a function,
- o a hampered functioning because of conditions attached to the function, and
- o a prevention of the exercise of a function by security measures.

Lacan summarizes these classifications by saying that in general inhibition produces a halt: the expected exercise of a function doesn't come along. There is a block at the level of movement, and movement is a dimension that is at least metaphorically present in all functions.[71] By way of inhibition, for example, one becomes mute or one is unable to walk.

Concerning inhibitions, Freud situates three underlying mechanisms:

First – and this is the least important category – the ego can be generally inhibited when it is involved in a particularly difficult psychical task (such as mourning).   In this case the ego 'loses so much of the energy at its disposal that it has to cut down the expenditure of it at many points at once'.[72]   Freud illustrates this with the case of an obsessional neurotic who 'used to be overcome by a paralyzing fatigue which lasted for one or more days whenever something occurred which should obviously have thrown him into a rage'.[73] In other words: due to the energy spent in suppressing an affect that is experienced as incompatible with the ego, the ego got exhausted.   This first causal category is a purely energetic one since inhibition is seen as the consequence of an impoverishment of energy.[74]

Secondly, a function can be inhibited because the physical organs brought into play by it are too strongly eroticized; 'the ego-function of an organ is impaired if its erotogenicity – its sexual significance – is increased'.[75]   Freud states that the ego renounces the function at stake in order to avoid a conflict with the id.   In his essay on Leonardo da Vinci, Freud explains that at a certain moment of development, infantile researches concerning sexuality are subject to repression.[76]   He describes three different possible vicissitudes for the research instinct following this repression.   One possibility is that 'research shares the fate of sexuality; [77] thenceforward, curiosity remains inhibited and the free activity of intelligence may be limited'.[78] Freud describes this consequence as neurotic inhibition. Inhibition is defined here as a reduction in the activity of a

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[71] J. Lacan (1962-63) op.cit.
[72] S. Freud (1926) op.cit., p. 90.
[73] ibid.
[74] This causal category is quite separate from the two other categories. A totally different causal mechanism lies at its basis.   I find it problematic that Freud lumped such different underlying dynamics under the same category.   This results in a disparate conception concerning inhibition. I think that there are more aspects separating causal categories two and three from one than there are that unite them. I propose that it would be better to consider the first causal category as *mental exhaustion* resulting from intensive psychic activity.
[75] ibid, p. 89.
[76] S. Freud. *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (1910). *S.E.*, XI. pp. 59-138.
[77] The other two vicissitudes – the sexualizing of thinking in compulsive thinking and the sublimation of libido into curiosity – are less important for our purposes.
[78] S. Freud (1910) op. cit., p. 79.

psychic function (for example, curiosity) due to repression (repression to be understood here in the broadest sense of the word).

In other words: an impulse at the level of the drives presses in via a function, but contradicts the ideational context of the ego. The ego can't stand this pressure and renounces the function.

If we apply to this the four terms involved in the drive according to Freud and Lacan – namely thrust, source, object and aim – we can note that in the case of inhibition, thrust is restrained from discharge since a thrust is radically blocked in the pursuit of its course. The subject refrains from manifesting the thrust via a function. That's why neurotic inhibition is different from sublimation and aim-inhibition. In the case of an aim-inhibited impulse one activity is substituted for another, but the thrust continues to run its course around the object. For example, the courtly poet sings to the lady instead of fucking her. Only the aim is changed here. In sublimation both object and aim are changed.[79] In this case the poet sings about a rose instead of fucking the lady. Aim-inhibited impulses don't have a compulsory character. According to Freud they 'always preserve some of their original sexual aims'[80] and they can be transformed back into uninhibited impulses just as they arose out of them.[81] In neurotic inhibition, the situation is different since the subject painstakingly abandons the function that expresses the impulse. While the aim-inhibiting subject keeps in touch with the drive, the neurotic inhibiting subject attempts to erase any manifestation of the drive whatsoever.

Thirdly, a function can be inhibited to serve what Freud calls 'a purpose of self-punishment'. In this case the ego is not allowed to carry out an activity because it might bring success and gain. The ego gives up an activity 'in order to avoid coming into conflict with the super-ego'.[82] The activity is tabooed since it would result in a situation that is experienced as the realization of a forbidden wish. The person gives up the activity in order to avoid a psychic conflict. According to Freud this is 'often the case in inhibitions of professional activities'.[83]

An illustration of this process can be found in Freud's discussion of the seventeenth century painter Christoph Haizmann.[84] Freud described this painter as a person who was inhibited in his work. He situates the cause for this inability to work in the relation between Haizmann and his father. It is due to his father's death that our painter was unable to work. Freud hypothesizes that Haizmann's attitude towards his father 'bore the stamp of ambivalence'.[85] The lost father was hated as well as loved. This attitude is inherent in all relations between son and father but tends to be most pronounced in cases of obsessional neurosis. Freud claims that above all, the accidental factors that

[79] S. Freud. *The Encyclopaedia Articles* (1923b). *S.E.,* XVIII. pp. 234-260.

[80] S. Freud. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). *S.E*, XVIII. p. 138.

[81] ibid, pp. 67-144.

[82] S. Freud (1926) op. cit., p. 90.

[83] ibid.

[84] S. Freud. *A Seventeenth-century Demonological Neurosis* (1923). *S.E.*, XIX, pp. 67-108.

[85] ibid, p. 87.

add to these typical motives need to be elucidated. These accidental factors can help us understand why he became unable to work. Freud presumes that it 'is possible that his father had opposed his wish to become a painter'.[86] The inability to paint after his father's death can consequently be understood as an expression of deferred obedience. In addition it is likely that his inability to earn a livelihood is the expression of 'his longing for his father as a protector from the cares of life'.[87] After the death of the father the stance of opposition towards the father was tabooed. His hostile attitudes were incompatible with mourning the loss of a beloved father. As a consequence the subject tries to nip hostility in the bud. Being inhibited in his work, then, is an indication of the hostility the subject defends against. We can conclude that Haizmann's inhibited function refers to an underlying psycho-neurotic conflict. The same mechanism can be found in Freud's description of 'those wrecked by success'.[88] In this case a person falls ill due to a realized success; 'when a deeply-rooted and long-cherished wish has come to fulfillment'.[89] Freud claims that falling ill from success is closely connected to the Oedipus complex. In other words, a person renounces an activity since the activity is linked associatively with an oedipal situation. At an unconscious level a person experiences the actual success as the realization of an old but insisting wish.

In this case we see that a subject inhibits one of his or her functions in relation to a big Other. From a Freudian point of view the function is inhibited since it expresses a desire the subject cherishes but experiences as forbidden.

From a Lacanian point of view these inhibiting subjects act in a typically obsessional way. According to Lacan[90] an obsessional resembles a slave who's awaiting his master's death in order to be able to enjoy.[91] However, once the master is dead the obsessional subject is confronted with a problem. From a Lacanian point of view the essence of the problem is not that he or she is now confronted with feelings of guilt due to his or her desire for the master's death. The essence lies in the fact that he or she is confronted with his or her own stance towards desire as such. The feelings of guilt are only secondary.

Let's consider more globally the last two causal categories - namely, inhibition due to a conflict with a drive and inhibition due to a conflict with a hostile impulse - and link them to the obsessional neurotic's attitude towards desire.

In both cases inhibition is the result of a psycho-neurotic conflict that has been avoided. The conflict concerned in both cases is a conflict between two inner tendencies: on the one hand we have a tendency within the ego and on the other hand a contradicting impulse. The subject chooses to shun this

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[86] ibid, p. 88.
[87] ibid.
[88] S. Freud. *Some Character-types met with in Psycho-analytical Work* (1916). *S.E.*, XIV. pp. 311-334.
[89] ibid, p. 316.
[90] J. Lacan. *Ecrits* (1966). Paris, Seuil.
[91] ibid.

conflict and limits the associated ego-function. This self-imposed limitation consequently serves as an indication of the underlying conflict.

Lacan sheds light on this point of view. According to him an inhibition is the consequence of introducing into a function a desire that is different from the desire the function normally satisfies.[92] Inhibition results from a defense process against this secondarily introduced desire. The subject attempts to have nothing to do with the secondarily introduced desire and renounces the function; for example, from the moment that our poet's singing becomes a sign of his desire to fuck the lady, singing becomes impossible.

This attitude towards desire is typically obsessional, since when an obsessional neurotic approaches his object, desire disappears.[93] In inhibition desire is exercised, but essentially as a desire to retain. The desire to retain constitutes the fundamental structure of obsessional desire as an anal desire.[94]

In obsessional neurosis the anal object plays a role in the function of desire.[95] It's not its end or goal, but its cause. The nature of this cause is non-substantial since it's constituted on the function of lack. An anal desire is a desire to retain the primordial object a that the Other is supposed to want.[96] This non-substantial object makes the subject desire because it indicates a lack in the Other, a failure at the level of the Other's jouissance.

If on the one hand the Other would get the object a the subject retains, the Other would appear as a threatening agent. It's precisely this anxiety that the neurotic subject tries to avoid. If on the other hand the subject was on the verge of attaining what he really wants, he would also pull back from it. By maintaining a lack, in both cases the central lack of subjectivity is prevented from lacking. A lack of a lack would efface the subject, and elicit anxiety.

Inhibition consequently reflects the basic attitude of the obsessional towards desire as such. In some of his notes the old Freud reflected on the problem of inhibition in work and intellect. At this point he links inhibition to the unsatisfying nature of human satisfaction. 'There is always something lacking for complete discharge and satisfaction'.[97] According to him, inhibition is a reaction to dissatisfaction. Lacan inverts this line of reasoning. He considers inhibition to be a way of installing dissatisfaction, for at an unconscious level the neurotic doesn't want his own desire to be satisfied. The neurotic wants a desire of his own, a desire he secretly cherishes. This own desire guarantees a distinction between subject and Other. Anxiety appears the moment this lack is filled up.

For the obsessional this desire for an own desire implies that he tends to sustain his desire as impossible; He situates his own desire at the level of the impossibilities of desire.[98] While the hysteric needs an unsatisfied desire, the

[92] J. Lacan. (1962-63) op.cit.
[93] J. Lacan. (1998) op.cit.
[94] J. Lacan. (1962-63) op.cit.
[95] ibid.
[96] ibid.
[97] S. Freud. *Findings, Ideas, Problems* (1941). *S.E.*, XXIII. p. 300.
[98] J. Lacan (1962-63) op.cit.

obsessional produces a forbidden desire. The ban is there to sustain desire. At the imaginary level, the emergence of his desire would result in a fear that someone will take revenge on him. When someone appeals to the obsessional's desire, this results in a dual situation for the obsessional, a situation where he/she is an object for an enjoying Other. In order to prevent this, he/she inhibits manifestations of desire.[99] The inhibiting obsessional can't stand the manifestation of his own desire and chooses to retain his desire. This retention of desire becomes an aim in its own right.

When the Other asks an obsessional to reveal his desire, to manifest his desire in a signifying way, to officially declare his desire, he will hesitate and shy away. When an obsessional achieves what he longed for, his super-ego will forbid him to enjoy. He will feel unable to fulfill the act he fantasized about and will renounce the desired object. If an encounter with the desired object manifests itself as a possibility, the obsessional shrinks back.

Freud illustrates this with the case of an academic teacher who for many years cherished a wish to succeed the department head, who was also his own master. When the department head retired and his colleagues chose him to succeed the old master, our man fell ill and was unable to work for years. He began to hesitate; he depreciated his own merits and declared himself unworthy. Freud attributes this breakdown to the forces of conscience. The ego tolerated a wish that was harmless as long as it only existed in fantasy but hotly defends against it 'as soon as it approaches fulfilment and threatens to become a reality'.[100] From a Lacanian point of view we can remark that his secretly cherished desire began to be realised. The obsessional runs away when he gets what he really wants. The obsessional sidelines himself when he is about to score.

What Lacan calls an act can be considered the very opposite of obsessional inhibition.[101] In an act we have indeed movement and action, but in such a manner that the action implies at the same time a signifying manifestation. In an act a subject is engaged and desire is manifested. This manifested desire is the same desire as the desire that is involved in inhibition, the same desire that the obsessional shies away from.[102]

Let's now further distinguish the typically obsessional inhibition from a typical hysterical symptom.

Firstly, in Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety Freud states that function-related inhibitions do not necessarily have a pathological implication.[103] Symptoms are different since they do denote the presence of a pathological process. This distinction is quite vague.

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[99] J. Lacan (1998) op.cit.
[100] S. Freud (1916) op.cit., p. 318.
[101] J. Lacan (1962-63) op.cit.
[102] ibid.
[103] S. Freud (1926) op.cit.

Secondly, Freud writes that a symptom cannot 'be described as a process that takes place within, or acts upon, the ego'.[104] On the one hand a symptom is the consequence of an underlying repression and it is repression that proceeds from the ego.   The ego on the other hand tries to dissociate itself from the symptom and acts as if it doesn't have anything to do with it.   A symptom is something the ego experiences as foreign, it's a foreign body; a 'Fremdkörper'.   It seems that the ego has nothing to do with it. Inhibition on the contrary is directly situated at the level of the ego; it involves an ego that has given up one of its own functions.   Freud writes that inhibition is a matter of renouncing a function 'in order not to have to undertake fresh measures of repression'.[105]   The inhibiting ego renounces the function that would elicit a psychic conflict.   So, whereas a symptom is the consequence of a repression, inhibition is a way to avoid repression.   Repression is avoided by avoiding the conflict that would force the ego to repress.   This results in a different cathectic situation.   In the case of inhibition, the cathexis or eroticization of a conflict-related function is maintained, but due to the renouncing, the function is not executed.   In this way the conflict-related situation is avoided.   In the case of repression, cathexis is displaced from the conflict-related idea to an associated element that becomes the symptom.   In this case the function implied in the conflict is maintained.   The associated amount of excitation is displaced onto an element outside the scope of the direct conflict-situation.

Lacan also contrasts inhibition from symptoms and anxiety, and he describes their relation via his triad RSI.   Anxiety concerns the Real, symptoms the Symbolic and inhibitions the Imaginary.[106]

Lacan[107] links the stoppage that inhibition produces to an intrusion into the symbolic field.[108]   This intrusion is imaginary since it hinders symbolic articulation as such.   Inhibition is a halting at the level of the image and the dying down of symbolic articulation.   It prevents the formation of symptoms that would allow for a symbolic expression of a conflict.[109] Inhibition is an attempt to flee from a conflict and can be situated as logically anterior to repression.   So, an inhibition indeed has meaning, even a 'too much' of meaning, but it is a meaning that is not articulated in the symbolic field.

In fact, inhibition implies a double avoidance.   On the one hand it's a strategy to avoid repression, but on the other hand the avoided repression is already itself an avoidance.   After all, repression is a strategy for avoiding the anxiety-provoking drive by binding it to a signifier.   A symptom is a signifying answer to the anxiety-provoking enigma the drive implies for the subject.   This signifying answer is doomed to failure since the repressed impulse continuously returns.   With the symptom the impulse, moreover, gains an amount of satisfaction.

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[104] ibid, p. 90.
[105] ibid.
[106] J. Lacan (1975) op.cit.
[107] J. Lacan (1974) op.cit.
[108] ibid.
[109] J. Lacan (1975) op.cit.

Inhibitions are a more radical attempt to efface desire as such and at a more fundamental level they are an attempt to totally erase the drive, inhibitions totally blocking the manifestation of thrust and drive.

This double avoidance implies a double problem. On the one hand it implies a problem for the inhibiting subject and on the other hand a problem for psychoanalytic technique.

Balbure thinks that this strategy of inhibition in avoiding anxiety involves a danger.[110] Inhibition on the one hand has a structural aim in maintaining the subject's lack, but on the other hand by suppressing desire, inhibition tends to separate the subject from its desire. As a consequence, desire threatens to be extinguished and the subject may slip into a depressive situation. The subject would thus pay for the avoidance of anxiety with his own being.

On the other hand inhibitions produce difficulties for psychoanalytic treatment, for the more a person inhibits at an imaginary level, the more this person tends to avoid expressing his problems at a symbolic level. To the extent that the subject speaks through its symptoms, it shuts up through its inhibitions. Symptoms always express a struggle with an ignored desire. Inhibitions are a more radical attempt to efface desire as such. The inhibiting analysand must be willing to reframe his problems in terms of symptoms in order to make an analysis possible. Psychoanalysis such as Freud proposed it is based upon talking and seeking the truth. The obsessional tends to flee from the full speech this requires, and inhibitions are one way to achieve this flight.

As a response to the typically obsessional strategy of engaging in empty metonymic speech, Lacan proposed the psychoanalytic act (such as short sessions; stopping the analytic session earlier than the analysand expected it to stop).[111] A psychoanalytic act is a technical measure that confronts the analysand with an enigma. It's an attempt to provoke full speech from the analysand and it is useful to break through the obsessional's intra-psychic defenses, through his 'system', through empty metonymic speech. As such we think that an act can also destabilize the obsessional's choice of inhibition and stimulate a signifying questioning of desire.

Pierre Rey,[112] a French journalist and writer who was in analysis with Lacan illustrates the effect of a psychoanalytic act. He characterizes his pre-analysed existence by the dictum 'I am because I don't act'.[113] His life at that time was a matter of non-action. He did literally nothing: 'I was too good to create. Enjoyment is a condition of fullness that suffices in itself'.[114] Lacan's interventions seem to disrupt this situation of immobility. Several acts destabilize Rey's subjective situation and drive him to action. Lacan for example obliges him to pay while he has no money anymore. Another time Lacan plans the sessions at 6 o'clock in the morning, knowing Rey was in the

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[110] B. Balbure. *Inhibition et Procrastination.* 2000 *http:www.freud-lacan.com/documents/docs/bbalbure180494.shtml.*
[111] J. Lacan (1966), op. cit., pp. 315-316.
[112] P. Rey. *Une Saison chez Lacan.* Paris, Robert Laffont, 1989.
[113] ibid, p. 21.
[114] ibid, p. 23.

habit of getting up late.   By this acts Lacan attempts to deprive his analysand of something he cherishes and enjoys.   Rey writes 'I had simply forgotten that creation is elsewhere; everywhere a lack is manifested'.[115] What Lacan did was to create this necessary lack.

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[115] ibid.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Throughout several chapters we have linked our Lacanian and Freudian interpretations of the data to other relevant psychoanalytic literature (American and British schools), and other qualitative findings. In this section we aim at a further discussion of our conclusions. We will then go into the clinical implications of our findings and into our research methodology. Last, by way of conclusion, we take a conceptual turn and discuss the relation between Lacanian psychoanalysis and qualitative research. The kind of systematized research we report on is quite new and uncommon to the Lacanian-Freudian psychoanalytic tradition. In this final section of the thesis we attempt to formulate a framework that brings both together, one that we hope will stimulate further qualitative research within the field of psychoanalysis.

A discussion of our conclusions

The differentiation between high and low scoring respondents described in chapters 3.1. and 3.2., which was based on Lacan's reflections concerning the master/slave dialectic and his distinction between imaginary and symbolic relations, and the three subtypes/sub-processes described in chapter 4.1., could be interpreted differently from other theoretical perspectives.

The typical imaginary orientation we described in high scoring respondents links up with previous qualitative findings by Hallsten (1993), Forney et al. (1982) and Firth (1985), described in part 2 (e.g. that feelings of identity are closely linked to effected change and to feedback of others, the idea that one is only loved for one's achievements, the general omnipotent orientation). In line with the research described in part 2 we also observed frequent conflicting relations for people with a high burnout score. Linking both aspects, we concluded that personal characteristics and interaction style are concomitant aspects that influence one's orientation toward the organizing factor of the burnout problem. This, however, is an idea that needs to be tested further. Starting from theories on 'emotional labour' (Abiala, 1999; Büssing, 1999), it could alternatively be argued that the fusion between person and role we observed in the high scoring group is a direct consequence of the service-relation in which these persons are engaged. Starting from this point of view, the data could have been analyzed differently: with a main emphasis on how the work-context is organized. Perhaps, the subtypes we discerned in chapter 4.1. also could be related back to different models of work-organization.

The characteristics of the low scoring respondents link up with the findings of Schaufeli et al. (2001), who found that engaged workers actively direct their lives and are not entirely swallowed up by their work.

The observations of Kets de Vries (2001) and Cherniss (1995) concerning well-functioning individuals link up with our findings as well. Core characteristics Kets de Vries (2001) discerns for this group, for example, are: stable sense of identity, taking responsibility for their actions, not blaming others for set-backs, sense of efficacy, knowing how to handle ambivalence. These are all characteristics we observed in our low-scoring group as well. Important similarities between our conclusions and those of Cherniss (1995) are that: these people tend to cultivate a special interest in the job that meets with an organizational need, they experiment in the job, they have an open and active curiosity, and they adopt an active and problem-solving stance in dealing with difficulties. These findings and our own data, which accentuates the difference between high and low scoring respondents, do not link up with Reagh's (1994) conclusions that there's only a small step between burning out and staying in the job. The characteristics Reagh (1994) describes for those who stay rather link up with our picture of high scoring respondents (need to be needed, seeing themselves as rescuers, etc.). Perhaps the difference in conclusions can be brought back to the fact that in Reagh's (1994) study, burnout was operationalized by the criterion of staying or not staying in the job, which assumed that staying is an indication that there is no burnout. All the interviewees we interviewed corresponded to this criterion, for they were all at work the moment we questioned them.

We checked the MBI-scores of the 15 low-scoring respondents we interviewed and observed that in this group, the scores on the depersonalization subscale are remarkably low (mean = 0.86). We could not observe trends in within-group differences. The distinction we made between the symbolically- and imaginarily-functioning respondents that are protected by environmental factors, was not reflected in a differentiating score on the subscales.

The described withdrawal and harshness of the high-scoring respondents described in chapter 3.2. and part 4 have frequently been observed in ward staff with professional burnout (Reid et al. 1999a) and could alternatively be interpreted in terms of action theory and the concept of 'emotion work', as an effect of emotional dissonance (see Zapf et al., 2001). Starting from the theory of social exchange, professional burnout can be seen as a way of restoring reciprocity between client and caregiver (see Buunk & Schaufeli, 1993; Van Horn & Schaufeli, 1996). One aspect these theoretical explanations overlook is the threatening quality the other (see also Leiter et al., 2001) might have for a burnt-out person. This, however, is an issue that perhaps could be brought back to a disruption of cognitive schemata. Iliffe and Steed (2000), for example, observed that prolonged work with difficult clients could disrupt people's trust in the world. More broadly, the second and third subtypes we discerned in chapter 4.1. could, from a constructivist point of view (Iliffe & Steed, 2000), alternatively be interpreted as consequences of disrupted cognitive schemas due to difficult interactions on the work-floor.

From a psychodynamic-existential perspective, some authors (e.g. Pines & Yanai, 2001) conclude that professional burnout is a consequence of a failed quest for meaning. Although we didn't take this aspect into account while we were formulating our research question, we conclude that finding or not finding meaning indeed could be used as a criterion for differentiating between high and low scoring respondents. A feeling of meaninglessness especially typifies high scoring respondents from the second subtype, for whom the cherished ideals lose their privileged function. Moreover, in this context we think that we need to differentiate between a search for meaning and the finding of meaning. We have the impression that, in line with our differentiation between high and low scoring respondents, a substantial group of high scoring respondents desperately seeks meaning and in doing so starts from a personal image. Low scoring respondents, on the other hand, seem to find it apart from their own representations of meaning. Further research could study these differentiations.

In our study we observed that groups and organizations can have an obvious mediating effect in some cases of burnout. Although we didn't examine this variable systematically, we found indications of how this influence works (cf. chapter 3.2.). The exact nature of this influence constitutes an interesting topic for future research. Kahn (1993) already indicated through qualitative research how patterns of care-giving interact with co-worker relations in a small volunteer organization. We wonder if similar patterns are at work within professionalized care-giving. Interesting ideas can be found in the work of Kaës (2002), which indicates how group-history determines actual functioning, and in the work of Aubert and Gaulejac (1991), which indicates how organizational ideals influence subjective ideals.

We compared the MBI-scores of the 15 high-scoring respondents we interviewed, and checked if the mechanisms/subtypes we discerned in part 3 correspond with specific patterns in these persons' scores on the MBI-subscales. We could not observe clear differences between the subgroups. The only minor trend we observed is a slightly higher score on the depersonalization subscale for those respondents we situated in the second subtype and for those respondents we simultaneously situated in the first and second subtype. Perhaps, this trend could be linked to our observation that respondents within this subtype experienced the other as a threatening agent, which eventually motivated them to distance themselves from the other. It would be interesting to further research, study and refine the possible link between subtypes on the one hand, and profiles in burnout-scores on the other hand.

Clinical implications

Throughout the chapters we indicated some guidelines that could possibly orient psychoanalytic intervention. For us, intervention should not focus solely on the pressures of work or fatigue as such, but also on the position a person repeatedly takes in relation to others through his/her job. Analytic intervention should concentrate on the subjective function work has in the relation between subject and Other.

First we will address therapeutic intervention in cases of burnout. We think that given the general imaginary orientation of people with a high score, treatment will have to focus on a person's tendency toward excessive libidinal investment in the job and on the tendency to narcissistically relate results in the job to oneself. We consider burnout complaints as a side-effect of people's imaginary intersubjective orientation. This focus is especially important for those within the first subtype we discerned. Research (Firth, 1985; Firth-Cozens, 1992, Pines & Yanai, 2001) indicates that these attitudes are closely related to people's representations of their oedipal history and to their relational experience with their own primary care-givers. In the same vein, characteristics of the position that someone adopts in relation to the Other in a work relationship are likely to be repeated in the transference. A Lacanian intervention would specifically focus on the core signifiers the person uses to relate on the job and with others. These signifiers constitute the frame of one's identity. By unraveling and working through the structure of these signifiers, imaginary preoccupations will be put into perspective. This enables subjects to break the repetition they are involved in, and to make new choices in relation to the Other and to their laboring. Since people's position in the Imaginary and the Symbolic reflects a particular position taken toward the Real, psychoanalytic intervention has to involve more than merely stimulating people into making a mental or cognitive shift. Intervention needs to focus primarily on people's attachment to their style of interaction and, consequently, this must be designed on the basis of the concept of working through. For those within the second subtype, an experience of loss at the level of object-cathexis is pivotal. Positive and negative memories of the invalidated ego-ideal will have to be remembered, such that disinvestment is possible. Freud (1917) indicates that this will always proceed through a temporary over-cathexis. Through a temporary intensive elaboration of expectations and memories, it will be possible to establish distance from early cathexes and to re-invest in new objects. For those within the third subtype, intervention will have to focus on these persons' tendencies to flee situations of aggression and to defend strongly against ambivalence. Antithesis should be recognized, verbalized and worked through so that it is no longer automatically defended against. This implies that intervention should break through people's spontaneous tendency to avoid the taboos of aggression and sexuality and the tendency to disown these dimensions. As in

psychoanalysis proper, professionals should be stimulated to say what's on their mind and to address incidents they experience as compromising. In this way, the conflictual nature of contradiction may be diminished to the extent that it no longer seeks expression via subjective complaints. Intervention should focus on the symbolic roots upon which the imaginary care-giving relation is based (cf. the caregiver's own oedipal history) and on the real impotence in relation to which this imaginary relation functions as a defense.

At a more general level, we think that our results indicate the importance of individual and collective psychoanalytic supervision and of coaching, whereby an external supervisor/coach stimulates people to talk on their work-experiences, such that people are stimulated to take a symbolic distance from the imaginary roles and conflicts. These interventions could be organized permanently or in relation to specific conflict situations.

The qualitative research project

As far as we know, no qualitative interview-research has ever been done within the Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition, from which our study starts. This created some difficulty, as there were no examples of good practice available that could possibly orient our research. On the other hand, this obvious lack opened up some possibilities to be creative. A major difficulty we were confronted with is the lack of compatibility between existing research procedures within the domain of qualitative methodology: several authors have designed several research procedures, yet no common standards exist. This state of affairs constitutes a major difference compared to quantitative research, which does start from clear conventions. Given the complexity of the situation, our initial decision (made when we first designed our study) to start our data-analysis from Grounded Theory was made too quickly. The moment the interviews were conducted, however, we decided to opt for the broader methodology Miles & Huberman (1994) designed. We made this decision because their approach linked up more closely with our research question. Although we changed our general framework, we didn't have to change the coding procedures we had already started. After all, the coding procedures proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994) start from Grounded Theory. At this procedural level it could be argued that a steadfast choice at the beginning of the research would have been desirable.

Although we followed the procedure of data-analysis Miles and Huberman (1994) developed, we don't claim that this method enabled us to describe causal relations. We limit our presumptions to the idea that we discerned structural patterns and interconnections between elements in the data we collected. Since we only had cataloguing intentions, we never considered the step to network-building they propose.

In the process of data-analysis, we only used the Atlas-ti software as a kind of refined card-tray. From a methodological perspective, one could claim that the possibilities of using this program for organizing the data were not fully utilized. We gave our interviewees the freedom to answer the questions the way they wanted to and restricted our own contribution to asking interviewees for clarification on aspects they introduced. Consequently, we noticed that the amount of equivalent codes given in the context of one interview was largely dependent on the spontaneous discursive style of the interviewee. Within the same vein, we had the impression that the weight we could attribute to equivalent codes differed to a degree that was so substantial, that comparisons between cases, based on the amount or weight of codes, were irrelevant. The counting (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 252-254) we applied solely concerned the occurrence or non-occurrence of patterns at the case-level. We consequently can't judge on the gravity or gradations of occurring patterns.

While designing our research we could have made the choice to use part of the sample (e.g. 10 of the 30 interviewees) as a control-group, against which we could have tested the findings that were based on the 20 other interviews. On the one hand, this would have increased the internal validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279) of our conclusions. On the other hand, it is difficult to judge upon this issue, for the conclusions drawn from the research are indeed based upon all of the interviews.

The only method through which we collected our data was the semi-structured interview. Triangulation at the level of methods (e.g. also structured interview and participant observation) could have validated our data more strongly. Miles & Huberman (1994, p. 279) indicate that this enhances internal validity. The internal validity of our conclusions also could have been enhanced if we had decided to feed our conclusions back to the interviewees. Reliability could have been enhanced if an external colleague would have been involved when we were collecting and analyzing our data. He/she could have acted as an auditor by reviewing our procedures.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, it could be argued that our conclusions are based on a very limited basis (one interview with each respondent). Compared to the richness of information gathered during psychoanalyses, information gleaned from one interview can be considered superficial. In order to gain further in-depth insight into the nature of burnout, a study of it within a classical psychoanalytic setting that enables us to study phenomena in the context of a transference relation would be illuminating. Hollway & Jefferson (2000) try to overcome part of this difficulty by organizing two interviews with each respondent. In this case, the first interview is meant to establish a preliminary symptomatic reading that stays close to what is said, whereas the second interview acts as a control, wherein researchers can seek further evidence to test emergent hypotheses. They moreover observe that during this

second interview a kind of intimacy is realized that prepares interviewees to express more intimate material. We opted to interview a fairly large sample, which enhances representativeness. We also could have chosen to opt for repeated contacts with each interviewee. This would have made the data stronger (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 268).

Lacanian psychoanalysis versus qualitative research

We already indicated that the kind of qualitative interview-research we report on is quite new and uncommon to the Lacanian-Freudian psychoanalytic tradition. In this final section we reflect on the interrelation between both, and attempt to formulate a framework that opens up perspectives for further application of qualitative research techniques within the context of Lacanian-Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

In his continuous attempts to define psychoanalysis, Lacan clearly differentiated the latter epistemologically from classical empiricist and positivistic science. In the classic text 'la science et la vérité' (1966), Lacan explores the difference between both. In this text he addresses the question of causation, but inverts its classical logical and scientific meaning by claiming that it is the Freudian 'Ichspaltung', or what he calls the division of the subject, that should be considered the basis for all thinking on causation (cf. Lacan, 1966, pp. 855-877). For Lacan, the 'Spaltung' or division is the "material cause" of all (inter-)subjectivity (Lacan, 1966, p. 875). Although, on the one hand, this concerns the determination of the subject by the signifier and the aforementioned primordial symbolic recognition, this cause also pertains to the subject's inherent in-determination, its absence of tangible determination. We can connect this latter aspect of causation to the Lacanian category of the Real, which refers primarily to the dimension of the bodily drive that all subjects try to master by way of their symbolic and imaginary representations and relations, but toward which, because of its incongruous nature, all representations necessarily fall short (cf. Zizek, 1988). Both dimensions of causation converge in Lacan's idea that the relation of the divided subject to the object a constitutes the object of psychoanalysis (cf. Lacan [1966, p. 863]: "L'objet de la psychanalyse … n'est autre que … l'objet a … dans la division du sujet"). Compared to classical science's definition of an operational object (cf. Lacan, 1973, pp. 16-17) – i.e. an object that can be caught in signifiers (Milner, 1995) – the psychoanalytic object strikes because of its non-rational and abject character. This object has a peculiar status, firstly because it concerns the way a subject deals with aspects of its experience that can never be objectified, and secondly because the object itself is constituted by a relation. The relation concerned is the stance ($\&$) of the subject, to the extent that it is marked by signifiers ($\exists$), toward that which escapes all

attempts at signification (the object a): ∃&a. In other words, the Lacanian object of study concerns the way a human being positions itself in the three registers of mental experience that Lacan discerned: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. More specifically, it regards the clash between the Real, on the one hand, and the Symbolic and the Imaginary on the other hand.

According to Lacan (1966) the subjective relation to the object a is veiled in classical science. In Lacan's view, science works with generalized and univocal theories that precisely neglect subjectivity. In this view on science, the latter is merely equalized to knowledge that starts from a-priori statements and that constitutes a 'closed' system, a unified interpretative theory. In this context he criticizes the kind of research within the hermeneutic tradition that applies theory in interpreting phenomena, for this results in a never-ending search for meaning (Lacan, 1973). In the same vein, researchers' implicit theories on reality in general, and on the reality they are studying in specific, tend to mould the conclusions a researcher arrives at. In this context it can be said that a researcher who applies his own (implicit) theory to research is scotomized in a structural way; he or she becomes blind to the things that don't fit within his or her own frame of thinking (cf. Devreux, 1967; Lacan, 1964-1965).

Psychoanalysis, such as Lacan defines it, is a peculiar science since it over and over again departs from something else, namely the particular and equivocal speech of a specific subject. From his point of view, the analysant's singular discourse is a way of dealing with the ungraspable Real with which he/she is confronted (∃&a), an interrelation in which a subject possibly gets stuck and consequently suffers. So, while according to Lacan scientists are looking for general laws, psychoanalysts listen to manifestations of radical subjectivity, to subjective truth. This truth does not refer to the classical conception of truth, "according to which truth is synonymous with a perfect overlap (correspondence) between reason and reality, between thing and the outside world (adaequatio rei et intellectus)" (Nobus, 2002, p. 99). Psychoanalytic truth concerns the organization of the signifier in a particular subject, which as such is already an answer to the Real with which it is confronted (cf. Verhaeghe, 2002). This organization is not subject to self-knowledge, but rather determines the subject's functioning at an unconscious level. The experience of surprise is generally seen as an indicator that elements of this truth became conscious to the ego.

Consequently, the psychoanalyst doesn't actually work with his specialized knowledge when he acts as an analyst. The analyst rather occupies the position of the object a and works with the associative material the analysant produces (on the analysts' discourse: cf. Lacan, 1991; "Un sujet est psychanalyste … pour autant qu'il entre dans le jeu signifiant" [Lacan, 1964-1965, session 5/5]). If, however, psychoanalysis were only to focus on the particular, it could hardly be called a science ("le champ d'une praxis … ne suffit pas à definer une science" [Lacan, 1973,

p. 17]). That's why the switch to the conceptual level is made. Throughout his oeuvre Lacan wondered how the particularity of the relation of a subject to the object a could be grasped in a scientific way (e.g. Lacan's [1964-1965, session 5/5] comment on the object a: "c'est par une voie singulière dont il nous reste en somme à inverser la question de savoir comment il se fait que nous puissions en attraper quelque chose dont nous puissions parler scientifiquement"). In answering this question he opted for a logical formalization of psychoanalytic insights (Vanheule, 2002). By formalization, such as that done in logic, knowledge is detached from the imaginary interpretations that tend to generalize particular insights to all cases. In Lacan's line of reasoning formalization, on the contrary, opens up a possibility for describing mechanisms and structure, against which particular cases can be tested.

This firmly stated contrast between (Lacan's view of) science and psychoanalysis elicited many critical comments about Lacanian psychoanalysts vis-à-vis science. In our opinion, the opposition between both should not be thought of rigidly ("Il n'est nullement nécessaire que l'arbre de la science n'ait qu'un tronc" [Lacan, 1973, p. 17]). In the context of this thesis, we won't comment and critique this issue in detail (for a recent account on this topic: Milner, 1995; Glynos & Stravrakakis, 2002). Let us just say that in our view, the main difference is to be situated at the level of the object of study: psychoanalysis studies the very domain that science normally excludes, i.e. particular subjectivity. We agree with Gori, Hoffmann and Douville (2002), who state that this object can be studied in a methodologically sound way. These authors differentiate between scientific discovery – which is the moment of creative enunciation research aims at – and the construction of unifying scientific knowledge. According to them, research does not necessarily exclude subjectivity; it can indeed take subjective enunciation as its object. As such it differs from scientific knowledge and its interpretative application, which by their comprehensive nature indeed exclude subjectivity. In line with these authors, we think that the subjectivity science excludes and that psychoanalysis takes as its object can be investigated through other methods than the psychoanalytic cure, which is the methodical 'via regia' of psychoanalysis. We believe that qualitative research that starts from the particular speech of a subject is a particularly well-suited method for doing so. Within the Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition, research is no common practice. Recently, however, things are changing and research based on interviews is gaining a place within Lacanian psychoanalysis (cf. Gori, Hoffmann & Douville, 2002; Vanheule, 2002). We assume that for our current academic context, in which thinking is more and more evidence-based, psychoanalytic interview-research deserves a place of its own ("Là se trouve le défi lancé à la recherche psychanalytique: comment inventer un dispositif de recherche et de transmission qui demeure homogène à sa méthode tout en prenant en considération les exigences de la communication scientifique" [Gori, Hoffmann & Douville, 2002, p. 18]). We

moreover think that Lacan's own practice opens up a possibility for situating qualitative research within the domain of psychoanalytic praxis. After all, in his continuous critical reflection on and study of the object of psychoanalysis, Lacan didn't limit himself to the psychoanalytic cure. His so-called clinical presentations and the procedure of 'the pass' he developed can be considered as two psychoanalytic working methods that are complementary to the cure. We think that both practices, on the one hand, and interview-research, on the other hand, can start from similar basic assumptions. We will now briefly go explore both methods.

Lacan started to give clinical presentations in the Henry Rouselle centre of the Sainte-Anne clinic in 1953 (Weill et al., 2001). In fact, these so-called presentations did not consist of him presenting or explaining the problem of a patient in the ancient clinical tradition – such as described by Foucault (1963) – but of an interview and dialogue with a patient who consulted the clinic. During these presentations – that took one to two hours – Lacan told the patient to speak ("… je laisse la parole. C'est en ça que consiste ce qu'on appelle mes présentations de malades" [Lacan, 1971-1972, session 6/1]). At the methodical level Lacan stressed attentive listening ("cette présentation … consiste à les écouter" [Lacan, 1971-1972, session 6/1]). As one studies the transcripts of such sessions (e.g. the case of Gérard Primeau in: Scheiderman, 1980, pp. 19-41), one notices that as an interviewer Lacan stayed very close to the speech of the interviewee and to the topics with which the latter was occupied. Between him and the patient a real dialogue developed, in which Lacan took an active position. His (frequent) interventions consisted of encouragements to go on speaking and of continued requests for concrete examples and specification. What is remarkable is that Lacan didn't take the other's utterances for granted and that very often he asked for clarification of discursive elements the interviewee introduced. Lacan obviously wanted to get a grip on the logic of the other's use of signifiers. In this kind of dialogue the patient is approached in his status of a subject in the psychoanalytic sense of the word: as a being that in dealing with the discontent provoking Real it is confronted with, uses and organizes signifiers in particular patterns. Through the interview Lacan studied the subject's implicit organization of signifiers in dealing with the Real. He stated that since his interviews precisely went into these signifiers and the implicit logic of their connections, they were to be considered psychoanalytic ("Ce qui s'est dégagé de ces présentations qui sont de présentations caractérisées par le fait que c'est au titre de psychanalyste que je suis là … c'est de ma position actuelle de psychanalyste que j'opère dans mon examen" [Lacan, 1970]).

The procedure of 'the pass' is another working method Lacan designed, though not solely as an instrument for investigation. This procedure concerned the recognition of new psychoanalysts and was put into practice in 1964, in reaction to his dissatisfaction and discord with the

way psychoanalytic societies at that time proceeded in recognizing analysts. The pass consists of a testimony on the end of one's own analysis that is given by a candidate analyst (who is called the 'passant') to two 'passeurs'. The latter are analysants that are asked by their own analyst to take on this role. It's the passeurs' task to listen to the passant, and to report on what they heard to a jury of already recognized analysts ('jury d'agrément'). This jury decides whether or not the candidate can carry the title of analyst. Actually, Lacan introduces the pass with a double aim. On the one hand it aims at recognizing psychoanalysts by giving them a title or 'gradus'. On the other hand he designed it as a research tool for studying the effects of a psychoanalytic cure. By asking analysants for testimony on the end of their cure, he aimed at getting insight into the changes psychoanalysis produces. One of the reasons for designing the pass can be found in Lacan's questioning on how psychoanalysis works, how it ends and how it produces didactic effects, such that it enables analysants to become analysts themselves. Lacan wondered about the structure of this experience and, more precisely, about how it affected the way a subject deals with the dimension of the Real ("… rendre compte de ce qu'est effectivement la praxis analytique, de ce qu'elle prétend conquerer sur le réel" [Lacan, 1964-1965, session 16/12]). According to him, the end of the cure is a moment that involves the relation of the divided subject to the object a ("Le passage du psychanalysant au psychanalyste, a une porte dont ce reste qui fait leur division est le gond, car cette division n'est autre que celle du sujet, dont ce reste est la cause" [Lacan, 1968, p. 254]). He assumed that he who made the pass was best qualified to give an account of what goes on during this moment of transition. Lacan thought that based on these testimonies, which he considered as a source of information, psychoanalytic theory could evolve (Lacan, 1971-1972, session 1/6).

What both practices share in common is that their starting point is not the typical patient's demand for help but a question of the analyst, a question that results in an analyst's demand for a subject to speak. In this context the latter is approached as essentially marked by the signifier, as a being that makes use of the signifier in dealing with the Real. In each case Lacan's interest goes to the subjective logic of the signifier: in the clinical case presentation he is merely focused on the organization of signifiers, and in the procedure of the pass on the effect of a long-term treatment via/of the signifier. The underlying idea inherent in both methods is that they enable conceptual advancement, precisely by abandoning preconceived (implicit) theory and by applying the idea of the 'docta ignorantia'. It is remarkable that in both cases Lacan didn't consider the psychoanalytic cure itself as the only method suited for doing so. This relativity of the psychoanalytic cure allows for two advancements. A first advancement over the psychoanalytic cure is that these methods enable analysts to address subjects that normally don't ask for a personal

analysis (cf. the clinical case presentation). A second advancement is that these enable us to study specific questions (cf. the pass). After all, during psychoanalysis proper the analyst occupies a non-questioning position in which he/she via his/her free floating attention follows and carries on the associations of the analysant. Through these active methods, questions addressing gaps in conceptual thinking (S(%)) can be studied directly.

We think that interview-research, to the extent that it starts from the idea of deliberately not-knowing and focuses on the way a speaking subject deals with the Real, can link up with both methods. Interview-research can aim at registering subjective enunciation and manifestations of subjective truth. Whereas from a Kleinian point of view, qualitative researchers consider their interviewees as "defended subjects" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 4), from our Lacanian point of view we consider them as 'divided subjects'. A research interview implies an opportunity to give voice to such a divided subject that is not asking for analysis. In line with Hollway & Jefferson (2000) and our own focus on the subjective organization of speech, we suggest that eliciting and paying attention to free association is the general principle along which these interviews have to be organized.

Taking into account current criteria on the validity and reliability of research implies that the particular speech of a subject has to be studied in a methodologically sound way. In this context we think that it is a good idea for qualitative interview-research to link up with the methodologies of structuralistic research. Nobus (2002, p. 100) correctly describes structuralistic approaches, such as the approach of Lévi-Strauss, as "the only frameworks which Lacan considered sufficiently attuned to the subject of science and its inherent division between knowledge and truth". Furthermore, he says, "these frameworks are all concerned with the rigorous analysis and systematic classification of the modes of thought which people may use to organize their relationship with the environment" (Nobus, 2002, p. 100). These two core characteristics, rigorous analysis and systematic classification, which on the one hand imply a thorough study and a meticulous deciphering of raw data, and on the other hand refer to the discerning of implicit patterns and elementary structures in this material, indicate exactly what is needed in qualitative data analysis. In order to make research conclusions acceptable to the broader scientific community, a systematized approach in analyzing data is needed. Consequently, we think that the way we have to proceed during this analysis should link up to Lévi-Strauss's methodical study of myths (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1974). We think that situating one's work within the Lacanian tradition implies a danger of too hastily making steps toward formalization, whereby the inductive steps of reasoning remain unclear. From the perspective of Lévi-Strauss, logical formalization of structure is only a last step in the process of analysis. On the other hand, the refining we – starting from Lacan – can add to the structuralistic approach is that the

idea of comprehensiveness can be abandoned. The lack that according to Lacan is inherent to all functioning of the signifier, necessarily also concerns our own conclusions. In the same vein, the research described cannot result in a determination of the cause of the phenomena/problems studied, but just at a description of the way patterns and structures are organized, i.e. the way a subject situates itself relatively to the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

This framework we formulated a posteriori in relation to our own research, contextualizes this research. There has been much talk on the relation between psychoanalysis and science, which we believe all too often has resulted in a deaf man's talk rather than in a possibility to learn something in relation to the Other. Our thesis in fact fosters such dialogue and attempts to bring it into practice. The strategy we followed is quite obvious. At a methodological level we linked elements from clinical psychoanalytic tradition to current academic research approaches and, in clarifying the problem we studied, we confronted speech of particular subjects with conceptual thinking. We think and hope that both the conclusions we draw on professional burnout and the research framework we worked out, can function as a starting point for further research within the domain of Lacanian-Freudian psychoanalysis.

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