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'The Me and the Not Me': The importance of anti-role models in the construction of professional identities (0261)

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Situated within an interpretive paradigm and drawing upon Foucauldian notions of power this paper explores the concept of role models in the construction of professional identities. It offers a theoretical positioning which emphasises the centrality of disidentification emphasising difference as a key element in the early stages of identity construction. It is predicated upon notions of identity as constructed through social interactions and therefore a relational concept requiring interaction, enactment and reciprocity (Burr 2003, Jenkins 2004, Lawler 2008, Burke and Stet 2009). Foucault supports a view of reality as a construction, constructed through interaction between human beings and whose interactions are governed by discourses. Foucauldian notions of power and his ideas associated with social and political processes as forms of social control provides a coherent theoretical framework to understand the dynamics of 'student and other'

Drawing upon the work of Gibson (2003, 2004) and upon the biographical narratives (Reissman 2008, Andrews, Squires and Tambouka 2008) of student physiotherapists this paper is focused upon an exploration of the dynamic interplay between 'student and others'. It is proposed that student's interaction with others serves to establish their individual sense of professional self in direct relation to the others with whom they interacting. Just as the individual student is actively constructing themselves they are reciprocally engaged in constructing the others with whom they are interacting; an unacknowledged and thus unproblematised and undetected process. Role models are acknowledged as vital self comparators in the process of professional socialisation, yet despite this remains largely ill defined and vague (Gibson 2004, Kenny et al 2004).The concept of role models is well established and the majority of the literature considers role models from a positive perspective (ibid, Shakespeare and Webb, 2008).

Gibson (ibid) defines role models as active cognitive constructions that individuals devise in an attempt to construct their ideal self, emphasises similarity and emulation as being of central importance. Importantly he emphasises the dependency on acts of identification to the concept of role models. The biographical narratives of student physiotherapists were elicited and difference was identified as a recurring and consistent plotline in and across several participants' stories.

One of the main findings of this study was that student physiotherapists enter physiotherapy education (or very soon after, develop) with a well formed idea of what being a physiotherapist means, constructing an idealised professional self. This idealised professional self becomes the lens through which they subsequently experience and evaluate their professional education experiences.

Foucault's notion of the institutional gaze suggests that local culture is always in the making, localised configurations of meaning are mediated by organisational conditions where self construction is embedded (McKay 2007, Clandinin, 2007). This is not to suggest that

individuals simply adopt the dominant cultural scripts as expressed through discourses but that in everyday professional life, individuals are engaged in interpretive acts between competing and conflicting organisational affiliations, as Foucault observes; power [should]'be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body'(Foucault 1986, p120). If clinical placements are seen as sites of identity construction they also become sites of identity performance producing statements about which identities can be performed and which cannot.

This paper proposes that student physiotherapists actively construct 'others' as anti role models where their role models transgress their expectations and whom they perceives as standing in opposition to their idealised professional selves. It proposes that this active construction illustrates how student physiotherapists exercise individual agency to construct socially and spatially situated professional identities in everyday professional interaction and supports contemporary notions of professional socialisation as interactive (Vanderstaeten 2000, Burke and Stet 2009, Williams 2011). Student physiotherapists construct themselves in and through their day to day professional interactions and discourses between themselves and others. In this way learning contexts are subject to power functions and controls which govern which identities it is possible to display; in other words they are reflective of the culture that individuals inhabit.

It is proposed that this active construction of 'others' as anti role models provides some insight into how role models are chosen by individual students. Identify work always involves embodiment, categorisation, and boundary work; between who we are and who others are (Jenkins 2004) In McCall's (2003) terms 'the me and the not me' can be regarded as the positive and negative poles of identity. The literature associated with role models infers a common understanding of who is and who is not a role model exists between the role model themselves and the newcomer/student. Within the professional world of physiotherapy there seems to be an acceptance that clinical educators (physiotherapists who supervise students in clinical practice) and others who occupy positions of seniority and who enjoy the professional status which goes along side this are universally and unquestionably accepted as role models by students.

Utilising the biographical narratives of student physiotherapists, this paper presents narratives of resistance (counter narratives) which stand in opposition to the grand narratives of role modelling emulation; thus facilitating the possibility of taking an alternative look at the educator/student dynamic. However it will emphasise the profoundly positive impact of anti-role models upon the early stages of professional identity construction and suggests ways in which physiotherapy educators may reconsider the complexities of identity and its importance to students within a learning context.

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