

'I just love youth work!' Emotional labour, passion and resistance

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Abstract

This article is inspired by findings from a small-scale study in which grassroots street-based youth workers talked about their love and passion for their work and their affection for young people. Emotional engagement could be seen as intrinsic to youth work and necessary for building relationships with young people, but how might we think about workers' emotions as youth work is increasingly governed by market principles? This article explores the relevance of emotional labour, the theory that workers' emotional efforts are controlled and exploited by employers in the pursuit of profit. Such analyses have a renewed relevance as private sector organisations and practices enter youth work, but may not adequately account for the potentially positive political role of emotions. The article concludes by suggesting that passion might play a role in resisting the dehumanisation of youth work.

Key words: Emotional labour, marketisation, passion, resistance, youth work.

PASSION IN THE workplace has become a ubiquitous concept. Every other job advert on the high street requires potential applicants to demonstrate their 'passion for coffee', 'love of fashion' or 'obsession with sandwiches', and the internet is full of blogs with titles such as 'ten ways to inspire passion in the workplace' or 'you too can turn regular employees into passionate workers'. As education and welfare work is increasingly affected by market principles, managers in reconfigured services find inspiration in 'management guru' style literature which emphasises passion and individual expression. Whether they are in the public, private, or third sector, 'organisations now call for employees to love the company, to love the product and to feel motivated through their empowerment in the workplace' (Bolton, 2005: 111). Passion has become commodified, used by companies to bolster profits and by individuals to enhance their promotion prospects.

This article was inspired by in-depth interviews with part-time and volunteer detached youth workers¹. Detached youth workers work in public places such as street corners, parks and bus shelters, aiming to meet young people on their terms and on their territory. In contrast to outreach work which aims to encourage young people to attend a youth centre or project, detached youth work takes place where young people are already spending time. The interviews were not intended to be about love and passion; they focused more generally on how grassroots youth work is

experienced in the context of policy changes. In common with the rest of youth work, detached work has been affected by managerialism in the form of performance targets and computerised tracking systems which have made it increasingly short-term, individualised and office-based (Crimmens et al 2004; Davies and Merton 2009, 2010; In Defence of Youth Work, 2011; Jeffs and Smith, 2008; Spence and Devanney, 2006; Tiffany, 2007). Since the coalition government came to power in 2010 there have also been disproportionate cuts to services (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011; Wylie, 2010) as well as a widespread withdrawal of the state from youth work provision (Davies, 2013).

In this context it was almost inevitable that the interviewees talked about some of the struggles and difficulties they faced; more surprisingly, they also expressed their love and passion for youth work. I had not set out to explore youth workers' emotions but it was a strong theme that could not be overlooked. These workers' commitment to young people was clear and went beyond simply 'doing their job'. However, I was uncomfortable with interpreting their passion as a straightforward expression of care, vocation or calling (Jeffs, 2006) without also considering what passionate commitment might mean in an increasingly marketised youth sector. After a brief description of my study's methods I will share my findings in relation to emotional commitment, consider the relevance of theories of emotional labour and emotion management, and end by asking whether passionate commitment might be a source of strength and even resistance in the context of marketisation.

Methods and research participants

This small-scale study asked how part-time and volunteer detached youth workers are experiencing their role in the context of a changing policy framework. I carried out in-depth interviews in spring and summer 2011 with eight participants recruited through my networks as a practising detached youth worker, including the Federation for Detached Youth Work and the London Detached Forum mailing lists. The interviews were relatively unstructured to encourage themes to emerge from the workers themselves. Five of the interviewees were either not known to me or barely known to me before the study, and were interviewed individually for around an hour each. The other three were interviewed together as a group for over two hours, were colleagues at the time of the interview, and were well known to each other and to me.

The interviewees self-identified as part-time or volunteer detached youth workers and all worked in southern England, but otherwise came from a relatively diverse range of settings and perspectives. They had between three and twelve years of youth work experience and two were studying for youth work degrees while three of the others had taken part in local youth work training courses. Six worked in London boroughs, one in a smaller city and one in a town. Three worked for the

voluntary sector and five for local authorities. One was a volunteer, six were paid and one had recently left her job. Seven were female and one male; four were white and four black. Such a small number of participants cannot represent all perspectives, but the commonalities in the findings suggest that the views and experiences of these workers are likely to be reflected beyond this specific group.

The study and the interviews were intentionally open-ended and improvisational, taking inspiration from youth work practice as well as from feminist, grounded theory and narrative methodologies (Oakley, 1990; Charmaz, 2006; Chase, 2005). I used a conversational approach to interviewing (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), beginning by asking participants how they had become youth workers and encouraging them to elaborate on issues they found interesting and meaningful. Interviews were recorded and transcriptions were completed. Names were changed, with pseudonyms chosen by the participants. Quotes may have been edited in minor ways for clarity, leaving out some hesitations or repetitions.

Analysis started with detailed line-by-line coding to enable me to become deeply familiar with each interview, moving towards a more open and instinctive analytical approach to draw out common themes. I wrote up tentative theories as I went along, comparing these ideas within and between interviews, with relevant literature and with my ethnographic youth work practice journal. I had not expected or intended to write about love and passion and only read about emotional labour after analysing the interviews. If I had preconceptions about my findings, it was that these youth workers might be demoralised at a time of increasing control and bureaucracy combined with impending cuts and redundancies. While these aspects of workplace reform were indeed key issues for the interviewees, this made it all the more striking that love, passion and enjoyment also arose as strong themes.

Love and passion in youth work

What do I like about youth work? I just love youth work! (Bridget)

All eight interviewees used the word 'love' in connection with working with young people, as well as talking frequently of other positive emotions such as liking, enjoyment and passion when they shared examples from their practice. This was a consistent theme across interviews, but it is hard to identify what passionate youth work might look like in practice terms because the workers had a variety of methods and approaches. Some focused primarily on building relationships with peer groups, talking with them and engaging them in activities such as quizzes, sports, games and even circus skills, while others worked mainly with individual young people who wanted support. Some did most of their work on the streets, whereas others used mobile youth buses and local community

buildings. Although their approaches differed, they all emphasised the importance and satisfaction of getting to know an area and its people.

I love getting out there and talking to people, because you don't just talk to young people, you talk to mums, dads, uncles, find out what's going on in the area. (Forde).

If we move to a new area we always start our work through reconnaissance [...] through the area, through the community members, through where young people hang around, through the parks and everything and open spaces and slowly build that. (Mahad).

One thing I like about youth work is the roots in it, the community aspect. I love the fact we bump into parents, people just come and say, 'what are you up to today?' (Laura).

The interviewees' positive emotions seemed strong and genuinely held, expressed not only through their choice of words but also through the excitement in their voices and eyes when they talked about the young people they worked with and described projects which were 'brilliant', 'really successful' or 'amazing'. They spoke about young people with a demonstrable and infectious emotional attachment. Interestingly, this was not usually in reference to specific individuals; they talked about love for groups of young people, or working with this age group more generally:

I love working with teenagers! Love it. That's the age group that I'm most comfortable with. (Rachel).

I've known some of them for three years now and the way you see them grow and the way the relationship is and I can be myself and they can be their self. I just think young people are fantastic, they're clever and they're switched on and they're fun. (Lucy).

When the interviewees talked about their routes into youth work, some had positive emotional associations with detached work even before becoming youth workers themselves:

I thought it sounded fantastic. It was amazing that you actually have a profession, you actually get paid for walking around on the street, talking to the young people on their terms, on their territory, I just loved the idea of it. And I was like, 'how is it possible that in this society that exists?' It went counter to what I think of this society or this world. And I was, 'wow!' (Laura).

I had read about detached but never actually done it, I thought that would be really, really interesting, the hours were great, and then it was local, so that's why I applied. (Rachel).

The workers' positive emotions were based not only on personal satisfaction but also on synergy

with their values, their desire to make a difference whether for individual young people or on a wider scale. For some, their commitment to youth work was motivated by difficult experiences in their own lives:

I started doing voluntary work round my local area. What really got me into it was one of my best friends, they got killed. [...] And then it just kind of hit me, you know what? There's too many young people out here that this is happening to. [...] I wanted young people to have the same choices that I had – and more. (Forde).

I hated teenage years, and I wish I'd had someone there, or like a club that I went to, and therefore I think teenage years was a really, really hard time that I've ever experienced in my life and I'd really like to be good and support people going through that as well. (Lucy).

I went to prison for a spate of time and whilst in prison took a good long look at myself and at my inner self and thought that this is just not for me and I'd like to give something back to the community. On coming out of prison I had a really, really good probation officer. And she noticed the rapport that I had with young people [...] She really encouraged me and pushed me forward, going into mentoring, and done a rites of passage course. Which then spurred me into thinking, wow, maybe I can be a youth worker and a good role model for the community. (Bridget).

Mahad became involved in youth work after meeting local detached youth workers at a community event his brother and nephew were involved in:

I just thought, 'let me just get this done and over with, I know they're gonna be blah, blah, blah, and I'll just leave afterwards'. I went there really with that mentality and I just came back with a wow factor because they had the ideas, and the detached youth workers were really supportive, encouraging, they were giving them information on what to do, what not to do, that sort of thing, and they were just listening to them and they were taking their ideas on board. And I thought, wow, that was quite different compared to other services. [...] I gained a lot of motivation, a lot of passion for youth work. Not for any youth work but for detached youth work because I knew there was a lot of youth work services around in the area but I particularly liked the detached youth work, and having that different environment and different agendas every day, it just really made me passionate to take part and maybe become a detached youth worker one day. (Mahad).

The interviewees had been youth workers for many years, so it was interesting that they remembered their early motivations with vivid enthusiasm. However, this should not suggest that they all enjoyed their work immediately or felt a natural affinity with teenagers. Louise and Lucy's

first volunteering experiences were in youth clubs:

I was sworn at a lot. And I cried a lot. My mum would always say, 'why do you keep going back there?', and I was like, 'the positive weighs out the negative', and I just loved it. And in the end they go from swearing to actually being really nice to you and it was just the thing that I had to go through. So it was hard but I did love it. (Louise).

I was petrified the first time I walked through the door. Mine was at [my local youth club] and it's a bit of a rough area and I thought, 'oh my god, I don't know what I'm doing here'. After the first day I thought, 'I'm not coming back, it's awful, young people are horrible'. Then afterwards I was like, 'no, it's fun'. (Lucy).

These quotes suggest that the transformation and challenge involved in building positive relationships from unpromising beginnings can bring particular satisfaction and enjoyment. In youth clubs, the first months before the worker is accepted by established groups can be particularly challenging. In detached work, such difficult beginnings might be experienced repeatedly as workers continue to make contact with new groups on the street:

I have to say I think that is quite difficult a lot of the time. Just approaching random young people that you've never met before. I mean, I love it, but I don't think it's the most natural thing in the world. (Laura).

Walking up to a group of young men who are all taller than me and they've all got their hoods up and it can be dark, it can be quite intimidating. As soon as you say what you're there for and what you're doing it's such a change in atmosphere, and they're like, oh, chat, chat, chat. Yeah it's really good. It's really good. (Rachel).

The process of changing the atmosphere from intimidation to chat, of getting to know young people so they are no longer 'random', demands of street-based workers a constant emotional engagement which can encompass fear, nerves, embarrassment and awkwardness as well as more positive feelings. Workers talked about the length of the process, from getting to know the area and making initial approaches to having short conversations, followed by developing longer projects, organising activities and 'having really deep conversations about something really important to them' (Laura). Because of the long-term nature of this work and its challenges, there may be times where the intrinsic rewards of the work are somewhat limited and where payment can help; as Rachel said, 'in the middle of winter when its minus seven and you're being paid, at least you know you have got to go out and do it'. But money was not the sole motivating factor, especially given the relatively low wages of part-time youth workers. Most of the paid workers I interviewed started as volunteers and continued to do extra unpaid work. Louise was primarily a volunteer

while studying youth work:

Outsiders think I'm mad. And part of it is because they don't understand why you'd go from earning money to not earning money and money isn't important to me but it is to a lot of my friends, so they don't understand that bit. (Louise).

When you've got passion for something you don't continuously look at the time or how much you're getting paid, you just get into it. (Mahad).

I come in on my days off. Because that's the only time that that meeting, or meeting that young person, could be done. [...] I can't on any conceivable concept say 'I need money for coming in on my day off'. (Quincie).

The section above includes a relatively large amount of interview data in order to build up a picture of the passion with which these youth workers discussed and engaged with their work. They saw their positive emotions as demonstrative of their principled and value-based commitment to young people which could perhaps be seen as a 'political ethic of care' (Taggart, 2011: 86). This is not to suggest their emotional experience of youth work was unstintingly positive. They also talked about negative emotions, sometimes associated with challenging situations with young people or forms of youth work they didn't enjoy, but more often with target cultures, spending cuts, surveillance systems and hierarchical management. Overwhelmingly, face-to-face work with young people was experienced as challenging, enjoyable and satisfying.

Such enjoyment despite adversity perhaps relates to the particular position of this group of workers, and might not be experienced in the same way by managers and full-time youth workers. As volunteer and part-timers they are likely to be relatively less experienced and perhaps less jaded. Youth work was an important part of their lives, but as part-timers they have other interests and commitments, so any difficulties could perhaps be more easily tolerated. They were likely to spend a greater proportion of their time directly working with young people than their managers, and therefore spent relatively less time on tedious bureaucratic tasks or stressful managerial work. In addition it could be speculated that detached youth workers tend to have more autonomy than those based in buildings by virtue of operating outdoors away from the gaze of senior management, and sometimes being seen to be doing work that is experimental or edgy.

I am not suggesting that all part-time and volunteer detached youth workers love their work. These interviewees cannot be assumed to be representative, and it is likely that they had a stronger commitment than average; after all, they volunteered to be interviewed about their work for no personal gain. However, they are by no means the only welfare and education professionals who love their work in spite of inherent challenges and encroaching managerialism (see for example

Day, 2004; Taggart, 2011). Towards the end of this article I will ask whether passionate workplace commitment may contribute to workers' ability to cope with or even resist target cultures and hierarchical management practices. First I will reflect on theories of emotional labour and emotional management and their contemporary relevance for youth workers.

Exploited emotions?

The concept of emotional labour was first introduced by Arlie Hochschild (2003) in her book *The Managed Heart* (originally published in 1983), in which she argues that service sector workers' emotions are often tightly controlled and exploited by employers. Hochschild uses ethnographic and interview material from flight attendants (airline cabin crew) and debt collectors to argue that these workers become alienated from their emotional labour when it is used for company profit, just as factory workers are alienated from their manual labour. The flight attendants in her study, mainly female, were taught to boost future sales by smiling, being friendly and generally creating a positive emotional experience for passengers. Their success was closely monitored through customer feedback and they were trained in staying cheerful when dealing with demanding passengers. Wearing a 'painted on smile' was not enough; customers and therefore managers demanded genuine good humour. In this way, 'seeming to "love the job" becomes part of the job; and actually trying to love it, and to enjoy the customers, helps the worker in this effort' (Hochschild, 2003: 6).

Hochschild argues that emotional work takes place in both personal and work spheres, and can take the form of surface acting or deep acting. Surface acting means feeling one emotion while displaying another: a false 'have a nice day!' at the checkout, or insincere friendliness at a party. Deep acting means trying to call up a real feeling in order to act more convincingly. To use the same examples, this would mean actually wanting the customer to have a nice day, or finding a way to be genuinely friendly at the party. Building on Goffman's (1959) analysis of how people present themselves to maintain social norms, Hochschild contrasts the 'emotion work' we undertake in our personal lives with that which is required in service sector workplaces. Her contention is that emotional work becomes exploitative once it is prescribed and controlled by an employer rather than by the individual themselves:

Emotion work is no longer a private act, but a public act, bought on the one hand and sold on the other. Those who direct emotion work are no longer the individuals themselves but are instead paid stage managers who select, train and supervise others (Hochschild, 2003: 118-9).

The concept of emotional labour has been widely developed and adapted, especially in the study of

female-dominated spheres including the caring professions (Gorman, 2000; Gregor, 2010; Smith, 1992, 2012; Taggart, 2011). Whether in private or in public, women's emotional work tends to be seen as 'natural' and is therefore under-valued (Steinberg and Figart, 1999). For example, Smith's (1992, 2012) studies of the emotional labour of student nurses over two decades found that complex caring and emotional skills are not sufficiently recognised in training or in pay structures. Of course, emotional labour does not operate in the same way across different spheres: in contrast to sales and service workers whose emotional work is often rigidly controlled and monitored, professionals' emotions tend to be less tightly prescribed. Nevertheless, the experiences of private and public sector workers are moving more closely together. For example, nurses' care skills have been distilled into a 'compassion index' which monitors their emotional work (Smith, 2012), while flight attendants today negotiate an increasingly complex set of emotional demands, which go beyond a smile to encompass safety responsibilities and care for ill passengers (Bolton and Boyd, 2003).

In an era where bureaucracy and target cultures undermine the importance of human relationships, the concept of emotional labour has renewed relevance as well as increased complexity for caring professionals (Gorman, 2000; Gregor, 2010; Smith, 2012; Taggart, 2011). As business methods and modes of organisation encroach in the public sector, these workplaces are affected by the 'cult of the customer' (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992). Workers may 'find themselves having to present the calm and caring face of the public sector professional whilst also having to present a smiling face to clients who now behave as demanding customers' (Bolton, 2005: 128).

How far can this analysis be applied to youth work? Most young people presumably want genuine rather than fake emotional engagement from their youth workers, but surely this is a human rather than a consumerist desire. Caring engagement with young people is intrinsic to the youth work role; it would therefore be far-fetched to claim that most youth work managers and employing bodies have a conscious intention to exploit the emotional labour of their employees. And yet, whether conscious or not, youth workers' emotional work almost inevitably is exploited when profit is involved. In recent years, as private companies have entered the field and 'payment by results' has become more common, youth workers' employers are relying on and profiting from their emotional labour. In the quasi-marketised public and voluntary sectors the situation is less clear, and a more complex theoretical framework is useful.

Recognising the complexity of understandings of emotions in diverse work settings, Sharon Bolton (2005, 2009; Bolton and Boyd, 2003) argues that emotional labour theory is too limited and overly pessimistic to apply to the current context, and that 'something of a one-dimensional portrayal of organisational life is presented with frustrated managers, emotionally exhausted workers and dissatisfied customers' (Bolton, 2005: 53). She argues that emotional labour theory underestimates workers' ability to choose how they feel and act.² Despite the potential for exploitation and control,

workers should be understood 'as knowledgeable agents who are able to consent, comply or resist and who also have the potential to collectively alter the balance of power' (Bolton, 2005: 87). Bolton's model is useful in developing a more subtle and complex understanding, based on four overlapping types of emotional management:

- *Pecuniary*: Emotional work that is harnessed for profit (similar to Hochschild's emotional labour).
- *Prescriptive*: Emotional work that is required by organisational or professional norms.
- *Presentational*: Everyday emotional interactions, particularly with colleagues, which tend to follow social norms (building on Goffman's understanding of social interaction).
- *Philanthropic*: Emotional work as a 'gift' to customers, clients or colleagues.

(Summarised from Bolton, 2005, 2009; Bolton and Boyd, 2003)

This model is useful in emphasising that there are different types of emotional management in the workplace, and philanthropic emotional work, conceived of as a 'gift', seems particularly relevant to a youth work context. The concept of prescriptive emotional management may apply less clearly; in particular it is unclear why organisational and professional norms of emotional behaviour have been conflated when it seems likely that these might come into conflict. For example, a detached youth worker may follow professional norms by prioritising long-term work with a challenging group of young people, while their employer might encourage them to move on to new groups to meet targets and maximise funding. In addition, the label 'prescriptive' seems unfortunate, especially for a model which foregrounds worker agency; rather than being simply prescribed, the emotional rules of organisations and professions could be seen as being continuously enacted and reinvented by workers in practice. However, Bolton's model takes us forward in understanding the complexity of emotions in today's workplaces, particularly in the public sector.

Concepts of emotional labour and emotional management can help us to think about youth workers' emotions from different angles. Firstly, these theories point out that emotion work, despite the complexity and sheer effort involved, is too often seen as something that comes naturally (to women in particular). Emotion work is difficult and demanding, can be improved through practice, reflection and learning, and should not be taken for granted. In the following quote, one of the youth workers I interviewed expresses some of the intense effort and deep reflection involved in working with her emotions:

I'm such a massive character, such a massive personality, sometimes even within youth work it's overbearing, it's overcrowding, it's too much, it's too inviting, it's too open, it's, oh my goodness! [...] You have to self reflect, everything that is required of you in terms of your work with young people you have to first be able to do it yourself, be completely honest with yourself [...] You have to honestly ask yourself, 'if that happens, how would I react, and if this

happens?' And then depending on what you get back will determine the kind of work or how far you engross yourself within your role. [...] Youth work throws a lot up about yourself, you know? (Quincie).

Aware that she can be 'too much', Quincie reflects on how she might be perceived and what she might do in different situations. There is an element here of being 'honest' with herself while also reflecting on how to use her 'natural' personality most effectively. This is a complex and skilled way of using her personality and emotions which goes beyond an instinctive use of self and makes use of deep reflection. Quincie was not the only interviewee to express the emotional intensity and challenge of youth work:

In the last few months round here there's been like three stabbings, on one estate. And that's just on their doorstep, where they live, and so it is – it's difficult [...] It's always hard not to get too stressful with them and bring your personal feelings into things. (Forde).

A lot of the time I struggle that I can't live their life for them. So I have to accept that they might do something that I would love them not to do. (Laura).

A second way in which theory can be useful is in helping us understand that emotional work is affected by multiple and changing influences, including personal, organisational and professional norms (Bolton, 2005). Some of the emotional demands on youth workers are well established. Half a century ago, youth workers were said to need to possess a 'burning love of humanity' (Brew 1957: 112; see also Orpin, 2011). Emotional commitment continues to be seen as almost mandatory: one key youth work text argues that anybody who doesn't enjoy the work 'should find another job' (Robertson, 2005: 47). And yet, increased priorities placed on risk assessment require youth workers to construct boundaries and distance between themselves and young people (Jeffs, 2006; Batsleer, 2008), and some of the interviewees found that newer cultures of accountability and monitoring clouded their enjoyment and infected their relationships with young people:

There's a lot of politics involved, it's always those kinds of things. Lots of obstacles involved in terms of information sharing and all those bureaucracy and politics that's involved, sometimes it is emotionally draining and that's the downside to it to be honest. Cos one minute you can be really great and emotionally, you know, on a positive, and the next minute you can be really negative. (Mahad).

At the back of all our minds was always these targets. As much as we tried to do really good youth work for what young people wanted, at the back of our minds it was always there [...] And the young people even feel that. (Laura).

Finally, Hochschild's (2003) work is of renewed relevance as youth work policy is increasingly

based on the principles of the market (Davies, 2013) and the idea of enterprise (de St Croix, 2012). As well as private sector encroachments into youth work (Puffett, 2012), most organisations in the public and voluntary sectors are also run on business lines with those at the top receiving proportionately much higher salaries than those at the grassroots. Whether it is named as profit, surplus or reserves, the income of youth organisations is partially reliant on the continuing emotional work of low-paid and low-status workers such as those in my study. Young people benefit from their emotional labour, but so do directors and senior managers.

The similarities between youth work and more commercial sectors should not be overstated, however. Organisational requirements such as monitoring and targets clearly influence youth workers' emotions, but this cannot (yet) be equated with airline companies micro-managing the feeling displays of their workers. Thankfully, youth workers and young people are not usually told exactly when and how to smile. We might wonder, however, whether this is so far-fetched, with the encroachment of happiness indicators and well-being indexes, as well as programmes such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming which claims to train workers to enhance rapport and change behaviour using techniques such as mirroring body language.

It is a good thing if young people have youth workers who are emotionally committed. Clearly, young people are more likely to benefit when their youth workers like them, and workers benefit from enjoying their work. And yet, we should not obscure the potential for organisations to exploit and profit from the emotional labour of frontline youth workers. So what should workers do if they are passionate about youth work and young people but oppose the increasingly marketised and target oriented nature of their work?

Passion and resistance

It is important to mention here that emotional commitment was not the only significant theme arising from this research. Most of the interviewees discussed at length the things they felt were wrong with youth work today, and many spoke passionately against the direction that youth work is going in. All were thoughtful and critical about systems that did not seem to prioritise the needs of the young people they worked with. In particular they discussed intrusive monitoring procedures, the centralisation of services, hierarchical management, increasing time pressures, funding cuts, redundancies and inappropriate performance targets (de St Croix, 2011). Such concerns are reflected in other studies of youth work (Davies and Merton, 2009, 2010; Gratton, 2012; Spence and Devanney, 2006; Tiffany, 2007) and of other welfare and education fields (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2008a; Fraser, 2008; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall and Cribb, 2009; Mooney and Law, 2007). It is notable that the youth workers in my study contrasted their negative emotions around these issues with their continuing enjoyment of face-to-face work. For Rachel, who had recently left her youth

work job, negative management experiences contributed to this decision even though she had always enjoyed face-to-face work.

I didn't ever not enjoy working with young people. Even when they were being difficult, I've never found I didn't enjoy that, because that is challenging, but it's still interesting, it's still working out how you're gonna work with them and overcome things. [Pause]. Towards the end I really stopped enjoying a lot of the things with my managers. That was really difficult. (Rachel).

You just have to kind of just let it go and think, stuff it, I don't care, I don't care about targets. I'll get what I can done, and I just care about stressing about activities for young people. I'd rather put my stress into, 'oh I need to plan this trip because they really want it and I don't want to let them down'. Rather than, 'I've got to write this report'. (Lucy).

These workers acknowledged that working with young people can be intrinsically challenging but differentiated this from the stress caused by extrinsic pressures such as targets or overly hierarchical management. They suggested that certain policies and requirements came into conflict with their understandings of themselves as youth workers, understandings which prioritised respect for young people over bureaucratic and money orientated objectives.

You've got to know what it is that you're asking of young people. Be respectful of them. So if they do turn round and say no, for me it's not a tick box exercise. There's boxes to be ticked but I'm not going to tick a box unnecessarily or unjustified. I have to be justified when I tick that box. And that, for me, it gives credence to what I'm doing as opposed to 'ok I just need to do this so I can get paid at the end of the month.' If that's the case, I think jobs like retail would more suffice. (Quincie).

We said to young people, 'look, we do have a target where police would come to the project'. And they said 'no'. They wouldn't move on that at all. And that's fine and we really respected that. [...] So in the end we didn't do it. And we just said to our managers, 'there's no way we can do that and expect young people to come to the project.' [...] The targets we had to meet I don't think were relevant for our group. (Lucy).

Each worker spoke of occasions when they had challenged management policies, whether by speaking up for young people's choices and freedoms, refusing to prioritise the filling in of forms, or taking part in anti-cuts demonstrations (de St Croix, 2011). Their words and actions might be seen as enactments of personal and professional ethical integrity (Banks, 2009; Batsleer, 2008; Cribb, 2011), or as acts of resistance or rebellion (Collinson, 2005; Thomas and Davis, 2005). In future writing I intend to explore in more detail what constitutes resistance amongst part-time and

volunteer youth workers, but I raise it here because there is a question to be asked about whether emotionally committed youth workers are perhaps more likely to resist the dehumanising nature of reforms, and whether emotions are part of this resistance.

There has been limited writing on the relationship between emotional labour and workplace resistance, but one exception is Tolich's (1993) study of supermarket checkout workers. Tolich (1993) acknowledged that workers' emotions are often regulated, but argued that they can also undertake autonomous emotional action which 'serves to liberate them from management's control of their emotions and thereby alleviates some of their sense of estrangement' (Tolich, 1993: 362). For the supermarket workers, autonomous emotional actions included a subversive use of play and humour as well as expressions of pride. Although supermarket work is different from detached youth work, this conception of emotions as exploited or liberatory is useful, although perhaps they can be both at the same time; if being warm towards favoured customers might feel 'liberatory' for the checkout worker, it is also likely to increase sales and consequently company profits.

Whether employed by a supermarket or a youth service, the passionate worker is likely to bring financial resources to their employer:

When all of us are talking about our work, we're passionate about it and we're very genuine. And at the end of the day they [employer] need people who do a good job. Because if they don't they won't get the funding. (Lucy).

Passion has become somewhat ubiquitous in the modern workplace and ambitious individuals are required to demonstrate passion, even if this passion is somewhat performed or even fabricated (Ball, 2003, 2008b). However, as Bolton (2005) points out, emotions are complex and can serve different purposes at the same time. While youth work employers may benefit financially from a passionate workforce, these workers' genuine commitment to young people could make them less willing to comply with management directives. The interviewees did not make a direct link between their love for some aspects of youth work and their resistance to other elements, but this does not mean the link is not there. A deep concern for human relationships 'mitigates against treating people as cases, consumers or numbers' (Banks, 2011: 16). As youth work becomes more regulated, there is a sense that even expressions of affection for young people can feel like resistance:

You know what I like? Somewhere in [employer's] protocol is that you mustn't be physical with young people. You know what I love? Young people come and they're like, 'Bridget!' and I get big hugs! (Bridget).

What I am aiming to illustrate here is that the complex relationship between resistance and positive workplace emotions should not be neglected, and that expressions of love, play and creativity

can be subversive. Emotional commitment can never be entirely autonomous, particularly in hierarchically controlled workplaces, and passionate youth work is by no means an unproblematic expression of liberation. Love and passion alone will not defend youth work from the clutches of the market. And yet, loving and passionate youth workers are surely more likely to speak out and take a stand, particularly when there is a collective element to their resistance:

We deal with it as a team. There's no individuals. You can never achieve a goal by yourself. So if there's policies, if there's a change, we always meet up as a team and plan and discuss and raise good practice, raise issues, raise what's good, what's bad, and that sort of thing. (Mahad).

Shifts in capitalism have led simultaneously to the homogenisation of work processes and, paradoxically, to a growing emphasis on emotional capacities (Gill and Pratt, 2008). These dual processes go some way to explaining how emotional commitment can contribute to exploitation (where emotional commitment is profitable and therefore demanded and controlled) and also to resistance (where love and passion directly challenges work which has become somewhat dehumanised by systems built around form-filling and number-crunching). Whatever the complex consequences for exploitation and resistance, it must also be emphasised that these youth workers' love for their work was important, satisfying and enriching in its own right. Interviewed at a time of serious threat to both the nature and funding of their work, they nevertheless feel that youth work brings its own rewards for themselves and for young people:

They loved all the quizzes, loved the fact that we would start a relationship by asking, 'what do you like about your area, what kind of things do you enjoy?' We could chat about trips we were doing, and we came from it from such a different perspective. (Rachel).

One day I'm a counsellor, then I'm a nurse, then I'm a teacher, then I'm a mother, then I'm an auntie, you know, it's amazing, the amount of different hats you have to wear doing [the project]. I love it. (Bridget).

I would love to continue to do youth work because I want to give back something to the community and to the young people and hopefully continue till the day that I haven't got the passion. (Mahad).

Conclusion

As welfare and education settings are infused with market principles and managerial practices, there is a growing potential for employers to exploit the emotional commitments of workers in the pursuit of profit. Emotional labour theory explains how this might alienate workers from their

emotions and complicate their feelings of love and passion for their work. By itself, however, this theory gives an inadequate understanding of the emotional commitment of workers in welfare and education settings, and does not help such workers decide what to do in practice. Young people need adults who genuinely care about them, and most employees want work which is fulfilling and enjoyable. Not feeling passionate is entirely understandable in these stressful times, but deliberately suppressing one's passion would be neither politically nor personally satisfactory.

The workers in this study express an authentic love of youth work which calls into question or at least complicates the arguments of those who worry that there is little space for care and commitment in the current policy context (e.g. Jeffs 2006; Ball 2003; 2008b). Love and passion might help youth workers to work in authentic ways despite having to deal with systems which treat people as commodities. For some of us, this might necessitate a tricky balancing act as we attempt to retain passion for our work and our principles while keeping our employers or funders at a more cynical distance. Perhaps it has never been more important to be on the side of the people we work with rather than the organisations we work for, especially if and when those organisations are financially motivated. Passion alone is not enough, but if we can combine it with resistance, a love of youth work could be liberating for ourselves and for young people.

Notes

- 1 This paper is based on the first round of interviews from an ongoing ESRC-funded project on the occupational identities of grassroots youth workers in a changing policy context. I thank my supervisors Sharon Gewirtz and Alan Cribb as well as peer reviewers for very helpful comments on an earlier draft.
- 2 I do not agree with Bolton (2005) that Hochschild's (2003) rich account is one-dimensional or neglects agency but I will not pursue this point here; see Brook (2009) and Bolton (2009) for a detailed debate.

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