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**Academic labour as professional service work? A
psychosocial analysis of emotion in lecturer-student
relations under marketization**

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3 **Academic labour as professional service work? A psychosocial analysis of emotion in**
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5 **lecturer-student relations under marketization**
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31 **Keywords:** academic labour, emotion, psychoanalysis, psychosocial, service worker-service
32 recipient; student as customer.
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36 **Abstract**

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39 The marketization of higher education entails a radical reshaping of the educational
40 relationship as one in which the lecturer is recast as a professional service worker, implicitly
41 or explicitly tasked with ensuring the satisfaction of fee-paying students as sovereign
42 consumers. What does an organizational discourse of high customer satisfaction mean for the
43 emotional experiences of lecturers on the frontline? In this article, we conduct a psychosocial
44 analysis of academics' experiences of interacting with students in a marketized higher
45 education context. We illustrate how institutional imperatives readily align with lecturers'
46 internalised professional duty of care for students who are discursively constructed as highly
47 anxious and vulnerable. At the same time, changing power differentials wrought by
48 marketization heighten the likelihood of emotional responses in the relationship that are
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3 intense, spontaneous, and sometimes involuntary – and thus appear replete with unconscious
4 meanings. Informed by Freudian psychoanalysis, we illustrate how academics enact various
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6 defence mechanisms in response to unconscious feelings of dependence, subordination,
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8 vulnerability and resentment of the student as an authority figure. We conclude that
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10 organisational imperatives to ‘corporately care’ for students have the unintended consequence
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12 of generating acute ambivalence that drastically intensifies the psychological demands on
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14 teaching staff.
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23 **Introduction**

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26 Students talked about wanting academic staff to have empathy and compassion, to
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28 smile and encourage. Most revealingly, they asked academics “to treat and talk to me
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30 as though I’m a person.” (The Guardian, 2018a)

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33 I was expected to conform to a set of rules...Everything was prescribed: we were told
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35 when to meet students and for how long, as well as what to focus on and in what way.
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37 (The Guardian, 2018b, anonymous article entitled ‘Lecturing in a UK university is
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39 starting to feel like working for a business’.)
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43 University counselling services ‘inundated by stressed academics’ (Richardson, 2019,
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45 BBC News)
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49 Numerous public sector reforms in OECD countries since the 1980s have attempted to
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51 change the production of services such as education and healthcare along neoliberal lines,
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53 ostensibly to improve quality via managerialism, rationalisation and the introduction of
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55 market logics (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Pollitt, 1990; Power, 1997). Such
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57 reforms have involved the establishment - at least at a discursive level - of a service worker-
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3 service recipient relationship, placing new emphases on staff as frontline workers to create
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5 and maintain positive (efficient) relationships with ‘customers’.
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8 Combined with managerialism, some have argued that an ideological commitment to
9
10 serving the sovereign customer – which is often accompanied by marketing priorities which
11
12 valorise customer satisfaction through the fulfilment of their needs and desires – can supplant
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14 the caring, vocational nature of many service roles, such as university teaching (Fineman,
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16 2010; Deem et al., 2007). The marketization of higher education (HE) in England in
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18 particular has sparked a vigorous and impassioned scholarly debate. Advocates point to the
19
20 power of market competition to drive up quality and the need for universities to be more
21
22 accountable to those it serves and provide a better experience for students (see Guilbault,
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24 2018), while vociferous critiques from a wide range of academic disciplines have detailed the
25
26 serious threat it poses to the fundamental ideals and purposes of HE (see Docherty 2014;
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28 Lynch 2006; Molesworth et al. 2011; Ritzer, 1998). Within this literature, the notion of the
29
30 student as a customer or consumer of a commodified educational experience looms large.
31
32 Yet, the corollary conceptualization of the lecturer in this rhetoric – namely, as a frontline
33
34 service worker – has been strangely invisible. Even in the fine body of work examining the
35
36 impact of marketization for academic staff and the nature of their professional work, the
37
38 emphasis has tended to be on governance issues, the ramifications for research, relationships
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40 with colleagues, and mental wellbeing (Barker, 2017; Hall, 2018; John and Fanghanel, 2015;
41
42 Taberner, 2018) rather than the labour involved in teaching. Certainly, aspects of
43
44 marketization including the introduction of metrics and measurement (such as the Research
45
46 Excellence Framework, but also audits of teaching and student satisfaction in the Teaching
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48 Excellence Framework (TEF) and National Student Survey) have become major features of
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50 university culture, where they inflict ‘a toll on the emotions’ (Morrish, 2019: 51) of many
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52 who work in it. Yet there has been a reluctance to scrutinise academic work for the emotional
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3 efforts it entails, despite it ‘merit[ing] an analysis as much as any other workplace’ (Gabriel,
4 2017: 960). Indeed, recent scholarship (Erickson et al., 2020) and media commentary
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6 (Fazackerley, 2019; McKie, 2020; Weale, 2019) indicates widespread experiences of stress
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8 and increasing mental health problems among HE staff that suggest the university, too, is a
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10 most emotional arena.
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15 Outside academia, the rise of consumerism and an ethos of customer care in many
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17 organizations has also seen emotion placed at the heart of the service encounter (Du Gay and
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19 Salaman, 1992; Sturdy, 1998). As Fineman (2010: 29) puts it,
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22 The very notion of ‘customer’ is imbued with symbolism...the once passive, silent or
23
24 long-suffering client, passenger, patient, student or taxpayer is free, or freer, to
25
26 express how they feel about the institution that has provided the service and, more
27
28 poignantly, the person who has served them.
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32 Theoretically, emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983, 2003) has been a highly valuable concept
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34 to render visible the ways management seek to oversee and control personal interactions
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36 between employees and customers in commercialised contexts and the impact these have on
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38 employees (e.g. Barger and Grandey, 2006; Henkel et al., 2007; Leidner, 1993; Barger and
39
40 Grandey, 2006; Leidner, 1993; Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996). However, a theoretical
41
42 perspective of emotional labour - the effort to display the emotions perceived as expected in
43
44 employed work - is recognised as less appropriate for the analysis of emotions involved in
45
46 historically non-commercial contexts (Bolton, 2005; Gabriel, 2010). Though the
47
48 accomplishment of service work in organizations such as universities may indeed involve
49
50 managerially prescribed emotional appearances, it may rely to a greater extent on the
51
52 performance of ‘emotion work’ – i.e. individuals’ pre-existing ability to control themselves -
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54 at one’s own discretion (Guy et al., 2008). Public sector staff may skilfully manage their own
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3 emotion (Bolton 2015: 60) in ways that occur outside commercial ‘feeling rules’ or choose to
4
5 go beyond the script to enact compassionate human interaction (Kanov et al., 2017).
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8 Such a sociological perspective has helped to underscore the knowledge and skill of
9
10 employees, and the complexity of motivations that lie behind sincere and cynical
11
12 performances of emotion when interacting with ‘customers’ (patients, clients, students etc.).
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14 In academia, extant scholarship indicates that performances of emotion in line with
15
16 institutional expectations – levels of emotional labour – are increasing markedly (e.g. Berry
17
18 and Cassidy, 2013; Chubb et al., 2017; Ogbonna and Harris, 2004). Yet, the popularity and
19
20 mainstreaming of the terms ‘emotional labour’ and ‘emotion work’ has tended to blur their
21
22 conceptual distinctions at the cost of some of their original analytic power (Gabriel, 2008).
23
24 Indeed, the spread of marketization and managerialism also make previous distinctions
25
26 between commercial for-profit contexts and the public non-profit sector increasingly hazy.
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31 Others have criticised perspectives of emotional labour for their focus only on the
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33 social aspect of affect in the workplace. For Gabriel (2009) emotion at work is not solely
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35 dictated by the logics of capital accumulation; service work with a pronounced caring
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37 dimension may frequently involve feelings that are not scripted but arise unpredictably, with
38
39 differing intensity and passionate embodiment (Gabriel, 2010). This may be especially
40
41 pronounced in historically public sector professions including university teaching (Gabriel,
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43 2017), although scholarship has tended towards the analysis of such work in healthcare
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45 contexts (Menzies, 1960; Lewis, 2005, Bolton, 2005). Fotaki et al., (2012) have argued that
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47 psychoanalytic approaches that take into account individuals’ situatedness in society are
48
49 especially appropriate in analyses of emotion, since psychoanalysis recognises the influence
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51 of human desires, passions and above all, the work of the unconscious in ‘continuously
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53 affecting behaviour, often in unexpected or unwanted ways’ (Vince, 2019: 958). If emotion
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60 itself is to be understood as *both* socially constructed and having a private, internal dimension

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3 (Fineman, 2003; Craib, 1998), the emphasis on social norms, rules and expectations in
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5 sociological perspectives may underplay the influence of the psychic world. As Craib (1998:
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7 112) puts it ‘the sociological aspects of emotional life should not be mistaken for the whole
8
9 of emotional life’.

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12 In this paper, we advance empirical investigation of the emotions involved in service
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14 worker-customer relations by adopting a psychosocial approach (Frosh and Young, 2008;
15
16 Hollway and Jefferson, 2013) to investigate the affective dimension of the lecturer-student
17
18 relationship under marketization. Our contention here is that a discursive conceptualisation of
19
20 the lecturer-student relationship as service-worker and customer – effectively recasting
21
22 university teaching as professional service work – may have important ramifications for the
23
24 working lives of staff that have not yet received the attention they deserve. Using data from
25
26 in-depth interviews with teaching academics, we adopt a psychosocial approach to 1)
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28 examine the emotional meanings of the discursive positions our informants adopted and 2)
29
30 consider the unconscious processes that may mediate the relational dynamics of this changing
31
32 work relationship. We posit that the emotional intensity of many of our participants’ accounts
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34 reveals a psychological dependence, including an emotional dependence, on students.
35
36 Employing psychoanalytic concepts, we argue that the anxiety-ridden narratives of many
37
38 participants reveal unconscious yet powerful feelings of ambivalence towards students, which
39
40 appear to stem from processes of transference. In doing so we offer a critical interpretation
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42 (Gabriel, 2019; Svensson, 2014) of academics’ affective experiences of ‘customer’
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44 interaction.
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51 In the following sections we first outline the contemporary HE context and consider
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53 the reinvention of the lecturer-student relationship as one of service provider and customer.
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55 We then present how a psychoanalytic perspective is especially useful for theorising powerful
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57 and unpredictable emotional experiences that are both likely and largely overlooked in this
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3 context, before detailing Freud's concepts of ambivalence and transference as key concepts
4 that inform our psychosocial analysis.
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8 *Service work and emotion in the marketized academy*
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10 The neoliberal reforms by the UK government in the 1980s were expressly intended to
11 increase the accountability and responsiveness of universities as service providers (Brown
12 and Carasso, 2013) and empower students to make rational, informed choices as fee-paying
13 customers of educational offerings. The impact of creating a market within a much-expanded
14 HE sector has been dramatic: for the first time in their history, universities were forced to
15 generate revenue in a marketplace of buyers and sellers. The end of grants and the
16 introduction of upfront tuition fees, from a maximum of £1000 per year in 1998 to £9250 in
17 2018, cemented the social position of the student as a consumer and the reinvention of HE
18 from public good to private commodity. Now subject to market forces, the post-purchase
19 satisfaction of students has become an institutional imperative, resulting in a reification of the
20 'service offering', an experience in which teaching academics and their relationships with
21 students are key.
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37 As organisational members, students and lecturers have always been in a social
38 relationship, generally a hierarchical one of unequal power distribution (Holmes et al., 1999).
39 However, marketization results in greater power being structurally embedded and
40 discursively awarded to students (Nixon et al., 2018) and there may be reasons to welcome
41 this (Hollway and Jefferson, 1996; Wilson, 2000), though this is a specifically *customer*
42 sovereignty. HE scholars have argued that many students arrive with a consumer confidence
43 and carry the same attitudes over to their educational experience (Molesworth et al., 2009;
44 Varman et al., 2011). Certainly, most young people enter HE highly accustomed to making
45 consumer choices but few may be aware of the alternative roles available for them as students
46 beyond demanding customers (Gross and Hogler, 2005). Molesworth et al. (2009) have
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3 argued that the adoption of market-driven ideology, in policy but also and perhaps moreso by
4 university senior management teams, encourages students to see HE primarily as a
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6 commodity they must possess to access a consumer life by obtaining a well-paid job.
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10 In marketized HE, academic staff who teach are uniquely positioned as most obvious
11 ‘provider’ of curriculum content and assessor of student work. One consequence of
12 reconfiguring the lecturer-student relationship as one of service provider and service recipient
13 is a heightened importance of the *performance* of the lecturer as a key determinant in the
14 quality of the interaction as experienced *and evaluated* by the student. In one of the few
15 studies that attends to academics’ emotional experiences in relationships with students,
16 Ogbonna and Harris (2004) argue that massification and marketisation have intensified
17 occupational and organizational expectations of staff to make an affective, not just
18 intellectual, contribution to the student body. They identify both the surface and deep acting
19 described by Hochschild (1983) as well as spontaneous non-acted emotional displays by
20 lecturers. The combination of rising student numbers, managerial expectations to be ‘nice’
21 (rather than simply professional) to students, and individualised penalties for non-compliance
22 based primarily on student feedback, alter the content of emotional display rules for lecturers
23 (Ogbonna and Harris, 2004). A felt obligation to students as paying customers underlies a
24 similar sentiment expressed in Clarke et al’s (2012: 10) study, ““should we care about
25 students or not?...[W]e have to care about them, they are paying for this””. Though teaching
26 is a ‘traditional primary concern’ (Clarke and Knights, 2015: 1871) of the academic role,
27 much of the extant discussion focuses on the myriad consequences of research assessment
28 procedures, overlooking how the relationship between lecturers and students also affects
29 working conditions. Indeed, formal complaints by students are increasing (Turner and
30 Southgate, 2019) and there are signs of growing student incivility towards staff (Burke et al.,
31 2014) reminiscent of that suffered by other public service workers (Stroeback and
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3 Korczynski, 2018). What remains opaque, however, is what an organizational discourse of
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5 customer satisfaction means for the emotional experiences of teaching academics on the
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7 frontline, whose roles are now implicitly or explicitly reconceptualised as professional
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9 service work.

12 *Theorising emotion in service encounters*

14 Emotion work is a sociological term that refers to a conscious act of attention and effort
15
16 directed at attempting to regulate one's affective state and thus to manage one's feelings
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18 (Eller and Alexandre, 2007; Goffman, 1969; Scheff 1997). Hochschild's (1983) development
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20 of the concept of emotional labour established the fact that workers do not only labour
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22 manually or intellectually but must adopt an emotional attitude appropriate to their job role,
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24 and this is particularly so in customer-facing service work. Like many occupations, university
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26 teaching requires certain emotional displays - enthusiasm, concern, authority, for instance -
27
28 that are integral to the job. However, since emotional labour was developed from the analysis
29
30 of commercial contexts, it is known to be limited when analysing professional service work
31
32 with greater autonomy (Hochschild, 1983). Bolton's (2005) typology of emotion
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34 management offers a less deterministic view in awarding more agency to organizational
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36 actors to better theorise the complex work of managing one's emotions and the emotions of
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38 others in marketized public sector contexts (Bolton, 2009; Bolton and Boyd, 2003). However,
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40 its theoretical emphasis on actors' skilled management of their emotional responses is less
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42 suited to the analysis of those feelings that may be difficult to express or understand, that take
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44 us aback with their intensity or refuse to be subordinated to cognition; those that have been
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46 referred to as an 'unmanageable' aspect of work in organizations (Gabriel, 2010: 45).

53
54 In a psychoanalytically-informed critique of emotional labour, Gabriel (2009) argues
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56 that all service relationships involve a caring dimension which is likely to generate a plethora
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58 of unpredictable and powerful emotions that are not easily managed by organizational actors.
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3 This caring dimension (whether positive or negative) means that early relations with parents
4 or primary care-givers, in the lives of both the carer and the cared-for, can be reawakened,
5 unleashing powerful and unmanageable fantasies, 'where each becomes for the other an
6 object of fantasy or desire...charged with extreme positive or negative qualities' (Gabriel,
7 2010: 55). Fantasies first experienced as a result of the gratifications and frustrations of
8 infancy can be triggered in both service worker and cared-for customer, including desire for
9 power, submission, dependency and vulnerability. As Menzies' (1960) seminal work
10 illustrated, the nurse-patient relationship is laced with libidinal wishes and strong impulses
11 that derive from intense and opposing sets of feelings experienced in infancy. Both nurse and
12 patient may thus experience gratitude, resentment, envy, pity, compassion and fear:
13 conflicting emotions that evoke those experienced in extreme form as an entirely dependent
14 baby. Gabriel (2010) thus places fantasies - derived from early memories of being helpless
15 and cared for - as key to understanding emotion especially in service interactions that can
16 involve flirtation, harassment, emotional blackmail, toxic exchanges, romance and violence.
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36 In the service encounter, hugely different forms of emotional connectivity emerge if
37 employees create a 'hierarchy among customers' (Gabriel, 2009: 182), including very intense
38 relations well beyond what is expected given the organisational script. For their part,
39 customers too may behave unpredictably and their irrational behaviour increases the emotive
40 demands made of frontline employees, who may view customers as both demanding and
41 deserving, and feel both close to and resentful of them (Gabriel, 2009). In such settings,
42 Korczynski (2009: 74) has described how routinization and managerial expectations of
43 empathy from staff contribute to a lived experience of customer interaction as 'deeply
44 contradictory', where customers are both a source of pleasure and pain, satisfaction and
45 dissatisfaction, and positioned simultaneously as friend and enemy. Thus, for many
46 interactive service workers, their affective experience is characterised by ambivalence.
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3 Moreover, the complexity of emotions in such relationships means they are liable to entail
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5 ambivalence beyond the range of consciousness (Korczynski, 2009; Sturdy, 1998).
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8 Less is known about the consequences for workers of unpredictable and
9
10 unmanageable service encounters (Gabriel et al., 2015). Given that service workers can
11
12 develop relationships with customers full of meaning, may have intense emotional reactions
13
14 beyond scripted performances, coupled with the noted unpredictability and irrationality of
15
16 customers, psychoanalytic theory on emotion is particularly useful.
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19 *A psychoanalytic view of emotions for the lecturer-student relationship*

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21 Psychoanalysis conceptualizes emotion as motivation; feelings are seen as driving forces of
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23 behaviour, not (just) socially constructed (Fineman, 2000). Psychoanalysis also views
24
25 emotions as having histories within the individual subject's life so that experiences with
26
27 significant others from early life can influence one's emotional response in a current
28
29 interpersonal situation: an unconscious process known as transference. Teacher-student
30
31 relations are known as particularly likely to involve transference, both 'positive'
32
33 transferences of affectionate feelings and 'negative' hostile ones (Freud, 1930; Freud, 1974).
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35 Indeed, for some educationalists, transference – the unconscious displacement of thoughts,
36
37 feelings and behaviours from a previous significant relationship onto a current relationship –
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39 is what gives the teacher/student relationship its 'fire' i.e. the power of teaching lies in the
40
41 intensity of the connection (Robertson, 1999: 152).
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47 Here, there are clear parallels between educational scholarship and organizational
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49 literature that focuses on adults; for many organizational psychoanalysts, 'the subordinate-
50
51 superior relation resembles the structure of the child-parent relationship and as such, calls
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53 forth and reactivates its core paradoxical dynamics' (Oglensky 1995: 1038). Though the
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55 marketization of HE explicitly seeks to alter the educational relationship, psychoanalytic
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57 analyses of HE are scarce, and tend to focus on pedagogy (e.g. Gilmore and Anderson, 2016;
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3 Robertson, 1999) or students (e.g. Nixon et al, 2018) rather than the experiences of staff. This
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5 is despite the fact that it is well known that transference feelings can be projected by the
6
7 teacher onto the student and not solely vice versa.
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10 As we have seen, organizational scholarship indicates that the affective experience of
11
12 many professional service workers is characterised by *ambivalence* that may be unconscious.
13
14 In educational scholarship, it is well-known that *transference* is likely in (non-marketized)
15
16 pedagogic relationships (Robertson, 1999). In psychoanalysis these concepts are connected;
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18 ambivalence is a major feature of transference. Ambivalence refers to the simultaneous
19
20 combination of opposing affective orientations towards the same person, object or symbol
21
22 (Smelser, 1998): i.e. attraction with repulsion, love and hate, respect and fear. Freud's notion
23
24 of ambivalence originates in his view that relations with parents always contain two sets of
25
26 opposing emotional impulses, those of an affectionate and submissive nature, but also hostile
27
28 and defiant ones (Freud, 1955 [1909]; 1979 [1926]). Gradually recognising the existence of
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30 an external environment and the limits to his/her omnipotence, infants mobilise unconscious
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32 defences and illusions in order to cope with ambivalent feelings and a lack of control, as well
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34 as the 'helplessness, envy and rage that accompany these moves away from the glories of the
35
36 narcissism and grandiosity of infancy' (Oglensky, 1995: 1036). The resulting intra-psychic
37
38 conflict is resolved in different ways but typically involves one of the two opposing sets of
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40 feelings being heavily repressed and the other (usually affection) intensified (Freud, 1979
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42 [1926]). Consistent with Freud's characterisation, Smelser (1998) emphasises that it is the
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44 relationships with *those on whom we most depend* that are rife with ambivalence; a
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46 subordinated person in a power relationship is dependent, their freedom to leave is restricted
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48 because it is costly politically, ideologically or emotionally.
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56 Psychosocial approaches explicitly adopt ideas and concepts from psychoanalysis but
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58 assume that emotions can be both socially constructed in context and be unrelated to, and pre-
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3 exist, such performances (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). The characteristic assumption of
4
5 psychosocial studies is that the psychological is not reducible to the social and vice versa
6
7 (Hoggett 2008). Indeed, Fotaki et al. (2012; 1113-1114) name psychosocial approaches as
8
9 particularly suited to capturing ‘the diversity and complexity of emotions to understand
10
11 people’s experiences of workplaces’, as exemplified in recent work by Baker and Kelan
12
13 (2019) and Dashtipour et al. (2020). Though there are tensions between social constructionist
14
15 and psychoanalytic perspectives, scholars interested in understanding emotion have identified
16
17 the critical potential of using psychoanalytic ideas *alongside* rather than *instead of* social
18
19 constructionist theories (see Clarke, 2003; Craib, 1995, 1997; Ulus and Gabriel, 2018). As
20
21 Clarke (2003: 153) argues, ‘neither discipline provides a better explanation, but together they
22
23 provide a deeper *understanding*’ [emphasis in original]. A psychosocial analysis recognises
24
25 that emotions are situated, or ‘socially scaffolded’ (Craib 1995: 154), for example, by
26
27 discourses operating in marketized contexts. It *also* recognizes that there is emotional life for
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29 the individual beyond the scripts and display rules of the job role which necessitates an
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31 explanation. Theoretical concepts of psychoanalysis emphasise features of certain emotions
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33 that are often rendered invisible in sociological analyses (see Clarke, 2003). Transference is
34
35 one of these key concepts and is especially helpful for an analysis of lecturer and student
36
37 relations because it illuminates the ‘intricate, delicate dance of mutually affecting emotions
38
39 between individuals’ and that these often occur ‘under the surface of explicit emotion rules’
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41 (Ulus and Gabriel 2018: 224). As such, a psychosocial approach allows us to identify the
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43 discursive positions our participants adopted under an institutional imperative of customer
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45 sovereignty *and* offer an explanation of the intrapsychic dynamics that account for the
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47 emotional meanings of such positions.
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55 56 **Methodology** 57 58 59 60

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3 The following analysis and excerpts draw from 50 in-depth interviews with academics from
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5 10 UK universities (6 pre-92, 4 post-92), each lasting on average one hour and fifteen
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7 minutes (see online supplementary material for participant detail). Our aim was to glean
8
9 richly detailed and diverse experiences of academics and their relations with students with no
10
11 intent to compare segments within our dataset. We thus purposively sampled from across the
12
13 social and physical sciences, length of teaching service (3 months to 34 years), geographic
14
15 location (North England, South England, the Midlands and Wales) and gender (25 men, 25
16
17 women) to ensure diversity of emotive content. Although the literature on workplace emotion
18
19 identifies it to be highly gendered (see for example Ashencaen Crabtree and Shiel, 2019) our
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21 focus in this paper is the analysis of discursive positions that were common across the
22
23 dataset. The interview was loosely structured around the topics of academic identity,
24
25 perceived expectations of their job role (from students and management), organizational
26
27 culture, and positive and negative interactions with students, in which specific examples or
28
29 stories were requested throughout. Depth interviews were considered most appropriate given
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31 participants were recalling personal experiences and their accompanying affective responses
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33 in as much detail as they could provide. We correctly anticipated this would, on occasion,
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35 result in conversations that triggered distress and other intense emotions in the participants
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37 (see for example deMarrais and Tisdale, 2002), which always prompted an offer to stop the
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39 interview by the interviewer. Most interviews were transcribed verbatim, however, four
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41 participants declined to be audio recorded and so detailed notes were made by the researcher
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43 immediately afterwards.
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51 Our initial analysis proceeded with each author independently reading all transcripts
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53 in order to collate similarities and differences across the dataset, especially regarding the
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55 emotional tenor of each interview, which was assisted by listening to audio recordings and
56
57 reference to interviewer fieldnotes. This process yielded copious observations per interview
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2
3 and commonalities across the dataset that we consolidated to identify the main discursive
4
5 positions our participants adopted.
6

7
8 We then re-read the transcripts and first stage notes to re-examine the data for
9
10 significant minor details, ambiguities, repeated references, contradictions and any implicit
11
12 forms of association made (Kvale, 2003). Psychoanalysis is particularly interested in
13
14 associations that can yield meanings that follow an emotional, rather than rational, logic
15
16 (Cartwright, 2004; Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). Unconscious motivations may thus ‘leak
17
18 out’ in the interview situation, just as in the analytic one. We therefore also documented
19
20 emotionally vivid stories and metaphors as potential indicators of unconscious dynamics that
21
22 could explain the emotional investment in the discursive positions. Initial working
23
24 interpretations were corroborated or dismissed depending on the presence of associated signs
25
26 in the data. For example, indications of fear, as well as affection in relations with students
27
28 prompted us to consider transference dynamics. All participants’ names below are
29
30 pseudonyms.
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34
35 There is one further point that is pertinent to our methodology. Psychosocial studies
36
37 emphasise the notion of the participant (and the researcher) as a defended subject. It
38
39 acknowledges that we all employ defence mechanisms to protect ourselves from our own
40
41 painful emotional experiences. Methodologically, this manifests as a conception of the
42
43 subject as an unreliable narrator. As Thomas (2019: 7) puts it, ‘the unreliable narrator is not a
44
45 judgement of the person, but of their narrative.’ It refers to the notion that the meanings of
46
47 participants’ accounts of themselves – indeed, our own accounts of ourselves – are not
48
49 wholly transparent or necessarily trustworthy: that lived experience is itself influenced by
50
51 desire, fantasy, defences against our vulnerabilities, and thus reports of lived experience
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53 cannot be accepted at face value as the ‘final arbiter of truth’ (Gabriel, 2019: 193). The
54
55 interpretive task of psychoanalysis thus involves a hermeneutics of suspicion rather than a
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3 hermeneutics of understanding (Ricoeur, 1970). This means that rather than trusting
4 articulated experience as evidence of meaning, psychoanalysis requires the systematic search
5 for clues, signs and symptoms in order to uncover patterns of unconscious meaning that may
6 not be readily accessible to participants themselves. Rather than seeking to avoid over-
7 interpretation of data, psychoanalysis strives for it in order to offer accounts of social
8 phenomena that are critical and novel, rather than ostensibly sensible or moderate (Frosh and
9 Emerson, 2005, Gabriel and Carr, 2002; Svensson, 2014). A psychoanalytic reading thus
10 goes ‘behind’ the text, so that an individual’s discursive positions can indicate anxieties,
11 defences and relations that developed in infancy and recur throughout their lives (Frosh and
12 Young, 2008).

25 **A psychosocial account of lecturers’ emotions in relations with student-customers**

26
27 The following empirical sections start with a discursive reading that identifies two powerful
28 subject positions and shared discourses employed in lecturers’ narratives of their
29 relationships with students. We reveal a dominant construction of the student as a vulnerable
30 child, pressured and anxious, which corresponded with an abundance of images of lecturers
31 as care-givers. The analysis then proceeds with a psychoanalytic formulation that examines
32 the possible sources of investment in these discursive positions by considering the influence
33 of fantasies from early life experiences on emotions in the relationship. We suggest that the
34 rise of student-customer authority in HE, constituted in policy but also (re)produced in
35 institutional structural mechanisms and cultural practices of staff and students, leads to an
36 inversion of psychological dependence at the subject level, especially emotional dependence.
37 This appears to create unconscious feelings of ambivalence in lecturers towards students:
38 both love and affection, hate and fear. This interpersonal relationship with students – where
39 they are overtly, if at times begrudgingly, viewed as fee-paying customers whose recruitment
40 and retention is directly linked to academics’ employment – has emotional consequences for
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3 staff that suggest the presence of unconscious processes of transference. Moreover, our
4
5 analysis indicates that this recasting of the lecturer-student relationship can trigger
6
7 profoundly troubling feelings associated with subordination and vulnerability in the
8
9 unconscious.

12 *Discursive reading*

14 *Pastoral care as customer service* A shared discursive construction of students was as
15
16 highly vulnerable young people. Reproducing a broader policy discourse in English HE
17
18 (Brooks, 2018) and sectoral awareness of rising mental health conditions (e.g. Hubble and
19
20 Bolton, 2020; Shackle, 2019; Stokel-Walker, 2020), many participants characterised their
21
22 students as under immense pressure. The burdens students face are internalised; from tuition
23
24 fees to the supreme importance of gaining high marks and thus ‘good’ graduate employment
25
26 combine to produce highly anxious, emotionally insecure students. The axiomatic nature of
27
28 this discourse led, for some interviewees, to a heavy sense of caring responsibility.
29
30 Participants referred to academic work as ‘a caring profession’, or spoke of their relationship
31
32 with students as one in which they care about or for students, as well as expressing some
33
34 concern about the perceived requirement to care ‘too much’ about student welfare. The
35
36 seemingly increasing levels of student care, and the work involved in this, was also reflected
37
38 by participants’ metaphors for their work as a lecturer: social worker, mentor, surrogate
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40 parent, confidante, counsellor, and for one participant, priest.
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47 Though these discourses were not necessarily deemed problematic, they produced a
48
49 subject position for lecturers that had consequences for their understanding of professional
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51 behaviour and emotional experience. First, such a narrative means lecturers need to care for
52
53 every student, predominantly understood as satisfying their needs. Second, it positions
54
55 student welfare as a *personal* rather than systemic responsibility, thus producing a sense of a
56
57 highly atomised workforce in which lecturers must ‘get through this on their own’. We
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3 expected complaints about having to care for students as Ogbonna and Harris (2004)
4 describe. Instead, our data exposed interpersonal relations that were experienced as
5
6 emotionally intense, often seeming to involve internalised conflict for staff.
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10 Although some participants challenged the characterisation of students as customers
11 as an inaccurate generalisation, an implicit managerial expectation that students' expanding
12 needs and desires 'have to be' recognised was accepted as largely consistent with implicit
13 institutional priorities of service quality and customer satisfaction. Some interviewees
14 referred to students, not necessarily disparagingly, as service users. In a similar vein, our
15 interviewees referred to the lecturer's role as that of coach, personal trainer, or more
16
17 pejoratively, customer service agent. Despite this, explicit requirements to perform more
18
19 'care' appear in Janet's account of a toxic encounter with a student:
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28 This year I had a student who...actually did say, "I've paid £9,000 and you're not
29 helping me." I'd said, "Well, you need to do this. Where have you been? You haven't
30 attended."...Her attitude was, "This is the service you should be making available to
31 me." It turned out she had said that to every person who had taught her. I then spoke
32 to other staff, because I was so upset by it. I had people from the disability team
33 writing to me saying, "You're not supporting this student adequately. Where is such-
34 and-such." [...] It was very upsetting. [When we met to discuss the work] it was
35 always, "You are making me anxious," the student would say. [...] Eventually this
36 person stood and shouted at me for 10 minutes. I had to say, "You have upset me
37 significantly now. This is inappropriate; this is not part of my role. I do not have to
38 listen to people shout. It is unacceptable, please go away." She kept saying, "Let me
39 finish." She kept putting her hand in front of my face. It was really unpleasant.
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57 This experience is narrated by Janet as the angry outburst of an irate customer, in an
58 encounter highly reminiscent of consumer incivility and verbal abuse levied at service
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3 workers in liberal market economies (Stroebeak and Korczynski, 2018). Janet describes the
4 student's behaviour as a customer's dissatisfaction with a transactional service in a discourse
5 of consumer sovereignty ('I've paid £9,000...') that is embellished by the student with claims
6 of being subject to emotional harm as a result of Janet's responses ('You are making me
7 anxious'). While one might expect academics to have a 'status shield' (Hochschild, 1983:
8 163) to protect them from such expressions of contempt, furnishing individuals with the
9 material, cultural and symbolic resources to address them, this contrapower aggression
10 (Lampman et al., 2009) is worsened by colleagues' accusations that appear to directly
11 challenge Janet's display of care ('You're not supporting this student adequately'). A sense
12 that academic staff are not trusted by management increases anxieties that are compounded
13 when student-customers are experienced as 'management accomplices' (Bolton and
14 Houlihan, 2005: 685).

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Several participants described how psychologically demanding the task of handling
students in a crisis was, including reports of violence and rape, ('she'd been raped and the
Welfare Office gave her a leaflet' one interviewee told us). Even outside of such extreme
situations, our interviewees admitted to privileging student-focused academic labour over
family commitments, and working beyond reasonable expectations. It seemed that a deep
commitment to professional ideals common to public sector service workers (Cohen et al.,
2018) was intensified by managerial priorities of student satisfaction and the resulting
expectations for frontline academics. For some staff, the discourse of students as pressured
and vulnerable and a shared professional ideal to care for them, did not appear at odds with
an implicit management protocol to satisfy students: it intensified it. Few illustrated this as
clearly as Andrea. Her extraordinary efforts to accommodate all students' needs leads to
almost self-sacrificing exertions and considerable emotional demands:

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3 I do worry that ultimately, we will be held accountable for [poor attendance]...I try
4 really, really, really hard in my seminars, to do as much as I can, to accommodate
5 absolutely everybody...And I can't see what else we can do, other than handing out
6 fivers when they come in through the door [...] I'll give each student 1,500 words of
7 feedback...pour over the students' feedback...And if the students don't engage with
8 it, I think, "What am I doing wrong?" You know? [...] The nature of this job, you
9 never shut-off, do you? So even if you take time off sick...I cannot not check my
10 emails, because somebody might tell me off for not doing something. And then in my
11 email box, "Bing," what pops up? "Oh by the way Andie, I've just self-harmed; what
12 do I do?" And I'm thinking, "Think, Andie. Really, really quickly. Because you can't
13 say the wrong thing here." You know?...I was saying to the Welfare Team; what if
14 she killed herself? What if she killed herself? To be told that stuff, can be incredibly
15 traumatic [...] By no fault of the universities necessarily, we are expected, more and
16 more, to step into that role. And they've just released the TEF results...It's about
17 student satisfaction, and a big part of student satisfaction is pastoral care.

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39 Andrea's testimony could be read as an example of deep acting, that she is experiencing the
40 emotions dictated by her playing the part of lecturer. Though there is no *explicit* management
41 protocol scripting interactions, Andrea clearly fears managerial repercussions of poor
42 performance and internalises an implicit management protocol to care by going the extra mile
43 in order to offer the best possible service. Yet there is an intensity to her account that suggests
44 the involvement of emotional forces that go beyond efforts to evoke emotions 'appropriate'
45 to a work situation. She rails against student apathy with a variety of pedagogic techniques to
46 improve engagement yet seems despairing that it is never enough ('I can't see what else [I]
47 can do'), feels she alone is responsible for responding appropriately to a student crisis, and
48 must manage her own emotional responses of frustration, concern and outright panic ('What
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3 if she killed herself?’). This appears to engender chronic guilt; she constructs student
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5 misbehaviour as a personal failing (‘What am I doing wrong?’), thus prompting her to work
6
7 longer and longer hours almost to the point of self-exploitation (she claims to frequently work
8
9 at weekends and during sick leave).

10
11
12 *The lost authority of in loco parentis* Linked to the discursive construction of the student as
13
14 vulnerable, we were struck by the prevalence of a conscious recognition of the parent-child
15
16 dynamic operating within interactions with students, including by those without children.
17
18 Hannah, a lecturer with just three months’ experience, described teaching as ‘heart-warming,
19
20 exciting...I’m not a mother... That sort of, nurturing relationship...[is] an absolute
21
22 unexpected pleasure.’ By constructing one’s professional identity like this, our participants
23
24 were able to assert the importance of the caring aspects of their interaction with students,
25
26 disciplining when necessary but seemingly always motivated by nurturing intentions that
27
28 went far beyond any notion of a transactional service relationship dominated by a need to
29
30 secure high student satisfaction.
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35 Yet, understanding the relationship as a parental one meant participants felt
36
37 increasingly responsible for students’ emotional as well as intellectual development. At the
38
39 same time, conversations with lecturers may be approached by students as contexts of service
40
41 interactions in which the traditional superiority of the academic can be directly challenged by
42
43 assumptions of customer sovereignty. The emotional potency of such an encounter is
44
45 illustrated in the following extract, in which Hannah’s own anxieties appear intensified by
46
47 having to handle students’ aggressive outpourings regarding a risk assessment:
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51 One student became very aggressive and quite confrontational. It was all “this is
52
53 fucking bullshit” and, you know, “It’s a tick box exercise,” and they saw it as me
54
55 torturing them, actually, rather than a part of UK law...The other student was...just in
56
57 tears, you know - way out of being, kind of productive - in a sort of chest-beating,
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3 toddler tantrum, kind of way. The one that was angry...everything I said was big
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5 sighs and rolled eyeballs. And the other student, it was, sort of quivering bottom lip.
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7 And I just stopped and I went, “I need you both to absolutely draw a line right here...I
8
9 want to see some young professionals. Enough.” [...] I wanted to scold him like a
10
11 child, because he was acting like a child...but I didn’t because I’m a brand new
12
13 academic and I don’t know how far I can go.
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16
17 Hannah and Janet’s stories illustrate a shared sense of lost authority (cf. Ylijoki, 2005)
18
19 described in many examples of emotionally intense work experiences that we heard,
20
21 including student complaints, criticisms voiced publicly during lectures, in conflicts over
22
23 marks, when being asked to account for low student satisfaction scores to management, or
24
25 forced to confront angry parents. Pastoral care as expected customer service combined with
26
27 the lost authority of in loco parentis meant relations with students could be extremely
28
29 psychologically challenging for lecturers. With few or increasingly marginalised off-stage
30
31 non-judgemental spaces where professional scrutiny is absent, the impact of such stresses on
32
33 staff appear especially difficult to bear. To offer an explanation for why, we now turn to
34
35 psychoanalysis.
36
37

38 39 40 *Psychoanalytic reading*

41
42 *The student-customer as an object of ambivalence* Our participants’ accounts convey an
43
44 emotional experience of relations with students as one of profound ambivalence. The shared
45
46 discursive construction of students as children suggested interactions were consciously
47
48 associated with familial relationships in which the external object is the target of genuine
49
50 affection and nurturing love. Yet we also saw signs that this relationship can arouse the fear,
51
52 resentment and hostility associated with early primal experiences with authority figures that
53
54 one is obliged to repress. Reproducing the discourse of the vulnerable student constitutes a
55
56 familiar rationalisation that serves defensive purposes. In this way, lecturers’ own anxiety
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3 created by different and often demanding student behaviour could be intellectualised, thereby
4
5 offering a semblance of control. This rationalisation was common in our data and is best
6
7 illustrated in this excerpt from our interview with Claudia:
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10 [A student] took one of my modules and she got a high 2.1. And she fired the most
11
12 offensive emails at me about how I was destroying her career and she'd had always
13
14 achieved top marks in everything she'd ever done...I felt, it was a terrible shame. I
15
16 felt she was... Her reaction was a stress reaction on her part. A reaction because she
17
18 was taken aback that she wasn't getting first-class marks. And clearly, the pressure
19
20 she was feeling in other ways to go out into the marketplace with lots of other people
21
22 and get jobs against lots of other people. So I felt for her at the time. I felt that her
23
24 reaction was because of the pressure she was under.
25
26
27

28 Abuse of service workers can be understood as produced by the context; as Bolton and
29
30 Houlihan (2005: 695) note, rude customers 'also feel victims of the system'. Here however,
31
32 Claudia is attempting to disassociate aggressive behaviour from her student. Rationalising
33
34 incivility as products of students' intense anxiety appeared to be a central way our
35
36 participants sought to comprehend, console and comfort themselves in situations of threat.
37
38 Emotional investment in such a discourse is likely to be a part of a defensive strategy against
39
40 assaults on the ego posed by forms of behaviour we might in other work contexts refer to as
41
42 client abuse (Stroeback and Korczynski, 2018). However, it may also signal a defence against
43
44 the expression of repressed hostility aroused within the relationship – a natural emotional
45
46 response perhaps when one is subject to aggressive behaviour ('the most offensive emails') –
47
48 and thus the vulnerable student discourse is a self-assuring rationalisation that buttresses the
49
50 suppression of such emotion (Smelser, 1998). Constructed as unfairly pressured and in
51
52 genuine need of care, students may trigger strong mixed feelings – pity ('I felt for her at the
53
54 time') and tenderness, but also anxiety and envy – so they unconsciously receive 'not just our
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3 compassion but also our fear, contempt and hatred' (Hoggett, 2006: 182; see also Menzies
4
5 1960). Such contradictory feelings and ensuing rationalisation were particularly clear in our
6
7 interview with Carl who early on in the interview repeatedly described his view of students as
8
9 anxious:

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12 My expectations of students are driven by my awareness of their anxiety in the world
13
14 that they live in...I interpret them as being very anxious about a world that is looking
15
16 more and more like the gig economy...So they arrive here with certain kinds of
17
18 anxieties about the future I feel like they didn't have in the past.

19
20
21 However, when asked about his own experiences offering pastoral advice to individual
22
23 students, Carl's narrative suggests the possibility that he is projecting his own anxieties on to
24
25 the student body and hints at unconscious aggressive impulses directed to the internalised
26
27 student object:

28
29
30 Initially I coped very badly and I kind of freaked out... You start feeling like you are
31
32 responsible and you need to help and you didn't realise that someone could actually
33
34 suffer this much. A lot of my students are the first time I have encountered anything
35
36 like this...I've had students who have basically told me that my failure to let them
37
38 progress to the next level is going to drive them to suicide...part of me wants to help,
39
40 but also part of it gets my heckles up, because I'm not driving anyone to do
41
42 anything... "I don't undertake any action for you."

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47 Carl's own anxieties appear interwoven with his belief that his students require him to own
48
49 their anxieties too. If academic labour is experienced as increasingly precarious under
50
51 marketization, the projection of largely unconscious fears by tutors onto students as a defence
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53 mechanism (they are all anxious) may be widespread, and only intensified when students
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55 appear to transfer the responsibility of passing the course back to the tutor.
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Signs of unconscious ambivalence pervaded the dataset. For instance, we saw primary responses to ambivalence in the expression of highly positive *attitudes* directed towards students as the source of the ambivalence, such as fanatical commitment (Weigert and Franks, 1989) - as illustrated in Andrea's account above - and *movement* towards objects of ambivalence in which 'in spite of [one's] estrangement and fears, [one] tries to win the affection of others' (Pratt and Doucet, 2000: 214). We also identified negative primary responses to ambivalence, in interviewees' use of derogatory comments ('we call them "daddy's little princess"') common in service organizations, as well as vacillation (Pratt and Doucet, 2000) as indicated by the defence mechanism of temporal splitting ('she had all the bad attitudes [in the first year]...absolute gold by the end').

Feelings of fear and hostility were apparent when our informants described face-to-face confrontations, the discovery of social media content criticising them personally, and the weight awarded to student evaluations by management. The widespread use of anonymous student feedback may account for anxieties arising in this work relationship, and several informants relayed stories of managerial inquiries into their teaching practice prompted by such metrics. Yet across the dataset, our informants' accounts indicated deeper anxieties including profound feelings of rejection, powerlessness and even persecution that suggest repressed desires and unconscious primal conflicts were resurfacing within this changing work relationship.

Beyond respect or admiration, our interviewees' narratives contained signs of both feelings of estrangement and an unconscious desire to win students' affection. Associated inner fantasies of being needed and loved are especially apparent in the following excerpt from our interview with Matthew, in which he stated repeatedly that he sees caring for students in the fullest way possible as his duty.

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3 First [students] say, you know, “No, I don’t need you. I’ll just look at the recording,”
4
5 but then they say, “I’m really stuck with this assignment. I need some help.” I mean,
6
7 that’s where I get the chance to do what I came here to do; show that humans are
8
9 humans... And then, I suppose, that has a good influence on them, and then that
10
11 creates a good impression about me as well. Then, after the year, or after the course,
12
13 they actually end up, maybe, liking me for years [laughs] because I’ve been there to
14
15 help them [...] When you have a chat with a student on a matter that is quite sensitive,
16
17 you’ve got, sort of like, a fan for life.
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21 Such inner desires, however, heighten the potential for psychic injury when they conflict with
22
23 the demands of external social situations. In the excerpt below, personal negative anonymous
24
25 student feedback constitutes an assault on Matthew’s ego and his anger, even during the
26
27 interview, was evident:
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29

30 I mean, at first when you read it, it actually makes you sweat, and it’s, like, ‘Why do
31
32 students actually act like this, when you know that I’ve tried my best and I’ve given it
33
34 100%, and you haven’t? But you now have the audacity to turn around and say,
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36 “Look, it’s not my problem, it’s yours”.’ And at first you feel a bit upset, and
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38 sometimes you feel angry, but I don’t sleep on it really. I just put it out before I go to
39
40 bed, and when I wake up in the morning, I always try to forget about it, and that’s it.
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42 Even when I meet that person face-to-face, although I know who that person is, they
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44 have no clue that I’ve already identified that these are the culprits. I don’t try to take it
45
46 out on them, or, you know, accept whingers. And it’s just...I just try to go on with
47
48 life, I suppose [...] The rotten apples, the bad ones, you can’t change them.
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54 Receiving critical student feedback is often painful for lecturers, but may be more so when it
55
56 triggers unconscious impulses associated with past intrapsychic conflict. The defences
57
58 evident in this excerpt certainly suggest the resurfacing of such feelings. Suddenly the
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3 deserving student is experienced as an aggressor arousing fear ('it actually makes you sweat')
4
5 and becomes the target of hostile impulses that, though subject to defence mechanisms, still
6
7 find expression albeit in distorted form ('I've identified...the culprits...I don't try to take it
8
9 out on them'). Recognised as dangerous or unacceptable, the expression of these feelings are
10
11 quickly subject to defence mechanisms. Matthew deploys denial ('I don't sleep on it really'),
12
13 and attempts to manage his anxiety through the defence of splitting (Klein, 1987), consoling
14
15 himself via the reassuring simplicities of good and bad external objects, of students as 'rotten
16
17 apples' and later in the interview, as 'naughty but nice'.
18
19

20
21
22 *The student-customer as authority figure* In psychoanalysis, hostile feelings and defiance
23
24 signify dependence just as much as affection and obedience (Freud, 1991 [1920]).
25

26 Contemporary student behaviour was characterised by many participants as emotionally
27
28 intense and potentially threatening, thus the meaning patterns assigned to these external
29
30 threats 'set in motion simultaneous *inner* struggles with those kinds of affects, meanings,
31
32 symbols and ambivalences that are aroused by association' (Smelser, 1998: 210). Our data
33
34 suggests that lecturers' emotional meanings of present relations with students resembled
35
36 those unconsciously associated with authority figures, heightening the potential for the
37
38 relationship to trigger potent emotions associated with the oedipal drama.
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40
41

42 In an inversion of the claimed transfer of emotional attitudes by lecturers from one's
43
44 children to their students, we saw signs that lecturers feel subordinate to the student, creating
45
46 an unconscious dependence highly reminiscent of that likely to have been first experienced in
47
48 relation to the parental authority as an infant. Indeed, psychoanalysis views ambivalence as
49
50 originating in the intimate relations between a child and his or her parents and siblings,
51
52 relations from which the child cannot escape (Smelser, 1998). The oedipal situation of the
53
54 child involves entering into competition with the same-sex parent for the love of the opposite
55
56 sex parent. Early infantile fantasies of being punished by the parental figure resurface,
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3 stimulating afresh the accompanying conflicting emotions, including rage, as glimpsed in
4
5 Matthew's testimony. We saw how a customer authority within lecturer-student interactions
6
7 appeared to trigger feelings highly reminiscent of those experienced as a result of being 'at
8
9 the mercy of another' (Oglensky, 1995: 1044). Furthermore, just as in the first realisation of
10
11 one's total dependence on an external other (Freud, 2001 [1914]), in contexts of customer
12
13 sovereignty the aggressor is unable to be challenged.
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15

16
17 As Smelser (1998) describes, we can become bound affectively to those with
18
19 authority in the organizational context because of their power, but also because we load both
20
21 positive and negative childhood transferences on to them. Indeed, unconscious transferential
22
23 projections of students as son/daughter substitutes common to teachers signals a relationship
24
25 of dependence that can underpin an affectionate attachment with students (Freud, 1930).
26
27 However, in our analysis an institutionally-inscribed customer status of students seemed to
28
29 make such types of attachments uncommon. In the following excerpt from Adrian's
30
31 interview, transferential projections seem to heighten feelings of hostility:
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33

34
35 Occasionally I have students who are not so respectful. I find that difficult. It's a
36
37 really difficult situation that our student population is in, and that we're in, because
38
39 they are paying £12,000 a year to be here...they deserve to have – the language is all
40
41 wrong and it's the language of business, which I don't think is the right language to
42
43 use – a reasonable product in terms of a reasonable experience. My daughters deserve
44
45 a reasonable experience [...] I tend to find that many of my undergraduates are not as
46
47 respectful...Many of them are not engaged and I don't understand that... 'Why are you
48
49 not doing this?' 'Why don't you care?' I just don't understand that. My daughters
50
51 engage. I find it frustrating when [students are] disrespectful because I am never
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disrespectful towards them.

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3 Here Adrian unfavourably compares his students' behaviour to that of his own university-
4 attending daughters, who apparently 'care' about their studies and by implication, respect
5 their lecturers. However, this excerpt also indicates how the unconscious transference of
6 thoughts and feelings associated with the paternal relationship – notably Adrian's emotional
7 dependence on his daughters' respect and ability to please him – to an internalised object of
8 the student intensifies the emotional response when students do not behave as the subordinate
9 recipient of parental love. Students' apparent indifference and 'disrespect' of him as a
10 lecturer – perhaps stemming from a consumer subjectivity in which the relationship is
11 transactional – prompts a resurfacing of the troubling unconscious feelings associated with
12 being in a subordinate position.
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26 Naturally, lecturers may seek something from those they care for; staff have affective
27 needs. Yet where the cared-for are awarded customer sovereignty they may come to
28 unconsciously represent an authority figure. The following story from Stephen, given in
29 response to the interviewer's request to share an example of a positive experience with a
30 student or students, reveals the narcissistic satisfaction of being admired, even loved, by those
31 on whom our ego increasingly depends:
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40 The most pleasure is getting cheered at the graduation ceremony, when I walked in.
41 And I deliberately went in last...And when I went past the students, the slow hand
42 clap of 2000 people turned into a massive cheer and a scream of "Stevie!", which
43 brought me to tears. I literally was in tears...I sat there, there were tears in my eyes,
44 with the biggest smile on my face, and thought, "Yes, it's all worthwhile."
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52 As an object of love, Stephen is moved to tears in a manner reminiscent of a subordinate's
53 fulfilment of a projected wish of parental adoration from a superior. However, this passage
54 also hints at unconscious emotions associated with sibling rivalry. Seemingly in competition
55 with colleagues for students' affections ('I deliberately went in last'), the gratification of
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3 narcissistic desires is only heightened by the public context of its expression alongside other
4 colleagues. Similarly, the following extract from John's interview indicates how a pastoral
5 care role can afford opportunities for narcissistic gratification by awarding special attention to
6 individual students, and thereby securing a place of special affection for oneself:
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12 I enjoy being an academic advisor...I quite like young people to be honest. I know
13 they get rubbished in the media, 'snowflakes' and all that kind of nonsense...I kind of
14 quite enjoy it and I enjoy mixing with them...Just the other day - a really worrying
15 one - but a student who suffers quite badly with depression and anorexia, and I spent a
16 good couple of hours just talking with her because she was in one of her down modes
17 [...]. [Students expect] a priest. Somebody they can turn to. Somebody they can rely
18 upon. Somebody who will be there on their side...They'll come and discuss things
19 [with me] they wouldn't discuss with other people and I include parents and friends in
20 that.
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33 Here John is expressing the kinds of satisfaction many professions that involve care can
34 provide. However, it is also suggestive of the pleasures of 'rescuing' students in a
35 relationship where one unconsciously depends on their need to be saved (see Robertson
36 1999).
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42 Though all social interaction mixes realistic reactions and transference ones
43 (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983), we heard many stories of tension-ridden situations with both
44 individual and groups of students that entailed the deployment of protective measures and
45 inhibitions suggestive of neurotic anxiety. In an institutional context where managers were
46 commonly viewed as all too keen to satisfy the customer (and their parents), several of our
47 participants detailed a myriad of practical mechanisms they now use to protect themselves
48 against punishments inflicted by student authority, such as expectation-setting in their first
49 dealings with students, lecturing on organizational policy and procedures, operating a
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3 yellow/red card warning system, and devoting time at the start of every class to go through
4
5 answers to student emails received in the interim. The following excerpt from our interview
6
7 with Claudia reveals feelings that suggest a deep-seated fear that coloured many of our
8
9 participants' most emotionally vivid descriptions:

12 I'm becoming more and more cautious over the years. I've gone from being quite
13
14 relaxed about lots of things to now being more nervous about things... So I've adapted
15
16 my whole approach to how I am with the students as a result. [...] I had a very bad
17
18 reaction to a student... she complained that I'd cut her short when she'd been giving a
19
20 response in a lecture room and she went and made a complaint, a formal complaint
21
22 and I was very, very, very upset about it... And I was actually off sick. I'd never been
23
24 off sick before and I've never been off sick since... I think what upset me most was
25
26 thinking, well, I don't know how I could have done it differently really... I think that
27
28 has stayed with me and that will continue to... And I think when you've got large
29
30 student numbers, it's hard... I constantly think, "Now, this room is full of individual
31
32 students. Am I actually going to manage to look after them all?"... And if I'm brutally
33
34 honest with you, I think that's why I'm more anxious today than I was 10 years ago
35
36 because I don't think that will ever go from me... So, yes, it's tougher today.

37
38 The potency of this event is indicated by the increased anxiety Claudia feels with all students
39
40 she encounters in her work, rather than solely the breakdown of trust with the individual
41
42 complainant. The complaint is presented as coming from nowhere, as if a force of nature, the
43
44 arbitrariness of which seems to heighten feelings of helplessness and victimhood ('I don't
45
46 know how I could have done it differently'). Like others, there is a sense of having to
47
48 constantly prepare for the worst, and that a relationship of dependence in which genuine
49
50 affection usually presides (because hostile impulses are repressed) could suddenly and
51
52 without warning arouse almost paranoid feelings of persecution (they are out to get me no
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3 matter what I do) and trigger pre-existing hostile impulses first encountered in the painful
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5 recognition of dependence after early childhood illusions of self-sufficiency and contentment.
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8 A psychoanalytic reading emphasising unconscious fantasy activity suggests that it is
9
10 in fact the disagreeable notion that students come to represent an authority figure akin to a
11
12 parent that arouses such profound and disorientating ambivalence in the unconscious, leading
13
14 to its inversion in the contrary image – and emotional investment in the discursive subject
15
16 position – of the child. Indeed, primitive fears awakened in lecturers in relations with students
17
18 may have a further oedipal dimension; appearing as more powerful than s/he is, the
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20 subordinate wishes for the authority figure to be out of the way, which in turn produces a
21
22 terrible dread of his/her vengeance and thus a fear of him/her (Freud, 1979 [1926]). This
23
24 threatening impulse is repressed via reaction-formation; lecturers' fantasy activity transforms
25
26 the impulse into its opposite, namely, fervent devotion ('Am I actually going to manage to
27
28 look after them all?'). In this way, unconscious feelings of dependency, vulnerability and
29
30 resentment are kept under repression.
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34 35 **Conclusion: a critical interpretation of the lecturer as service worker**

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37 The epigraphs of this paper allude both to relations riddled with intense, often difficult,
38
39 emotion in contemporary academic labour, and their importance to organizations that
40
41 increasingly revolve around customer-oriented service quality. Though managerial controls
42
43 on the encounter between service provider and service recipient appeared to be more
44
45 normative than direct in our study, we argue that an organisational discourse of customer
46
47 satisfaction is reshaping long-standing social norms of the power differentials between
48
49 students and staff in ways that have profound effects for lecturers' (and students') emotional
50
51 responses. Where once students may have primarily been in a subordinate role to lecturers,
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53 rooted in intellectual capital being central to the relationship, the importance of their
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55 satisfaction to HE institutions heightens the potential for lecturers to become emotionally
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3 dependent on them. Caring for students was perceived to be increasingly necessary but also
4
5 managerially expected so long as it was construed as helping to satisfy students' customer
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7 needs and desires. Organisational imperatives to 'corporately care' about and for students -
8
9 because they are the customers of the university - have the unintended consequence of
10
11 generating the sorts of acute ambivalence and emotional dependencies we have described
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14 here.

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16
17 Camouflaged by the nurturing instincts and caring behaviour associated with
18
19 parenting a child, a reasonable and socially acceptable discourse of teacher-student relations,
20
21 our psychoanalytic interpretation suggests teaching academics unconsciously experience deep
22
23 and powerful feelings of vulnerability, submission, fear and hostility that are awakened
24
25 within a work relationship that is changing radically in nature. Our analysis captures affective
26
27 work that recognises the nature of all human interactions that take us beyond scripts and
28
29 professional role demarcations, often generating unpredictable and irrational feelings based
30
31 upon inner representations and 'an emotional life rooted in the past' (Oglenky, 1995: 1037).
32
33 As such, personal appropriation of emotions that emerge in the workplace is likely to occur,
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35 when lecturers' care for students involves unconscious transference projections of them as
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37 son/daughter substitutes (Freud, 1930). Notions of surface and deep expression of feelings
38
39 miss the always fine-grained actual experiences of the frontline service workers we spoke to
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41 where, for example, many of their responses to the student-customers' behaviours and
42
43 emotional outbursts were unmanaged, spontaneous, even involuntary.
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49
50 Many studies point to a view that academic work has seen considerable growth in
51
52 affective management and that this is both because the marketized organisation deems it
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54 appropriate but also because academics themselves are sensitive to their own career
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56 progression that is itself evermore dependent on commercial business-like metrics. Our
57
58 analysis contributes to these discussions by revealing the ready alignment of institutional
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3 imperatives of high customer satisfaction with an internalised professional duty of care. Such
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5 an alignment weakens resistance to an excessive individualisation of responsibilities as
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7 afforded by a sector immersed in neoliberal value. In a context of student-consumer
8
9 sovereignty, academics feel they must ‘give of themselves’ whatever the seemingly angst-
10
11 ridden student feels they need to cope. Furthermore, our analysis suggests a discourse of
12
13 service provider and customer in the academy increases the likelihood of unconscious and
14
15 profound feelings of ambivalence, generating anxieties for teaching academics that may
16
17 entail considerable psychological effort to process. The institutional mechanisms to support
18
19 frontline staff are, at present, limited and piecemeal, perhaps in part because of widespread
20
21 managerial denial of the realities of the sorts of experience we have articulated in this paper.
22
23 The existence of authentic communities of coping (Korczynski, 2003) appear rare, even in a
24
25 setting historically steeped in a public service ethos.
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31 This leads us to highlight the need for more research that considers the implications of
32
33 an academic-student relationship characterised by often unplanned intense emotional
34
35 experience for the pedagogic endeavour. Are many academics now primarily shifting the
36
37 emphasis from intellectual to emotional needs and desires of students? We have also exposed
38
39 how the affective consequences for lecturers of reconceptualising academic labour as
40
41 professional service work are significant, intense and largely unheard. We thus also call for
42
43 research to investigate the existence of organic coping mechanisms or ways to challenge
44
45 these psychic demands; particularly those that may be collective in character considering how
46
47 isolating this aspect of the academic’s work appeared to be.
48
49

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52
53
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55
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57
58
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