
Editorial

Stephen Lloyd Smith

Centre for Research in Emotion Work and
Employment Studies (CREWES),
Brunel Business School,
Brunel University, UB8 3PH, UK
E-mail: stephen.smith@brunel.ac.uk

Biographical notes: Stephen Lloyd Smith is a member of Brunel Business School, more specifically the Center for Research in Emotion Work and Employment Studies. His research interests include emotional labour, authority, professional judgement and naive inquiry methodology.

In the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of social relations conducted remotely by electronic means, most of which are not transacted in 'real time', but instead, carried out discontinuously and from the comparative privacy of people's own homes and offices. The self-authored written word, albeit typed-out, has come back into mass use in a way, which few could have foreseen, partially displacing the spoken word and face-to-face encounters. This change has to have been largely of our own choosing, individual and collective.

The revealed preference of organisations and individuals for remote communication and remote contracting in a space which is at once highly public and rather private, begs many questions as to the future of feelings. It is clear that contact via screens and text-boxes holds great and growing appeal, and with it new forms of civility (and incivility) are emerging. (For an account of computer-mediated emotion see Vincent and Fortunati, 2009.) Why do so many prefer to confess intimate as well as trivial details to strangers they will never meet? What does it now mean to 'know somebody personally'? How many friends is it possible to have and what happens to friendship if one can claim to have 64 of them? What is the extent of our moral obligation to check our e-mail inboxes twice a day? What degree of imperative does a red-flagged e-mail carry? What is happening to the political economy of communication and of emotions when electronic self-service transactions displace paid service work and 'avoidable contact' (to quote a phrase newly in circulation) is indeed, avoided deliberately? And what does it add up to when copious amounts of equally avoidable and often unpaid contact is not avoided, but is, instead, embraced with enthusiasm and commands what has been called 'continuous partial attention'?

That is, parallel to the emotional labour force, which Arlie Hochschild counted carefully in 1983, there has arisen another parallel arena for exchanges, which are different in quality and quantity, many of which involve no payments and are not especially commoditised. To answer my own question, the appeal of through-screen relationships is perhaps that they provide simultaneously social relationships *and* social defence mechanisms. We seek contact and we seek to avoid it. Virtuality provides for

both impulses, because it represents relationships on screen and at the same time interposes separation between self and other. The verb *to screen* carries these different, indeed opposite meanings ... to screen against something as in 'fly-screen' and to place something in view, as in 'to screen a film'. Thus, ordinary language prefigures the double function of the computer screen.

In this second special edition concentrating on the *Future of Feelings*, we hear from the opposite end of virtuality on not just one, but on many dimensions; from areas of practice where there is less screening of the defensive kind and more direct projection of the subject matter of the relationship. Lynne Kovan and Kay de Vries report how palliative care nurses strive to 'get it right' in caring for the dying and how they mostly succeed at this, doing so in accordance with their own caring consciences. Getting it right means enabling happiness in the most anxious and least avoidable of circumstances: the end-of-life where we are all headed, where vulnerability of each to the other is laid bare, and probably for the best.

Geraldine Lee-Treweek reports from another scene of visceral encounter that experienced by economic migrants and their development of tough-seeming outer-defences, which at least prevent the other from seeing the negative impacts that they have on them, and thus deny them sadistic satisfaction, because one 'has to'. This is survival, but survival at a cost nevertheless. Curiously, this account deserves to be read against Georg Simmel's discussion of the 'metropolitan psyche' (1903) published by Wolff (1959). He saw in urbanites a degree of mild aversion and 'matter-of-factness', as he put it, which he thought of as not only present but also necessary to the well-being of any city-dweller.

Pam Smith and Helen Cowie review and connect the considerable literature on bullying and emotions in nursing. Not for the first time the conceptual movement provided by their work has the potential to speak clearly and practically to other very different branches of practice in terms which will nevertheless sound familiar and highly plausible to emotional labourers working in spheres where contact is not avoidable and where, anxiety notwithstanding, avoidance is undesirable because avoidance is ineffective and even dangerous. This paper poses the widest question, I think, of the extent to which bullying can be kept apart from care and how a certain perverse force of magnetism that seems to exist between care and bullying can be overcome.

A paper by Konstantinos Arfanis and Charlie Lewis reminds us of something that was true in 1983 and remains very much the case, that emotions are gendered and that this has a major impact on the gender composition of the division of labour. The 'scripting of masculinity' in everyday life reinforces difference in countless small and hardly noticed acts rather than through a few decisive ones. A strong force is created and upheld by a multitude of weak forces.

Ruth Deery, Pamela Fisher and Billie Hunter report separately from a sphere of practice that for obvious reasons deserves to be considered in direct relation to care of the dying: midwifery. End-of-life care and beginning-of-life care are the ultimate branches of emotional labour because both entail long periods of contact, high dependency and trust, very high moral and professional obligations, the most direct encounters with being and nothingness, and catastrophic consequences following neglect and abuse. Though the word 'human' is over-used, these are among a handful of services which deserve to be called human services. By the same token, Hunter asks what I would take to be the most strategic of all strategic questions. What might lie ahead, in midwifery (and I think by proxy, what lies ahead in all branches of emotional labour)? She finds that a series of

conflicting and sometimes contradictory practice principles are in competition, the outcome of which will be critical to the future of feelings in this service. To the extent that these conflicts take place between practitioners and their managers, this might be called a ‘class struggle’ for the emotions, or perhaps a conflict between managerial and professional authority. But as she explains, it is more complex than this, especially because most conflicts register as problems within the professional conscience of each midwife (and perhaps as problems of conscience for managers too). “How much will I ‘tick each box’ and meet the managerial requirement?” “How much will I persist with upholding standards of care that are more meaningful and precious to me?” “What resources can I draw on to sustain myself while I also sustain others?” “Under what conditions will sustaining others also sustain me?”

These are super-strategic questions because they apply by diminishing degrees to the future of all emotional labour in all services, and because a defeat in midwifery of all places suggests a defeat for care everywhere.

There are good reasons to be cheerful however. High among them is that researchers and practitioners of emotional labour have a considerable repository of useful analytic concepts and apposite research methods to draw on. Another is that unattended services provide for only the thinnest degree of satisfaction and the least meaningful of friendships. Might this be the kind of superficiality that Simmel thought of as especially appealing within a society of urban strangers? We’ll need and want more than this. A third is that the market-comfort of individual redemption by rising asset prices proved temporary. Another is that trying to accomplish quite simple-tasks is often more complex and less efficient than accomplishing them face-to-face, and most importantly, because there is considerable commonality of interest between the well-being of service workers and the well-being of the clients who depend on them.

Kay de Vries and Jane McCrystal’s welcome application of attachment theory to the care of people with dementia will play well, I think, for the one-third of readers who can expect to experience the effects of dementia themselves and the equal number who will find dementia in people closest to them. The same is true of Rebekah Luff’s excellent account of the contribution, which five types of empathy make to the care of older people; forms of empathy, which untutored practitioners work-out and apply quite spontaneously. Indeed, all of the papers published in this special edition are clear and direct about *we too*.

David Sims once joked with me that ‘strategy’ simply means ‘the important stuff’. Welcome, then, to the important stuff, its kindly class of producers and their considerable force for good; not limited by typing-speed, not protected by computer screens and which nobody should seek to escape from or to deny.

References

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