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# Emotions of austerity: care and commitment in public service delivery in the North East of England

## **Abstract**

In the context of an austerity agenda constructed through the deployment of aversive emotions, we offer a more-than-rational understanding of the implications of geographically uneven austerity politics for organisations providing public services for marginalised groups. The article highlights how emotions are at the heart of the experiences of those delivering services in the North East of England and considers the emotional toll of changes under austerity on the professional lives of participants, but also those impacts which relate to wider interpretations of loyalty and care beyond individual participants. Due to the nature of occupational roles which involve an ethos and practice of commitment, and through relations with decision makers, colleagues, service users and broader definitions of community and marginalisation over time, participants are engaged in a range of emotional work. We explore how recent experiences have highlighted a continued and in some cases accelerated undermining of their work and communities of which they are, in different ways, a part. However, they are also seen as generative of a set of significant emotionally charged responses to such challenges, which variously challenge and conform to the dominant discourse of austerity.

**Keywords:** austerity, emotional work, emotional toll, public services, care, resourcefulness

## Introduction

Since the global crisis of 2007/8, the relationship between austerity and emotion has been considered in a variety of ways. These have ranged from cultural theorists focussing on the 'affective orchestration of the crisis' (Helm et al, 2010), to those drawing on economic theory to characterise the policies of austerity as 'morality plays' (Blyth, 2013). Elsewhere, scholars have focussed on quantifiable consequences in relation to health, emotional wellbeing and social bonds (Clark and Newman 2014; Basu and Stuckler, 2012). Others have focussed on people/places most adversely affected, including research at the national scale, such as psychological work on the politics of trauma in Greece (Darvou and Dermertzis, 2013), but also in more specific contexts, through for example, qualitative studies of emotional suffering for youth support workers in the UK (Colley, 2012).

While such studies conceptualise the emotional quite differently, all view it as a crucial dimension of austere times. In a similar vein to Kraftl (2009) and Hardill and Mills (2013), who complicate the separation between policy studies and research on emotions, we bridge these lines of enquiry through a focus on the politics of emotions in relation to both the operationalization and experience of austerity for those providing public services in the North East of England. For Pain (2009: 18), the point of drawing attention to emotions is that they are always part reflection and part productive of power relations that are 'fundamental to the layout of society'. Other scholars (Thien, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006) also situate the study of emotions within specific arrangements of power, recognising their inter-subjective and potentially exclusionary character. In this paper we attempt to apply such an

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understanding of emotions to the experiences of those in caring occupations in a context of uneven cut backs, underpinned by a discourse of 'necessary' austerity.

As a way of introducing the intersections between politics and emotions, as well as providing context for changes being witnessed by those working on the front line of public service delivery in North East England, we first draw attention to the role of emotions as constitutive of UK austerity politics. We then consider the importance of emotions within community orientated occupations under austerity, drawing upon a recent study in a part of the UK which is amongst the most adversely affected by the recession and public spending cuts. Through the accounts of practitioners working in fields across sectors which have an ethos of care and commitment, we highlight the significance of both immediate workplace based experiences and broader psycho-social connections, before considering expressions of emotionally charged resourcefulness amongst our research participants.

### **Emotion, politics and austerity**

In sharp contrast to the call for 'compassionate' Conservatism by David Cameron when he became leader of the Conservative Party (Cameron, 2005a), the Conservative led Coalition Government since 2010 has been rather more tough-talking (Jenson, 2012). Austerity measures adopted in the UK have explicitly focused on deficit reduction through a reconfiguration of the state, cutting public spending (including substantial welfare reform) and reductions to public sector employment, thus 'further entrenching the neoliberal model' (Hall et al, 2013: 4). This approach continues apace, through an insistence that excessive public expenditure is the root cause of contemporary economic woes. International evidence of the social and health related damage done by such changes is clear (Basu and

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Stuckler, 2012), as is that which indicates that austerity is not economically effective (Krugman, 2013). Yet austerity has been popularly accepted as the new 'virtuous common sense' of fiscal responsibility (Blyth, 2013). Between 2011 and 2012, the proportion of the UK population saying the cuts were necessary rose from 55% to 60% (Moore, 2013).

Arguably, this is the result of an absence of convincing counter-arguments, but also the manner in which the idea of 'pain now, gain later' has hit a collective emotional nerve.

Public attitudes are subject to manipulation and the language of austerity, resurrected during the latest crisis (Cameron, 2009a), seeks to persuade and legitimate policy measures through an activation of emotions. In this sense, austerity can be viewed as the construction of a threat and as a means of regulating behaviour. Despite reasoned evidence to the contrary (Dolphin, 2011), the government appears to be fighting a battle of 'hearts and minds' through a quasi-religious discourse (Forkert, 2014) in which reductions in welfare expenditure are necessary to redeem the country's guilt about apparent profligacy through the years in which New Labour were in government (1997-2010). In their latest 'long term economic plan' the Conservative Party (2014) continues to reinforce this cardinal virtue of prudence against the recklessness of the previous government as central to a national recovery. Through a stirring of emotions the state has managed to *convince* that a failure of the market has been a failure of excessive state spending.

Ritualised language, such as 'we're all in this together' first tabled by Cameron in 2005 (Cameron, 2005b), but often repeated in the aftermath of the crisis (Cameron 2008; 2009b; 2010; 2011) as well as other slogans such as 'making tough decisions in tough times' (Montgomerie, 2012) and 'in the national interest' (HM Government, 2013) are examples of powerful semiotic tools repeatedly used for convincing that there is no alternative.

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Emphasising common strife, common cause and shared responsibility, these mantras present a strong and responsible government which, despite difficult conditions and limited choices, is making sensible and 'fair' decisions which 'share the pain' (Clarke and Newman, 2012).

This discourse has been deployed to justify the necessity as well as the benefits of policy choices around welfare reform (Duncan-Smith, 2014), the privatisation of public services (see Localism Act (2012) and Health and Social Care Act (2012)), and restrictions on government spending at national and local levels, ensuring that local councils 'keep doing their bit to tackle the inherited budget deficit' (Pickles, 2012).

What remains unquestioned is the inevitability of the cuts, their speed, consequences for economic recovery, disproportionate social impact (Reeves et al, 2013) and implications for the public provision of welfare. As Hochschild (1979), who pioneered ideas of 'emotional labour/emotional work' argues, political elites (as well as social groups) look to define the rules which govern the emotional tone of a situation (the *framing rules*) and the appropriate emotions to be felt in specific situations (the *feeling rules*). These rules are according to Hochschild (1979: 566) 'the bottom side to ideology' - varying ideological stances come with different sets of framing and feeling rules. However, the induction of a desirable set of responses is also contingent and for some may well result in a sense of vindication vis-à-vis their own judgements of marginal social groups, or for others the characterisation of austerity as an unpleasant necessity.

The 'crackdown' on the UK welfare system since 2010 has been enforced through the stirring of resentment but also guilt and shame (Probyn, 2005), directed against 'workless families' (Jenson, 2012), described by Cameron (2012) as 'the real shame' and the disabled (Watson et al, 2011) separated out from 'hard working families' and described as 'parked'

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on benefits (Osborne, 2013). Collective responsibility is pitched against individual responsibility and resentment fostered through the idea that individuals have been asked to provide for welfare, which is recast as fostering a 'shameless' dependency. Through such techniques emotional responses to austerity are controlled (Gilbert, 2011) and policy approaches narrowed (Helms et al, 2010).

On the other side of this is the experience of shaming for those targeted as culpable. In our research, amongst those working with groups subject to increased scrutiny, there was a sense of disbelief at the level of harassment. As with other recent research in the region (Garthwaite, 2013), we see here both the demonization of vulnerable groups as a justification of change, but also the emotional damage caused by these changes. For those already dealing with challenging conditions, the impact is acutely felt. As an experienced disability support group representative made clear in relation to benefit eligibility, this is new emotional territory. For those encountering austerity through direct engagement with those most clearly affected, persuasion about the logic of cuts might not be so straightforward (Bennett, 2013).

*It is extremely worrying and frightening and of course the various tests that there are for people on their ability to work, there's a huge percentage of those have been won on appeal, but in that period that person has gone through all that worry and anxiety and feeling of, in some cases, worthlessness. And so all this uncertainty and all this, I would say, villainisation of people who either have a disability or people, because of their disability, are having to claim benefits. I've not seen it to this extent I don't think since I came into the voluntary sector.*

(Chair, Disability Support Group)

### **Working between care and cuts**

There is then a blurring between Aristotelian *logos* (appeal to reasoned argument) and *pathos* (appeal to emotional connections) in the rhetoric and results of austerity measures, problematising what Emirbayer and Goldberg, (2005) call the ‘pernicious dichotomy’ of reason and emotion. If the realm of emotions is so significant, there is a need to further engage with these more-than-rational dimensions as encountered and understood by those who have a clear perspective of the changing funding landscape and consequences for marginalised social groups. As Anderson and Smith (2001: 7) point out ‘there are moments where lives are so explicitly lived through pain, bereavement, elation, anger, love and so on that the power of emotional relations cannot be ignored’. We see the changes brought about by austerity as triggering those kinds of moments. However, as Pain (2009, 478) reminds us, we should be wary of simplified views of emotions which treat them as ‘blank canvasses’ waiting to react to external events:

‘but [rather] as situated, historicized and relational – already formed and always changing - and affecting politics, as much as they are affected by politics, at a range of scales.’

Rather than treating emotions as purely the outcome of austerity measures in a mechanistic fashion, we consider here the manner in which certain emotions form a central part of the experience of public service employment, but which have been heightened and in some cases politicised as a result of recent changes. The workplace, embodiment and emotion, as McDowell (2009) illustrates are fundamentally intertwined. Modern work practices concern new forms of sociality, particularly when it comes to the dominant service sector. Despite

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the digital age, service based jobs still require face-to-face 'body work' and intense emotional engagement. This requires individuals to adopt specific forms of self-presentation, demeanour and emotional states and to actively engage in the management of such states (Hochschild, 1979).

However, the nature of the emotion work we discuss here differs from the experiences of figures such as Hochschild's airhostess (1979), who is valued for her ability to toe the line in her emotional performances. In this example the management of appearance and emotion concerns the manner in which emotions become traded as commodities – to appear happy and to mute anger depending upon what is required by customers – labour which has exchange value. Despite the proliferation of managerial organisational models, recognition of power inequalities between service providers and users and the multiple roles enacted by participants, this is not so clearly the case for those for whom caring is at the heart of what they do. One of the key characteristics of our participants, as set out by Lipsky (2010), is that despite efforts to manage and control their behaviour, they operate with a degree of discretion, with both positive and negative consequences. Whilst there is an awareness of the need to survive, the importance of emotions here is not linked to commerciality but a range of other commitments. These include interpretations of social justice (Baines, 2011), an 'ethic of care' (Askew, 2009) and affiliations to place-based and often marginalised communities (Jupp, 2013). These are roles which are characterised by the sensitivity of issues tackled, by the often urgent needs of service users and political orientations rarely limited to financial reward. What emerges from our study is illustrative of these distinctions, which result in, as well as provide the context for, a range of emotional performances.

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Following an outline of the methodology, the rest of the paper draws directly on our empirical material and comes in four parts. The first considers the character of relations between practitioners and service users, the second looks at immediate work-based implications of changing funding regimes in emotional terms, the third deals with broader issues of neglect and injustice and the last examines emotional dimensions of practical resourcefulness.

### **Methodology: accessing words and emotions**

The data discussed here is drawn from a broader study of the impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review in 2010 and changes to funding for placement partner organisations of a department in a university in the North East of England (x, 2012). Our study did not originally set out to explore the emotional experiences of participants. However, in discussing experiences of austerity, research encounters were emotionally charged events involving not just the recollection of emotions, but also the out-pouring of non-verbal expressions including bangs on tables, laughter of disbelief and on some occasions, tears.

Methodologically, it is recognized that there is a tension between non-representational understandings of emotion which stress the need to go beyond articulations of feelings to question the nature of 'feelingness' and interpretations which emphasise 'giving voice' to marginal experiences (Bondi, 2005a). We are interested, as Laurier and Parr (2000) outline, in the manner in which emotions are felt and performed, but also how they are articulated through research encounters. While experiences are best understood in the moment in which they emerge, emotions are not viewed here as an un-representational singularity outside the grasp of the research encounter. Significant glimpses of embodied and emotional experiences leak into and from such encounters and their articulation points

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towards events that are both within and beyond the moment in which they are expressed.

Our interviews and focus groups created opportunities for the expression of emotions that cannot be easily detached from the everyday realities of our participants.

Over the two-year study, twenty six in-depth interviews with practitioners working for organizations in the public and third sector and six focus groups involving both service users and practitioners from third sector organizations were conducted. By 'public' we refer to state led/funded agencies and by 'third sector' we refer to independent, non-governmental and non-profit organizations. In this paper we concentrate on the perspectives of practitioners which include those working in a range of roles including, managers, supervisors, professionals, chairs and members of steering groups and those offering voluntary support. Participants allowed us access to narratives in relation to funding changes over time and the impact of such changes on their work and their service users. The organizations involved all served the interests of marginalised social groups and variously provided youth work, early years work, disability support, care for older people, health promotion, volunteer support, refugee and asylum seeker support, community development through neighbourhood based centres and non-traditional education and training for women, support for self-help groups including survivors of domestic violence and social work. The sample was drawn from across the region.

The geographical focus of this study is important for several reasons. The social and political fallout from the re-structuring of the North East economy from the 1970s (see Hudson, 1998), can still be felt. Whilst change has been uneven, with Newcastle witnessing culture-led regeneration, the region remains peripheral. It continues to witness higher than average levels of deprivation and unemployment, has been relatively reliant on public sector

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employment (Worthy and Gouldson, 2010) and remains overwhelmingly loyal to the Labour Party. Under austerity these trends have continued through a North-South divide in terms of which areas have been hardest hit by cuts in spending (Pearson, 2011) and economic conditions which leave it more vulnerable to welfare cut backs (Jarvis et al, 2013). Regional research (VONNE, 2011) has emphasized that currently, public service provision through the third sector is in survival mode, with many organizations forced to consolidate or collapse. By focusing on the emotional dimensions of austerity, we hope to go beyond a restricted and financially focused interpretation of 'impact' in this region.

### **Connections of care and commitment**

*"It's not just about money, it's about experience, it's about knowledge, it's about commitment as well. If you lose that then commitment sort of dwindles as well doesn't it?" (Community Worker)*

At the heart of our participants' work is a sense of intense emotional, inter-corporeal (Cohen, 2011) and inter-subjective commitment established over time, which in different ways has been challenged, but also reinforced under austerity. As a refugee support worker expressed with a sense of regret, sadness and frustration after outlining the list of their projects due to close: 'I clearly feel that there is a lot of things that we cannot do anymore'. The impression given was one of letting down those people they existed to support and of difficult decisions around prioritisation. In this specific case, the sense of frustration was heightened as many of the support workers and volunteers had already been, or were currently going, through the asylum process. A sense of empathy, beyond attempts to appreciate the emotional trials of service users (Askew, 2009) is therefore related to recent and first-hand knowledge of daily challenges. This blurring of the boundaries between

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practitioners and service users was not always as clear as this, but the demonstration of care and commitment through an awareness of emotional and material circumstances appeared across the narratives of participants.

For example, two black youth workers we spoke with had spent decades working within black and minority ethnic communities on a detached basis. This involved moving around neighbourhoods to get to know young people and their families outside of formal youth spaces, often above and beyond the direct requirements of their job. In this example there were again indications of the permeable boundaries between professional and personal identities (Walker and Larson, 2006). There is also a connection to and empathy with service users here, nurtured through growing up 'non-white' in a predominantly 'white' region and experiencing forms of exclusion both outside of and within youth work practice. As Ahmed notes (2004: 23): 'the amount and quality of pain we feel is also determined by our previous experiences and how well we remember them, by our ability to understand the cause of the pain and to grasp its consequences.' The impacts of funding cuts and changing priorities certainly made their professional lives more demanding, but as some of the few people in the area engaged in detached youth work with ethnic minority communities, the weight of this responsibility and the nature of emotional entanglements both before and after the advent of austerity were discernible in their accounts as longer term draining experiences.

*Mentally it is absolutely draining. Youth work is generally, but this kind of work and how clever you've got to be within the communities and work within the communities. And you constantly, it's very subtle and it's constant battles within your own community. (Youth worker)*

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However, there is also an evident sense of fulfilment, passion and satisfaction from working with service users (de St Croix, 2013) highlighting an ambiguity as interviewees elicited both the emotional pain and pleasures of their work. As Bondi (2007:2) notes in relation to women's care work, what we see here is the co-existence of the oppressiveness of care and the hurt which emerges when this is undermined, but also the 'expression of love, pleasure and vocation'. Even for those working with service users in challenging situations, the depth of connection is tangible. The excerpt below speaks of the warmth and what Valentine (2008) calls the 'affective structures' that have developed over time between the youth workers and the young men they feel responsible for.

*YouthWorker2: So this lad who is always in trouble. Always in trouble. We had him here. He even cooked for his teachers, different curries and oh it was fantastic. It was really, really good. And when he's cooking, doesn't ever have any problems. And you just get this like, 'You do this. You do that.' So he's in control.*

*Youth Worker 1: All I ever seen is like a lot of warmth.*

*Youth Worker 2: Warmth. Absolutely.*

*Youth Worker1: And it's a pleasure to be with them.*

*Youth Worker 2: You look past. You look past. You get past what other people see.*

*Youth Worker 1: That's dead hard to explain.*

In order to appreciate the impact of austerity on the workplace experiences of our participants and a will to continue, it is crucial to understand the character of care,

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commitment and relations established over time between practitioners and their service users which included both emotional challenges and rewards.

### **Occupational emotions: health and morale**

Some of the most keenly felt consequences of changes to funding were in relation to the work-related circumstances of participants and their colleagues. The negative impacts on health and well-being were particularly discussed in emotional terms. As Colley (2012: 331) argues in her Bourdieusian analysis of youth support advisors, 'Austerity...not only changes the conditions of the field, but in doing so also seeks to re-orient practice within in.'

Practitioners spoke about feeling personally and professionally overwhelmed by increased workloads as they were being asked to cover for posts deleted, services cut and hours curtailed. For some, recent changes to funding had a dramatic, negative impact upon established work patterns, while for others, particularly youth workers (non-statutory and especially vulnerable), the impression was that this was a continuation of a history of under-resourcing. As one youth worker put it: '*...youth work is always understaffed anyway, the decent youth work.*' However, for all participants there was a sense that because of reduced budgets and the new challenges facing service users they were having to do 'more with less' at the same time as more experienced staff were disappearing. As one Community Centre Manager commented on the changing organizational landscape: '*When I look up I can only see sky*'.

In their response to cuts made in government funding to them in 2010, North East local authorities identified that one of the immediate implications would be 6,200 public sector redundancies and between 2500-4000 redundancies in private and third sectors (ANEC, 2010). As the following participant, from one local council explained, the re-organisation of

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local government resulting from such job losses, has had clear consequences for the amount, type and quality of work required of remaining staff, but also emotional ramifications in the form of precarity (Waite, 2009), uncertainty, fear of the worst and low morale. This illustrates not only the effects of changing funding priorities, but the very personal consequences of sacrifices made in the 'national interest' across this council:

*My line manager is retiring in two weeks' time and I'm getting jobs from there. So to me the situation, it's like that piece of elastic, we can all do more, but then there comes to a point where you literally can't do more and you're not doing anything as effectively as what you would hope to and wish to. I mean it's got to the crisis point with me in the sense that they're having to take some of the direct work...off me and pulling me much more into more strategic stuff, which is what the changes are going to be for me. I mean I never envisaged that when I came into this post, you know, so it's unsettling .... It's pulled me a lot further away from the service area, from operations ... So I mean mine is just a personal example, but I think the general morale is absolutely dire. (Social Work, Local Council)*

These experiences were also shared by those working in the third sector, who were struggling to cover the work of other recently closed groups/projects, an experience described by a representative from a refugee community organization as 'draining'. This refers to emotional work, not necessarily the labour that goes into the management of emotions for external audiences (Hochschild, 1979), but the work that goes into coping in increasingly pressurized environments. Other organisations, such as a women's education centre, were finding it harder to recruit employees on the wages they could afford to pay

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therefore compromising continued service delivery. The mood of the participant representing this centre during our interview was stoic yet clearly downbeat. In addition the atmosphere of the centre during the middle of the day was noticeably quiet with a sense of resignation in the air. Again in this case, the issue of low morale is raised as a significant concern as remaining staff faced the prospects of the project closing but were applying additional effort to ensure its continuation. In these examples, the impact of austerity is tangible in terms of mood, morale, ability to perform roles and additional efforts required to do so. However, the position of third sector organizations is notably more precarious. Shortly after this interview, the centre was forced to close:

*[W]e've lost staff over the years. Being a charity, we can't pay big high wages. We can't really compete with the private sector. ... Whereas years ago we would re-advertise and re-employ we just haven't been able to re-employ anybody, and as a result all the staff are working three-four times harder. They're picking up everybody else's job and morale is really, really low. (Manager, Women's Education Centre)*

Connected to the low morale of staff, there were also discernible implications for mental health, particularly in terms of stress and depression. As one youth worker explained in relation to the culture and atmosphere created within their local authority, it was not just the scale of redundancies which was 'horrible', but the process and manner in which individuals had been treated during the implementation of changes to staffing and roles. Participants working in other local authorities commented on similar processes and experiences, including the stress of competing for jobs against colleagues. The pain of

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austerity here is not a generic societal pain, financial cost or sacrifice, but one which is located, embodied and directly felt in the talk of 'going on the sick'.

*Well people in [the local council], if they didn't know what stress was, they know what it is now because they're feeling it in bucket-loads. I've seen it on a scale I've never even seen it before. Anybody when it comes to redundancy, even voluntary redundancy, the stress that people are going through. By the time they get into it I'm thinking, 'god, you're going to have to go off on the sick'. You either take redundancy or go off on the sick because some people are not able to cope with it. I personally couldn't cope with it. I went through about two months of just feeling like I was in a fog and just so depressed. I thought, 'I just...' I wanted to walk. I nearly did at one time. Lucky I made it through, but I'm expecting another round of cuts. So it's not over yet. I think they're going to do it all again next year. So there's no way anybody can relax at all... Someone's just had a baby and they were made redundant. It's horrible. Absolutely horrible. (Youth Worker, seconded from Local Council)*

There is already an established literature on how increasing workloads in 'human service' employment is leaving individuals more vulnerable to increased stress and burn out (Lait and Wallace, 2002). However, what we see here is an apparent acceleration of these impacts and recognition that such emotional intensities are becoming an accepted feature of these occupational identities – part of what seems to be a 'new normal' within and beyond the UK (Martin et al, 2012). As the following example, which comes from the account of a former manager of a children's centre, makes clear, health related implications are not restricted to specific locations, but are becoming geographically dispersed because of common pressures.

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*After I left, the assistant manager nearly had a breakdown. It was that bad... So staff morale is like really low at present and I'm working in other places now just as a supply and its lovely but I can see it and I can see the pressure on the managers and on the staff because of the cuts. I can see it happening and I'm thinking the same thing's going to happen here as happened at [former place of employment]. (Ex-Children's Centre Manager)*

Despite recognition of working within environments that were valued – seen as 'lovely' in the above excerpt - uncertain futures, increased hours and the additional workloads meant participants were not seeing positive results from the intensification of their physical and emotional labour. These experiences are also related to the inter-subjective emotional ties (Cronin, 2014) that exist for our participants in social and geographical terms, beyond immediate relationships with service users. The experience of *low morale* is by definition relational, collective and situated.

### **Geographies of neglect and injustice**

Despite a discourse designed to bring together the nation in a crisis and flatten out perceptions of uneven impact, some participants identified feelings of neglect in the context of historical disinvestment and emotional understandings of community. For example, in attempts to comprehend the consequences of cuts, some participants, particularly those in areas more severely impacted by the decline of the regions' industrial heritage, sensed a continued and purposeful level of undermining by national politicians. As one participant working as a volunteer in a former coal mining area suggested, an impression of retaliatory and revanchist politics (MacLeod, 2002) enacted upon their community has renewed relevance. This had material consequences, but is also understood here in emotional terms;

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both verbal and non-verbal as indicated by the use of laughter in this focus group to express a form of disbelief and as a mechanism for dealing with the gravity of the situation.

*I think we've been forgotten for quite a while up here. I don't think they've gotten over the miners' strike. No. I think they're still...I think it's still embodied in them, you know, like we haven't finished with youse yet [laughter]!*

(Volunteer, Health Centre)

A sense of injustice and in some cases, anger and disgust, was also expressed by participants not just in relation to punitive abandonment by national politicians, but to more recent decisions made at the local level. Participants' referred to their inside knowledge and perceptions of unjust and unclear funding decision-making, made more so because of the effort and time expended on establishing trust and reciprocity with local communities. The emotional consequences of such processes are starkly outlined.

*They've actually destroyed about the last ten years in that decision they've made. They've just swept away [local agreements]. Whatever partnerships they kept talking about, there isn't any. They've just done it in...I just pray we don't have a really hot summer actually. Riots on. Usually happens in August when there's a hot summer. But it's just diabolical how bad that's been. I can't express how absolutely disgusted and lost I am about that. I really worry about where it's going. And the idea now ... is [that] there's no sense of justice in it.*

(Community Development Worker)

The group represented above, along with other youth based organisations in the same urban neighbourhood, had recently been on the receiving end of a decision which meant they would no longer be able to work with 'at risk' young people through Early Intervention Grant

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funding. Despite a number of smaller and locally embedded organisations, forming a consortium to attract funding, money was given to a larger national children's charity to deliver the services thus severely compromising the future of these locally embedded organisations (see x, forthcoming). As Graeber (2014) argues, the portrayal of solidarity as a scourge under austerity seems to have pushed values of concern for others to the periphery. The sense of not being valued both as caring professionals, but also as locally embedded organisations was tangible through our encounters with the organizations in this consortium.

*[The successful charity] are a national organisation that has that infrastructure to survive, whereas the smaller projects, it is down to one person who has to spend all of their time constantly fund-raising which is soul-destroying when your local authority turns round and hands it to someone else. (Manager, Women's and Girls' Project)*

However, it was not just the fact that important funds had been diverted elsewhere, but also the manner of the process which did not appear to be fair or transparent and gave such organizations very little time and opportunity to prepare their tenders. For the worker below a key problem has been the perception that the local authority has never championed more deprived communities at the level of participatory democracy or through more everyday understandings of social justice (Baines, 2011). In his eyes the needs and feelings of such communities are rarely understood or met and the recent changes to funding have reinforced this. Interpretations of 'we' in the excerpt below are worth considering in relation to this sense of (in)justice. Arguably this includes the organization, the consortium of organizations who failed to attract funding, and the broader community in which this work is

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embedded. The account exposes power relations between national government, local authorities and locally embedded third sector organisations, illustrates a clash of values with the local authority in definitions of local democracy and highlights the degree to which those living in marginalized communities are at the centre of decisions around the future of their neighbourhoods (for further discussion see x, forthcoming).

*Oh we've just been hammered...There isn't a system there to run it with...The Council have always operated at best with, what was it, representative democracy. They have board meetings. They have these meetings and they get your token local person on and it's always somebody they can handle [laughs]. So they tick the box and they go on all the trips...We take eighty-four people away...for the day to run a conference about what do we need in our community. And you could ask any of them eighty-four people who's your rep for [the neighbourhood] on the Board? No idea. But the Council just don't...They can't handle participative democracy and that's where all the problem is I think.*

(Community development worker)

The sense of anger and emotional oppressiveness expressed here is palpable, and can be seen as both the latest reaction to longer standing perceptions of injustice brought about by the pressures of austerity politics, but also the basis of resourceful practices in the face of adversity.

### **Working through/against threats: emotional resourcefulness**

Participants were not passively experiencing change. They articulated their commitment to their service users through a determination to fight for survival and a belief that the work is of social use. There is, as Pain (2009) argues, a need to recognise that emotions are not just

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responsive, but also generative, challenging and potentially progressive. In highlighting how emotions are at the heart of the coping strategies adopted by the respondents we employ the term *resourcefulness* rather than resilience, recognising that responses to the funding context are often creative rather than pliant: despite the scale of challenges faced there is an element of resistance exhibited (Mackinnon and Driscoll-Derickson, 2013). However, it is also seen that some strategies can succumb to temporary resolutions which fall in line with hegemonic discourses outlined at the outset.

In dealing with stressful situations on behalf of others, there was some suggestion of emotional management, through the concealment of emotional toll in certain spaces as a means of coping (Parr et al, 2007). As these youth workers indicate, their demanding work means that the psychological toll has to 'come out' at some point. This is enabled through the use of transitional spaces such as the car/television room/pub to move between occupational and personal lives. These gendered performances demonstrate the dilemmas of multiple loyalties (Plantin and Bäck-Wiklund, 2009) and participants' attempts to protect service users, but also, in the case of the first excerpt, their families from their work related stresses.

*Driving back home, so it's about an hour, is my reflection time. And then when I get home I need to sit in front of the telly and just get lost for an hour and then I can go and speak to my family. So again, it's just like I think you feel a lot of the pressure is because you're responsible for the main work. (Youth worker 1)*

*I was sitting in a pub for an hour by myself because my head was just smashed listening to people's problems. None of the management structure ever worked that out, you know. I don't know how you deal with it. I go home. I just walk up*

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*and down for ages till I'd tire myself out. That's all I do [laughs]. But it takes me a long-long time to bring myself right down again. (Youth worker 2)*

An appreciation of the manner in which stress, anger and a sense of injustice is not just hidden but harnessed is also vital if we are to understand the potential of resourcefulness. As Tyler (2013) illustrates forms of subjugation, exploitation and exclusion are turned back on the powerful as means of resistance against perceived injustices. Our participants' situations demanded a response, even if that response is de-legitimised or eventually futile in maintaining the existence of services. In this way our research illustrated a complex relationship between emotions conventionally viewed as 'negative' and 'positive' (Lindebaum and Jordon, 2013).

Despite the fact that all organisations involved in our research knew of at least one other local organisation to recently close and all were running on tight budgets and short term plans, emotions evoked by participants can be typified as outward looking, focusing on 'the fight' that was to be had to win over funders, and more broadly the political arguments in favour of public/third sector funding. The positivity, passion and commitment previously mentioned illustrates that despite emotional pressures there is still room for caring (de St Croix, 2013). This period has witnessed several high profile anti-austerity protests in the region, and in alignment with the sentiment of these, participants articulated opposition to funding changes. But this did not mean that workers downed their tools. They continued in many cases to work harder to deliver their services. As one youth worker participant noted, *'You campaign and you protest but you don't just stop'*. Despite the challenges faced and the broad acceptance of austerity politics, many also saw a sense of hope in the resistance offered by their own organisations, service users and wider local communities.

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*I think really the community, they've got a voice, you know ... because I mean it's been proven in the past. It's just more or less getting the people to come forward and say we're not going to stand for this anymore.*

*Interviewer: And do you feel hope about that? Do you feel that could happen or do you feel...*

*I think it could. I think you can only cut so far and I think people will rebel.*

(Volunteer, Health Centre)

Others emphasized the historic ability of their organization and their sector to survive and adapt. Practices of resourcefulness included diversifying funding streams, making more effective use of volunteers, collaboration and stretching the limits of roles. They also included the development of personal and professional contingency plans for those whose futures were particularly uncertain. Again, whilst damaging, current cuts in budgets are not the first of their kind. The fact that the voluntary sector has had to historically defend itself to keep afloat illustrates how such emotional damage is also used as a tool to resist change and to survive despite being undermined.

Past experiences come through in many accounts as enabling the sedimentation of this form of resourcefulness. Even for those who seem emotionally spent in their challenging jobs or expressed a sense of resignation, there is still evidence of survival strategies. As the manager of one community centre in a deprived neighbourhood emphasises, the short term nature of funding for community work means that you 'learn to survive', and that to some extent the challenges faced become normalised:

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*Well even when funding was available, you know, it was there, it was still difficult for us and now it's just got a little bit more difficult and we've just got to steer things a little bit differently. So it's just another challenge. A little bit of a bigger challenge. ... It's massive. It is but the only thing going for it is, is that we've always faced challenge and we know that we've got to fight and find a way. So from that point of view I think we are a little bit more equipped than other people (Manager, Community Centre)*

This sense of being equipped is also mentioned in the following excerpt. Such responses can be seen as both an asset of the third sector, but also a persistent weakness – in that the ability to adapt may mean the sector undermines its case for financial support. As we have seen above, not all individuals and organizations have been able to take the shock of the current crisis and ‘bounce back’ so well. There is then a danger in assumptions of resilience (Vickers and Parris, 2007) in that individuals and organisations can only be stretched so far.

*That's what happens in the voluntary sector. It gets built up. There's a glut of money. The funders realise the value. Everything's going well. The country's doing okay. They can start giving to the voluntary sector again. We'll build it up. Strengthen it up. Then it'll all start to go downhill but because we're quite resilient, we'll keep it going until we're down on our dregs and that's a problem. There's more resilience in the voluntary sector of making resources last and very little wastage. (Volunteer Centre Manager)*

Despite the closures, the redundancies, the threat to the quality of services and the impact on well-being – there was a willingness amongst participants to continue as best they could. Therefore part of the survival strategies adopted involved forms of ‘goodwill’, kindness and

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going beyond the call of duty. As we have seen this comes from an intersecting set of commitments to a range of individuals, groups and places (Jupp, 2013). In the following excerpt an Ex-Manager of a Children's Centre who lived on the housing estate where she worked illustrates how far this can be stretched.

*I mean I had a woman who came in and did the kitchen and the house-keeping and I used to give her extra hours to do the house-keeping, to do the washing, because the children's bedding had to be washed and things like that. So I used to have her in extra to do the washing and things like that, jobs that the girls would have to do, which they do have to do now ... But of course they cut that back. Said I couldn't have her. She had to do her ten hours and ten hours only. So I lived on the estate. I would stay back an hour on a night time and just do it. But it's goodwill isn't it? They rely on your goodwill.*

This reliance on goodwill as a form of benevolence reveals both the continued relevance of emotional connections for those who are embedded within communities, but also some of the problems with the dominant mode of dealing with the current funding crisis, which is based upon what the individual can do to make a difference or even to sustain services. This can be seen in the current government's emphasis on the 'Big Society' which foregrounds the role of voluntary social action and appeals to ideas of civic duty and the 'make do and mend' mentality of earlier periods of austerity (Bramall, 2013) in sustaining local services (x, forthcoming). As is noted earlier, these discourses are powerful and despite the altruistic motives and limited choices of participants such tactics may be characterized as forms of self-regulation which fail to challenge dominant ideologies which prioritize individual endeavor (Bondi, 2005b). Whilst recognizing the role and value of coping mechanisms and

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survival strategies, we must be wary of how the emotionally charged resourcefulness of the austerity agenda may in attempts to challenge the worst of its effects, actually work to reproduce its potency.

### **Conclusion: valuing care/caring values**

This paper has considered the emotional dimensions of changing funding and resulting changes in work practices for those in public service provision in the North East of England. Several key areas have been explored. Firstly, the crucial role that emotions play in the presentation of austerity in the UK context; secondly the distinctiveness of the values and emotions embodied in occupations of care, both prior to and during the current crisis; thirdly the emotional ramifications of austerity for working conditions and occupational identities; fourthly the manner in which commitment to service users and colleagues is underpinned by practices of care beyond the workplace and stretching back through time. Finally the paper has argued that despite the severe restrictions placed on them, emotional experiences within these contexts are productive not just responsive. This has been seen to involve a level of sacrifice, but also potentially risks the internalisation of a political agenda which stresses individualistic solutions in the context of the accelerated re-positioning of the state (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011).

Naming and locating emotions, is not simply a matter of pointing towards where pain or joy is being felt. It is rather a way of recognising the multifaceted manner in which power relations operate and are manifest. This paper suggests that the emotional terrain is crucial to understanding both the operationalisation and experience of austerity politics. In so doing it has highlighted the challenges faced by those on the front line who have experience of

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both the realities of marginalised service user's lives, but also the changing funding landscape. As Horton and Kraftl (2009) contend in their examination of what matters to users of Children's Centres in the UK, we agree that what is often valued and what should be valued about such services is often missed – a lesson not specific to the UK context. We also contend that the politics of austerity and its emotional ramifications should not be conceptualised simply in terms of cause and effect, as if emotions were only activated in times of acute crisis in public services. Rather, we have shown how those working in the related fields of 'care' in the public and third sector operate on the basis of emotional commitments and that it is the character of these emotions in both more damaging and progressive ways which needs to be considered at moments such as this and in places such as this.

Lawson (2007) argues, that as market relations increasingly encroach on those areas of life which involve some form of caring, the need to care increases. The 'care' to which Lawson refers here is a broad definition which emphasises the responsibility we share for 'spatially extensive connections of interdependence and mutuality' (Lawson, 2007: 8). The responses identified by our participants are evolving in relation to an emotionally charged political landscape which offers little recognition, reward or value to those providing vital public services to those on the margin. The danger is that because much of this does not fit into established definitions of productive work, as with those who have argued the same for women's work (see Hanson and Pratt, 1995), it is under-valued by those with little experience of the difference it makes. It is time to recognise this value and those who are connected through a range of emotional ties that are threatened by the simultaneous manipulation of, and distancing from, the emotional realm.

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