**Emotional labour, Ordinary Affects and the Early Childhood Education and Care Worker.**

**Abstract**

This paper discusses society’s lack of recognition of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce as professionals, and its emotional impact that this deficit has on them. The concerns are that the role of the ECEC worker has been mainly conceptualised as maternal, where emotional labour is taken for granted and needing to be suppressed or harnessed as part of the caring role. This is at odds with successive government policy agenda which has focused on professionalising the workforce. In this paper we engage with qualitative data gathered from twenty-four experienced ECEC workers to explore the impact that ‘affect’ has upon them. In this respect we build on the theorisations of Massumi and Stewart, which connect affect theory with the emotional labour; we argue that affect theory offers different ways to consider how objects, spaces, material and discursive entities and bodies impact ECEC workers emotions and emotional labour.

**Keywords:** affect theory, emotional labour; ECEC work; ordinary affects

**Introduction**

Since women’s employment has seen an increase in the labour market in the UK (Roantree and Vira, 2018), demand for childcare has significantly increased. It is widely accepted that there is a strong connection between motherhood and care and, as Leach (2009) suggested, the ‘relationship’ between children and nursery workers should be one of “sensitivity, empathy, and attunement” (p. 19). Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) work as ‘care work’ has been conceptualised in the UK as an emotional entanglement where emotional labour (Elfer, 2012; Taggart, 2011), professional love (Page, 2018), and love labour (Lynch, 2007) are tacit expectations of the ECEC workers role. This link to care has been balanced by the desire to educate young children as they are prepared for compulsory schooling. Successive governments have focused on professionalising the sector in an attempt to validate wider government funding which is paid to ECEC settings to subsidise parents costs (Osgood, 2010). ECEC workers need to balance the complex demands of their role as both ‘educators’ and ‘carers’ of young children, whilst opinions of their roles have been framed as ‘natural’ work that women do, with low societal status and low renumeration. These aspects of ECEC have attracted much attention and are widely considered to be important factors in shaping the ways in which the occupation of ECEC workers are viewed.

In this paper we draw on contemporary debates around ECEC work which have focused on the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce as well as on the splits between education (public) and care (private) in which “care is relegated to a highly gendered workforce and counted only in the private domain” (Langford, 2019, p. 3). This allows us to concentrate on the tensions between emotional labour and professionalism which has been reflected in research directed towards the professionalisation process (Colley, 2006; Elfer, 2012; Osgood; 2010) some of which has been situated in research into care, maternalism, and love (Ailwood 2008; Aslanian, 2015; Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, & Varga, 2015; Elfer, 2012; Page, 2018). Scholars have proposed that care, maternalism, and love require the expression of emotion to be managed, where human agency allows the ECEC worker to control and perform emotional work whilst remaining ‘professionally’ detached (Van Laere, Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014). As a result, ‘care’ has being intrinsically linked with ‘emotional labour’ through which ECEC becomes gendered and naturalised (Chodorow, 1976, cited in James, 1989), with the potential for this to be socially and generationally reproduced (Rosen, 2019; Pizzorno, Benozzo, & Carey, 2015). The challenges faced by ECEC workers as they navigate the expectations of their role have been magnified by deficit perceptions of professionalism which have framed the role as low skilled and designed for women (Ailwood, 2008; Roberts-Holmes & Brownhill, 2011).

Scholars have started to critique, unpack and explore caring, gender, maternal, and professionalism in ECEC (e.g. Langford, 2019; Rosen, 2019). Part of this sees emotions, and emotional labour as an internalised human process in which emotions separate mind and body (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Williams & Bendelow, 1998), often going unrecognised (Mikuska & Fairchild, 2020). We argue that there are other ways to conceptualise the interplay between professionalism, emotional labour and emotions. Engagement with posthumanist and affect theory is emerging in the field of ECEC and there is a growing body of work attending to posthumanist theorising (Fairchild, 2019; Jones & Holmes, 2014; Lyttleton-Smith, 2019; Murris, 2016; Osgood & Robinson, 2019). Theoretically, posthumanism allow for ways of knowing which include relations between humans and other-than-humans. Methodologically these ensure humans are not the only ‘object’ of study but that a host of other materialities, affects, elements, things and objects deserve attention as vital ontological players (Taylor & Fairchild, 2020). Previous scholarship on emotional labour and ECEC workers is concerned with the impact of emotional labour and emotionality (Ailwood 2008; Aslanian, 2015; Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Elfer, 2012; Page, 2018). Our specific contribution in this paper is to consider how affect theory can provide different ways to understand the forces that influences the ECEC workers’ manifestations of emotional labour where “affects emerge, circulate and enter into conflict” (Snaza, 2020, p. 112). Affect invites us to think beyond subject/object dualisms and these intersubjective moments between bodies are concerned with what affect does to emotions rather than what it is (Van Viegan, 2020). We expand on the following questions – What does affect produce when brought into contact with ECEC worker bodies? What is the relationship between affect and emotions? How is the connection between affect and emotion manifested in emotional labour?

To address these questions, we initially consider ECEC work and how workers need to balance the competing demands of education and care, including a discussion of emotional labour within an ECEC context. We then turn to affect theory and debate the tensions between affects and emotions. Both ordinary affects and emotions/emotional labour were harnessed to analyse data and articulate different perspectives on ECEC workers and their everyday lives. We conclude by considering how our paper contributes to scholarship on emotional labour, gender and caring work by highlighting the affective relational connections found in ECEC practice, recognising that emotions are part of the intersubjective affective transmission.

**English ECEC: maternal, professional, and emotional labour**

This section sets the context and conceptualises the background to ECEC in England and the development of the professionalisation process which has not yet overcome the gendered nature of the role. It explores how emotional labour has been defined and how this has been incorporated into ECEC scholarship, considering the tensions between the current definitions of education and care and how this has reinforced some of the gendered perceptions of the ECEC worker role. In England, ECEC is predominantly part of a neoliberal market model where provision is diverse and micromanaged by a statutory curricular framework delivered to children between the ages of birth to five years old (DfE, 2017). All schools and ECEC settings are under the remit of the official English Government regulator of education who inspects and grades the provision from ‘outstanding’ to ‘requires improvement’. The required qualification to work in ECEC is a vocational accreditation, which is equivalent to exit-level high school certificates, although academic qualifications have developed to postgraduate level in recent years (Bonetti, 2018; DfE, 2017). Qualification requirements have been driven by different levels of funding between compulsory and non-compulsory provision which splits the need for education and care.

Historically, ECEC originated, and still is, a job that “women naturally do” (Van Laere et al. 2014. p. 233) where patriarchal classed and gendered positions saw childcare was an acceptable form of work for women (Forrester, 2005; Barkham, 2008). Being ‘natural’, no specific qualifications were needed; being a good ECEC professional was similar to being a good mother. The care and education bifurcation replicated Western Cartesian dualisms where ‘body work’ (care) was seen as ‘dirty work’ and lower skilled workers performed the role (Twigg, Wolkowitz, Cohen, & Nettleton, 2011; Van Laere et al, 2014). Second and third wave feminism challenged these essentialist assumptions, where social, political and ethical conceptualisations offered new dimensions for caring work (Grosz, 1994; Haraway, 1992; Noddings, 1984, 1992; Tronto, 1993). Changes in perspectives of caring work have resulted in a renewed interested and scholarship in the debates on care, maternalism, and love in ECEC and how emotional labour then impact on ECEC workers’ emotions (Ailwood 2008; Aslanian, 2015; Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Elfer, 2012; Page, 2018).

Emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) has been widely employed in ECEC research with expectations for workers to build caring, even loving, relationships with young children and how this might link to their professional identity (Davis & Degotardi, 2015; Elfer, 2012; Langford et al., 2017; Taggart, 2011). The caring and emotional nature of the role has been explored as a part of ECEC professional identity whereby passion and emotional intelligence are seen as key requirements for working with young children and their families (Elfer, 2012; Langford, 2019; Osgood, 2010; Taggart, 2011). Andrew (2015), Aslanian (2015) and Page (2018) explored emotional labour as a way to understand the lived nature of emotional work; indeed, the concept of professional love has been developed to legitimise the ways in which ECEC workers ‘love’ as part of their role (Page, 2018). It is also apparent that there are tensions between the maternal caring discourse and the development of professionalism agendas in ECEC (Colley, 2006; Elfer, 2012; Hevey, 2013; Osgood; 2010; Page, 2018), which have contributed to the perception that ECEC work is gendered, low-skilled and low paid. Even with the development of a professionalisation agenda where graduate qualifications were designed, English government policy from 1997 reinforced a divided system of vocational and academic routes (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Vincent & Braun, 2013). These routes did not provide parity of pay, status, and terms and conditions with teachers who work with older children (Hevey, 2013; Moss, 2017). This contradictory position of professionalisation with limited recognition and remuneration are a product of the external view of ECEC as ‘naturally’ gendered.

There are inherent tensions between the personal and professional spheres of work as the reification of emotional labour and love can become part of subjectivities that make work meaningful (Boyer, Reimer, & Irvine, 2013; Vachhani, 2015). These tensions also become conflated by gendered links to emotion which has historically been relegated to the “domestic sphere” of caring for others, outside of the “public spaces inhabited by males” (Boler, 1999, p. 6). Zembylas (2003) brings to the discussion the importance of the power that emotions generate in discursive practices, stating that emotions “grant powers to some relations and delimit the powers of others” (p. 115). These powers move beyond the notion of emotions as private and individual as they “create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 117). The complexity of human emotion does not stop here, as the ways individuals decide how to “perform them, subvert them, go beyond or work around” (Bolton, 2004, p. 29) are debatable. The prevalence of emotional labour and love in ECEC work links to normative gendered ways of working, which has in turn led to wider debates on the potential of emotional labour as skilled work (Nixon, 2009; Payne, 2009).

Therefore, debates on emotional labour in ECEC are nuanced and complex due to the organizational requirements of work in settings where both care and education are key components. There is a notion that ECEC workers “care *about* the children they care *for*” (Colley, 2006, p. 20) in which the caring (emotional) engagement is an expectation when working with young children. Since the ECEC workforce mainly consists of working-class women (Vincent & Braun, 2013), Skeggs (1997) argues that working-class students are encouraged to develop their responsible caring selves as respectable ECEC workers. Our paper aims to build on these human centred circulations of emotional labour and emotions and incorporate the influence of the affective dimensions that are produced during or as a by-product of the work. It will also connect with the impacts of the tensions between professionalism, emotional labour and emotions and consider how these affects register on ECEC workers practice.

**Mobilising (ordinary) affect**

In this section, we employ and draw on affect theory, more specifically *Ordinary Affects* (Stewart, 2007), which affords us new theoretical purchase on emotional labour. We understand ordinary affects as intersubjective transmissions of intensity that move beyond subject/object dualisms and focus on what affect does to bodies (Van Viegen, 2020), while emotionality is an important function that contributes to successful relationships in which emotional labour is ‘sold’ within the labour market and is taken for granted. Affects, in everyday life, are experienced in many forms, such as extra-linguistic and sensory intensities which impact on and change bodies’ capacities to act (Massumi, 2002; Pullen, Rhodes, & Thanem, 2017). In particular we examine how both ordinary affects and emotional labour are micropolitical flows that open ECEC workers’ gendered experiences to new modes of expression.

Defining affect can be problematic as there are multiple theoretical perspectives and positions (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019). However, we argue affect is the ways in which the forces produced by objects, spaces, material and discursive entities and bodies leave an impression on human bodies (Massumi, 2002, 2015). This suggests affect has the capacity to influence bodies, growing in intensity as bodies react, producing “a co-subjective circuit of feelings and sensation” (Fotaki et al., 2017, p. 4). Stewart argues that “affect is a kind of conceptualization that approaches prolific forces and forms coming down to roost on people and practices” (2020, p. 33). Affect works as intensities that sit outside of the discourses of representation of feelings and emotions, but affective bodily capacities can reveal emotions (Massumi, 2002). This passing of intensities is based on the Spinozan view of a body’s ability to affect and to be affected (Anderson, 2014; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2015; Stewart, 2007). Here “affects are not just ‘produced’ by bodies, they *define and ceaselessly constitute and reconstitute* the nature of the body” (Seyfert, 2012, p. 32). Therefore, bodies become defined by what is produced when they are affected and bodies-as-affective-processes are more that the physical form on view.

Affect and emotions are connected in as much as emotions can be produced as part of the modification of connecting bodies; emotions are episodic “realizations of affect” (Von Scheve & Slaby, 2019, p. 46). Although employing terms such as emotion may appear “too reliant on unspecified social and cultural assumptions about what specific terms mean and do” (Anderson, 2014, p. 11), emotions can be an expression of the capture of affect (Massumi, 2002). This indicates that the ethical dimensions of affect are more than characterising a pre-set form of good/bad to right/wrong judgements. Therefore, affect becomes political as bodily transformations unfold and bodies reveal an unlimited potential that takes life in different and novel directions (Massumi, 2015).

Building on Massumi’s work, we are particularly interested in the critical theorisation of ordinary affects which are “varied, surging capacities to affect and be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies and emergences” (Stewart, 2007, p. 1-2). Ordinary affects mobilise thinking about everyday life and are rooted in “actual lines of potential that a *something* calls to mind and set in motion” (Stewart, 2007, p. 2). Our rationale for this is the way in which ECEC workers draw on both personal and professional day-to-day events which have impacted on, and become materialised in, their experiences of emotional labour. Although Beyes and Steyaert (2012, cited in Ashcraft, 2017) have critiqued Stewart’s work for being more-than-representational which “exceeds signification without entirely leaving it” (Ashcraft, 2017, p. 47) we feel the conceptual power of ordinary affects and the resonances they produce offer us an opportunity to add to existing thinking on emotional labour in ECEC.

**Methodological approach**

By working with the concept of ordinary affect (Stewart, 2007) we engage with empirical data gathered from twenty-four experienced and qualified nursery workers who were based in the South East of England. The participants had a range of titles attached to their role in their working environment; for example early years teacher, manager, assistant, trainee teacher, nursery nurse, nursery practitioner and volunteer. Due to the breadth of roles we have used the term ECEC worker to encompass the variety of participants interviewed. Data, generated by semi-structured interviews, explored the ECEC worker experiences of professional practice which highlighted the impact of particular moments where their emotions influenced their work.

Data were analysed by turning to affect theory, not to reify and fix the notion of how affect circulates and what it produces, but to give alternative visions to widen and expand current debates on emotional labour. A posthumanist approach to data analysis highlights both human and other-than-human interactions. The outcomes disrupt traditional approaches to data analysis that privilege participants’ issues, voices and experiences. Affects invite us to understand the circulations between bodies and that pays attention to both the rich and varied experiences of ECEC workers and how this might be materialized. This includes the emotive and personal language of ECEC workers as well as the materiality in which they found themselves.

Being cognisant of our commitments to affect, the interview transcripts were subject to close reading and we immersed ourselves in the affective nature of the data. To decide which data to be analysed, we let ourselves be guided by the ordinary affects that reveal the “intensities they build and in what way thoughts and feelings are made possible” (Stewart, 2007, p. 3). Whilst we could have considered an inductive or thematic analysis of these accounts, we were conscious of some of the materialist critiques of representation (Koro-Ljungberg, MacLure, & Ulmer, 2018; MacLure, 2013). Since there is no simple rule regarding how to display the speaker / listener data, and there is no strict guideline about how to identify and analyse stories, we followed our ‘affective’ turn to recognise the data that ‘glowed’. Here certain parts of the texts ‘captured’ us and was magnified by affects that connected to our roles as academics who had previously work in the ECEC sector; data “arrested our gaze and made us pause” (MacLure, 2013, p. 662). The data fragments presented in this paper include both longer and shorter extracts from interviews from both male and female workers as we consider the affective forces and their impact on practice that glowed for us, illuminating aspects of emotional labour, and the materiality of ECEC work. Pseudonyms have been added to each excerpt to acknowledge the human body as part of the wider affective connections that are revealed. Taylor encourages researchers to focus on the small and mundane happenings to “pay attention to what we don’t normally see, to what is excluded” (2013, p. 629) and the data presented allows us to do this.

**Enacting ordinary affects**

***Regulators, classroom practices, and emotional labour***

ECEC workers may be located in a range of different (class)rooms which could be situated in purpose-built premises, church halls, buildings that were previously residences, or schools. This event recalls an incident in a nursery classroom based within a primary school. At the time, John was a trainee teacher who had been on placement and was supporting literacy with young children. He had originally gained qualifications to work in ECEC but John was subjecting himself to the professionalisation agenda by undertaking teacher training. In this excerpt he discusses an incident in the classroom:

I was sat once with a child who tried really so hard to (this is what pushed me over the edge)…he was trying so hard to do his writing…and he had done this fantastic bit in his book and then the teacher of the classroom came over (we knew that Ofsted were on their way at some point) so there was lots of stress going on and then the classroom teacher, who was also the deputy head, came over and she was in a rush and she looked at this work which I thought she would say “wow, well done, this is a fantastic job” but instead she ripped the page out of the book in front of him and I just remember feeling choked up and wanting to cry and I thought, I don’t really want to be working in this environment, so that was it.

All education provision is regulated by the English Government body Ofsted; their role focuses on quality assurance, school leadership and educational outcomes for children. In the interview, John had discussed that the school had been very keen to meet the regulator requirements as a good or outstanding grading could impact on the numbers of children who enrol with the school each year. He mentioned ‘I soon kind of found that they were very Ofsted minded and they wanted everything to be right for Ofsted.’ In addition, the EYFS curriculum (DfE, 2017) expectations are that a child attains a ‘good level of development’ before transitioning into compulsory schooling which can have an impact of practice as teachers try to meet this requirement.

The ‘schoolification’ and policy agenda in England becomes heightened by the impending inspection visit from the regulatory body. The focus on regulatory requirements was replicated in interviews with other participants: ‘I oversee the nursery quality and make sure the service we deliver is in line with the EYFS and suitable for Ofsted’ (Jennifer). Justification of practice also becomes overwhelming: ‘Early years workers are forced to complete too much paperwork…it is more important to be spending time with the child than filling our reams of paperwork’ (Heather). These challenges are played out where workers are overcome with the practicalities of the role. Another participant, Joe, when reflecting on his manager, sees that as ‘a drain on her, it’s a strain on her but she gives and gives and gives’ However, there is also joy found in the enactment of the curriculum, as exemplified in this quote: ‘I am a qualified maths teacher and I made my children go crazy for maths. Because my love of maths stuck on them’ (Elizabeth).

Political discourse and education are historically inter-twined as successive governments promote children’s education as part of wider manifesto promises. Berlant (2011) proposes that affective response to everyday events act as a cruel optimism where attainment of a potential reality are thwarted. The performative nature of neoliberal expectations for ECEC workers act as a burden of expectation on the teachers, where the curriculum requires children to demonstrate a good level of development and the regulator inspection is based on classroom pedagogy and children’s progress data. These moments “*matter* because they materialize a felt sense of not mattering” (Taylor et al., 2020, p. 2).

Affective capacities and affective/affected body relations can impact bodies by either enhancing or diminishing the body’s capacity to act (Massumi, 2015). Some of these excepts reveal how the affective nature of Ofsted and the EYFS curriculum can diminish ECEC workers capacities to move beyond more performative types of practice. Conversely a maths activity became a chance for Elizabeth to enhance her relationship with the children and ECEC teaching. Affects circulate in and through classrooms and these moments manifest themselves on the ECEC workers consciousness (Berlant, 2011). The participants excerpts show that affects do not have a fixed way of being expressed and are experienced in a myriad of different ways dependant on the participants personal situations (Massumi, 2015). In these data, human and non-human bodily encounters are experiences in multiple ways – literacy interventions, paperwork, the ECEC curriculum, exercise books, regulatory inspection, ECEC workers, and notions of quality.

***Qualifications and emotional labour***

Part of the response to the professionalisation agenda was to increase opportunities for degree level qualifications. Many ECEC workers took the opportunity to gain degrees which had been designed to include a work-based element. For many workers this was the first time they had considered graduate level study as historically (and currently) the required qualification to work in ECEC in England is a vocational accreditation. There have been many debates in ECEC as to the importance of qualifications or whether experience of working in the sector is preferred. The view of ECEC work as ‘natural’ and gendered has fuelled these debates which deflects the notion of ECEC as skilled work.

For those interviewed, overall the attainment of qualifications was a positive, if a nerve wracking, experience. Ashley discussed the situation as follows: ‘qualifications will give you the theory and knowledge that you didn’t know you had and that you didn’t have before’. This was echoed by Hayley who found attending University daunting but rewarding. She explained it as follows: “the staff I work with ask me now because of the course…it has helped me feel more confident…more happy with what I’m doing’. Nevertheless, there was some resistance to how qualifications were received as indicated by Kate: ‘I don’t think it will necessarily make you a better practitioner than anybody else’. Indeed, Hayley noted that other staff would say to her: “you have to remember you are the same as everyone else. They are trying to put me back in my place a little bit I think at times’. These discussions reflect the qualifications versus experience binary and the flatness of the structure in ECEC settings. ECEC workers also noted their own anticipations about returning to education where, as remarked by Hayley: ‘it was really daunting coming in that first session…I was really nervous, but really excited you know’.

An example of the emotional labour which manifested when returning to study was gained from Zoe, an owner and manager of a large private day nursery. She had completed her schooling when younger but had not attended University, although she had worked in her family ECEC setting before becoming the owner. During this time, she had married and, at the time of the interview, had six children of her own with her youngest born whilst she was studying for her degree. She had opted for the degree programme in ECEC because she regretted her choice to not continue studying after leaving school, and because of her position in the nursery leading and managing staff who had a variety of vocational and graduate qualifications. In this event, she talks about how the University building and requirements to be present for the teaching sessions was impacting on her work with a particular family:

I am deeply frustrated professionally…particularly professionally you know…An example is when a little boy, who is only 18 months,…and I would say that he is on the autistic spectrum he has language difficulties, he has English as an additional language and is father left around 6 months ago and before it was the father who to picked him up. I never saw the mum .. so, he (the boy) has got a really hard year and he is going to school this September and his language has completely disappeared. And I feel emotional, very emotional that I kind of left him, as I haven’t been there, I haven’t read or focused on him. I probably could have helped him and perhaps other practitioners haven’t so much.

As we argued earlier affects are the objects, spaces, material and discursive entities which impact ECEC worker bodies. From the excerpts above, these affects reside alongside and within the desire of some workers to gain degree level qualifications. In some cases these extra-linguistic sensations register in the feelings of doubt when attending university or the intersubjective responses when trying to balance home life, work and the requirements of the course. This is exemplified by Hayley who explains how she feels ‘overwhelmed as I try to balance it [study] with home stuff and with the children and with working’ (Hayley). For Zoe emotional labour is a multiple force derived from her own frustrations and not being present at the setting to support a child and their family. The pull of these expectations when attending University later in life, and the need to hold the same (or higher) qualifications than her staff, resonates through her discussions. Zoe’s history also influences her need to attend University, the past where she cared for her family colliding with the birth of her youngest child and the present which frames the way she feels about the appropriate level of care she is not fulfilling for the boy in her nursery.

Affects circulate around the attainment of qualifications. This links to the wider sector tensions surrounding the benefits of academic qualifications or practice experience, and the schisms between education and care of young children. The expectations of worker and carer seek to sediment and structure emotional regulation as a means to cement the gendered nature of certain dualisms such as rational though or emotional expression and public versus private lives (Hochschild, 1983). However, affects are never neutral; the power that flows within and through bodily connections can take an anarchic and chaotic turn as negative and challenging emotions, when this happens self-doubt, frustration and guilt, are produced within its maelstrom (Ahmed, 2004). The affective flows can also include a greater sense of confidence, self-awareness, knowledge, stress, and frustration which influence wider relations with colleagues, children and parents. Stewart details that stress is an affective powerful force and that any stressful articulations come “not from a meaning it harbours inside but from its actual circulation through forces and trajectories of all kinds” (2007, p. 43) and these circulations were revealed in the interview data.

***Professionals, mothers, gendering, and emotional labour***

The gendered nature of the role and the workforce have been a component of ECEC, both historically and in contemporary research. This has been reflected in the low status and low pay that surrounds the work (Hevey, 2013). Despite these perceptions the relationship between professional practice and being a mother was revealed in the data. It became evident that there was a close relationship between motherhood and ECEC work and this was highlighted in participant interviews. The interviews revealed numerous accounts regarding this relationship such as: ‘I can really relate to the feelings of those mums who had to go to work and leave their child with us’ (Lucy) and ‘I know how difficult it could be to leave your child with appropriate care’ (Holly). Other participants who had experienced motherhood suggested: ‘my emotions are totally different to someone who hasn’t got a child because I see the parents from totally different perspectives’ (Jade) and ‘I felt more emotional after giving birth towards children in general especially towards those who needed more help’ (Natasha). These comments reflect the reality of ECEC work they reflect the reality of ECEC work in which these participants felt their own experiences benefited their professional roles. The comments are of interest as they connect to the gendered discourses of mothering as a need for an ECEC worker to be able to successfully perform her role. The development of the Government’s professionalisation agenda could be seen as a direct response to the wider perceptions of female ECEC workers. Comments from participants included ‘it’s a notoriously under-rated job…when you say “Oh, I’m a nursery nurse” I really struggle with that term…there is a challenge to the cultural stigma attached’ (Lisa) and ‘I don’t think they [the Government] value us’ (Tara). These comments link to the affective nature of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) where the promises of professionalisation do little to change the wider perspectives of those both inside and outside the sector.

There have been calls to recruit more men into ECEC work, both in the UK (DfE, 2019) and overseas (Peeters, Rohrmann & Emilsen, 2015). These debates have been couched in terms of gaining a better gender balance which would provide role models for children and kickstart children’s love of learning, with a more diverse workforce to reflect and mirror heteronormative aspects of family life. Increasing the number of men in the workforce raises interesting discussions in themselves, and there has been critique as to whether the assertions have a basis in research (Fairchild, 2019). Participants discussed how ‘the activities some men do in the nursery would never occur to [her]’ (Monica); this participant was describing how the male ECEC worker played with children whilst introducing more physical aspects of play. There were also comments suggesting: ‘the best practitioners I have ever seen were both males’ (Holly) and one male participant said: ‘I think as a male practitioner we bring something different to the industry. There are not many males in childcare and perhaps the reason for that is that it’s not a well-paid job’ (Sean). The debates that surround pay have been a component of the low perceived value of care work; again the government’s professionalisation agenda has not been able to overcome the deficit model of the ECEC worker. Kristen, a setting manager, summed this up when she said: ‘due to the low pay and long hours my staff work, there has to be a certain level of passion and motivation for working with children, as the salary and hours certainly aren’t tempting in any way. And because of this reason, I don’t think it is attractive for males’.

The discussions generated by participants on mothering, gender and professionalism resonate with other dimensions of ECEC work. In the excerpt below, Louise considers her role as a childminder in her own home. Childminders make a significant contribution to ECEC care in England where women care and teach children in their own homes whilst being subject to the same regulatory and curricular requirements as other ECEC provision. Childminding has often be seen only delivering childcare in a private home, this is perceived as different to what happens in the majority of ECEC provision where education and care occurs in public ECEC settings (Moss, 2017; Van Laere at al., 2014;). In Louise’s case she had her own children and had been childminding from when her first son was born, and at a time when there were minimal qualification and training requirements to set up her business. Louise had since undertaken a degree level study when funding had become available:

I do struggle with it. I don’t think people see us as professional either, childminding…I think people think of it as babysitting which you get a lot…and most of the legislation doesn’t back it up as professional…We haven’t got to have written policies and procedures. I don’t see why not. I think we should have written policies and procedures so we can follow them…. because they make quite a difference between nurseries and childminders which I don’t think helps people see childminders as professional. I have the mum who said to me she sent her child to me as a childminder because she wanted the small group interaction…quite a lot of parents I speak to want their children to be loved and cared for in a home environment. I’ve learnt through the experience of my children and being a mum…ones I know [childminder’s] that aren’t mothers…I have thought, ‘Why would you want to fill your house with children’s toys and equipment when you’ve not got your own children?’

In this excerpt the need to be professional acts as an affective intensity and reflects the challenges of ECEC provision in a private home and how this might be perceived. This is materialised by the influence of a home-care setting in a private space and the need for policies and procedures present in public professional spaces. The private: public and babysitter: professional dualism register in Louise’s comments. She discusses her perception of a lack of professionalism when she notes that some people see her role as a ‘babysitter’ linking back to the perceived natural-ness of the work. The affective nature of ‘being professional’ and the reification of ‘professionalism’ becomes linked to structural requirements, where those without are seen as lesser non-professionals.

The affective orientation of the professional reveals a sense of lacking something more tangible to denote an accepted role as an ECEC worker. Louise had undertaken a degree to mark herself as more professional than a baby-sitter but emotional labour notes the double-bind of professionalism where childminders have often perceived themselves as a less valued ‘others’ (Mooney, Knight, Moss, & Owen, 2001). She talks about how the introduction of policies and procedures might help her develop her sense of professionalism and to be an external marker to parents which is particularly pertinent for the perception of a female home worker. Louise finds herself in a liminal space of having responsibility as an Ofsted registered ECEC worker but without the perceived professional status that gives her a certain level of recognition. Whilst policy and procedures could be framed by discursive productions, we concur with Barad (2007) that discourse and materiality are co-relational and, as such, we argue have a material affect/effect on Louise. There is also the affect generated from the gendered connections to maternalism and caring for children in her home and the impact of having ‘*children’s toys and equipment*’ as part of the requirements of the role. Her struggle is with the potential for others to perceive her as not ‘professional enough’. However, for her and for the parents of the children she cares for, she feels she can offer a unique environment in which children can get the love, care and attention they need in a homely environment. The affective emotional responses Louise is experiencing work in the middle of maternalism and professionalism and provide “a looser, more affective, form of “mother”” (Stewart, 2007, p. 120). The affect generated by policies and procedures, toys and equipment in her home produce a positive affirmation for Louise to see herself as more professional, regardless of how she feels others may perceive her.

**Affective reverberations**

Our aim for this paper was to make a connection to the scholarship on professionalism, emotional labour in ECEC, and affect theory. Engaging with data produced by ECEC workers we considered the questions - What does affect produce when brought into contact with ECEC worker bodies? What is the relationship between affect and emotions? How is the connection between affect and emotion manifested in emotional labour? Our rationale for this was due to the bifurcation of research and practice on emotional labour, maternal, and care and the ‘caring’ professional. This bifurcation was reinforced by the mind: body dualistic approach to working with young children and the limited value placed on ECEC work by government policy.

Turning to affect theory provided an opportunity for us to consider how other materialities such as objects, spaces, material and discursive entities and bodies left impressions and had influences on how ECEC workers live, work and interact. Some of the challenges when writing and thinking about affect theory is how to map what affect does to bodies without tying it down to representational logic which universalises experiences. This is further complicated by the inter-subjective nature of affect and how it acts on bodies. Once emotional responses to affect have been identified it has been proposed that affect’s intersubjective nature becomes dissipated as emotions are primarily a psychological response as part of cognition (Blackman, 2012). However, we concur with Snaza (2020) that affects and emotions are inter-relational events and encounters that orient bodies in affective/emotional relays which are in constant motion with each other.

The enactment of ordinary affects in the data excerpts led us to consider how affect registers on ECEC worker bodies and in some cases produced visceral and emotional responses. In answering the questions ‘What does affect produce when brought into contact with ECEC worker bodies?’ we turn to the data analysis and findings. In the section entitled ‘regulators, classroom practices and emotional labour’ the participants discuss the link between policy and regulatory expectations and how this manifests as emotional responses. The affective dimensions of cruel optimism link to the neo-liberal expectations of education policy and even when practice is a joyful experience, the anticipation of regulatory requirements has a negative impact on ECEC workers emotions. The English government’s drive for a professionalised workforce and the development of degree level qualifications are the focus of the second section. Here the tensions between graduate practitioners and those with practice (vocational) experience is tangible. There the affective nature of study is present for all those interviewed; this gave them confidence to perform their role but also brought challenges made by those they worked with who did not always perceive the value of this type of qualification. Periods of study also impacted on relationships with children, particularly cases which were emotional in nature. In the final section, professionalism, mothering and the gendered nature of the sector were explored, where affects resonated and impacted on the emotions and emotional labour experienced by both male and female workers.

When considering the questions ‘What is the relationship between affect and emotions?’ we argue it is only by considering the more ordinary and mundane aspects of ECEC that we can pay attention to the affective elements that become apparent which are not always seen in purely discursive and thematic analysis (Taylor, 2013). The analysed data detailed how affective resonances impacted ECEC workers and their emotions. These data revealed how objects, spaces, material and discursive entities and bodies impact ECEC workers. This enables us to conceptualise what affect does to bodies and how emotions are manifested. These affects circulate, influencing workers’ bodies to produce emotions, and emotions feedback and orient the circulation of affective bodies which then contribute to the flow of affect. As demonstrated, emotions are a realisation of affect but they are constantly moving and re-circulating, in turn re-affecting bodies which helps us answer the question ‘How is the connection between affect and emotion manifested in emotional labour?’

The contribution we make in this paper is to consider how affect theory can provide different ways to understand the forces that impact on the ECEC workers’ manifestations of emotional labour. The data excerpts help us to consider what affects produce when connecting to ECEC worker bodies. We also note the emotional responses to these affective intensities, recognising that emotions circulate and are produced as a response to these connections, but also influence these connections. Therefore, ECEC emotional labour is moved outside of the subjectivity of the worker to include diverse, situated, expansive, relational, and connected responses to affective situations. These responses highlight the tensions found in ECEC work, which is linked to professionalism, mothering and emotionality and the ways in which affective dimensions can reveal an ‘other-than-human’ dimension to wider contemporary and historical debates.

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