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# Dirty Work and Emotional Labor in Public Service: Why Government Employers Should Adopt an Ethic of Care

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**Abstract**

This article combines theories on emotional labor in public service and dirty work to argue that organizations should adopt an ethic of care to support their workers. The economics of public services undermine the consumer-sovereignty narrative in government, particularly where public servants are agents of social control and enforcement. Public servants cannot and should not behave according to a customer-service ethos in many important areas of public service. Emotional labor is the process by which workers manage the identity-damaging aspects of public service. This article critiques individual-level human resource management (HRM) approaches and recommends dismantling customer service expectations that are inappropriately applied in public-service contexts.

**Keywords**

emotional labor, dirty work, workplace environment/culture, job stress, professionalism

The view that workplaces are sites of interesting emotional dynamics worth studying is fairly recent: Organizations "as emotional arenas in which different emotions are generated, displayed, shed, and traded did not emerge seriously until the 1980s" (Gabriel, 1998, p. 293). Emotional labor research emerged and developed during this period, while research on dirty work is a little older. Although "dirty" is subjective,

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stable categories of stigma exist and include physical, social, and moral dirty work. This article argues that public service includes more than its share of dirty jobs, given its role as a Harbor of Refuge and provider of last resort. Firefighting is physically dirty and dangerous work, law enforcement officers work with stigmatized populations, and public defenders and politicians may resort to ethically-questionable conduct. Workers in dirty jobs employ several techniques to sustain a positive self-image; techniques I argue require emotional labor. Emotional labor is the process by which dirty workers manage the stigma of their jobs.

This article contributes to the literature on emotional labor by placing it in conversation with the literature on dirty work, and contributes to the literature on public personnel administration by situating public service squarely in the dirty work literature. I consider whether government work obligates public-sector organizations to adopt an ethic of care to mitigate the negative effects of dirty work. I conclude that the nature of government services indeed compels employers to manage their organizations according to an ethic of care, or particularism, rather than an ethic of justice, or universalism. I argue that reforming government to run like businesses is inappropriate to the delivery of public goods and services, given the oftentimes-involuntary nature of transactions from the citizen's perspective.

## Dirty Work and the Public Service

Because government is the service provider of last or, in some cases, only resort—consider public safety, courts, and children's services—public servants often work with socially- and morally-stigmatized people. To the extent that people are stigmatized or reluctant partners in citizen/state encounters and that they have few options, these public servants are engaged in dirty work. If individuals seeking services could obtain what they needed in the market, they would not place themselves in subordinate positions to the state. In the United States, good examples are legal services and housing: Private counsel differs qualitatively from a public defender, as does market-rate housing from public housing. While excellent public defenders and public housing exist, individuals with the means to acquire legal services and housing from the private sector enjoy a better range of choices than those who cannot. Government as provider of last or only resort often means that the citizen/state encounter involves high stakes: From securing the safety of a child in foster care to securing the nuclear arsenal.

The high stakes of government services place public servants in an antagonistic position according to the definition of dirty work. Knowing this and recognizing that public servants work on society's behalf, an ethic of care, defined as treating public servants particularistically rather than taking a universal approach, obligates government organizations to address the adverse impact of certain government work. Under an ethic of care, workers are treated like individuals deserving of attention as ends unto themselves, not just a means to a separate economic end. This is the appropriate approach to public service workers who identify deeply with their roles and want to make a difference. In the next section, I review the literature on emotional labor and dirty work. In the third section, I discuss the role of emotional labor in

stigmatized government work and the particular case of emotional dirty work. The article ends with directions for further research and a critique of individual-level human resource management (HRM) approaches in favor of broader changes to better support public servants.

## Emotional Labor in Public Service

Emotional labor is the effort to display appropriate emotions and suppress inappropriate emotions at work, where "appropriate" and "inappropriate" are defined by the norms of the occupation (Guy & Lee, 2015; Guy et al., 2008; Guy et al., 2019; Hsieh, 2014; Hsieh & Guy, 2009; Mastracci et al., 2012). Emotional labor is also the effort to elicit appropriate emotions and suppress inappropriate ones *in others*. Emotional labor is the process by which the police officer both appears intimidating and also intimidates a suspect. It is the means by which social workers appear caring and clients feel cared for by them. Workplace norms that shape behavior are called display rules. Workers can convince themselves that the display rules are correct and worth following, which is called deep acting. In surface acting, workers express and suppress as the need arises without accompanying felt emotion. Richards and Gross (1999) show that surface acting—faking expression—exacts higher cognitive costs by diminishing working memory. Surface acting leads to workplace burnout while deep acting tends not to do so (Hsieh, 2014; Hsieh & Guy, 2009; Guy et al., 2019).

Failure to follow or to violate display rules manifests as criticism that a worker is not "professional." Professionalism is a catch-all concept to capture display rules, both known and emergent, written and unwritten—in occupations and organizations. Professional behavior is exhibited by incumbent workers, and new workers are socialized as they learn the ropes. Professional behavior in government service delivery is as important as tangible outcomes. How the citizen *feels* they have been served constitutes as much of the service as the outcome of the service encounter (Guy, 2019; Mastracci & Adams, 2018, 2019a). Emotional labor is therefore foundational to government and essential to public service delivery and fundamentally shapes, for example, the current focus on citizen/state encounters in policing.

### *Dirty Work*

The concept of dirty work is also fundamental to understanding government work. Work is "dirty" physically, socially, and morally; in one, two, or all three dimensions. Physical dirty work involves handling foul material such as collecting garbage or performing autopsies or in dangerous contexts as in firefighting. Social dirty work places the worker in close contact with socially-stigmatized populations as with addiction counselors and parole officers. Morally-dirty work involves engaging in ethically-questionable conduct and/or coming into contact with those who do, such as sex workers and abortion counselors. While stable categories of dirty work exist, stigmas are socially constructed: "Dirt exists when people *think it does*" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014, p. 85, emphasis supplied). The social construction of

stigma means that dirty work can be culturally contingent and mutable: An animal-rights advocate would categorize factory-farm workers as morally dirty if not also physically dirty. An anti-nuclear activist would judge nuclear power plant workers as morally and perhaps also physically dirty due to dangerous working conditions. Working in a state liquor store or for a public health department distributing condoms or in a needle-exchange program could be stigmatized as socially and/or morally dirty as well. Stigmas are revealed as a community's boundaries are encroached. Workers in dirty jobs can change how they identify with their own work, but they exercise less control over others' views.

Sociologist Hughes (1951) observes that an individual's occupation is "a combination of price tag and calling card" (p. 313). Because workers more or less choose their fields, people in dirty-work jobs are judged harshly for choosing to work as they do. The presumption of occupational mobility in market economies creates a particular cultural context for the construction of "dirty work." Assumptions surrounding both occupational choice and mobility create stigmas that define dirty work. People in developed economies identify closely with their jobs. To the extent that their jobs are stigmatized, workers have to manage that stigma to preserve a positive self-image. Emotional labor is how the stigma of dirty work is managed by individual workers.

Dirty work is further dissected into dirty *tasks* within jobs and varying *degrees of* taint within and across jobs, rather than a yes/no classification defining jobs as dirty or not. Baran et al. (2012) specify "dirty tasks" to reveal variations within occupational titles that bear stigma. For example, while police officers are stigmatized due to the physical danger they encounter and their ability to use lethal force, officers working undercover may be especially stigmatized, given not only the deceptive tactics involved but also the need to develop close ties to drug dealers, drug users, human traffickers, or sex workers in an undercover assignment. Internal Affairs investigators are stigmatized as snitches. Focusing on dirty tasks rather than dirty jobs introduces Pachirat's (2011) "politics of sight:" Socially and morally proscribed tasks in a workplace are sequestered from view to protect others from taint (Kreiner et al., 2006). The salience of dirty tasks to a job affects the extent to which workers engage in reframing, refocusing, and recalibrating in order to manage the stigma of their work. Reframing, refocusing, and recalibrating underscore the importance of social identity theory to understanding dirty work. This is the process by which working in a dirty job translates into being a "dirty worker" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014).

## *Emotional Labor and Dirty Work*

Reframing, refocusing, and recalibrating require emotional labor. In recent years, scholars have integrated emotional labor and dirty work to develop the concept of emotional dirty work (Grandy & Mavin, 2014; Malvini Redden & Scarduzio, 2018; McMurray & Ward, 2014; Rivera, 2015; Rivera & Tracy, 2014; Ward & McMurray, 2011, 2016; Ward et al., 2019). Both emotional labor and dirty work benefit from extending their literatures in these directions. Emotional labor is the process in which

dirty workers engage to manage the identity-damaging aspects of working in stigmatized jobs in the public service.

An example of reframing is found in Rivera's (2015) US Border Patrol agents who downplay their punitive law enforcement role and identify themselves as "the face of immigration" policy (p. 200) who are "contributing to the greater good" (p. 221). US Border Patrol agents engage in emotional labor to manage their felt tension between upholding the law and empathizing with migrants: "Other Hispanics or Mexicans sometimes accused them of being traitors to their people or race" (Rivera, 2015, p. 209). Wilkins and Williams (2008) examine similar conflicts among African-American police officers and racial profiling, and find that as the presence of Black police officers increases, racial profiling in vehicle stops also increases. Empathy could play a role in reframing, and it is a key component of citizen/state encounters due to the nature of the services provided by government (Dolamore, 2019; Edlins, 2019).

Recalibrating underscores the redeeming aspects of a dirty job. Ward et al. (2019) interview "agents of social control" such as bouncers and security guards, who emphasize their responsibilities to maintain order and ensure public safety and downplay any servile aspects. Likewise, Ashforth and Kreiner (2014), discuss how certain scientists recalibrate their work, in that "nuclear weapons scientists define their work not in terms of political ideologies or in the ethics of nuclear deterrence, 'but by a shared dedication to a technocratic program (make sure the nuclear arsenals are safe and stable) (p. 89).'" Refocusing is to overlook stigmatized characteristics altogether and is found, for example, among public defenders, who may not want to know the guilt or innocence of their clients to instead focus on honoring the defendant's right to counsel and winning the case by exposing weaknesses in the prosecution's case. Reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing are three coping mechanisms employed by workers in dirty jobs to manage the controversial or stigmatized aspects of their work. The means by which this coping happens is emotional labor.

## *Emotional Dirt and Emotional Dirty Work*

Emotional dirty work is distinct from emotional labor, but even very difficult emotional labor is still "just" emotional labor and not necessarily dirty work. In Hochschild's (1983) initial conception, both nicer-than-nice and tougher-than-tough emotional displays constitute emotional labor. Much more scholarly attention has been paid to care work and nicer-than-nice affective displays (Ward & McMurray, 2016). This is due to three interrelated factors.

First, Hochschild's (1983) book launched social science research into the crucial role of emotions in service work, at a time when emotion was considered a workplace contaminant rather than a subject of serious study. Consequently, care work received extensive attention in subsequent research. Second, Hochschild's results with respect to women's nicer-than-nice emotional labor captured the scholarly imagination in a way that her results on men's nastier-than-normal emotional labor did not. Third, emotional labor research has been dominated by studies taking place in the United States (Mastracci & Adams, 2019b), particularly in the for-profit context. This dual

narrowing by both culture and sector has resulted in an overwhelming emphasis on positive affect (nicer than how one feels) and sustaining the customer sovereignty narrative (customer is king).

Expanding beyond the for-profit context, Guy and Newman (2004) challenge this received wisdom because a customer-is-king ethos is problematic in the public sector and nicer-than-nice affect is inappropriate in some areas of public-sector service delivery. Tougher-than-tough emotional displays are just as important to understand and are indispensable to understanding emotional labor in public service, given the need for public-sector agents of social control like police officers to engage in emotional labor. However, tougher-than-tough emotional labor is not—on its own—emotional dirty work. The enforcement aspect of public service and tougher-than-tough emotional displays usually accompany dangerous working environments and it is *this* characteristic that renders it emotional dirty work: "Law enforcement officers are dirty workers because they put their bodies in physical danger or serve others as 'first responders,' work closely with stigmatized populations such as criminals or homeless, and employ morally-questionable techniques such as coercion or force" (Rivera & Tracy, 2014, p. 203).

Ward and McMurray equate noxious emotions with noxious substances that make work dirty. But they do not differentiate emotional dirty work from "plain old"—albeit very difficult—emotional labor. To classify emotions as dirt, Ward and McMurray (2016) argue that the very disturbing emotions arising in oneself or in others that are not welcome in the work context threaten one's own sense of safety and order or "are deemed out of place, contextually inappropriate, burdensome, or taboo" (p. 59). But in their examples, the difficult emotions with which workers are engaged are entirely appropriate to the work context. Ward and McMurray (2016) claim that work is dirty is because it is "often invisible and under-valued by the wider organization (p. 87)." While government work is often difficult and undervalued, whether or not emotions create dangerous workplaces similar to physical work dangers remains unclear. What Ward and McMurray miss are display rules and context-specific emotional labor demands.

A clearer definition of emotional dirty work anchors it firmly in physical, social, and moral dirt as originally conceived by Hughes (1951). While workplace exposure to noxious emotions may or may not mirror exposure to noxious materials, emotions are certainly more fundamental to meaning-making work in an increasingly service-providing economy. The salience of dirty work to government is grounded in the capacity of the individual public servant to coerce others to act in society's best interests regardless of their own interests. To the extent that public servants engage in coercion on behalf of society—as agents of social control (police use of force) or as proxies (as in guardians *ad litem*)—then they engage in emotional dirty work. Coercion is the key. Coercion backed by the power of the state—even if in the best interests of the citizen—invokes the definition of dirty work to the extent that the ethics of coercion are questioned.

Many government workers have at least some power over clients/consumers of public services, particularly if the services they provide have no real counterparts in

the private market. This power imbalance creates a dirty-work situation for the public servant: "Where other emotional laborers are paid to uphold the myth of consumer sovereignty, those in enforcement roles are charged with effectively *compelling people to do something they would not otherwise want to do*" (Ward & McMurray, 2016, p. 27, emphasis supplied). When citizens need services from government, street-level bureaucrats represent the state. In citizen/state encounters, public servants hold at least some power over the citizen. Even in non-enforcement roles, citizens are at least somewhat subordinated to bureaucratic gatekeepers of government resources.

### *The Paradox between Stigmatized Work and Self-Identity*

Whether physically, socially, or morally dirty, the stigma of dirty work inspires solidarity among coworkers. Paradoxically, greater stigma correlates with *greater* identification with a dirty job, not less (Baran et al., 2012). Awareness of difference strengthens identification with the job and with one another. The result of engaging in emotional labor to cope with the identity-damaging effects of work stigma is to become *more* closely identified as dirty workers (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). If workers are believed to have chosen their occupations and they work in a dirty job, then an ego-enhancing means by which to reconcile the perceptions of others with the desired perception of self is to create solidarity with colleagues.

Social identity theory suggests that perceptions of others are important to one's perception of self, such that dirty workers are aware of job-based social stigma. This awareness affects a person's self-image. System justification theory predicts that the members of stigmatized groups will accept and justify their social standing. Public service motivation suggests that individuals are drawn to public service to help others (Levitats & Vigoda-Gadot, 2019; Perry & Wise, 1990). Altogether, an individual's awareness of stigma gives rise to ego-enhancing occupational ideologies. Combined with a strong motivation to serve the public, dirty work in public service elicits deep attachment to and identification with emotional dirty work. Dirty jobs arouse solidarity among colleagues on top of the strong public-service ethos the worker may hold already. These two motivations, individual identity and dedication to service, renders public servants as far more than mere inputs to a production process. Therefore, the economics of public service render citizen/state encounters as potentially high-stakes interactions. Both oblige government organizations to pursue an ethic of care for public servants who are likely to engage with citizens in antagonistic circumstances. An ethic of care is the appropriate HRM approach to support public servants in their difficult work.

## The Economics of Public Service and an Ethic of Care

The economics of public services—government as provider of last or only resort—produce power imbalances between citizens and the state. Malvini Redden and Scarduzio (2018) cite power discrepancies in their analysis of emotional dirty work in public service and "show how bureaucratic work normally considered professional is

actually quite 'dirty'" ( p. 226). Many dirty work tasks and jobs are found in government, and the unique nature of public service provision creates a relationship between public servant and citizen that is not found in profit-maximizing, private-sector, customer-service jobs. The economics of government, that is, the processes by which public services are allocated in a community, (i.e., Who gets what and how much) necessitate an ethic of care for the government worker because the nature of their jobs increases their likelihood of being in an antagonistic relation with citizens.

State and citizen each come to the transaction under different circumstances and via different motivations. In private-sector transactions, both parties—buyer and seller—approach the exchange more or less as equally-situated autonomous actors. In fact, to the extent that the "customer is always right," the buyer may have more power than the seller. The same cannot be said for citizen/state encounters. Not only are buyers and sellers differentially empowered, but both may not come to the encounter willingly (e.g., Arrests, removing a child from a home, levying taxes and fines). Encounters can also involve life-altering decisions such as approving welfare benefits, housing vouchers, or restraining orders, removing children from foster-care placements, arresting impaired drivers, or renewing passports. Unequal power endowments between the two parties coupled with high-stakes transactions render encounters with government fundamentally different from private-sector market transactions. Moreover, government as "Harbor of Refuge" renders it the service provider of only resort in important areas of service delivery and establishes an imbalance of power between the public servant and citizen (Mastracci et al., 2012).

A Harbor of Refuge is a sheltered port open to any vessel in need, regardless of the flag it flies or the doctrines of its native country and is an appropriate metaphor for government (Mastracci et al., 2012). Government services such as public safety accrue to everyone regardless of ability to pay or support for the regime in charge. Public goods are provided where markets fail to deliver adequate levels of services or any services at all. The market-failure aspect of government services is understood almost exclusively from the consumer side. But how does serving as Harbor of Refuge affect the working experience of government employees? What is the worker's experience of being the provider of last resort for client after client after client?

## *Power Imbalances and High Stakes*

The power imbalance between public servant and citizen shapes the citizen/state encounter, but public HRM research has barely scratched this surface and considered what it means for public servants and how they experience their job. The rhetoric of customer sovereignty sets up expectations of transactions that are inappropriate to the nature of government services, and because those expectations cannot be met, public servants suffer consequences in the form of abuse from "customers" (Leidner, 1993) as well as self-criticism if they expect themselves to provide a level of service that could never have been provided. Due to inappropriate expectations between government and individual and given the often-involuntary nature of the "customer's" participation, government workers commonly face stressful citizen/state encounters.

Stress arises from the collision between citizen expectations and public servants' duties. While stress alone does not define government work as dirty, stress leads to burnout. Government employers owe it to their workers to equip them with the skills needed to deliver services in a context that does not foster stress and burnout.

In his seminal writing on dirty work, Hughes (1951) rightly observes that government is the provider of only resort in emergencies, and tensions arise between routine and emergency. The citizen experiences an emergency, yet emergencies are the stuff of routine for first responders. Despite the citizen's emergency, each incident is triaged against others to determine where limited resources are best deployed. Hughes (1951) acknowledges that the stakes are high in government and he further underscores the role of display rules in the provision of services (p. 323, emphases supplied):

> There may indeed be in the minds of the receivers of emergency services a resentment that something so crucial to them can be a matter for *a cooler and more objective attitude*, even though they know perfectly well that such an attitude is necessary to competence, and though they could not stand it if the expert to whom they take their troubles *were to show any signs of excitement*.

Given the high stakes and unique circumstances of government service provision, recipients—emergencies or not—are hardly "customers" by any recognizable definition. They are more aptly referred to as "consumers" at best and oftentimes reluctant ones at that; for instance, few consumers are "in the market for" fines, code violations, or speeding tickets. Indeed, what market exists for such services? While public goods are usually examined from the demand side, what about the supply side? Denying services in a government context levies a cost on the one doing the denying that is not borne by the private-sector denier of services. The person who is refused entry into a nightclub can go to another club. The applicant denied unemployment benefits or Food Stamps or a restraining order is affected existentially by government discretion. Unlike Ward and McMurray's bouncers, but very much like Rivera's US Border Patrol agents, public servants are drawn to government service to make a difference. Indeed, Samaritans call takers studied by Ward and McMurray (2014) describe the "honor" of serving marginalized people as the provider of last resort. This motivation as well as high-stakes public-sector encounters obligate government employers to adopt an ethic of care to address job stress and burnout arising from emotional dirty work in public service. Emotional dirty work in government is a perfect storm of high stakes, power imbalances, and stress. And yet, police officers and firefighters possess strong attachments to their work and identify closely with each other and their organizations. Although emotional dirty work is difficult, serving others is an important source of job satisfaction and the basis for an organizational ethics of care.

## *Necessary, Evil*

For agents of social control like law enforcement and corrections officers, part of the stigma may be the ambivalence with which society accepts its need for them. Creating

agents of social control is the means by which society controls itself. Government acts on behalf of society and citizens resent them for doing this work because society resents that this work must be done: "Society delegates dirty work to groups who act as agents on society's behalf, and that society then stigmatizes these groups, effectively disowning and disavowing the work it has mandated" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p. 413). Even the potential for resentment as the stigma underpinning public service work only underscores the importance of an ethic of care in government. Indeed, the "extent to which those pariahs who do the dirty work of society are really acting as agents for the rest of us" is at *least* the extent to which government organizations are obliged to adopt an ethic of care (Hughes, 1970, p. 7).

## *An Ethic of Care in Public Service Employment*

An ethic of care is defined as "treating workers as particular, special, and deserving of our attention as ends in and of themselves, rather than as a means to some other rational economic goal" (Ward & McMurray, 2016, p. 110). An ethic of care stands in opposition to an ethic of justice (Gabriel, 2009, p. 383, emphases supplied):

> Treating the person under your care as special, *making special provisions and allowances for him or her*, is one of the characteristics that distinguishes the ethic of care from more conventional 'ethics of justice' that treat all as formally equal and subject to general principles . . . the ethics of care *do not seek to discover universal principles* of ethical behavior, but rather how people sustain fragile networks of relations that allow people to grow and prosper, developing trust, respect, and responsibility for each other.

An ethic of care is a different way of thinking and is based on particularism and not universalism. It is expressly emotion-based and relationship-focused whereas an ethic of justice opposes particularism and relationships. Public HRM has embraced an ethic of justice and universal principles. Following Weber (1946), emotions are "unwelcome intruders to the world of organizations, symptoms of pathologies from which organizations had to rid themselves" (Gabriel, 1998, p. 293). A Weberian approach is preferable to management by whim that can result in discrimination and an unjust workplace. But an ethic of care rejects the false choice between being fair or bigotry. While a legalistic ethic of justice seeks universal principles and same treatment across all individuals, an ethic of care emphasizes particular attention to individuals as necessary and permits unequal treatment for the good of the whole.

An organization-wide ethic of care "that encompasses connectivity, inclusivity, and compassion presents us with a new ethical proposition for organizations as it invokes the idea of co-habitation and joint relational space" (Kenny & Fotaki, 2015, p. 184). Co-habitation and joint relational space underscore the webs of interdependence that connect workers and workplaces (Linstead et al., 2014). Acknowledging interdependence "allows us to recognize that self-interest is not the only driver of human action" (Ward & McMurray, 2016, p. 116). An ethic of care in public service is consistent with the spirit of public service motivation that draws many to public service in the first

place (Perry & Wise, 1990); toward interdependent communities of public servants working toward collective goals. An ethic of care recognizes "the fact that human lives are mutually and already implicated in one another that establishes the principle of equality and connectedness" (Kenny & Fotaki, 2015, p. 193). Public servants providing crucial services as providers of last or only resort require the discretion to handle citizens on a case-by-case basis and likewise deserve to be managed as individuals and not as cogs in a machine. An ethic of care best captures the interdependence and high stakes of public service work.

The rationale for operating government as a business is based on a false equivalence between government and business; because competition fosters efficiency in the private sector, so it must for government service delivery. Ethics and equity take a back seat to efficiency and effectiveness under government-as-business: "We want administrators to be responsive, to achieve outcomes, and to produce results, but not at any cost . . . in American public administration, ethical outcomes have been *an afterthought at best*" (Alkadry et al., 2015, p. 1210, emphasis supplied). Efficiency is not pursued at any cost in the private sector—regulations curb firm behavior—and to the extent that equity is undermined by efficiency goals, government cannot operate like businesses either.

Another consequence of government-as-business falls on government workers themselves. Making a difference in other people's lives motivates workers to pursue careers in public service, yet the efficiency movement in Australian public schools, for example, forced educators to subordinate the principles of their profession to managerialism and efficiency (Carr, 1994). Vickers and Kouzmin (2001) similarly criticize the impact of New Public Management (NPM) reforms on the government workers carrying them out and plead to program evaluators to focus on workers instead of outputs (p. 111, emphasis supplied):

> There must, in the first instance, be an acknowledgment that actors may be *permanently damaged, traumatized, and alienated* as a result of their experiences with New Public Management. Future research should address 'at risk' actors in organizations, those who face redundancy through downsizing, and outsourcing, violence, stress, illness, disability, substance abuse or other coercive practices.

Unique among NPM postmortems, Vickers and Kouzmin highlight the affront to public service values and the long-term damage of neoliberal reforms on workers themselves. Theirs is an excellent example of an ethic-of-care perspective.

## Discussion and Future Research

This article argues that emotional labor is the process by which dirty workers manage the stigma of dirty work, and further argues that public organizations ought to adopt an ethic of care, given the manifold implications of emotional labor in public service. This contributes to the literature on dirty work by recognizing the centrality of emotions to government. This article also articulates the unique relationship between

government and individual due to the characteristics of the public encounter and the power each party brings to the encounter. This article also argues why the dominant narratives underpinning market reforms in government are ill-suited to it and that the unique circumstances of government—the unwillingness of the putative customer and the nature of public service as emotional dirty work—call for an ethic of care in public-sector workplaces.

At the outset, I argued that the economics of public service establish an imbalance of power between the state and citizen. If the individual had private or market options, they would pursue those options on equal footing in a market exchange. The power imbalance and potential antagonism of public encounters suggests that at some level certain government work is dirty work by definition, because the reluctance of the individual in his encounter with the state creates an antagonistic situation for the government worker. At a minimum, government work is fraught due to high stakes and power imbalances between worker and the public that subordinates the individual to the state. There are no private or market options for certain goods such as hunting licenses, license plates, and building permits. People reliant on government services may be "consumers," but they are not "customers" and sometimes unwilling consumers of government services involving agents of social control.

The myth of customer sovereignty alongside the power imbalance between government worker and citizen distorts the relationship between citizen and state and can create tensions for the public servant in how they understand and make sense of their work and the emotions attached to it. While the narrative of consumer sovereignty establishes expectations on both sides of service delivery, it sets up unrealistic expectations for the putative "customer" that they will be attended to in a way that is inappropriate for the context. In law enforcement, government serves the broader public by policing people, up to and including denying their liberties. Where capital punishment is legal, the state can even end someone's life. A typology of antagonism or unwillingness in public services and how this affects the dirt attached to particular public service jobs could be the focus of future research.

Future research can also embrace nastier-than-normal emotional labor and/or take seriously the emotional lives of men at work. What are the effects of using coercive force on the individual worker? Ward and McMurray (2016) explore this question with security guards and Rivera and Tracy (2014) with Border Patrol, but more research is needed. Furthermore, just as both men and women engage in emotional labor but face different display rules, do they also face different expectations in dirty work occupations? How does stigma affect male and female workers over their careers? Future research can also examine whether dirty-work tasks are left for lower-status workers. Are there patterns in the type of worker who can successfully delegate dirty tasks and are there similarities among the lower-status workers with respect to race/ethnicity and sex?

Following Malvini Redden and Scarduzio (2018)'s intersectionality approach, future research could explore how occupational display rules do not apply equally across members of an occupation. They examine emotional dirty work of judges in municipal arraignment courts and airport security with TSA agents and reveal that

a display rule can seem uniform on its surface but is applied differently to women and men. A municipal court judge who is also a woman of color is criticized as cold and uncaring for her Stoicism while her white male colleagues are *expected* to display neutrality and are rewarded for it. Display rules can also vary by socioeconomic class: TSA agents enforcing safety rules are ignored or yelled at by higher-income travelers.

Previous scholarship on emotional labor in public service advised practitioners to enhance training or recruit to values to lessen the incidence of job stress and burnout in jobs that require emotional labor (Mastracci et al., 2012). But this approach may miss the mark. Perhaps worker stress and burnout are broader problems and not individual shortcomings: "Training programs and counseling services emphasize making the individual worker more 'stress fit', better able to cope with the causes of stress and hence more productive" (Korczynski, 2003, p. 75). From a critical management perspective, perhaps the solution to high stress and burnout in high-stakes government roles is not human resource management staples like enhanced training and work/life balance programs. Perhaps the solution is to dismantle the "enchanting myth of customer sovereignty" (Korczynski, 2003, p. 75) fomented by reform efforts like NPM and misplaced advice to run like businesses. How far should the customer sovereignty ethos extend into government? Where business norms have taken hold, can the mentality be reversed? Perhaps answers lie in a broader appreciation for the collective nature of public service and deconstructing the archetypical autonomous independent worker in a competitive workplace whose performance is individually incentivized and rewarded to increase organizational performance overall.

Macro-level changes that dismantle customer-service expectations would involve changing display rules: "Having a wider range of appropriate emotional displays, especially for [those] who have less discretion at work, would be useful" (Malvini Redden & Scarduzio, 2018, p. 241). Government is a complex context (Guy, 2019) and to suggest otherwise is to lead both citizen and state to expect interactions to be as simple as private-sector purchases. Furthermore, definitions of "professionalism" and "professional behavior" might abandon expectations of Stoicism to better reflect workplace realities and better equip government workers to engage in difficult work. Rivera and Tracy (2014) wonder whether *expression* rather than *suppression* would empower emotional laborers and better equip them for their roles: "Dirty workers may find unexplored avenues of success in learning to embrace, discuss, and celebrate their emotions, rather than attempting to suppress, normalize, or transform them" (p. 218).

Encouraging workers to *use* emotions to tap into important sources of information, abandoning the customer-service ethos in public service, and rejecting business approaches to government will improve workplace culture and service quality. Adopting an ethic of care rather than an ethic of justice in the public-sector workplace is one step in this direction. The citizen/state encounter is at the heart of public administration (Edlins, 2019; Guy, 2019). An ethic of care honors the emotional labor of public administrators across a wide range of services while opening a promising door for further research into factors that may underlie, for instance, systemic racism in public institutions. The citizen/state encounter lies at the heart of the current context of

social unrest and demonstrations against over-policing Black and Brown communities in the US. A humanist personnel administration would involve deeper understandings of both sides of the citizen/state encounter.

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