The student 'experience' in commercialised higher education: a psychological needs perspective

Louise Bunce

Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK

Louise.bunce@brookes.ac.uk

Abstract

The socio-political context in which learning takes place has a significant impact on students' 'experience' in higher education. In England, UK, and other countries such as Australia and the United States of America, the influence of neoliberalism has extended to higher education; as a result, individual students, not the state, have become responsible for its cost. This act of commercialisation transforms students into consumers and universities into service providers. It challenges the traditional roles of students and academics by placing different emphases and new demands on learning and teaching. Within this context, this chapter discusses research examining how commercialisation may impact some aspects of the student experience, including academic performance, motivation for learning, and how academics perceive the effects of commercialisation on students and themselves. This chapter also considers the experience of a specific group of students—those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Much of the research discussed is underpinned by a theory of motivation, self-determination theory. This theory is supported by empirical research showing that when our psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, we experience optimal forms of motivation to achieve our goals and have greater wellbeing. Unfortunately, the environment created by the commodification of higher education may cause conflict between what students think they want as consumers with what they need as learners, which undermines motivation for learning and academic

success. These findings are discussed in light of implications for facilitating student engagement, experience, and learning, with resources provided at www.brookes.ac.uk/SIIP.

Introduction

Following the model for higher education funding in the United States, England, UK, provides the most extreme recent example of 'abandoning' higher education to market dogma (Anderson, 2016). Unlike some European countries that provide state-funded degrees, such as Germany and Norway, higher education in England is now funded by the individual student. Although the cost is not an up-front fee, it is payable by the graduate through income-contingent loans. The application of market principles to higher education in England was first laid out in the British government's White Paper titled 'Students at the heart of the system' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). The rationale for the paper was partly based on the argument that higher education had become increasingly perceived as an individual benefit over a societal benefit, placing increased earning potential for the student above their traditional contribution to social development and economic advancement (McMahon, 2009). The White Paper contended that marketisation would provide students with more choice of provider, increase competition among providers, drive down prices for students, and improve quality. In reality, it served to sanction the roles of students as 'consumers' and universities as service providers. Its success in achieving its aims is debatable: the notion of choice is arguably illusory because many higher education institutions (HEIs) are highly selective; metrics of quality, such as student satisfaction scores, have questionable reliability (Lenton, 2015); and competition did not drive down prices[1]. By commodifying higher education, learning has become aligned with earning power.

---

[1] In 2012, the first year in which HEIs were able to charge students the maximum cost of £9000 for tuition (Equivalent to approx. US$11,600, AU$16,300, or €9,900), almost all of them charged the maximum fee level (Bolton, 2018)

HEIs in England now find themselves overly concerned with providing an education for students that translates directly into high-earning employment (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). They are in a position whereby (consciously or not) they treat students as consumers, and are concerned with the quality of the student 'experience' rather than education per se (Williams, 2013). The student voice in this context is often given precedence above other factors in decision making (Bunce, 2019). For example, HEIs seek regular feedback from students about their experience and then act on that feedback to improve student (or consumer) satisfaction. This occurs both at the micro level, such as individual classes, and at the macro level, such as library services and catering. Staff may inadvertently have started to engage in so-called 'safe teaching' (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005, p. 275), that is, a straightforward transmission of pre-specified content and simplistic assessment of knowledge. This is thought to serve satisfaction metrics because it avoids placing intellectual demands on students, in order to reduce the risk of student complaints about difficult content. If students are treated as consumers by their HEI, they may be more likely to view their education as a product rather than as a process of intellectual development, and expect to be 'served' a degree rather than challenged to study for their degree (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002). They may also feel a sense of entitlement to a 'good' degree, that is, a first class or upper second class degree, while also feeling a lack of responsibility for the outcomes of their education (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). Within this context, there is evidence that some students now explicitly identify as consumers, making statements such as, "if we're paying for it that's like you are a consumer more or less. So you know I am paying for education therefore I am a consumer of education" (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 458). Thus, a consumer identity is largely believed to be unhelpful when it comes to the nature of engagement that is required of students to benefit from a high quality education (Bunce & Bennett, 2019; King & Bunce, 2020). These potential impacts of treating students as consumers appear to conflict with the methods of effective pedagogy that require students to be engaged and take a meaningful or 'deep' approach to learning (Marton & Säljö, 1976; Bunce & Bennett, 2019). This chapter will now consider recent empirical research that speaks to the potential impacts of identifying students as consumers on academic performance and motivation for learning. It subsequently considers the perceptions of academic teaching staff on the impact of marketisation on students, as well as its effects on their interactions with students and on their own teaching practice. This chapter will then

consider the experience of students from Black and minority ethnic[2] (BME) backgrounds within a commercialised higher education context.

Academic performance in a commercialised higher education context

The first study in England, UK, to examine levels of consumer orientation and its impact on students' academic performance and learner identity was conducted by Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017). This study provides some support for those concerned about the impact of identifying students as consumers on their educational experience. Over 600 students studying at several different universities in England, UK, completed a questionnaire to assess their consumer orientation, learner identity, and academic performance. Consumer orientation was assessed using items based on a scale developed for use in the United States by Saunders (2015). Students rated their level of agreement on a 5-point scale with statements such as, 'It is solely the lecturer's responsibility to educate me at university', 'As long as I complete all of my assignments, I deserve a good grade', 'I think of my university degree as a product I am purchasing', and 'If I cannot earn a lot of money after I graduate, I will have wasted my time at university'. Learner identity was assessed by asking students to rate their level of agreement on a 5-point scale with statements including, 'I would choose to study even if I didn't achieve a degree from it', 'I discuss my subject with my lecturer', 'I always try my best in assessments', and 'I want to expand my intellectual ability'.

Although overall agreement with the consumer statements was weak and agreement with the learner statements was strong, Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017) found a negative correlation between consumer orientation and learner identity. In other words, the more that students agreed with the consumer statements, the less they agreed with the learner statements. In terms of academic performance, this was assessed by asking students to report their most recent grade expressed as a percentage. The researchers found that a stronger consumer orientation was negatively correlated with academic performance, meaning that students with a stronger consumer orientation had poorer academic

---

[2] Many campaigners argue against the use of the acronyms 'BME' as well as 'BAME'—Black, Asian and minority ethnic'. However, it is used in this chapter because it is widely used in the UK education system as a way to highlight racial inequalities (e.g., see https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Universities-acting-to-close-BAME-student-attainment-gap.aspx).

performance. This was the first study to show evidence of a link between students' identification as consumers and academic performance. Although the measure of academic performance was based on self-report, the finding supports concerns that a consumer orientation conflicts with the behaviours required for effective learning.

Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017) also examined other factors that could be associated with a stronger consumer orientation. These included subject type and grade goal, because these may influence study behaviours and academic performance, which may in turn interact with a consumer orientation. They also examined whether there was a difference in consumer orientation between students who were personally funding their education, for example, through a government loan, compared with students who were not personally responsible for the cost of their education, for example by having a scholarship or grant. The researchers found, unsurprisingly, that students with loans as opposed to grants expressed a higher consumer orientation. Students studying a Science, Technology, Engineering, or Maths (STEM) subject also expressed a higher consumer orientation. This may be because STEM subjects can provide a route into more professional, highly-paid roles (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2020), thus potentially emphasising the link between attending university and future earning potential. In relation to grade goal, students with a first-class grade goal had a higher consumer orientation than those with a lower grade goal. This may be because student consumers are overly preoccupied with obtaining good grades, which are perceived as necessary for securing well-paid future employment (Tomlinson, 2017).

In addition, Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017) examined the extent to which a consumer orientation interacts with, or mediates, other factors traditionally associated with academic performance. These factors included stronger learner identity and higher grade goal. Typically, these are both positive predictors of academic performance, however, the study found that consumer orientation mediated these relations: a stronger consumer orientation resulted in negative relations between both learner identity and academic performance, and grade goal and academic performance.

Overall, the findings from this study support concerns raised by educators who are worried about the effects of marketisation on academic standards, and call into question the

capabilities of graduates who have experienced their education as a product. There is an irony in the fact that the marketised higher education context emphasises the need for students to obtain good grades (albeit with the external goal of securing a graduate-level career rather than internal goals relating to expanding the mind) while simultaneously seeming to hamper students' ability to achieve good grades. This suggests that an optimal student education is not best served within a commercialised higher education context that has transformed education into an 'experience' at the expense of academic excellence.

Motivation for learning in a commercialised higher education context

How might the findings of Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017) be explained? Motivation for learning has received a lot of empirical attention as a way of attempting to understand differences in student behaviours and performance (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Prat-Sala & Redford, 2010). According to self-determination theory, there are two dominant forms of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is defined as our innate need to gain motivation from within, and is experienced when engaging in a task for its own sake because it is inherently satisfying. According to this theory, a good education should nurture students' intrinsic motivation for learning so that the learning process is experienced as inherently enjoyable. Treating education as a commercial product may, instead, emphasise extrinsic motivation for learning. Extrinsic motivation is experienced when engaging in a task in order to achieve a specific outcome or reward, such as good grades in order to secure a well-paid job. Thus it seems plausible that students who have a higher consumer orientation are more likely to experience extrinsic motivation than intrinsic motivation for studying.

These two forms of motivation could be argued to align with two dominant approaches to learning: deep and surface (Biggs, 1987; Entwistle & Tait, 1995; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Marton & Säljö, 1976). The concept of approaches to learning concerns differences among students in their intentions, motivations, and processing strategies in a learning situation. A surface approach to learning involves treating the task as an external imposition, and thus applying superficial strategies such as memorisation or reproduction of content in the absence of reflection and critical thinking. The motivation behind it involves the desire to simply avoid failure by putting in the minimum amount of effort thought necessary to meet

task requirements. Conversely, a deep approach to learning involves studying with the goal of understanding, critically appraising, and synthesising material in order to make meaning. It is motivated by an inherent interest in the subject and a genuine wish to learn for the sake of learning, as opposed to merely achieving an external goal. When taking a deep approach to learning, concepts are related to everyday experience rather than being processed in the abstract.

An additional approach to learning, which is more closely aligned with a deep approach than a surface approach, is a strategic approach (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983). Although achievement motivation (i.e., wanting to achieve the best possible grades) drives this approach, it is associated with good study skills such as being highly organised, having good time management, and being acutely aware of assessment demands. While students may adopt different approaches to learning according to specific learning and assessment demands (Lindblom-Ylänne, Parpala, & Postareff, 2018), deep and strategic approaches to learning have generally been associated with higher levels of academic performance than a surface approach (Duff, Boyle, Dunleavy, & Ferguson, 2004; Marton & Säljö, 1984; Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2012).

Different motivations for studying, as operationalised by the concept of approaches to learning, may therefore provide some explanation for why Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017) found that a consumer orientation relates to poorer academic performance. This possibility was examined in a study by Bunce and Bennett (2019). They tested the hypotheses that a) students who identify more strongly as consumers would take a more surface approach to learning, b) students who identify more strongly as consumers would take a less deep and less strategic approach to learning, and c) approaches to learning would mediate or explain why identifying as a consumer is related to poorer academic performance. Over 500 students studying a variety of subjects at different universities in England, UK, completed a questionnaire to assess their approaches to learning, consumer orientation, and academic performance. Approaches to learning (deep and surface approaches) were assessed using the 20-item revised two-factor Study Process Questionnaire (Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001). Students rated their level of agreement with statements such as, 'I find that at times studying gives me a feeling of deep personal satisfaction' (deep), and 'My aim is to pass the

course while doing as little work as possible' (surface). Strategic approach was assessed using 12 relevant items from the Revised Approaches to Studying Inventory (Entwistle, McCune & Tait, 2013; Entwistle & Tait, 1995). Students rated their level of agreement with statements such as, 'I organise my study time carefully to make the best use of it' and 'I put a lot of effort into studying because I'm determined to do well'. Consumer orientation and academic performance were assessed in the same way as in Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017), that is by using an adapted version of the consumer orientation questionnaire developed by Saunders (2015), and requesting students to provide a grade expressed as a percentage for their most recent piece of assessed work.

The results partly supported the hypotheses. As found in Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017), a stronger consumer identity was correlated with poorer academic performance. In addition, the more that students identified as consumers, the more likely they were to adopt a surface approach to learning and the less likely they were to adopt a deep approach. However, there was no relation with a strategic approach. Furthermore, a deep approach to learning mediated the relation between consumer identity and academic performance, meaning that students who identified more strongly as consumers had poorer academic performance because it reduced the extent to which they adopted a deep approach to learning (surface and strategic approach did not have a mediating impact).

Again, the findings from this study support the argument that the commercialisation of higher education may undermine students' ability to achieve their potential, in this case by affecting the attitudes and behaviours that underpin their approaches to learning and subsequent academic performance. Commercialisation seems to be associated with extrinsic motivation to achieve an end goal as shown by students taking a more surface approach to learning if they identify more strongly as consumers. Again, the irony is that student consumers may experience extrinsic motivation by focusing on grade goal, but high grades are not served by consumerist attitudes that discourage deep approaches to learning that underpin higher grades.

A psychological needs perspective on motivation for learning

This raises an important question: What can educators do to support student achievement in a commercialised teaching environment, without promoting extrinsic motivation for studying? Aside from structuring the learning environment to foster creative and critical engagement that is characteristic of a deep approach, it is also important to consider the psychological factors that support learners' intrinsic motivation for studying. Self-determination theory provides a broad framework for understanding individuals' experiences of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory proposes that everyone has an innate desire to engage, grow, and master challenges, but that external factors (e.g., social or cultural contexts) can be enabling or inhibitive (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The requirements for healthy development are specified using the concept of basic psychological needs. Self-determination theory proposes that there are three universal basic psychological needs that need to be fulfilled in order for an individual to experience intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three needs have been defined by Vansteenkiste, Ryan, and Soenens (2020, p. 3) as follows:

> *Autonomy* refers to the experience of volition and willingness. When satisfied, one experiences a sense of integrity as when one's actions, thoughts, and feelings are self-endorsed and authentic. When frustrated, one experiences a sense of pressure and often conflict, such as feeling pushed in an unwanted direction.
>
> *Competence* concerns the experience of effectiveness and mastery. It becomes satisfied as one capably engages in activities and experiences opportunities for using and extending skills and expertise. When frustrated, one experiences a sense of ineffectiveness or even failure and helplessness.
>
> *Relatedness* denotes the experience of warmth, bonding, and care, and is satisfied by connecting to and feeling significant to others. Relatedness frustration comes with a sense of social alienation, exclusion, and loneliness.

All three needs are considered essential, and if any one of them is thwarted, this will have a negative impact on an individual's motivation and wellbeing. The experience of psychological need satisfaction has been researched extensively within the context of students' experiences of learning. Students who experience fulfilment of their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more likely to have intrinsic motivation for

learning, meaning that they are likely to put in more effort, use more fruitful approaches (in some situations this may be a deep approach), be more actively engaged in their education, and ultimately perform to a higher academic standard (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Autonomy supportive teaching has received particular research attention. This type of teaching involves providing as much choice as possible within situational constraints (choice provision), explaining the extent to which choice is/is not available (meaningful rationale provision), and acknowledging and caring about the point of view of the student (perspective taking) (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994).

In support of this theory, a longitudinal study of students studying law (Sheldon & Krieger, 2007), a subject known for being exceptionally stressful, found that students who experienced an autonomy supportive teaching environment not only experienced greater levels of autonomy, but also competence and relatedness, over the three years of their degrees. As a result, they also experienced greater subjective wellbeing. Perceptions of autonomy support also positively predicted graded performance and intrinsic motivation for pursuing a career in law. The authors noted that this is important because an individual's initial motivation within a new context can predict whether or not they will succeed over time.

An individual's experience of basic psychological need satisfaction is also differentially supported by the presence of intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Intrinsic goals, such as personal growth or close relationships, are associated with greater wellbeing and healthier functioning than extrinsic goals, such as wealth creation or external recognition. The pursuit of extrinsic goals is often believed to bring psychological benefits, but it actually relates to the experience of reduced need satisfaction and increased distress (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). In a recent study of university students, Holding, St-Jacques, Verner-Filion, Kachanoff, and Koestner (2020) tested this idea to explore whether students sacrificed their three basic needs in pursuit of extrinsic career goals. A sacrifice of autonomy may relate to neglecting a basic need for freedom if students oblige themselves to study; a sacrifice of competence may result from students deciding only to learn about concepts perceived as contributing to their career; and a sacrifice of relatedness may result from self-

isolating in order to study, thereby missing out on fostering a sense of connection and belonging. At the beginning of two three-year longitudinal studies, students were asked to state their career goal. They also completed an Aspirations Index that measured the importance of intrinsic aspirations, e.g., 'to grow and learn new things', and extrinsic aspirations, e.g., 'to have enough money to buy everything you want'. They were then asked why they were pursuing their career goal by responding to items that assessed reasons relating to intrinsic motivation, e.g., 'Because of the fun and enjoyment which the goal will provide you—the primary reason is simply your interest in the experience itself', or extrinsic reasons, e.g., 'Because you would feel ashamed, guilty, or anxious if you didn't—you feel that you ought to strive for this'. Midway through the year students were asked about their motivation for making sacrifices to achieve their career goal (career-related sacrifices). This rating was done on a 100-point slider scale, with one end described as 'because I want to, it feels personally meaningful to do so' (autonomous motivation) and the other end as 'because I feel like I ought to, other people want me to' (controlled motivation). Once the academic year had finished, students rated the extent to which they agreed that they had progressed towards their career goal, and the extent to which each of their three psychological needs had been thwarted.

The analysis revealed that students who had more extrinsic life aspirations were more likely to report that their career goal was supported by extrinsic or controlled reasons. This subsequently translated into sacrificing their own basic psychological need fulfilment, and experiencing controlled motivation for doing so. Furthermore, sacrificing these needs in order to progress toward a career goal seemed to 'backfire': a year later, career goal progress was less likely to have been achieved by students who had sacrificed need fulfilment, and they experienced increased levels of depressive symptoms and negative mood. The authors concluded that universities should 'discourage the prioritization of career goal pursuit above needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness' (Holding et al., 2020). They further proposed that teaching should be designed to support students' fulfilment of their basic psychological needs, which will improve students' progress towards their career goals.

Academics' perspectives on the effects of commercialisation on psychological need fulfilment among their students and themselves

Another study reveals more about whether students, as well as academics, may experience less fulfilment of their psychological needs in learning and teaching activities in a commercialised higher education context. King and Bunce (2020) analysed data from in-depth interviews with academics to explore their views on the impact of marketisation on students' and their own experiences of psychological need fulfilment. The participants were 10 academics from five teaching-focused universities in England, UK, who had a range of 3–35 years of teaching experience. In the interviews, the academics were asked a series of questions covering a range of topics, including the perceived effects of marketisation on students' approaches to higher education, their students' motivation for attending university, and their own sense of control over their work. Their responses were analysed to explore the extent to which they thought the marketisation of higher education had supported or undermined their students' and their own fulfilment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Overall, the analysis revealed that the majority of academics perceived many of their students as displaying consumer-like attitudes and behaviours. They reported that these students seemed to want an "easy ride", expected to be given not "knowledge" but "information […] something that doesn't really need to be extended upon, or digested", and sometimes described how such students made explicit comments such as, "I pay your wages", and "I'm paying for my degree" (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 798). Importantly, the analysis also revealed that the academics perceived these student 'consumers' as lacking fulfilment of their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The majority of academics (7 out of 10) also felt that most of their students did not experience fulfilment of the need for autonomy:

> I think they've lost […] the fact that they should be studying themselves, and developing themselves, and reading around subjects. […] A number of times I get a student write to me and say, "Can you not just give me the answers?" (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 800).

Although the academics discussed multiple ways in which they tried to support students to engage in self-directed learning, the majority felt that the commercialised environment meant that they had limited control over their teaching, and that their own autonomy had been eroded as market pressure increased. One academic explained: "I feel I'm being […] steered, forced, coerced […] into designing my activities, my learning modules. […] I don't feel I have the control of how I plan and design [compared to] […] four, five years ago" (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 801). The corporate approach was seen as instrumentalist and stressful, diminishing academic freedom: "We obviously are target-driven. […] We have inquests and enquiries into why x, y, and z module didn't go well. […] It is very stressful. […] That is chipping away at my professionalism" (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 801).

In terms of competence, most academics (6 out of 10) felt that many of their students did not experience fulfilment of this basic psychological need. This manifested in various ways, including a lack of confidence, a desire to do the minimum amount of work needed to pass their course, and an unwillingness to engage in academic challenges: "I think they're, you know, they're quite scared of these activities where they have to sort of look at the literature themselves" (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 798). The academics also felt that a target-driven culture undermined their own experience of competence: "In some ways it's very stressful. […] We are increasingly being given targets that I think are unrealistic […] and more often than not, we are not meeting" (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 799). This in turn affected the academics' ability to help students to feel competent:

> I do not think [students] are improving because there are so many controls that stop us from improving them. I would push my students far more if I didn't have the cost of the National Student Survey behind me the whole time. (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 799)

Finally, the majority of academics (6 out of 10) felt that most students did not experience fulfilment of the need for relatedness, and often attributed this to the marketisation of higher education. They reported how many students now appeared to view academics as 'service providers' instead of partners or mentors: "[As academics] we've always prided […]

ourselves […] to try and be as approachable as possible. But I think unfortunately, what has superseded that is this new model, the student-as-consumer, […] 'I'm demanding that you help me'" (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 802). This lack of positive, reciprocal interaction was seen to erode trust and empathy, and to obstruct the development of genuine collaborative relationships between students and academics. This left the academics feeling distanced and undervalued.

However, some (4 out of 10) academics explained that students experienced good rapport with academics, and provided support and encouragement to their peers. In turn, this contributed towards fulfilling the academics' own experience of relatedness because they felt that they could make a valuable contribution to students' experience:

> They *do* learn from each other and they say, "Wow, have you seen that?" […] so there's lots of that, so sometimes I [say], "Where did you get that from, can you teach me that?" […] So they teach me as well, which is great (King & Bunce, 2020, p. 802).

The importance of the need for relatedness for supporting a deep approach to learning, and potentially weakening consumer identities, is supported by data from another study by Bunce, Bennett, and Jones (under review). In this study, relatedness was measured by the extent to which students felt a sense of belonging with other students in their study discipline (herein referred to as discipline identity). The study examined links between students' discipline identity, their approaches to learning, and academic performance. It also looked at how discipline identity affected student - or consumer – dissatisfaction. The strength of an individual's identity with a group will influence the extent to which they adopt the norms of that group. In England, UK, the group norm is consistently one of satisfaction with university, according to several years of the annual National Student Survey (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2013-2017). Therefore, it follows that students with a strong discipline identity are more likely to be satisfied and students with a weak discipline identity are more likely to be dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction was measured by asking participants to report the frequency with which they complained about their course. Complaining would risk exclusion from their discipline group, thus to maintain in-group

identity, members may minimise their level of complaining and focus on satisfying elements of their experience. With this in mind, Bunce, Bennett, and Jones hypothesised that a stronger discipline identity would relate to less complaining. Previous research has also found that students with a strong discipline identity are more likely to express attitudes that support a deep approach to learning (Smyth, Mavor, Platow, Grace, & Reynolds, 2015). Thus, Bunce, Bennett, and Jones also hypothesised that stronger discipline identity would have a positive effect on approaches to learning and academic performance. Data from almost 700 students studying in England, UK, supported these hypotheses. Frequency of complaining affected approaches to learning and was influenced by discipline identification: a stronger discipline identity was related to less complaining, and this subsequently related to taking more deep approaches and less surface approaches to learning, and higher academic performance. Therefore, fulfilment of the need for relatedness, defined here as a sense of closeness to other students in their discipline, appears to have an indirect but positive impact on academic performance through its relation to (dis)satisfaction, and approaches to learning.

In summary, the research presented thus far supports concerns raised by those who fear the detrimental impacts of the marketisation of higher education, specifically with regard to students' motivation for learning and academic performance. The commodification of education appears to undermine students' intrinsic motivation for achieving academic excellence by supporting an environment that potentially encourages surface approaches to learning. Furthermore, it appears to promote extrinsic motivation for studying, such as the view that university attendance is a means to a well-paid career. Research discussed in this chapter has shown that we can address these issues by understanding the impact of marketisation on both students and academic staff in terms of psychological need fulfilment. If the psychological needs that provide the foundation for intrinsic motivation are undermined, then learning and teaching among students and staff will not flourish.

Experiences of students from Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds in a commercialised higher education context
In the final part of this chapter, the experience of psychological need fulfilment in a marketised higher education context will be discussed by drawing on a recent study that has

explored the perspectives of students from BME backgrounds. These students are a particularly important disadvantaged group to consider because there is an inequitable attainment gap in the UK in the proportion of BME students who graduate with a 'good' degree, that is, a first class or upper second class degree, compared with white students (Equality Challenge Unit, 2017). In a study by Bunce, King, Saran, and Talib (2019), BME students studying health and social care subjects at one teaching-focused university in England, UK, participated in one of three focus groups. The aim of the study was to understand their experiences of basic psychological need fulfilment within the learning and teaching environment. The students were all female (reflecting the fact that most students who were studying this discipline were female) with a mean age of 32 years, and most described themselves as Black African. In general, the focus groups revealed that the basic needs of these students were not being met by the learning and teaching environment.

In relation to these students' experiences of the need for autonomy, in all three focus groups students felt that they could not be themselves and felt pressure to conform to white norms of behaviour:

> I know that when I'm out in public […] I get a bit like… like it's Queen's English. […] We have to put on the acceptable front, you know, the package… to prove yourself to fit into white society. […] You can't be yourself (Bunce, King, et al., 2019, p. 8).

They also noted the lack of diversity in the content of their curriculum, feeling that it lacked relevance and served to reinforce negative stereotypes associated with their minority group status. Although they did not experience explicitly controlling styles of teaching, they felt that the learning and teaching environment limited their freedom to express themselves and their identity as BME students. This created internal tension and, for some, ultimately diminished their intrinsic motivation for studying:

> We came with high expectations, everybody wants… well it's human nature to want to do well. […] But everything has been such a struggle, and we're just like, we can't be bothered now. […] I've gone through life, and I have had to shout and fight

and challenge and raise and re-raise and re-challenge […] and that is bloody tiring. I'm knackered, I am tired, I am fed up (Bunce, King, et al., 2019, p. 8).

In relation to the need for competence, some students reported how their families had often made them aware that they would have to be 'twice as good' to achieve the same outcomes as a white student:

> If you are of a minority, in order for you to achieve something that a white person achieves, you have to be twice as good, yeah, you can't just be on the same level as a white person (Bunce, King, et al., 2019, p. 7).

Despite their attempts to achieve this, however, many students experienced disappointment at not getting the grades that they felt capable of, and believed that their level of effort was not commensurate with the outcomes. They attributed this to a learning and teaching environment that failed to develop their potential, partly due to the existence of underlying racist stereotypes relating to their intellectual ability, and a lack of understanding of diversity among other students and staff. This often made them feel ignored or dismissed.

Finally, in terms of relatedness, some students were disappointed with the level of interaction and support that they received from other students and staff, thus undermining their experience of relatedness. It has been recognised that international BME students who were not born in the UK may require guidance to understand pedagogic practices and expectations, and are more likely to be first-generation university attenders (Dhanda, 2009). For example, one student explained:

> Some of the stuff I grew up with is not what's reflected here. […] My upbringing and how things are done over here, it's quite different. […] It was kind of like, I had to learn [to adapt to the UK higher education system] by myself (Bunce, King, et al., 2019, p. 7).

Other students described their feelings of isolation, which they felt may have been due to their accent or skin colour, which made them be perceived or treated as other. For example, two students explained: "I have an African accent. [...] I didn't have anyone to turn to. [...] I was isolated, it was like no one wanted to be with me", and "I know that the first thing that someone's going to see me as is a 'black woman'. [...] I'm more than that [...] but you can't change people and their perception of you" (Bunce, King, et al., 2019, p. 5-6).

Overall, this study revealed that their experiences as BME students had a predominantly negative impact on the extent to which their three psychological needs were fulfilled. Specific issues also arose for these students within the context of the commercialised nature of higher education (this information comes from unpublished data from that study). There was a reasonable amount of discussion about future career goals and employability, but this was in the context of using their degree to develop a fulfilling and meaningful career by making a positive difference in the health and social care workplace. Many students actually demonstrated a high level of intrinsic motivation by discussing how hard they were studying due to a genuine passion for their subject:

> I find I put, when I'm doing my work I put in more than I'm supposed to, because I'm trying, trying to, you know, reach my potential and try and get as high as I can (Bunce, King, et al., unpublished data).

In one focus group, however, students explicitly discussed their concerns about the nature of the learning and teaching environment in consumerist terms:

> I was still expecting that that amount of money that I had to pay, I had to get something, I had to get something from lecturers. [...] Basic tutorials where we can discus more these issues that we've learned about [...] Plus we should feel comfortable to be students, we should feel comfortable to ask questions in the classroom, like that's... but we don't feel safe to. So that's... not really. So if I'm to be honest, I need some refunds (Bunce, King, et al., unpublished data).

This consumerist sentiment is perhaps unsurprising given that they had not experienced an environment that nurtured their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It is particularly disappointing given the high levels of intrinsic motivation that they described experiencing at the beginning of their student journeys. However, it is insufficient to consider the dissatisfaction of these BME students purely in consumerist terms, that is, as customers dissatisfied with poor service provision. To fully address the needs of these students, the institutional and structural causes of racism that underpin their negative experiences urgently need to be tackled (see e.g., Universities UK & National Union of Students, 2019).

Conclusions and Future Directions

This chapter has summarised recent research that has explored some of the impacts of the commercialisation of higher education on students' education and their wider 'experience' at university. Unfortunately, a commercialised learning and teaching environment, in which concepts such as satisfaction and value for money are emphasised over other forms of educational value, seems to undermine students' motivation for learning and academic performance. It also seems to have a negative impact on academic teaching staff by compromising their intrinsic motivation for teaching and affecting their relations with students. The experiences of BME students also do not seem to be met by the commercialisation of higher education, which may compound structural and institutional causes of racism that they already face.

The perspective provided by self-determination theory offers a useful way to understand and address some of these issues in order to mitigate the negative impact of commercialisation. Commercialising higher education appears to undermine satisfaction of the three psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In part, this may be because it propels the view that higher education is an 'experience' involving teaching that is entertaining rather than challenging, and the view that a graduate degree is a means to an end, with that end being wealth creation or status. Consequently, this affects students' experience of intrinsic motivation for learning, which is the type of motivation that supports optimal performance and wellbeing.

Further research is needed to examine how marketisation may differentially affect the needs of different groups of students, both in terms of students studying different disciplines and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We also need to know more about how different functions within the university (e.g., academic, library, careers) can support students to experience fulfilment of their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness within a commercialised learning and teaching environment. Resources to enable students to reflect on their identities as 'learners' or 'consumers', and to support students who experience discrimination, can be found at the Student Identity and Inclusion project website, available here: www.brookes.ac.uk/SIIP. This resource enables students, either individually or within a group tutorial setting, to assess the extent to which they hold attitudes commensurate with being a consumer and/or learner of their higher education, and provides questions for reflection and discussion. It also provides information about how to hold discussion groups for students who experience discrimination to help them work with universities to support their psychological needs in the learning environment.

Ultimately, universities need to help to reduce the tension created by commercialisation between the role of students as learners and the new role of students as consumers of a 'service' provided by their university. Students need to identify with the more traditional role of 'learner' for a truly meaningful university 'experience', in which learning is enjoyed for its own sake and not done to fulfil an external imposition. It is clear that having students' and academics' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness at the forefront of practice within higher education institutions will go some way towards achieving this aim.

References
Anderson, R. (2016, February 8). University fees in historical perspective. Accessed from http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/university-fees-in-historical-perspective

Biggs, J. B. (1987) *Student Approaches to Learning and Studying*. Hawthorn, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Biggs, J. B., Kember, D. & Leung, D. Y. P. (2001) The revised two-factor study process questionnaire: R-SPQ-2F. *British Journal of Educational Psychology,* 71, 133-149.

Bolton, P. (2018, February 19) Tuition Fee Statistics (House of Commons Research Briefing SN00917). https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn00917/

Bunce, L. (2019) The voice of the student as a 'consumer'. In S. Lygo-Baker, I.M. Kinchin & N.E. Winstone, (Eds.) *Engaging Student Voices in Higher Education: Diverse Perspectives and Expectations in Partnership,* Palgrave Macmillan.

Bunce, L., Baird, A. & Jones, S. E. (2017) The student-as-consumer approach in higher education and its effects on academic performance. *Studies in Higher Education, 43(11):* 1958-1978.

Bunce, L. & Bennett, M. (2019) A degree of studying? Approaches to learning and academic performance among student 'consumers'. *Active Learning in Higher Education.* Accessed from
https://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/U9Y7R6PUQ7GRPG69NWTM/full#articleCitationDownloadContainer

Bunce, L., Bennett, M. & Jones, S. E. (under review) *Social identity processes in undergraduates' course (dis)satisfaction, approaches to learning, and academic performance.*

Bunce, L., King, N., Saran, S., & Talib, N. (2019) Experiences of black and minority ethnic (BME) students in higher education: Applying self-determination theory to understand the BME attainment gap. *Studies in Higher Education*, Advanced online publication DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2019.1643305

Daniels, J. & Brooker, J. (2014) Student identity development in higher education: implications for graduate attributes and work-readiness. *Educational Research, 56,* 65-76.

Deci, E. L., Eghrari, H., Patrick, B. C., & Leone, D. R. (1994) Facilitating internalization: The self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Personality, 62,* 119-142.

Deci, E. L., Ryan, R. M., Gagné, M., Leone, D. R., Usunov, J. & Kornazheva, B. P. (2001) Need satisfaction, motivation, and well-being in the work organizations of a former eastern bloc country: A cross-cultural study of self-determination, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *27,* 930-942.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000) The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*, 227-268.

Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L. G., & Ryan, R. M. (1991) Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist, 26*, 325-346.

Delucchi, M., & Korgen, K. (2002) "We're the customer-we pay the tuition": Student consumerism among undergraduate sociology majors. *Teaching Sociology*, *30*(1), 100-107.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. (2011) *Students at the Heart of the System.* Accessed from http://discuss.bis.gov.uk/hereform/all-documents/

Dhanda, M. (2009) *Understanding Disparities in Student Attainment: Black and Minority Ethnic Students' Experience.* Accessed from http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/equalopps/mdsummary.pdf

Duff, A., Boyle, E., Dunleavy, K., & Ferguson, J. (2004) The relationship between personality, approach to learning and academic performance. *Personality and Individual Differences, 36,* 1907-1920.

Entwistle, N. J. & Ramsden, P. (1983) *Understanding Student Learning.* London: Croom Helm.

Entwistle N. J. & Tait, H. (1995) *The Revised Approaches to Studying Inventory*. Edinburgh: Centre for Research on Learning and Instruction, University of Edinburgh.

Entwistle, N. J., McCune, V. & Tait, H. (2013) *Report of the Development and Use of the Inventories.* Accessed from https://tinyurl.com/yb97thg8

Equality Challenge Unit (2017) *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report.* Accessed from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-higher-education-statistical-report-2017/

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2020) Higher Education Graduate Outcomes Statistics: UK, 2017/18 - Salary and location of leavers in employment. Accessed from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/18-06-2020/sb257-higher-education-graduate-outcomes-statistics/salary

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2013-17) National Student Survey Results. Accessed from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/nss/results/

Holding, A. C., St-Jacques, A., Verner-Filion, J., Kachanoff, F., & Koestner, R. (2020) Sacrifice—but at what price? A longitudinal study of young adults' sacrifice of basic psychological needs in pursuit of career goals. *Motivation and Emotion*, *44*(1), 99-115.

King, N. & Bunce, L. (2020) Academics' perceptions of students' motivation for learning and their own motivation for teaching in a marketized higher education context. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 90,* 790-808*.*

Lenton, P. (2015) Determining student satisfaction: An economic analysis of the National Student Survey. *Economics of Education Review, 47,* 118-127.

Lindblom-Ylänne, A., Parpala, A., & Postareff, L. (2018) What constitutes the surface approach to learning in the light of new empirical evidence? *Studies in Higher Education, 44,* 2183-2195.

Marton, F. & Säljö, R. (1976) On qualitative differences in learning: I—Outcome and process. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 46,* 4-11.

Marton, F. & Säljö, R. (1984) Approaches to learning, in Marton, F., Hounsell, D. & Entwistle, N. (eds.) *The Experience of Learning*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

McMahon, W. W. (2009). *The Private and Social Benefits of Higher Education.* Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press.

Naidoo, R. & Jamieson, I. (2005) *Empowering participants or corroding learning? Towards a research agenda on the impact of student consumerism in higher education. Journal of Education Policy, 20*, 267-281.

Niemiec, C. P. & Ryan, R. M. (2009) Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice, *Theory and Research in Education*, *7*, 133-144.

Prat-Sala, M., & Redford, P. (2010) The interplay between motivation, self-efficacy, and approaches to studying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *80*(2), 283-305.

Richardson, M., Abraham, C., & Bond R. (2012) Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 138(2)*, 353-387.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68-78.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). Overview of self-determination theory: An organismic dialectical perspective. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 3–33). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Saunders, D. B. (2015) They do not buy it: Exploring the extent to which entering first-year students view themselves as customers. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 25(5),* 1-24.

Sheldon, K. M. & Krieger, L. S. (2007) Understanding the negative effects of legal education on law students: A longitudinal test of self-determination theory. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *33*(6), 883-897.

Smyth, L., Mavor, K. I., Platow, M. J., Grace, D. M. & Reynolds. K. J. (2015) Discipline social identification, study norms and learning approach in university students. *Educational Psychology, 35*, 53-72.

Tomlinson, M. (2017) Student perceptions of themselves as 'consumers' of higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 38*, 450-467.

Universities UK & National Union of Students. (2019). *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #closing the gap*. Accessed from https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf

Vansteenkiste, M., Simons, J., Lens, W., Sheldon, K. M., & Deci, E. L. (2004) Motivating learning, performance, and persistence: The synergistic effects of intrinsic goal contents and autonomy-supportive contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87,* 246-260.

Vansteenkiste, M., Ryan, R. M., Soenens, B. (2020) Basic psychological need theory: Advancements, critical themes, and future directions. *Motivation and Emotion, 44,* 1-31.

Williams, J. (2013) *Consuming Higher Education: Why Learning Can't be Bought*. London:

Bloomsbury.