

# Chapter 6

## Emotional Labor of Instruction Librarians: Causes, Impact, and Management.

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter consolidates aspects of emotional labor that apply to the work of academic faculty and staff. Perspectives will focus on the instructional work librarians do, in the classroom and through research support, and be applied to teaching faculty and support staff in higher education. The collaborative nature of the work, along with the environment and structural components that both enhance and challenge that work, are examined. The chapter describes risk factors that are common and unique to librarianship, such as academic culture, administrative demands, communication, and student support, applying these concepts more broadly in higher education. Pulling from the research on emotional labor, industrial psychology, and the authors' experience in libraries, strategies are presented that can be used or adapted by individuals and departments. Finally, the chapter discusses tensions inherent in the work of those who choose to perform emotional labor: the love of supporting students and faculty through academic and personal challenges versus the exhaustion that sometimes results.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Say the phrase “emotional labor” when describing how the semester is going and notice the recognition in the listener’s eyes. It’s fair to say that most employees in higher education perform work involving emotional labor daily, even though the details of each person’s experience differ. While we may recognize the concept of emotional labor at an intuitive level, we also benefit from a body of research on emotional labor in various work settings that can be mined to improve our own work environments.

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## ***Emotional Labor of Instruction Librarians***

Different industries have interpreted the concept according to their own professional values and goals. Readers who are interested in the range of definitions of emotional labor from various professional fields may turn to Bono and Vey's work (2005).

The concept of emotional labor initially described experiences of those working in the service industry (Hochschild, 1983). As professionals, educators provide a service to students and the community. The social environment and expectations from students and colleagues are ingredients for emotional labor. Faculty have more autonomy and flexibility than a food service employee, but emotions will always be a part of the social engagement inherent to education. This chapter will explore emotional labor of faculty within higher education, specifically within the context of disciplinary silos, collaboration, professional identity, and the work of academic librarians. Academic librarians are uniquely positioned as collaborators who routinely work across departments and supporting campus units affording particular insight and complexity to emotional labor among all faculty. It is worth noting that some academic libraries have faculty status for librarians, while others give their librarians staff status.

## **BACKGROUND**

Arlie Hochschild is credited with formally describing the concept of emotional labor in the book, *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 1983). She describes *emotional labor* as the outcome of dissonance between outward-facing feelings and emotions, or our public face, and those emotions that are truly felt. This is something faced every day by service industry workers, where much of the research originated. The concept has since matured with the research. It is now more complex and nuanced, but essentially remains consistent with Hochschild's ideas. To understand the concept at a practical level, think of a salesperson assisting a customer in the purchase of an item of clothing. The salesperson has been attentive and responsive, pulling different colors and sizes as requested. Unfortunately, the customer is demanding and rude throughout the selection process. Our salesperson is exhausted and irritated by the rude behavior but must remain helpful and pleasant. The employer's requirements are very clear on exactly this matter; outward-facing behavior must meet prescribed norms. The sales clerk will hide their feelings.

Most of us have experienced a similar situation at some point in life. Emotions can't be avoided and social situations are their hunting ground. In the moment, we experience the emotion and work at recovery after the fact (or during, if we are particularly adept). Our understanding of this experience and the underlying processes involved has been the subject of much research since Hochschild coined the phrase. The degree to which the emotions an individual feels and the emotions they express differ determines the amount of emotional labor they feel. Hochschild describes mechanisms we use to manage the display of emotions in the workplace and identified two fundamental drivers, surface acting and deep acting. Depending on the situation and emotion, we may *surface act* (suppress true feelings or express completely fake feelings) or *deep act* (express the desired and authentic feeling, even at times when we aren't quite feeling them: for example, trying to demonstrate energy and enthusiasm during an early morning class). The salesperson described above might be doing either. If they truly believe that the valued customer should not be criticized, the pleasant "act" will represent deep acting. In this case, the salesperson embraces the employer's rules, even in the face of stress. Should the salesperson truly not believe in the "customer is always right" mantra, they will be surface acting. Outwardly, each can look the same. This definition and process of emotional labor creates the measurable construct, but misses much of the texture that we feel in our daily work. Diefendorf and colleagues (2005) investigated the

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