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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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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expression of naturally felt emotions as variables distinct from surface and deep acting. Their research supports the idea that deep acting, surface acting, and naturally expressed emotions are unique constructs. They pose important considerations, specifically the role that personality factors play into the expression of natural emotions (not acting). People who measured higher in extraversion or agreeableness were more likely to display spontaneous or natural emotions. This seems intuitive and would make an interesting area for further research. These and other lurking variables may play an important role in the degree of emotional labor experienced by the individual and clues as to its effective management.

The occurrence of emotional labor does not seem to have argument. The impact or consequence remains an area of question and research. The negative outcomes of high emotional labor can be destructive, leading to job burnout and low job satisfaction (Jeung, Kim, & Chang, 2018). At the same time, positive emotions can be just as much a part of the emotional labor equation, and provide a high degree of satisfaction. Wharton (2009) provides a thoughtful literature review from the lens sociology on the complexities surrounding emotional labor, causes, and consequences. Studies have not shown significant relationships between the consequences of emotional labor, deep acting, or surface acting when multiple environmental and personal factors are considered. We can consider this complexity in light of higher education. Many people who work in the field of higher education enjoy the emotionally charged challenges of, for example, helping students to cope with the individual academic and social challenges they face in this new setting. They also tend to have autonomy and authority as educators. Our understanding has benefited from a large body of research that has attempted to better define the attributes of this construct, the risk factors to individuals and organizations, the causes, and strategies for prevention and management. There is also a large body of literature on the interlaced positive and negative effects of emotional labor in fields where many employees have chosen the field partially for the emotional contexts, such as nursing, emergency medical response, or teaching. (See, for example, Yin, Huang, & Chen, 2019; Newman, Guy, & Mastracci, 2009). It is notable that many, but not all, of these are female-dominated professions.

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Professional Identity

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) look at the role that professional identity plays within the emotional labor process in the context of social identity theory. Social identity theory concerns the personal sense of self, based on membership in a group. Their work considered the impact that self-identification with one’s role may have as a moderating influence on that emotional labor. Their analysis of the literature links one’s sense of identity, social identity in particular, to the variables that involve emotional labor. When we strongly identify with a group and conform to the expectations of that group, we are our authentic selves. The authors make the point that acting can be a tool in this case: one that protects the authentic self. Relatedly, Wharton (2009) discusses the idea that a frontline service employee will see threats to their sense of identity-based on an employer’s demands regarding customer interaction. We can draw the connection back to Hochschild (1983) and the need to surface or deep act. The very definition of acting is to perform, or adopt a different persona.

Within the context of social identity there is much to consider when looking at higher education. The personal commitment and years of education required for academic positions certainly solidify one’s
identification as an educator, researcher, or specialist in the field. The complex interaction of identity and emotional labor has been and continues to be explored within management and workplace dynamics (Winkler, 2018). Emotional labor comes into play when one’s identity is incongruent with the expectations of others. Academic faculty have an identity that is firmly rooted within their discipline. Everyone knows what the history or chemistry professor does on campus, even with variations inherent in rank and institution. This is not the case for everyone in higher education, such as academic librarians, members of the registrar’s office, and many more.

Affiliate (formerly referred to as “adjunct”) faculty provide one example where professional identity can be incongruent. These individuals are subject experts with similar or the same credentials as permanent faculty. The work they do is within the disciplinary context of their academic department. The 100% teaching appointment inherent with the position, however, typically lacks responsibility in research, scholarship, administration, and curriculum decisions, all core to the academic mission and highly valued. The employer structurally and legally limits the affiliate role. Affiliates also miss out on chances to significantly shape the environment in which they work, as well as the professions they belong to. Opportunities for professional development that permanent faculty enjoy can be difficult or costly to pursue, depending on the employment contract. Such an environment will likely require greater emotional labor in order to maintain the individual’s internal sense of professional identity that led them to a career in higher education to begin with. The commonalities with the early work on frontline service workers conforming to norms that are at odds with their true sense of self are rather striking. These faculty take great value in their expertise as both researchers and educators; this work is their identity.

It is worth noting that identity manifests in different groups of affiliate faculty differently, due to differences in composition of their working lives. A part-time university teaching position that a full-time accountant uses to stay connected as an educator is entirely different from the affiliate faculty whose professional goal is a tenure line and the chance to conduct research. Some affiliate faculty may have important personal and family struggles, too, as they may be in situations where they teach numerous classes to make ends meet, yet lack health insurance or sufficient income. The tensions related to both survival and stretching toward professional goals create emotional labor for those individuals. By contrast, a professional concert violinist who teaches a limited number of music lessons at a local university may base their identity around their role as a performer. They may feel that they have indeed reached their major professional goals; the additional affiliate role helps to shape the future of their art. They may also have sufficient income and other support through their primary employer. Of course, affiliates’ personal situations come in a huge range—they do not exist on a simple binary of struggle versus ease and contentment. Considering the work of Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), the moderating influence of self-identity would be key to professional satisfaction for many people. Personal enrichment and confidence in one’s self makes some negative experience or conflict more manageable. In such cases, internal professional identity along with environmental variables will influence the level of incongruity that person deals within their working life and their emotional labor.

Identity, Expertise, and Morale within Academic Organizational Structure

Thus far, consideration has focused on the broad status levels of faculty. The organizational and social structure that exists on a typical, modern college or university is also a contributor to the emotional lives of employees. Disciplinary silos are a long and traditional part of academia. Such organizational structure fosters the professional identity of the members. Connecting these concepts, we can envision how
emotional labor would stem from divides between academic departments and non-discipline-specific units such as the library. Faculty who teach within a discipline may be broadly trusting of the expertise of other traditional academics: the fact that they are experts in whatever subject they study and that they know how to teach it. Such understanding would even be deeply embedded in the history of academic culture. Libraries and student support units have a shorter history as intellectual contributors to the scholarly mission. The modern university environment is young in regards to the diversity of players among the academic ranks. Therefore, instruction librarians and others with other nontraditional teaching roles stand as an unknown for many academics. Kendrick portrays this struggle as a contributor to some academic librarians’ low morale (2017, pp. 870-871).

Librarians and other support faculty do teach as experts in their discipline. In the information literacy classroom, and in planning communications prior to information literacy instruction, a professional misunderstanding often leads to either somewhat confrontational questioning of librarians’ qualifications and teaching experience, or to indirect questioning that comes across as microaggressive. Not knowing the exact nature of academic librarians’ expertise is fair. However, the microaggressive questions and insinuations—sometimes in front of the faculty member’s students—take an emotional toll. These may manifest as frequent interruptions during an instruction session, or questions such as “Did you have to have a degree to get your job?” or “Have you ever taught before?” Librarian Arroyo-Ramirez and colleagues (Arroyo-Ramirez, Chou, Freedman, Fujita, & Orozco, 2018, p. 107) begin describing common microaggressions in the library profession by outlining a common definition of the microaggression: “...brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward individuals from marginalized communities” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007, p. 271). It is emotionally difficult bringing expertise in information literacy, experience in teaching, and more into the classroom and facing skepticism and microaggressive behaviors regarding one’s perceived skill sets.

Librarians encourage faculty to ask honest questions about their academic backgrounds and skills as long as the faculty and receptive to and respectful of the answers. Libraries and other units whose members’ expertise are often misunderstood or questioned can take some proactive steps as well. In-person outreach to academic departments and university administrative units builds awareness. Clear statements about mission and descriptions of expertise on units’ websites can facilitate understanding among university faculty and administrators who initiate the process of reaching out. This will likely be a common type of sticking point some of the time—but effects can be mitigated. Science librarian Peggy Pritchard (2010) presents a compelling story of her path to becoming a close collaborator with faculty at her institution. Her article clearly outlines her path from starting out as a new librarian experiencing skepticism among science faculty, to valued collaborator. It is important to note that she did have to actively verbalize and demonstrate her value to faculty while building successful relationships.

For this and other academic or disciplinary silo-related challenges, another major, proactive step that libraries and other units can take is making sure that they have representation on university-level committees as often as is possible. Depending on the institution, this may require lobbying and other support from the library’s administrators. When representation seems to make sense, but the university actively declines to welcome membership from a particular unit, it’s important to ask why, and to open up discussion if necessary.
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Identity Outside of Disciplinary Silos

When faculty work outside of a disciplinary context, their role within the academic organization may be less obvious. Instructional designers, for example, often have faculty status and teach classes. They also provide a service function for departments and faculty across the institution. The aspect of their role, designing a course that is owned and taught by someone else, will likely involve considerable negotiation. What area of expertise has greater rank in the decision making for that course design? There is a fine line here. The subject specialist faculty member teaching the course takes the lead on content creation. The instructional designer has expertise in course design. This individual should take the lead on course structure. There will be cases where disagreement occurs and content creation conflicts with recommended course design. Where there is recognition of expertise and respect for each person’s role, emotional labor will be less for all parties.

Similarly, the role of the academic librarian can be perceived inconsistently across campus. Professional status or academic rank of librarians varies within libraries and institutions, within the profession, and culturally. It has also changed over time. In contrast to other faculty positions in higher education, the work of an instruction librarian may not be accurately understood or perceptions can be based on outmoded practice. It’s not unusual for an instruction librarian to repeatedly define their role to others on their own campus, explaining to each new group or individual faculty member that they teach in the classroom, design curriculum, and assess student learning. Having to routinely justify one’s place at the table requires considerable emotional labor, strength, and confidence. Therein lies an incongruence with the external perception of professional identity and the internal professional identity experienced by the individual.

This is not necessarily the fault of the perceiver. Our culture has taught and reinforced perceptions about different roles in the workplace. It takes experience and effort to see beyond such norms. This exists just as much for librarians themselves, and impacts their own internally perceived professional identity. Unlike most academic faculty, the work of librarians has undergone significant change within a fairly short time, certainly within the last 20 to 30 years.

Campus Planning, Development, and Communication Across Silos

For many academic librarians who teach, differences between academic departments and the library are often the most common challenges. These manifest in numerous ways. Librarians are often unaware of whatever change is afoot in departments—even large-scale change such as the creation of new degree programs—until the change has been carried out. This leads to librarians planning retroactively. For example, in the case of an unexpected new degree program, a liaison librarian may find herself studying the curriculum and goals of the program, considering where to recommend placement of information literacy instruction, coordinating funding and purchase of library materials, making connections with new faculty members and more, all in the rushed span of a few weeks. While new programs are sources of excitement and vigor, bypassing a librarian’s involvement from the beginning leads to frustration and a sense of rush for all involved. At a more subtle emotional level, there is also the question of why the librarian was not involved ahead of time. The librarian will need to reach into some of that professional identity and embrace their contribution, not taking the lack of communication personally, in order to minimize the emotional labor. Of course, this doesn’t rule out some authentic expression of annoyance,
professionally displayed (deep acting and naturally expressed emotions). As previously discussed, our understanding of the literature points to a positive outcome from such emotional labor management.

This example of the new program coming as a “surprise” to a librarian is only one example, but it is a common one. The example highlights a phenomenon seen commonly in higher education: the fact that even large changes may be invisible across units. They are often shared with key stakeholders such as librarians far later than is ideal. Stakeholders who connect with programs in essential ways are often left to plan ways to support models that would have been much easier to work with had the librarian been involved from the start. This sort of situation also frequently leads to programs missing out on opportunities for student support that the library and other units could have helped to integrate.

The good news is that this sort of challenge can be relatively easy to avoid from the beginning. By involving librarians and other key stakeholders from a much earlier stage in the planning process, they can build in strong support in terms of information literacy and other factors from the beginning. Libraries’ program administrators, as well as librarians serving on university committees, can help larger units within an institution learn about the points at which librarians’ involvement can be most effective. This allows faculty who are planning new programs to template libraries’ involvement in advance, and to plan for strategic points of librarian involvement. The simple reduction of stressors here is notable for everyone involved.

**Scenarios**

Many academic libraries teach hundreds of classes on how to do research every semester. Such informational literacy instruction is foundational to the mission of the library. There are many variations on such instruction, one of the most common being an on-demand, single-session class. A librarian does this type of instruction at the request of campus faculty. These classes prepare students to find and synthesize relevant literature for a research project. Upon receiving the request for library instruction, the librarian communicates with the course instructor, then develops a lesson plan and activities based on the research assignment and course goals. This model of library instruction plays out every semester in academic libraries, accomplishing what is intended, to prepare students for their research.

Fairly often, however, faculty request library instruction that is not directly connected to course assignments or goals. Experienced librarians generally view this sort of session as ineffective since engagement and retention are generally low. Individual librarians can work with faculty to adapt plans and better connect the session to assignments. Libraries’ instruction departments can support their librarians in these efforts by encouraging consistency in librarians’ responses to this sort of request.

**Lesson Planning**

A library instruction lesson plan for a graduate class concerns the scholarly conversation (scholars responding to and stimulating each other’s ideas through their writings) in great depth, citation mining or tracking, and the non-linear aspects of research. The seminar will fill the 90 minutes of class time, easily. At the last minute, maybe even during the session, the professor asks the librarian to add a few more time-intensive topics, such as teaching the basics of EndNote citation management software. The librarian is now caught in a challenging bind, knowing that the lesson is overloaded, but wanting to meet as many of the faculty member’s wishes as possible. In addition, if this is the first time they have worked with the faculty member and most of the students, complicated aspects of relationship-building
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and trust-building come into the scenario. For readers who come from areas of higher education other than academic libraries, this has some parallels with the challenges associated with deciding how much material to cover during a semester: being pulled between the value of deep study versus breadth of knowledge and preparation for future studies. There can be several components impacting emotional labor for the librarian in this situation. The most immediate is the difficult balance between supporting the faculty member’s intentions and the librarian’s own judgment on best supporting students. Another is the potentially microaggressive attitudes toward their professional expertise and roles. The lesson plan was carefully considered and crafted to specifically address the needs of the students. Adjustments need the same consideration. More seriously impacting the librarians’ emotional labor is the assumption that this tool can be taught with no preparation. In the moment, the librarian will either grudgingly provide the instructional service or be irritated by the request and state why they can’t fit it in. The later will create less emotional labor but require more confidence.

Pedagogies and Content

Several of the aforementioned tensions arise again when academic librarians and other non-discipline-specific experts in higher education provide some instruction for faculty. Julien and Given discuss several variations of the ambiguity and tension between instruction librarians and classroom faculty in terms of “role ambivalence” (2003). Some of the tensions that arise in these situations again focus on perceptions of a librarian’s expertise. The nature of collaboration on a lesson between a teaching librarian and a faculty member with deep discipline-specific expertise often becomes complicated. One of the major questions that arises—and often goes unspoken—is how much the content of a library instruction session will be a collaboration with the faculty member, and how much it will focus on the librarian’s expertise in information literacy. Julien and Given provide a helpful outline and discussion of major types of faculty misperceptions about librarians’ work and skills (2003, pp. 177-180), which librarians can use to help avert trouble in advance.

Minor power struggles sometimes happen when faculty and their collaborators share the classroom. Questions over who has power in terms of content, time, atmosphere, and the nature of interactions become complicated. Traditional teaching faculty may come away from less-than-ideal interactions feeling simple frustration or deciding to forego library instruction the following semester. Teaching librarians and others who support students and the curriculum with ongoing skills, however, often leave tough sessions with a sense of disrespect.

A Changing Landscape of Professional Culture

Professional Identity of Service

Part of the current tension arising from miscommunication over professional roles, expertise, and authority has to do with the history of librarianship itself. The work of librarians has shifted away from providing information and resources to students and faculty to one that is more collaborative, such as conducting research consultations and teaching. Technology has given the scholar and student immediate access to powerful search tools. The librarian’s role as a necessary intermediary between human and information source is largely gone. Information is available and easy to get to. Discovery systems (single search boxes that skim a library’s collections), Google Scholar, and many tools on the free web require minimal skill
to use. As long as the researcher can get beyond the paywall, relevant and scholarly information is in reach. This isn’t to say that the use of these search systems isn’t without challenges, but technology has altered the landscape as it relates to needing high-level search skills to find information. The first-year undergraduate can usually find the required number of scholarly sources for their paper, even if they don’t fully know what a scholarly source is or why it’s needed. This has changed what librarians teach and the way it is taught, impacting the pedagogy used in library instruction programs. That pedagogy is now built on teaching information literacy rather than on navigation of a search tool. While instruction librarians know this well, the campus faculty they collaborate with often do not. Having an instruction library teaches students to perform efficient searching while developing judgment about the sources from which they gather information supports student success immensely. When librarians negotiate to incorporate greater information literacy content into courses, they have powerful effects on learning. The negotiation, however, often requires extensive time and emotional labor.

Academic librarians entering the profession in the 1990s developed lesson plans that were informed by skills-based standards provided by the American Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Many subsequently experienced the pedagogical transformation initiated by membership of ACRL in the retiring of the Standards and the development of and switch to the Framework for Information Literacy. The Standards to Framework transformation described by Foasberg (2015) was experienced in practice by working librarians. Campus faculty may have been invited to participate in the efforts at their own university library, but for the most part, this change was insular to libraries. Relatedly, it might be fair to say that many campus faculty learned to do research without formal instruction on information literacy. They may have had instruction via one or two undergraduate classes, which would likely have been based on the older ACRL Standards, or learned on their own. Their most meaningful information literacy experience would have been as graduate students, with deep searching and citation mining within disciplinary resources. What the campus faculty sees as essential for a student’s success is likely based on their own experience. They know the value of academic databases first hand and don’t want their students to plagiarize or use Google. Campus faculty who request a laundry list of tools in the library session are thinking about it from a completely different perspective than the librarian is. Often the requesting professor has not thought through the relationship between the tool and important aspects of the research process, such as critically evaluating results or learning why a scholarly article is important. The librarian can be caught in the middle when their lesson plan doesn’t cover the tools or mechanics of searching to the extent the course professor expected. Furthermore, many academic libraries use the phrase “instruction services” to describe the information literacy program. This language may cast the librarian’s role as that of a service provider. When a service provider is told to do what the customer (course professor) wants, this can be at odds with what they (the students) need. This complex arrangement of service provider and customer, with students in the middle, is one reason that viewing education through a customer service lens has some flaws.

For those librarians with a number of years in the practice, their internal professional identity has already gone through substantial changes and developed congruence with current professional norms. This would benefit the emotional labor output. New librarians should already have that sense of identity. As described in the instruction scenarios above, conflict will instead come from external perceptions (course professor) of the role of the library instructor. This can eat away at the individual sense of professional identity as well. If what you are being asked to teach by your campus colleagues can be delivered perfectly well by a streaming video, you may feel concerned that your value is diminished in faculty
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members’ and students’ eyes. Misalignment between individual and professional identities occurs when academic librarians are asked to teach content that does not effectively address student needs.

Perceptions of Role

People who work in many professions may laughingly say that no one has any idea what their work really consists of. Unique to librarians however, is that people have experience working with librarians outside of academia; in a public library or in a P-12 school library. This can set up certain cultural expectations of what a librarian does, most notably that of a service role. That expectation was shaped by seeing a different professional model from what is in most universities. Academic librarians who work at university research support desks see this often. Even though the job of the librarian is to teach students how to find information, the expectation of the student may be that the librarian will retrieve information for them. It’s not unheard of that a student will approach the desk and ask the librarian to find and email them the sources they need for their paper. The conversation that follows often involves heated emotion on both sides, a great deal of negotiation, and significant emotional labor for both the librarian and the student.

The interrelationship of identity and emotional labor is complex and contextual. How might aspects of a faculty member’s status impact the emotional labor involved in handling their flawed request for library instruction or other assistance? A librarian who has advanced rank in the organization can more comfortably negotiate regarding a request. A brand-new librarian, one who belongs to a racial minority, or one who comes from a marginalized sector of society often feels less comfort and power in these situations. Hua (2018) describes this with nuance and emotion as it relates to women of color in academia. The energy it takes to craft the response to even a well-intentioned, but implicitly biased request, is high. The repeated expenditure of this energy takes a toll. Given the scenario above, if the professor in Computer Science were on the tenure track, or belonged to a marginalized group, and the history professor who asked the favor was tenured and well established, the answer “No” would be extremely uncomfortable, and possibly detrimental to their career.

Many individuals working in higher education hope that their professions will become more diverse over time. Increasing diversity would bring intersectional identities to light. It would also increase support and status for individuals in marginalized groups.

Intermediary Between Students and Faculty

Everyone, regardless of professional or personal roles, knows the challenge of being caught in the middle of awkward interactions or tough relationships. Academic librarians, as well as other higher education employees with interdisciplinary roles, frequently end up in the space between an individual (often struggling) student and a traditional, discipline-specific faculty member.

For librarians in particular, unexpected challenges often arise in some situations when students consult them on improving their current substandard performance in a class. The motivation is great—but as the librarian learns more, the situation becomes messy in one of several ways, and the emotional labor component increases.

Sometimes the librarian finds that the assignment that the student has received has caused problems, for reasons that have no relation to the student’s practices or work ethic. Rather, the faculty member who created the assignment has assigned something that is outdated or poorly planned. While academic librarians tend to have an unwritten guideline of not actively criticizing students’ professors, deciding
how to respond becomes challenging. They are pulled between this respect for the instructor and their frequent role as students’ collaborator and ally.

In a handful of situations, the librarians may also question whether they need to stand up and advocate for students. For example, they may see an assignment with information-gathering instructions that are clearly outdated. They can, of course, suggest that students who bring these questions to the library contact their professors about the outdated information-gathering methodologies. Yet many students feel shy or otherwise hesitant to approach a librarian for help in this situation. Is it best to play the role of advocate and contact the instructor? Or is it best to stay out of the situation and respect the instructor’s intent, even if it appears from the outside to be misguided? Whatever decision the librarian makes, tensions between supporting the students and respecting the faculty member’s autonomy exist.

Academic librarians who teach credit-bearing courses at their institutions, often report a different kind of tension in roles and allegiances. Those who spend time assisting students with research often develop the aforementioned role of the ally when they relate to students. The practiced methods and rhetoric of helping someone to excel in their courses and work toward their goals becomes more complicated when grading is involved. Suddenly, hoping that everyone excels, and filtering the encouraging language that many librarians use instinctively becomes more complicated. Even librarians with a great deal of experience in teaching credit-bearing courses often find that the code-switching between these two roles requires a great deal of effort and never feels quite comfortable. This is true for other university employees who occasionally teach credit-bearing courses but spend the bulk of their time playing the role of ally to struggling students. While experience helps to lessen the tension, the incongruence will always be there.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Administrative Challenges and Opportunities From Within

Thus far, the chapter has primarily discussed challenges that originate from outside the library or other unit. However, a portion of many teaching librarians’ and others’ day-to-day stress comes from challenges in administrative support from within their home units. Librarians often have numerous levels of administrators above them, some of whom have experience and interest in academic libraries—and others who do not. Administrators at these varied levels make judgments about librarians’ roles, about funding, all of which affect librarians’ capacities to work. Working through administrative obstacles in addition to the task at hand contributes to emotional exhaustion. These concepts align closely with Fouquereau and colleagues’ discussions of “perceived supervisor support,” which the authors describe as a major factor in negative emotional labor in the workplace (Fouquereau et al., 2019, p. 278).

Administrators both within and above academic libraries and other units sometimes bring an additional challenge: the gap in time since they have last taught or had significant interactions with students. As the discussion on academic silos indicated, misinterpretation can easily occur when we isolate our work from each other and fail to recognize each other’s expertise. Regardless of where the challenges occur, within the primary unit or higher, systemic and institutionally ingrained behavior is difficult to mitigate. It is likely easier to start at the micro or even individual level. The research discussed previously shows complexity within the personal and environmental aspects of emotional labor management. This can be used to our advantage when considering solutions.
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Strategies for Mitigating the Effects of Emotional Labor

Departments within institutions of higher education can take many practical steps to support their employees as they experience emotional labor. One thing to reiterate is that, as this chapter mentioned earlier, emotional labor exists on a spectrum. Individual employees also experience emotionally intense interactions differently. That said, interactions that draw heavily on emotional labor are often taxing, no matter how the people involved ultimately feel about it. Thus, a writing center instructor who coaches a struggling, anxious student through revisions for a paper for an hour may feel quite satisfied; she may also feel exhausted on several levels. She knows that this has been an hour well spent, and feels good about the student’s future progress. Yet she still feels emotionally spent and needs to recharge. Employees who support students through even more intense struggles, or those without quick resolution—for example, counseling center employees or disability services staff—can struggle with considerably more intense emotional exhaustion.

Departments Supporting Employees and Colleagues Supporting Each Other

What can departments do to support employees as they work through emotionally intensive loads? Time can be a major factor. Employees need to be able to break up periods of emotionally intense work, rather than working at it for hours on end. This, in turn, points to the importance of sharing emotionally intensive duties: allocating them among as many employees as possible. It’s worth discussing whether members of a department find it most appropriate to divide emotionally intensive duties evenly—for example, all employees providing two hours of a certain service per week—or whether they should tailor loads according to individual comfort levels and preferences. Arguments can often be made in both directions.

Departments can function as a community to support members who perform emotionally intensive labor. Two common options in higher education are providing more formal educational opportunities for department members and organizing communities of practice. Educational opportunities often come through the various professional organizations relevant to members of a department. They may come in the form of webcasts, reading materials that are recognized as particularly high quality and shared by an organization, conference programs, and many more. In the case of emotional labor, they may focus on skills associated with emotionally intense situations such as supporting students in times of great stress. This sort of training takes a proactive stance, helping employees to prepare for future situations in terms of skills and confidence. Alternatively, they may focus on the idea of emotional labor itself. Taking advantage of training offered by programs within the university, such as a center for faculty development, can be powerful experiences as well. While these will not be tailored as closely to a specific area of work, the broader themes often resonate. They are also opportunities to talk about shared information and concerns with faculty and staff from other areas of the university, and to better understand the emotional labor that others perform.

Communities of practice are a more active option for supporting each other. Some larger instruction departments in libraries choose to introduce internal communities of practice. Universities can also offer communities of practice that welcome members with a range of roles across the institution. Communities of practice often focus on professional learning, with a certain set of goals in mind, whether they relate to a set of work duties or to a set of concepts that applies more broadly across the institution. A great deal of scholarly and professional literature exists discussing communities of practice with a range of purposes. For a basic introduction to communities of practice and professional learning in higher
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education, Arthur Linet’s article “Communities of Practice in Higher Education: Professional Learning in an Academic Career” (2016) provides structure and a strong introduction for those interested in starting a community of practice. Communities of practice tend to come together on a regular basis to offer intensive discussion and active learning around a central theme. Rather than bringing in “experts” to lead sessions, community members support each other in learning.

Department and community members can support each other through emotional labor in other ways as well. While it can be challenging to support each other in the moment, while the most emotionally intense interactions with students and university colleagues happen, colleagues can help each other to prepare. Somewhat counterintuitively, this can happen both before and after intensive interactions. Colleagues can talk through common types of intense situations before they occur, or discuss a range of ways that a situation might have been handled after it happens, in preparation for next time. While an employee might feel ambivalent or upset about how a certain situation went—perhaps a conversation with a tearful or angry student that didn’t resolve well—it’s meaningful to have a range of ideas for handling a similar situation in the future. Often that’s the best that people can ask for in the real world. It’s also helpful to draw on the varying strengths that different members of a department bring. Some are likely more comfortable than others in listening actively while students talk about the sometimes shocking challenges that they face at home, which compound the challenges they face in school. Others converse well with students who are angry at perceived barriers and injustices that the university puts in their way. Still, more have skills for talking with university administrators about departmental issues and needs, which requires a mature set of communication skills. It can be helpful for colleagues to share viable mental scripts and techniques for guiding conversations in ways that allow students to express themselves but work in productive directions. Sharing scripts with each other can help empower colleagues in a range of situations, even though individuals have to tailor strategies to their own personalities and scenarios.

External Representation and Connections

The past several ideas have focused on giving employees the skills to better handle emotionally intense situations and to feel more comfortable and confident in doing so. It’s also crucial to support colleagues within the larger structures of the institution. Earlier sections of this chapter shared examples of challenges that librarians, for example, face when they find that major changes have taken place at the university without them being made aware of them. A new major appears on a list of university degrees after years of planning, but only weeks before classes start. Units such as libraries can make a strong effort to ensure that employees represent them as often as possible on committees that make or discuss these choices. Certain committees that discuss curriculum or other high-level planning can help employees in all units to stay connected and informed. They also strengthen relationships across campus.

Within large units such as a university library, or a college within a university, administrators can support their employees by staying in closer contact and offering opportunities to interact directly. This also helps to better tailor support to real situations and real needs, which can be more satisfying for employees and more efficient for everyone. Connections are at the heart of all of these improvements.
CONCLUSION

Arlie Hochschild began the conversation about emotional labor a long time ago. Apparently, it wasn’t a short-lived trend. How can we not care about this emotional weight that we manage on a daily basis, intentional or not? Research has brought us new understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of personality, environment, and culture. People in many organizations, discipline areas, and industries have and continue to shape the discussion. When specific workplace conditions, such as teaching, are examined there comes a benefit to exploring highly specific causes of emotional labor. We can better identify and measure known variables associated with these causes, honing in on contributing factors and outcomes, positive and negative. Even with this focus, however, one can suspect that there are many lurking variables that would impact the individual experience of emotional labor and the outcomes. Research has just begun to scrape the surface of that investigation. Where there might be limitations in what quantitative research can show on the complexities of emotional labor in the higher education environment, qualitative research may show some paths to further exploration. The nature of the work performed on the academic campus is diverse, as are the people who do that work. Herein lies another focus for future research. Other aspects worthy of research include deeper exploration of emotional labor and specific identities, emotional labor experienced while teaching in the online environment, and how personal history shapes present emotional labor. Meanwhile, we know enough to improve our environment at the micro-level; encourage each other, provide support, and enjoy the positive emotions that fill our work.

REFERENCES


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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Academic Library**: A library that is attached to an institution of higher education that supports the teaching, learning and research mission of the institution.

**Collaboration**: Working together cooperatively with others on an intellectual endeavor.

**Emotional Management**: Regulating or controlling one’s own emotions.

**Job Satisfaction**: The sense of personal fulfillment, contentedness, or pleasure that comes from one’s work.

**Morale**: The sense of emotional or mental well-being, usually in regards to the task or purpose at hand.

**Professional Identity**: One's sense of self as a member of a profession or work.

**Teaching**: The practice of helping others learn.