



Emotional labour

Best practice guidelines

Disclaimer

'**Emotional labour**' is an academic concept that has become popularised by the media in recent years. Despite referring to a specific type of emotion management, the term 'emotional labour' is also often used to describe concepts more appropriately captured by terms like '**affective labour**' or '**emotion work**'. Due to the conflation and interrelation of these terms, this guide will explore each of them.

Definitions

Emotional labour refers to regulating one's own emotions for the sake of others, specifically as a component of paid work (Grandey 2000). In workplaces, it is considered 'professional' to suppress emotions that are related to one's personal life as well as avoid having emotional reactions to situations that occur in the workplace.

In her foundational texts on the topic, Hochschild (1979 & 1990) differentiates emotional labour from **emotion work**, which refers to a similar type of emotional regulation that occurs outside of workplaces. For example, in one's personal life, an individual might suppress emotional reactions for the purpose of maintaining amity within romantic, platonic, or familial relationships.

Rather than focusing on regulating one's own emotions, **affective labour** refers to the act of adjusting one's behaviour to moderate the emotions of others (Hardt & Negri 2000). For example, many roles require customer-facing representatives to adopt a subservient persona to increase the comfort and satisfaction of customers. Outside of the workplace, an extreme form of affective labour is the effort that the victim of an abusive relationship might put into modifying their own behaviour to avoid angering the perpetrator.

Emotional labour and marginalised groups

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A disproportionate amount of emotional labour, affective labour, and emotion work falls on marginalised people, who have been socially conditioned to believe they are 'better at it' than dominant social groups (Hackman 2015). This socialisation is what leads to professions that require more emotional and affective labour—like customer service workers, teachers, counsellors, administrators, and nurses—to be considered 'women's work' (James 1989). It is also why marginalised individuals are more likely to be stay-at-home parents than their counterparts from dominant social groups.

A common form of emotion work performed by marginalised people is the act of explaining or advocating for their marginalisation to non-marginalised (or differently marginalised) individuals. This could include answering questions about their identities or needs, and otherwise educating well-intentioned but ignorant people who have not attempted their own independent research (Stern 2019).

Reducing emotional labour of others

Non-marginalised people can reduce the emotional labour and emotion work of marginalised people by conducting their own research when they have questions about an individual identity. Even when you do not have explicit questions, researching identities unlike your own can assist you with avoiding inadvertently harming or insulting others with ignorant comments.

In instances where general research cannot specifically resolve your queries, hire consultants and pay them for their work. The most important thing to remember is that emotional labour is *labour* and should be paid for as such.

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