

Rarely Acknowledged and Often Unrecognized: Exploring Emotional Labor Across Library Work Tasks

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ABSTRACT

In the seminal work on emotional labor (EL), Arlie Hochschild (1983, 2012) defines EL as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display.” EL is “sold for a wage” (Hochschild, 2012). To date, there have been a few studies on emotional labor in librarianship. Julien and Genuis (2009) found EL to have a central place in the experiences of instructional librarians. Shuler and Morgan (2013) interviewed reference librarians, finding they are expected to perform EL yet are not formally trained to do so. Matteson and Miller (2013) surveyed librarians nationwide, with statistical analysis confirming EL present in librarianship. Matteson et al. (2015) asked MLIS holders to reflect via diary entries on performed EL. The results of these studies have clearly demonstrated EL as a part of librarianship.

To further advance the study of EL in librarianship, our work offers a quantitative perspective on EL across different types of library labor. We used a nationwide survey, recording types of library work performed, EL labor relative to task performed, with a section for open-ended comments. We sought to include all library workers, with a shorter questionnaire that still covers the established components of EL, such as hiding negative emotion. We will discuss how EL happens across the librarianship, with specific attention to differences to EL amongst various library tasks and between academic and public libraries based on the results of the survey, and implications for future studies.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

critical librarianship; academic libraries; public libraries.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

emotional labor; invisible labor; soft skills.

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