



Introduction:

In recent years, scholarship across disciplines has been concerned with how some people, as part of their professional role, are expected to feel or not feel particular ways in the workplace. This often uncompensated work is called emotion labor (a.k.a. emotional labour). According to Hochschild (1983), emotion labor is the work that professionals (often some groups of people, for example, women, more than others) are expected to perform in order to manage their feelings and “to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (p. 7). To be “professional,” employees in many professions are often asked to hide genuine emotional reactions or portray positive emotions even when they aren’t feeling them. These forms of emotion labor are often associated with burnout and emotional exhaustion. However, research has also found that emotion labor can be rewarding or rejuvenating if these emotions are authentic and the individuals feel satisfaction with their job (Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007).

In this activity, participants will first learn the theory behind emotion labor. Then, they will perform various emotions/roles associated with emotion labor as they complete a group activity. Finally, they will reflect on how they felt as they performed these roles and consider how emotion labor might affect their own professional careers.

Participant Instructions:

1. Your instructor will introduce the concept of emotion labor using the Emotion Labor PowerPoint.
2. Following the PowerPoint, you will complete an experiential activity led by your instructor.
3. Before beginning the activity, you will be assigned a role that you must perform during an entire round of the activity. Those roles are as follows:
 - You must smile and nod the entire time that someone is talking to you and enthusiastically agree with everything they say.
 - Try to genuinely care about how other people are responding emotionally to the activity. Watch their body language, ask people if they’re doing okay, and try to express genuine concern and empathy for them.
 - You must hide any frustration or anxiety (or really any other emotion) that you may be feeling, always presenting a neutral facial expression and tone of voice to your team.
4. Once the activity is over, the group will debrief with the following questions led by your instructor:
 - How did you feel during the activity as you were performing your role(s)?
 - How does what you experienced in this activity connect to past experiences where you had to perform emotion labor?
 - How might you be called upon to perform emotion labor in your future or current career? What concerns do you have about this demand on you? What strategies may be helpful to avoid burnout?