

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 positions 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 feels satisfaction with their job (Martínez-Iñigo, et al., 2007).

In this activity, participants will first analyze an “Emotion Labor in Careers” case study in small groups. Then, they will design their own case for the future occupation of one or more participants in their groups using the existing cases as a model.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Identify and analyze the role of emotion labor in a particular profession.
2. Design their own case that takes into account how workers perform emotion labor in response to a challenge; the potential toll of emotion labor; differences in terms of gender, race, other social identities; and strategies for coping with emotion labor.

Time:

2 hours.

Group Size:

Small group.

Materials:

Emotion Labor in Careers PowerPoint and copies of the five case studies (all in [Downloads](#)).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Empathy

- To interpret intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview.
- To demonstrate ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.

Other Skills:

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; Emotional Resilience.

Activity Instructions:

1. Introduce the concept of emotion labor using the Emotion Labor in Careers PowerPoint (in [Downloads](#)). Slides 2-4 provide definitions and theory/scholarship behind emotion labor. The facilitator should ensure that participants understand that emotion labor is a complex concept with benefits and drawbacks.
2. Transition into a group activity. Divide participants into five groups and assign each to a different "Emotion Labor in Careers" case study, ensuring every person in the group has a copy of the case. Instruct participants to first read through their assigned case individually and then discuss the case together using the following questions as guides (these questions are also on slide 5 in the PowerPoint):
 - What challenges do workers in the profession detailed in this case study tend to face?
 - How do they perform emotion labor in response to that challenge?
 - What are the differences in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, or other social identity markers that were identified within the case?
 - What strategies for coping or managing emotion labor were suggested by the case study authors?
3. Debrief. This step can be facilitated two different ways:
 - Option 1: Each group may present the highlights (brief summary and one or two insights that surfaced in their group discussion) of their case to the entire group.
 - Option 2: The facilitator could create a "jigsaw" and recombine groups so that one member from each of the first set of groups gets placed in a second set of small groups. Then, each person presents the highlights (brief summary and one or two insights that surfaced in their group discussion) of their case to the rest of the members in their second group.

The facilitator may choose which of the two options is best. Instruct participants to be ready to answer questions from others and to comment on connections they see with other groups' cases.

4. In groups, participants will create their own case for a future occupation of one or more group members, using the existing cases as a model. If the facilitator chose Option 1, participants should return to their original groups. If the facilitator chose Option 2, they

should remain in their second set of small groups. The case that each group comes up with should include the following (these directions are also on slide 6 in the PowerPoint):

- A narrative that illustrates a frequently occurring challenge that must be met in that career by workers
 - How they perform emotion labor in response to the challenge
 - The potential toll emotion labor can take on workers in that profession
 - Any differences in gender, race, or other social identities that surfaced in the research
 - Strategies suggested in the study
5. Debrief using Option 1 or 2 from Step 3.