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Emotion Work

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Emotion work refers to the psychological processes necessary to regulate emotions that are desired in specific private life conditions. It includes controlling the intensity and quality of the individual's feelings that are not related to the public sphere and are not undertaken for reasons associated with paid work.

However, part of employment that involves work performed by using feelings is called emotional labor. Contemporary service economies are based on the growing number of domains in which jobs are related to the provision of services to individuals, such as an airline flight attendant, waitress, bartender, and so forth. Such jobs are characterized by “selling feelings,” which then become a commodity, and by the domination of women's employment.

The concept of emotion work was introduced by American sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983) in her study on flight attendants and bill collectors. She argues that such jobs are characterized by emotional and service aspects, and are done mainly by women. Other examples are a waitress, nurse, amusement park greeter, insurance agent, nail salon attendant, food handler, and emergency operators.

According to Hochschild, emotion work is the effort involved in manipulating the emotions of self and others and as generating feelings that are appropriate for a situation. Such work is the act of trying and may lead or not to the successful outcomes. It may also be called emotion “management” or “regulation” when it refers to efforts to maintain balance in a relationship using the creation, transformation, or inhibition of feelings. Emotion work includes both shaping and suppressing feeling. It also differs from “emotional intelligence” in that it includes the sensing of others' emotions and competencies such as self-awareness, self-control, empathy, active listening, and the skill to resolve conflicts and cooperate with others (Guy, Newman, and Mastracci 2008).

Hochschild distinguishes between emotion work and emotional labor. The first refers to the private context where feelings are valued in relationships with family and friends. The latter is a social and economic exchange value of work sold for a wage. Emotional labor takes place in

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a paid, public environment with customers or coworkers that demand displaying and expressing certain emotions which are desired and consistent with organizational aims.

Hochschild describes two broad types of emotion work and three techniques of emotion work. The first type is evocation focused on an initially absent desired feeling and the second is suppression focused on an initially present undesired feeling. The first technique is a cognitive attempt to change images, thoughts aimed at changing associated feelings. The second technique is a bodily attempt to change physical symptoms of emotions (for example, slow breathing). The third is an expressive attempt to change gestures (for example, trying to smile).

Emotional labor occurs in face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with clients (for example, patients, children, customers, passengers, or guests); includes behavioral expressions that aim to change others' emotions, attitudes, and behaviors; and contains displaying of emotions related to social expectations (Zapf 2002). It is also possible to distinguish emotional labor by the episodes (for example, dealing with an angry customer before or after dealing with an angry coworker), by the job (different professions, possibilities of controlling other employees), and by the person (various individual characteristics) (Ashkanasy and Cooper 2008).

Emotion work and emotional labor may be analyzed on the levels of working, the organizing of work, and the sociocultural embedding of organizations (Sieben and Wettergren 2010). In the first case, emotions are created as antecedent consequences of work tasks. For example, it is a motivating joy with the work, fear of a certain task, and the shame of a failure. Emotion may represent the object of work (influencing others' emotions), a means while working (usage of own emotions to fulfill tasks), and a condition of work (establishing or altering certain feelings). At the level of organizing, emotions are related to the work-setting influence, organization specific emotion rules, and resources that are producing and reproducing emotions. The sociocultural embedding of the work refers to social structures like gender, class, or race that have an influence on emotion appearances. Examples include gendered expectations within organizations, emotion work in the household with a different standard of caring by women than men, and cultural beliefs in the service industry that women are more suited to emotional labor.

Emotion work was also expanded into the category of "intimate labor" (Parreñas and Boris 2010), which includes occupations primarily held by women related to care, domestic, and sex work that involve bodily and psychic intimacy (for example, manipulating genitalia, wiping noses, lifting torsos, feeding, listening, talking, holding). These labors are stigmatized by

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relation to dirt, bodies, and intimacy.

Related research fields include “aesthetic labor,” which focus not only on how companies attempt to support emotional labor as it may have an influence on the satisfaction of clients and service users, but also to stimulate the “right look” of employees and discriminate those who are perceived as less physically attractive (Warhurst and Nickson 2009). Another concept is “body labor,” which refers to the provision of body-related services, managing the physical work of hands and the bodies they touch, particularly in the beauty industry (Kang 2010). Recent studies include “embodied labor” such as commercial surrogacy, which consists of a rental of one’s body by somebody else, the use of the worker’s body as a site, resource, requirement, and product, as well as fields of resistances and negotiations between the surrogate, the family, the clinic, and the state (Pande 2014).

SEE ALSO: Division of Labor, Gender; Feminist Theories of Organization; Leadership and Gender; Occupational Segregation; Self-Esteem

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