"Just smile and wave": Workplace requirements and emotional labour of academic staff at a South African University

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Abstract

Emotional labour is a part of all work situations, and how people manage it influences their quality of work-life. We aimed to study lived emotional labour and sustainable work participation of a sample of 15 South African university lecturers (females= 73%; white = 73%, black = 13%, Indian = 13%; lecturers = 47%, senior lecturers = 20%, associate professors = 13%, full professors = 20%, mean years of work experience = 18 years, SD = 12 years). The lecturers completed a semi-structured interview on their lived workplace emotional labour and their emotional regulation strategies. Thematic analysis of the data indicated the lecturers utilised implicit emotional display rules focussed on professionalism, situational cultural norms, as well as the culture of the larger society and the interfacing of institutional, situational, and individual factors. Awareness of the emotional labour requirements related to lecturing and training interventions for the effective use of emotional regulation in the workplace will support lecturers in dealing with workplace relationships. Higher education administrative support, clear work role expectations, and lower work demands, and creating a psychologically safe work environment would reduce academic staff emotional labour.

Keywords: emotional labour, emotional regulation, imposter syndrome, interpretive descriptive design, lecturer well-being, psychological safety

Introduction

University lecturers play a crucial role in knowledge transfer (Riswanto & Aryani, 2017) and student well-being (Jeyaraj & Sagayadevan, 2012), often with significant emotional

labour from carrying excessive workloads with diminishing resources (Du Plessis & Martins, 2019; Hatzinikolakis & Crossman, 2020; Tytherleigh et al., 2005). In work settings, emotional labour is about the management of emotions to meet the organisational requirements (Heffernan & Bosetti, 2020). High emotional labour is associated with decreasing levels of well-being, including poor work-life balance and higher levels of stress and burnout (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Olivier et al., 2005; Salami, 2011). Moreover, emotional labour is associated with emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction (Grandey, 2000). While studies on higher education practices have shown that work intensification is directly related to high levels of emotional labour (Berry & Cassidy, 2013; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004; Yomi, 2017), few studies have utilised lived emotional labour by lecturers. Findings could inform support interventions for their sustainable work-life..

Emotional labour in the higher education context

Emotional labour is associated with the management of feelings through physical performance of emotions that are not necessarily felt by the employee but implicitly or explicitly required by the organisation (Hochschild,1983). Most research on emotional labour focussed on the services industry (e.g., flight attendants, bank tellers, nurses) (Hochschild, 1983; Näring et al., 2006). Despite some efforts to understand emotional labour in the higher education context, specifically for university lecturers (Berry & Cassidy, 2013; Kinman et al., 2011; Koster, 2011), the area remains largely underexplored (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylännec, 2011; Woods, 2010).

The emotional regulation approaches associated with managing emotional labour includes surface acting, deep acting, or genuine acting (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Surface acting is an act of appearance (an emotional mask), whereas deep acting is a deliberate effort to change the way you feel and think to meet emotional display requirements (Holman et al., 2008). The outcome of surface acting would be either to fake the expression because the emotion is not felt, or to suppress the felt emotion so that it is not expressed (Glomb & Tews, 2004). Genuine acting is where the emotional display reflects true feelings.

Goodwin and colleagues (2011) contend that deep acting is less detrimental to the employee than surface acting. Surface acting may lead to withdrawal, absenteeism, employee turnover (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), and emotional exhaustion (Mahoney et

al., 2011). This might be explained by the fact that, unlike with deep acting, reliance on surface acting is associated with higher levels of stress, exhaustion (Pătras et al., 2017), and burnout (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). The major exception is when surface acting is essential to work success (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). Ordinarily, if felt emotions are disguised, emotional dissonance occurs, where the internal state is characterised by incongruence which induces psychological strain, burnout and depersonalisation (Hatzinikolakis & Crossman, 2020; Morris & Feldman, 1996).

The South African higher education setting

The South African higher education context is in transformation which adds to the complexity of the work- life of employees (Mapesela & Hay, 2006; Olivier et al., 2005; Theron et al., 2014). The current higher education context is characterised by massification, widened access, diversification, marketisation, internationalisation, increased accountability, response to new demands in technology, and new demands in delivery (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Poalses & Bezuidenhout, 2018). Additionally, academics are under increased pressure to deliver better quality teaching, as well as research output (Du Plessis & Martins, 2019; Hatzinikolakis & Crossman, 2020). This comes with increased emphasis by higher education institutions on higher student completion rates, as well as publication in high impact journals (Du Plessis, 2019; Rothmann et al., 2008; Janse Van Rensburg et al., 2018). These changes in the South African higher education context have a direct impact on the lecturing staff, including work intensification (i.e., an increase in effort that the lecturer must invest during the working day: Green, 2004), higher workloads, poor work-life balance, and diminishing well-being (Anderson, 2006; Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Olivier et al., 2005; Tight, 2010).

Work intensification and role overload

The changing South African higher education system is placing increasing work demands on academics (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; Rothmann et al., 2008). The widening of access to higher education has resulted in a greater diversity of students with varying levels of preparedness (Janse Van Rensburg et al., 2018). Many students entering university are not adequately prepared for tertiary education (Pillay 2020). When students are underprepared, they have "unique needs, values, attitudes and skills, which require substantial attention from academics" (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 322). Moreover, large classes have become the norm in South Africa (Bothma & Rossouw, 2019; Pillay, 2020),

adding to administration and management overload on lecturers, resulting in less time to teach (Du Plessis, 2019). Due to declining public funds and a lack of administrative support, some of the roles that lecturers are expected to engage in are not related to their core tasks of teaching, research, or service and may include being entrepreneurs, marketers, and managers (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008). Engagement in various work roles lead to role conflict.

The high administrative burden is further exacerbated by increased use of quality assurance measures (e.g., checking and rechecking test and examination papers), with decreasing administrative support (Poalses & Bezuidenhout, 2018). For these reasons, lecturing staff in South Africa are being overburdened and overextended due to increasing work demands and working hours (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Bezuidenhout, 2015; du Plessis, 2019; Poalses & Bezuidenthout, 2018; Rothmann et al., 2008).

Work-life conflict

Work intensification and role overload inevitably leads to academics working longer hours with consequent blurring of the boundaries between work and home (Dhaphnat et al., 2019). Bezuidenhout (2015) notes that especially the change in lecturer availability due to information technology such as email and cell phones, increases the pressure to respond rapidly and at all hours of the day and night. Moreover, unrealistic work demands without the needed support leads academics to exceed the expected working hours, often sacrificing personal and family time (Du Plessis, 2019; Janse Van Rensburg et al. 2018; Rothmann et al., 2008).

Poor well-being

Lecturers have increasingly been held accountable for high quality teaching and research, yet their work have over the years become "more fragmented, overly scrutinised, and their workload steadily increasing" (Bothma & Rossouw, 2019, p. 30). Consequently, lecturers in the South African context experience high levels of occupational stress (Du Plessis, 2019) and exhaustion and are at risk of suffering burnout (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; Rothmann et al., 2008). Besides being overburdened with tasks, South African academics indicate that remuneration and career advancement opportunities are insufficient, and they do not experience job security or psychological safety (Janse Van Rensburg et al., 2018; Pillay, 2020; Theron et al., 2014).

Emotional labour

Koster (2011) argue that emotional labour is central to the current work context of lecturers. While the work of a university lecturer can already be described as highly

emotional, the contextual changes in the current higher education context in South Africa is adding to the emotional burden lecturers must carry. Although emotional labour has some positive effects in the workplace (e.g., allowing the employee to distance themselves from a potentially unpleasant situation: Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995), it has also been linked to various levels of negative work outcomes, including emotional exhaustion and lowering job satisfaction (Grandey, 2000) and may further decrease the psychological well-being of lecturers (Yomi, 2017).

Goal of the study

The current study explores the lived emotional labour of university lecturers at a research-intensive university in South Africa. We aimed to address the following specific questions:

- Which job specific demands and contexts as well as the institutional requirements give rise to emotional labour?
- What emotional regulation strategies do the lecturers engage in to cope with the emotional demands of the workplace?

Method

Research approach and strategy

This qualitative study employed an interpretive descriptive (ID) design (Thorne, 2016) to lived emotional labour by university lecturers. Interpretive descriptive research is ideal for describing the details of the experience to inform practice (Teodoro et al., 2018; Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). It is appropriate for this study on the lived experiences of emotional labour in the everyday work-life of academics, findings of which may inform sustainable practices in lecturer support and development.

Participants

Using snowball sampling, we recited 15 participants. As indicated in Table 1, the participants were predominantly female (n = 11) and white (n = 11). The lecturers were from seven different faculties of a large South African university.

Table 1. Summary of Participants

Partici-pant#	Race	Gender	First Language	Age	Marital Status	Job Title	Faculty
1	White	Female	English	40	Single	Senior Lecturer	Economic & Management Sciences
2	White	Female	English	41	Married	Associate Professor	Natural & Agricultural Sciences
3	White	Female	Afrikaans	36	Single	Lecturer	Education
4	White	Female	Afrikaans	36	Engaged	Lecturer	Education
5	White	Male	Afrikaans	60	Married	Full Professor	Humanities
6	White	Female	Afrikaans	40	Divorced	Senior Lecturer	Economic & Management Sciences
7	White	Male	English	61	Married	Full Professor	Engineering Built Environment & IT
8	White	Male	Afrikaans	61	Married	Associate Professor	Education
9	Indian	Female	English	33	Single	Lecturer	Education
10	Black	Female	English	27	Married	Lecturer	Law
11	White	Female	Afrikaans	42	Married	Senior Lecturer	Education
12	White	Male	Afrikaans	67	Married	Full Professor	Humanities
13	Black	Female	Tswana	35	Married	Lecturer	Health Science
14	White	Female	Afrikaans	31	Married	Lecturer	Education
15	Indian	Female	English	34	Married	Lecturer	Law

Data collection

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the lecturers to explore their emotional labour loading from day-to-day work experiences, the institutional requirements in terms of emotional displays, and the typical emotional regulation strategies they employed at work. The interviews were conducted at the beginning of 2019 and each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, we conducted a pilot interview to check the adequacy of the interview guide, recorded the interviews, and transcribed them literally (Thorne, 2016). The transcriptions were cross-checked for accuracy by listening to the recordings while reading the transcript. Our use of concurrent data collection and analysis ensured coherence between the data collection methods and the research question. Lastly, we ensured reflexivity by keeping a reflective diary and an audit trail throughout the process (Teodoro et al., 2018).

Procedure and ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the institution [protocol nr. EMS143/18]. The participants individually provided informed consent. We contacted the participants by means of email invitation, explaining the purpose of the study. Upon their agreement

to partake in the study, we provided the participants with a cover letter explaining the confidentiality of the data and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The participants completed interviews on campus at times convenient to them.

Data analysis

We employed thematic analysis using the broad phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2020): Familiarisation with writing notes, systematic data coding, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting results. During the analysis, the transcribed data were read several times to move beyond the first impressions towards deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Teodoro et al., 2018). To ensure credibility and confirmability we stayed close to the participants' experiences by employing open coding (Thorne, 2016). We only moved towards thematising after several cycles of open coding; thereby ensuring that we did not apply premature thematising and consequent bias during the analysis (Thomson Burdine et al., 2020). The data were analysed by the researchers independently and the results were decided on through a peer debriefing (Poduthase, 2015). We deidentified the data transcription for the analysis and reporting of findings.

Guided by the ID process, data was not analysed line by line (Thorne, 2016) but rather focussed on broader issues in the transcripts and on insights into participant experiences and perspectives (Thompson Burdine et al, 2020; Teodoro et al., 2018). Conceptual themes were extracted inductively from the interview transcriptions. Although open coding was used in the analysis, the main objectives of the study served as a structure for thematising the data. We would therefore read through the transcripts with the questions "Which job specific demands and contexts as well as the institutional requirements are mentioned?", or "What emotional regulation strategies do the lecturers engage in?" in mind.

Results and Discussion

As indicated in Figure 1, our results are coalesced under the three main themes and subthemes: (i) Emotional regulation strategies employed; (ii) Emotional display rules of the institution; and (iii) Factors impacting emotional labour. We discuss each of the themes and the evidence below.
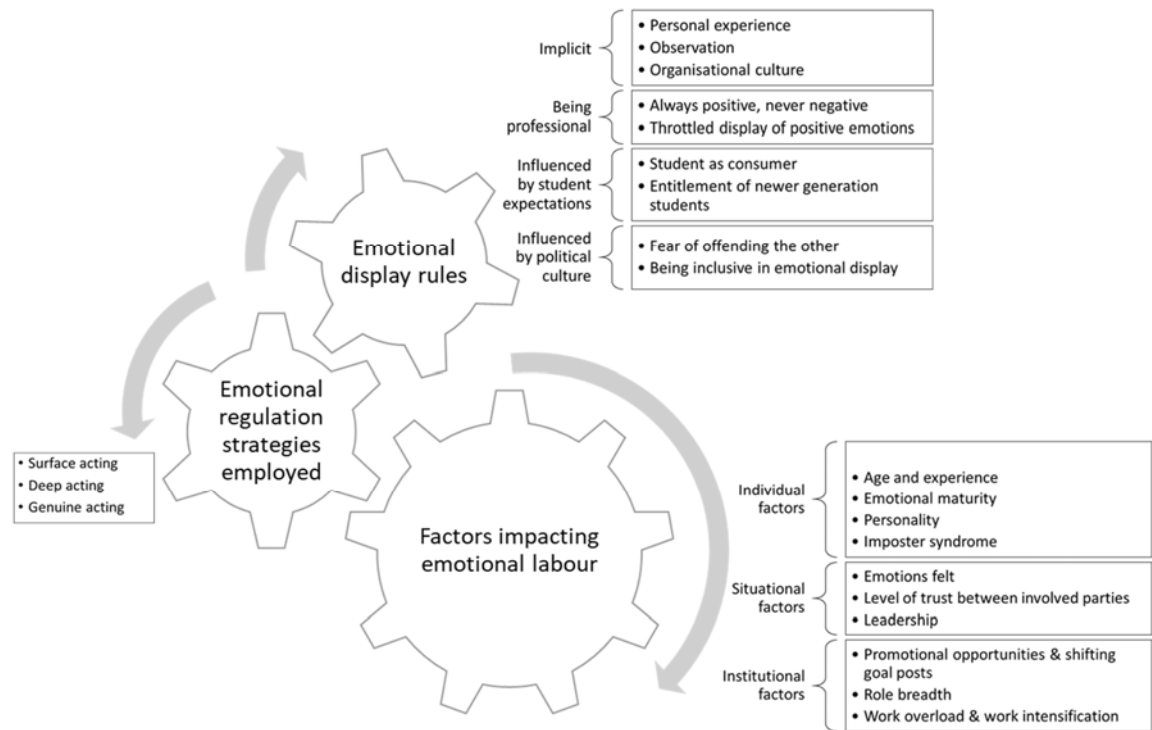
Figure 1. *Main Themes and Subthemes that Emerged from the Data*

Theme 1: Emotional regulation

To some of the participants, employing emotional labour meant averting the fallout of negative emotional displays and outbursts. Besides presenting emotional labour as a coping mechanism, some participants maintained that it had a positive impact on their well-being. Furthermore, some of the participants were content to mask their true feelings if it was in the best interests of the student. The following statements illustrate these observations:

> *It's a requirement ... as a human being, to cope. Because I mean all you want to do is really say "Get the fuck out of my office [but you cannot do that]. You can do 20 things right and people will always remember the one thing you did wrong. (Participant 15, Indian, female, lecturer with 5 years' work experience)*

> *[You feel that] "I can't have class today" ... It was really feeling like 'okay, I'm putting on a mask. Stepping onto the stage now, you are going, you are performing' ... . Yes, and immediately and it's like uhm immediately your mind ... was off of what you were busy with, that you were consumed with, in the office. Because you are like completely focused on something else, it's like a break. (Participant 6, white, female, senior lecturer with 15 years' work experience)*

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I haven't been an academic my whole life. And I think to me it's still very rewarding to know that I did a good job. It's actually something I want to do. I want to give the students that perfect learning experience. (Participant 7, white, male, full professor with 34 years' work experience)

For some of the participants, it was not only about keeping up appearances to ensure a good teaching and learning experience, but also an act of mirroring professionalism to the students. At the same time, employing emotional labour satisfies the management performance expectations and to the participants that means succeeding in their personal career goals using surface, deep, and genuine acting. Even when employing surface acting in interaction with colleagues, it was positive since it allowed possible negative situations to defuse. For example, the participants said:

There were a lot of problems, and we were just handling it and he said afterwards: "You were very calm. Did you feel calm?" I said "No! I was boiling inside, but you can't act out because we have to teach them professionalism as well." (Participant 3, white, female, lecturer with 12 years' work experience)

I come from [town of upbringing], from a very tough upbringing, that you always put that kind of pressure on yourself. I mean a very poor background, very poor street in [town of upbringing], parents don't have matric and all of that kind of thing. So, for me, that was a condition of my community or my reality as a child, that you have to survive. (Participant 15, Indian, female, lecturer with, 5 years' work experience)

If you treat people with kindness, I think it's just better for work morale. (Participant 14, white, female, lecturer with 8 years' work experience)

Well basically in terms of getting along with other people, it's easier to smile and wave than to shout and confront or be passive-aggressive and stuff like that. It's easier to get to your goals if everybody works together and smile and wave. (Participant 5, white, male, full professor with 32 years' work experience).

urface acting

Different situations present different relationships with both students and colleagues. Participants indicated that emotional labour depends on the trust relationship between the parties. Specifically, surface acting is an important means of self-preservation in less trusting relationships. Participant 15 (Indian, female, lecturer with 5 years' work experience) indicated that:

[working at a university is] a back-stabbing business … . you would have very measured conversations with people that you don't trust. Not because you assume that

you don't trust them, but if you have been burned by them before, then you will be very measured in your response.

Additionally, the participants described their work activities as a performance:

Over the years, I got better at lecturing, I have understood that lecturing is about performance. And so, it actually doesn't help terribly to be yourself, you have to be a performer. (Participant 7, white, male, full professor with 34 years' work experience)

… you got to put on this show, right? We all put on a show. (Participant 15, Indian, female, lecturer with 5 years' work experience)

If it's you have walked into my office and you have taken me on, then I try to take a – you might initially see that I'm upset or I'm angry, but I will try to disconnect and deal with you in a pleasant way or in a proper way. (Participant 2, white, female, associate professor with 12 years' work experience).

Deep acting

Participants agreed that that they frequently used surface acting in the workplace, but like the findings of Ogbonna and Harris (2004) participants made less use of deep acting strategies:

… I am convincing myself that I'm feeling happy and energised … because that's what I'm supposed to feel...say for instance I'm lecturing and I haven't got the energy for this and whilst I'm busy doing that, I'm acting much more energised than I actually am, and eventually I actually do do that. (Participant 5)

I think at the first reaction you feel a little bit threatened and agitated. But as soon as I feel those emotions, I immediately realize that I need to understand...where they [the students] are coming from, so we can find common ground. (Participant 4)

The changes in thinking and feeling that are required in deep acting were described as happening over time:

It's a maturity thing. After a while, you just kind of you know what is going to happen. So, you don't it's not unexpected … So now, it doesn't bother me anymore. But I can tell you, like five years ago … (Participant 14, white, female, lecturer with 8 years' work experience)

... if you are around people and you are acting happy, then eventually you do actually feel happier, you know. (Participant 3, white, female lecturer with 12 years' work experience)

Genuine acting

Similar to the findings of Mahoney et al. (2020) and Zhang and Zhu (2008), genuine emotional display was our participants' preferred emotional regulation strategy.

I feel that I'm reasonably congruent mostly with what I feel and express. (Participant 5, white, male, full professor with 32 years' work experience)

So apparently, my face shows a lot of emotion, so I find it very difficult to hide what I'm feeling but because of past situations I have been told that I just have, to you know. I still find it very difficult because it's just not part of who I am. (Participant 1, white, female, senior lecturer with 17 years' work experience)

Ogbonna and Harris (2004) note that surface acting may leave the lecturer with feelings of inadequacy for having shown "fake" emotions to cope with legitimate organisational demands. In the current study, employing surface acting was positive in that it facilitated learning. Self-regulation to display positive emotions through surface acting ensures teaching success (Koster, 2011; Mahoney et al., 2011). The perception exists that negative emotional displays such as anger or disappointment negatively affect student learning (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004). Therefore, for the university lecturer, employing emotional labour is about meeting the organisational demand for a satisfied student and achieving successful teaching and learning. When in interaction with colleagues and peers, surface acting was also used to navigate other work-related situations.

The academic staff used surface acting more frequently than deep acting or genuine acting, while genuine acting was the preferred strategy. Further, Ogbonna and Harris (2004) and Krishnana and Kasinathan (2017) found that university lectures employed both surface and deep acting as regulatory strategies when dealing with students, with higher levels of surface acting. Unlike Zhang and Zhu's (2008) participants, the participants in this study used surface acting more than genuine acting. Lecturing was described by the participants as a performance that naturally required surface acting to ensure teaching effectiveness (Abery & Gunson, 2016).

Similar to the findings of Mahoney and colleagues (2020) and Zhang and Zhu (2008), genuine emotional display was our participants' preferred emotional regulation strategy.

The preference for genuine emotional display in a lecturing environment may be because relationships with students and colleagues take place over longer periods of time (Grandley & Gabriel, 2015). Faking or suppressing expressions is harder to sustain over longer periods (Mahoney et al., 2011). Specifically, Mahoney and colleagues (2011) argue that genuine emotions may secure intrinsic rewards such as higher quality relationships with students or extrinsic rewards such as good teacher ratings. In the current study, participants indicated that they sometimes displayed a measure of negative emotions to students if it assisted learning. Although used less, deep acting strategies seem to develop over time and may be associated with emotional maturity (Austin et al., 2008). Regardless of the strategy, emotional regulation is more strenuous in response to organisational demands (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004).

The "emotion work" that comes with university teaching was once considered an unimportant aspect of lecturing. However, the responses concurred with Berry and Cassidy's (2013) finding that emotional labour is employed daily to cope with workplace demands. Similar to findings by Gonzales and Ayers (2018), emotional labour in this study is portrayed as an acceptable coping strategy to "navigate and survive the realities of commercialisation, massification and new managerialism" in their work contexts (Hatzinikolakisa & Crossman, 2020, p. 6).

Theme 2: The emotional display rules of the organisation
The participants all agreed that there are no explicit emotional display rules that would apply to everyone. They seemed to subscribe to the implicit display rule to act "professionally". This is demonstrated in the following quotations:

> *you are expected to always be happy, so to say. Uhm, you are expected to contain your emotions. (Participant 13, black, female, lecturer with 12 years' work experience)*

> *You are not allowed to be as expressive as you normally are, so you can contain your anger, don't show your sadness side necessarily. Joy you can also not – it's like ... you can't go into the extremes. (Participant 6, white, female, senior lecturer with 15 years' work experience)*

From previous experiences, observation of others, and/or the organisational values that are entrenched in the organisational culture the participants seemed to know what the implicit rules were. Relevant quotations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Knowledge Transfer for Emotional Display Rules

Method of knowledge transfer	Quote from the data
Experience	*I made the mistake once where ... and I got rapped over the knuckles. After that I realised, okay so no matter what happens you just gotta keep everyone happy no matter how you are feeling inside* (Participant 1)
Observation	*I have been in situations where people just really go out on their emotions and I see how uncomfortable it makes people and how little resolution it gives and how much problems it causes and how easily people either disrespect that person or immediately I would judge them to some sense or feel they are incompetent or unreliable or whatever. So I have seen how people react towards the people who were true to their emotions. Then immediately flags come up like "okay, maybe it's gonna affect my career"* (Participant 4)
Culture	*Well I think the culture of the department sets a lot of it, in terms of what you see the other colleagues do. There are other departments where people are much more informal and laid back, so then you take on that. Here...there's almost like a culture that's created....you have to be in charge of your emotions* (Participant 6)

The participants indicated that display rules are influenced by perceived student expectations. For example, they said:

> *[how you react emotionally] is dictated by what the consequences is if you reacted in the way that you wanted to ... because students these days; I think we are working with a different generation of children who are entitled. They want quick solutions to everything, and they are very quick to just go to the top if they want to complain about something ... . I even had students last year from distance education who went to [Vice Chancellor name], you know. And then it's about small things ... And I think that's why it is required to be extra careful with how you say things and what you say to students and even to colleagues. Because we are in such a volatile space where anything ... . Anything that is said, can be taken up as intimidation as bullying. (Participant 11, white, female, senior lecturer with 18 years' work experience)*

> *You always have to be very careful how you formulate things. I enjoy them [the students] interacting and actually challenging you in certain things, but I do see students are very assertive, more assertive than they used to be. I mean they would come into your office and tell you they don't like the way you lecture something; you should change your way, or they don't like you or whatever. So, they would really just confront with whatever they feel. (Participant 4, white, female, lecturer with 15 years' work experience)*

Participants mentioned having to avoid being seen as racist, sexist, or culturally offensive. This aspect of institutional culture directed their emotional display and their interaction with both students and colleagues:

Participant 6 (a white, female, senior lecturer with, 15 years' work experience):

> *… it's the whole situation of you coming into legal trouble if you say something-so there's this legal pressure. You can't say something bad to students, because then they go and complain and the HOD*
>
> *… So you have to be so careful of anything that you say or do. There's a lot of pressure in terms of that. Interviewer: Is this similar with colleagues?*
>
> *Participant: Yes, it is.*

Participant 6's assertion was justified by Participant 3:

> *And with students, you have to be so careful because they could, you know, go and make a case against you. So, you literally have to count every word you say to them … . I mean we had one last year where we suspected cheating. But even then, you can't say it. You can say: "Oh we see you were having difficulty with this, and how can we help you deal with it and … " … you have to be sooo – so falsely sweet – it's just the sort of environment that we live in. (Participant 3, white, female, lecturer with 12 years' work experience*

However implicit or flexible the display rules are (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004), performing positive emotional displays achieves the dual outcome of satisfying the students and meeting organisational goals (Koster, 2011). Even though emotional labour may not be explicitly measured in performance goals, the institutional reliance on indicators of quality control, such as student satisfaction and student feedback, motivates positive emotional displays (Krishnana & Kasinathan, 2017; Mahoney et al., 2011). The current study concurs with the findings of Hagenauer and Volet (2014) that indicated that university teaching is highly emotional and that the "appropriateness of emotional experiences and expressions is strongly context-dependent based on underlying institutional and cultural norms, values and practices" (p. 241).

Student expectations show generational differences, where the 'new' generation student is described as entitled. This concurs with the idea of the student-consumer culture in the current higher education context (Nixon et al., 2018). Student expectations provide feedback on the lecturer's performance, which in turn may impact the lecturer's career (Bennet, 2020). The participants' views of the students echoed Tunguz's (2016) description that the current generation is one "raised to think highly of itself" and in effect "will pose

challenges to the traditional power dynamics seen between faculty and their students." (p. 12). The display rules described by the participants mirror those of larger South Africa, embedded in the political context that is intolerant of insensitivity regarding diversity (Shefer et al., 2018).

Theme 3: Factors impacting emotional labour

Institutional factors mentioned by the participants included job specific demands such as work intensification, role overload, role breadth, and job security. Administrative tasks, which is linked to managerialism and an audit culture was mentioned by the participants as a point of frustration. Examples of the participants' views related to the main factors are noted below.

> *Negative emotions and role overload:*

> *I feel that they are just piling more and more admin onto us without realizing the effect it has on us and more and more students, which increases – for me, it becomes incredibly stressful; lots of students, lots of marking, lots of additional administration. (Participant 2, white, female, associate professor with 12 years' work experience)*

> *… so, admin takes up a lot of your time, that's why I think it's funny when they are like "Why aren't you publishing?" you are like "No, because I'm sitting here playing with my hair". (Participant 15, Indian, female, lecturer with 5 years' work experience)*

> *Positive emotions when talking about teaching: Lecturing is something that I really enjoy … And investing in people and I think to work with young people and to see their interest. (Participant 12, white, male, full professor with 42 years' work experience)*

> *Some aspects of teaching induced negative emotions and were an emotional burden:*

> *What frustrates me the most … is when you say something, and you say it repeatedly and it gets ignored and then that conflict comes back at me. (Participant 2, white, female, associate professor with 12 years' work experience)*

... then he [the student] turns to me and he says, "Do you know what this means to me?". So, I said: "No what?". He says: "I'm going to lose my bursary, I have a wife and kids" ... you know, like the whole big story, with tears in his eyes. I mean it was so traumatic ... the only way I could deal with it, I said: "Look, this is a university. Actually, when you come into this university, you sign a contract with yourself that you will work. And if you don't pass, you have to repeat the subject full stop ... .it's so emotionally difficult; so, I don't do it anymore on my own ... I don't like failing a student, but if they don't work, I fail them. (Participant 7, white, male, full professor with 34 years' work *experience*)

Role breadth:

... we are dealing with individuals, that every time you sit with an individual, you are not just here teaching someone. You are their nurse, you are their psychologist, you are their mother, you are their father ... it goes from "Ah, I'm just stressed" to "I was raped". (Participant 15, Indian, female, lecturer with 5 years' work experience)

I'm not a counsellor, you know ... there are hectic things that come out here, to the point where sometimes I found myself crying in my office ... the emotional tax is quite high. (Participant 10, black, female, lecturer with 3 years' work experience)

Institutional and situational factors

Other institutional factors, such as the lack of promotional opportunities or shifting goal posts, were also a point of frustration and anger:

... they have actually changed the promotion guidelines this year, so they have added more criteria ... a lot this year and a lot of the lecturers are very unhappy about it. I think it's just because you get to that point where you qualify based on the criteria, but then they still don't give it to you. (Participant 14, white, female, lecturer with 8 years' work experience)

Situational factors:

According to the participants, emotional labour is not related to a specific task; it is situational and involves students or colleagues or other stakeholders and is greater in times of high pressure. Participants said that they employed emotional labour more

actively when negative emotions occur (i.e., frustration, irritation, sadness, fatigue, insecurities, nervousness and anger). This is evident in the following:

> *... emotional labour is higher when it's high stress times. (Participant 15, Indian, female, lecturer with 5 years' work experience)*

> *... when there are deadlines, when there is a lot of stress, then people fight with each other. (Participant 3, white, female, lecturer with 12 years' work experience)*

> *I was really angry, so I had to portray outwardly this sort of like 'okay, I have to address this calmly' but I was really angry. If I had a punching bag, I probably would have punched it. (Participant 2, white, female, associate professor with 12 years' work experience)*

> *It's never useful to be too open with negative emotions. (Participant 7, white, male, full professor, with 34 years' work experience)*

While negative emotions were deemed to be unprofessional, positive emotions such as happiness and enthusiasm were a resource to optimise learning:

> *Happiness is ... a valuable aid in learning and that's what this is about - how to maximize the learning opportunity. (Participant 7, white, male, full professor with 34 years' work experience)*

> *I think it depends on the leadership of the person who is your line manager ... [under a previous manager] it was just horrendous working here (Participant 14, white, female, lecturer with 8 years' work experience)*

Individual factors

Participants' emotional regulation may be influenced by individual factors such as personality, age, experience, and emotional maturity. Table 3 provides quotations for each factor.

Table 3. *Individual Factors that Influence Emotional Labour*

Code	Data extract
Age and experience	*I think the older you get, the less you are worried about that* (emotional display requirements) (Participant 7)
Emotional maturity	*I think it's also a maturity thing. When I was very young and I saw it working here – I don't think I had as good of a grasp on my emotions. I'm a very emotional person and I used to get angry so, so quickly...infuriate. ... And then I would go home and punch the punching bag–that angry. But I think over the years, you get mellow* (Participant 14)
Personality	*I enjoy working with people. So some people prefer to be locked in the office and do research and ... not have a human interaction, whereas in my drive is through human interaction.* (Participant 13)

Another individual factor that emerged from the data was that emotional labour is related to self-doubt:

> *on the one side, you are always underestimating your ability even though you are an expert and on the other side, you are always pretending to be an expert, but you are not. (Participant 6, white, female, senior lecturer with 15 years' work experience)*

> *I sometimes feel like you have to have that filter, where you can't always act, like you would normally act, because you have to see yourself as someone who is competent ... I think it's just a general being so hard on yourself, that anything you see or anything that, uhm, like a rejection or a failed attempt at getting a new project or failing to get funding for something or - like what happened yesterday, a prime example: I was working on a book proposal, and they came back saying they are not interested in this book but there are other options that we can explore. But in my mind, all I see is [failure] (Participant 11, white, female, senior lecturer, with 18 years' work experience)*

> *I need to validate why I'm here ... . I feel very – like it's way over my head ... . I feel this need to prove myself ... (Participant 10, black, female, lecturer with 3 years' work experience)*

This theme speaks to the unhealthy life of academia (Bristow et al., 2019) and the related imposter syndrome (Bethello & Roulet, 2019). Bristow and colleagues (2019) argue that the changing higher education environment places early career academics in a space of identity insecurity (Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2016). In our study, all the participants who

discussed their continual self-doubt were early career academics (i.e., not yet full professors).

Various scholars have connected the emotional labour of university lecturers to the changing higher education environment (Arbery & Gunson, 2016; Berry & Cassidy, 2004; Hatzinikolakis & Crossman, 2020; Koster, 2011; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). The political, economic, social, and technological changes in the higher education environment have directly impacted the job-specific demands of lecturers (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004).

What makes the role of a lecturer especially difficult is the role breadth, in that lecturing requires both teaching and caring. Without preparation or training, lecturers are expected to provide emotional and psychological support to students (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Berry and Cassidy (2013) maintain that a lack of promotional opportunities increases job insecurity, which affects well- being and job performance and entails emotional labour for university lecturers. This concurs with the model of Berry and Cassidy (2013) which posits a cyclical relationship between stress and emotional labour. Therefore, emotional labour is influenced by the situation in which the participants find themselves, and it varies according to whether emotions are positive or negative.

As in the study of Shani and colleagues (2014), our participants indicated that their relationship with their manager determined their levels of stress and in turn the level of emotional labour experienced. Management is an important determinant of job resources, especially in jobs that require high emotional labour (Brunetto et al., 2014; Yuhanis & Zaiton, 2010).

The link between personality and emotional labour strategies has also been found in previous studies (Sohn & Lee, 2012), supporting the idea that certain personality types may find it easier to perform surface or deep acting. Age and emotional maturity are often linked, with participants noting that one may be less equipped to manage your emotions effectively when you are younger, which inevitably leads to higher levels of emotional labour.

Implications for higher education institutions

Our results echo the fact that lecturing relationships, especially with students, are on an intense level of personal and emotional contact (Rothmann et al., 2008). Therefore, emotional labour will be inevitable (Tuguz, 2016). For a workplace environment to support sustainable lecturer well-being, an organisational climate that is orientated towards supporting the lecturer should be cultivated. Support starts with creating an awareness of the emotional labour requirements of higher education teaching (Hatzinikolakis & Crossman, 2020). It would therefore be an important component of induction programmes at universities. Based on our results, we suggest that higher education training interventions for academic staff extend beyond awareness to include practical skills in emotional regulation (Berry & Cassidy, 2013; Koster, 2011).

The current study highlights the role of inclusive leadership behaviours in increasing and reducing stress and, consequently, emotional labour. It should be an organisational imperative to create an inclusive leadership culture for a psychologically safe work environment (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). Psychological safety at work is when employees can express themselves without fear of reprisal, being victimised, and/or penalised (Dhanphat et al., 2019). A sense of psychological safety would be important in managing academic workplace conflict issues (Abery & Gunson, 2016), including those that involved students' rights and customer care (Bothma & Rossouw, 2019)

Emotional labour, role overload, and high work demands goes hand-in-hand. To decrease emotional labour higher education institutions should focus on creating clear role expectations. South African higher education institutions should seek to tie lecturers' responsibilities to post levels and the support and resources that are available at the institution (Bothma & Rossouw, 2019). This would entail better workload regulation of lecturers (Brunetto et al., 2014), which would reduce the workload (Barkhuizen et al., 2014), while providing administrative support as needed (e.g., large classes and high teaching loads: Bezuidenhout, 2015; Pillay, 2020).

Limitations to the study and suggestions for future research

Workplace emotional labour in higher education settings could be influenced by context specific institutional emotional display requirements (Abery & Gunson, 2016; Ogbonna

& Harris, 2004; Tunguz, 2016). Our findings would be true of the institution of study, and not others in South Africa or internationally. Findings from this small sample exploratory study are at best tentative or indicative. Further studies should survey a representative sample of academic staff utilising mixed methods approaches for a fuller understanding of emotional labour within the academic environment.

We did not analyse the demographic and biographic factors given the small sample size. Berry and Cassidy (2013) found that emotional labour decreased with age and length of service, while Koster (2011) indicated that there are differences between gender groups in emotional labour practices. Future studies should compare the emotional labour between age groups, years of employment, and institutional type for South African academics.

Conclusion

Lecturers perceived to use implicit emotional display, learned through personal experience in observing colleagues and assimilating the workplace culture. They also perceived student demands, role breath, and work intensification to increase their stress levels. In turn, this increased emotional labour. The lecturers identified institutional factors that contributed to the work stress and emotional labour, including the imposter syndrome. Sustainable university lecturers' work-life would thrive with emotional labour risk minimization and support for a psychologically safe work environment.

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