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Evidence Summary

How Affective and Emotional Labor Impede or Facilitate New Teaching Practices Among Information Literacy Instruction Librarians Is Inconclusive

A Review of:

Galoozis, E. (2019). Affective aspects of instruction librarians' decisions to adopt new teaching practices: Laying the groundwork for incremental change. *College & Research Libraries*, 80(7), 1036–1050. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.7.1036>

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Abstract

Objective – To investigate the correlation between emotional and affective labour and instruction librarians' willingness to adopt and implement novel teaching and educational practices.

Design – Semi-structured interview, grounded theory.

Setting – Academic libraries in the Greater Western Library Alliance consortium.

Subjects – 12 information literacy librarians from the Greater Western Library Alliance consortium of 38 research libraries from the US.

Methods – In 2016, the author shared a call for study participants in the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA) consortium, selected a convenience sample of 12 information literacy instruction

(ILI) librarians, and conducted a structured interview over Adobe Connect, a virtual video-interviewing tool. Interview transcripts underwent initial thematic coding using a grounded theory approach. Additionally, the author used Walker and Symons' theories of motivation to code interview responses related to emotional and affective labour.

Main Results – The author identified three thematic categories in the interview transcripts: barriers and influences for adopting new teaching practices, and practices implemented by ILI librarians. The author mapped these response themes to Walker and Symons' (1997) conditions of human motivation: autonomy, competency, feedback, affirmation, and setting meaningful goals. Some major barriers to adopting new teaching practices are burnout and emotional exhaustion due to understaffing, time demands, the sheer quantity of instruction sessions, and the lack of post-instruction feedback to reinforce pedagogical decisions. A sense of competency, autonomy, and support when designing library instruction sessions encourages librarians to adopt new teaching practices. The author explored what practices ILI librarians applied to implement new teaching practices. Having plenty of time to prepare prior to an instruction session encourages ILI librarians to build new teaching practices into sessions. The respondents noted that building relationships with faculty, students, and library colleagues enables them to receive helpful feedback.

Conclusion – Though there is some correlation between affective and emotional labour and the motivation of ILI librarians to adopt and implement new teaching practices, the author notes that the results are not generalizable to a larger context based on the small sample size. It is clear there are many opportunities to investigate other factors that impact librarian motivation and emotional labour including the dynamics of race, gender identity, and disability, or the managerial and structural factors and workplace culture that impede or facilitate the adoption of new teaching practices.

Commentary

This research is a direct response to Celene Seymour's (2012) call to explore the emotional labour of ILI librarians in library instruction and contributes to the larger body of education and library information science research on motivation and the impact of affective and emotional labour on adopting new teaching practices. Currently, existing literature also examines ILI and student affect in the context of online instruction (Fernández-Ramos, 2019; Rapchak, 2019) as well as other teaching modalities (Baragash & Al-Samarraie, 2018), but does not address motivation or emotional and affective labour of ILI librarians. This article addresses the gap in the literature to identify emotional and affective labour in library instruction contexts, and highlights barriers and factors to positive motivation.

This research article was appraised using an adapted version of Russell and Gregory's (2003) qualitative research appraisal questions (Suarez, 2010). Though a specific research question is not articulated, the author provides a description of her research aims. The selected methodology is appropriate for the identified outcomes though it is unclear whether the interview questions were validated, how interviews were conducted, how data was collected, and what modality of instruction was investigated. However, the research methodology does not clearly identify how the questionnaire was distributed to 38 research libraries in the GWLA, how informed consent was obtained, and what inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select ILI librarians for the interview. A convenience sample was selected due to the author's institution participating in another research study with the same pool of GWLA libraries. It is unclear whether sampling methods were appropriate considering there is no demographic information of study participants or an explanation of why demographic data was not shared. The author conducted two phases of data analysis of interview transcripts, thematic coding using grounded theory and the theories of motivation, which were appropriate to the research study.

The author is incredibly descriptive of the research findings and upfront about some of the limitations of the study. She emphasizes that the findings are not intended to be generalizable. The author's conclusions accurately reflect the two-phased analysis and address the objectives of the study. Additionally, the author calls for more research examining how race, gender identity, disability, structural factors, and workplace culture contribute to adoption of new teaching practices.

Based on the results from the structured interview as well as the existing literature, the author makes practical recommendations for ILI librarians and library leaders and managers to identify and address emotional labour. The results of this research provide strategies to incrementally change workplace culture in order to build motivation to adopt new teaching practices in library settings. This research also demonstrates the potential value of using qualitative research in uncovering thoughts and experiences of library workers to address library-related issues. Additionally, the author brings attention to the importance of recognizing and proactively addressing emotional and affective labour in the library workplace, which has historically remained invisible, and unacknowledged elements that contribute to librarianship. These types of invisible labour can contribute to burnout, lack of satisfaction, and reluctance to explore new teaching practices among ILI librarians. Future research could investigate how student engagement contributes to ILI librarian motivation, as well as strategies to meaningfully collaborate, advocate, and negotiate with teaching faculty outside of the library that can lead to changes to the larger university culture.

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