

Understanding Interactive Effects of Emotional Labour on Racialized Support Workers in Post-Secondary Institutions

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Cet article traite de deux aidants discriminés qui travaillent ou ont déjà travaillé dans un centre de prévention de violence sexuelle à la demande d'un campus universitaire. Que veut dire cacher ses sentiments afin d'aider les survivants? Quel est l'impact de ce travail affectif sur le travailleur social?

Background: Understanding Sexual Violence Against Women on Post-Secondary Campuses in Canada

Sexual violence can happen anywhere, but colleges and universities in Canada are home to those who are at the highest statistical risk of experiencing gender-based violence: young women between the ages of 15 and 25 years (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics). Violence against women manifests in many forms and contexts ranging from intimate partner violence to drug-induced sexual assault, stalking and even digital sexual violence (Benn-John and Wane). In addition, 35 percent of first-year university women report experiencing at least one incident of attempted or completed rape by the age of 14 (Senn et al.). Sexualized violence commonly occurs at home, at school or within dating relationships—and these contexts can all be found on campuses.

Sexual violence must be understood within a broader social context. Women and girls experience sexual violence at a higher rate than men and boys. A 2011 summary of police reported crime found that sexual crimes were by far the most common offence committed against girls (Wolfe and Chiodo); and many prevailing societal attitudes justify, tolerate, normalize, and minimize sexual violence against women (WHO). In the case of young women from marginalized racial, sexual, and socioeco-

nomic groups, they are more vulnerable to being targeted for sexual violence and harassment (Wolfe and Chiodo). In these ways, it is clear that sexual violence cannot be separated from a broader context—one in which the victim-survivor, the offender, and the violation itself (or the threat of violation) exist in a larger system of social norms, relations, and inequities.

In 2015, the Ontario provincial government's plan to prevent and respond to sexual violence explicitly acknowledged that particular challenges were faced by campus communities dealing with victimization. In addition to pain and suffering that result from sexual violence, students may also suffer loss of academic year, school credits, or the ability to focus on academic tasks. Clearly, within this complex environment, it can be understandable that few survivors seek out or disclose their experiences to support providers.

In response to these realities, in 2016, the government introduced *Bill 132: The Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act*. This legislation strengthens the law to better support survivors of sexual violence. The new Bill stipulates that publicly assisted colleges, universities, and private career colleges in Ontario are now required to develop and implement sexual violence prevention and response policies.

While much work has focussed on improving programming and policies concerning sexual violence support, there has been little focus on those who actually carry out the work. In the next section, we intentionally focus on *who* is doing the work of preventing and responding to sexual violence on campuses and the ways in which this work impacts them.

Who is Doing the Work of Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Women on Post-Secondary Campuses?

A review of existing literature in Canada addresses the topic of preventing and responding to sexual violence on post-secondary campuses, including research on “best practices,” as well as identification of barriers to creating safer and more responsive campuses. While the literature takes account of collectives such as institutional staff, student leaders, campus police, and community advocates that collaborate to address sexual violence on campuses, few address the work-related concerns of workers who support survivors of violence in this context. Little intentional focus is put on the impact of this intense work upon these individuals, or how they self-regulate their emotions and feelings in the performance of their work of preventing and responding to sexual violence. Of note, Canadian literature that examines emotional labour of lecturers within post-secondary campuses appears to be, comparably, well documented (DeHart-Davis)

This article will examine the emotional labour experienced by the service workers who are responding to sexual violence from an intersectional lens. The paper seeks to provide insights from the experience of two racialized cis-gender women, Jacqueline Benn-John (Jackie), and Tanya De Mello (“Toni”), PhD candidates at the Department of Social Justice Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Jackie has worked with institutions from the outside (NGOs) and Toni has worked within university institutions. Both work in the field of sexual violence prevention and response. In this paper, they engaged in a dialogue to explore the impact of emotional labour on their work.

This paper contributes to a vacant body of literature about workers doing violence prevention and support work on post-secondary campuses. In addition, this paper contributes much-needed analysis on emotional labour from an integrative anti-racist African-Canadian feminist framework. Integrative anti-racism focuses on the intersection of race with other forms of difference, such as sexual orientation, ability, class, and gender identity (Dei). African-Canadian feminism creates an inclusive feminism that reflects both race and gender (Wane). Together, these theories help us to identify that while all members of a post-secondary campus community might experience violence and safety concerns, some populations, particularly women, are at an increased risk for experiencing violence and safety concerns on campuses. Our dialogue will explore these factual realities.

(In)Visible Work: Understanding Emotional Labour

Emotional labour was first defined by Arlie Hochschild in 1983 in *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling* as a phenomenon in which a worker is obligated to regulate their overall body language, including their facial expressions, while at work. According to Hochschild, the worker intentionally masks or suppresses their inner feelings to ensure that these feelings are not identifiable to the client. For example, if a worker is angry or upset in response to a client’s narrative, the worker does not outwardly express their inner feelings. As such, there are many times that workers will not genuinely feel the emotion that they are in fact displaying. Where conflict exists between what the individual actually feels and the emotion they are expected to display, Hochschild argues that attempting to conform to those expectations causes certain “pernicious psychological effects” (qtd. in Ashworth and Humphrey 89). The work involved in managing emotions in the workplace by either displaying appropriate emotions or suppressing inappropriate ones, is termed “emotional labour,” and it has an enormous impact on service providers. Hochschild examines the effect of such emotional labour on the well-being of the worker, particularly as it may result in negative effects such as stress, being inauthentic, and burnout.

However, a review of the literature revealed that emotional labour can have other effects for service providers as well. For example, a worker can derive great satisfaction, personal growth, and increased self-confidence from limiting their emotional reactions and setting boundaries, and later seeing their clients empowered (Pasanen). Another iteration of emotional labour in the literature is related to unpaid work. For example, women-identified faculty who teach courses and write scholarly work addressing gender-based violence are more likely to receive disclosures of sexual violence from their students, despite the fact that these academics have not been trained by the institution to respond to disclosures. This results in unanticipated and unpaid work, and can result in stress for women-identified faculty. Rebecca Godderis and Jennifer Root argue that when post-secondary institutions addressing sexual violence on campus incidentally or purposefully overlook the expertise of these experienced faculty, it makes invisible the additional emotional labour they contribute in their work, which in fact is unpaid.

Additional contexts of emotional labour go on to effect particular pressures on staffs of different social locations. Patricia Chong argues that “emotional labour requires the performance of appropriate or moral roles, as determined by one’s identity within interlocking gender, race and class hierarchies” (1). Similarly, in the case of Black workers,

sociologists Marlese Durr and Adia Wingfield argue that Black professionals engage in two types of “emotional performance” in the workplace: general etiquette and racialised emotion maintenance. The notion of *performance* comes from having to pretend or act in a particular way at work that is not congruent with one’s innermost feelings. The performance, for workers of colour, often includes enacting the implicit expectation to be or get as close to Whiteness as possible. “Behaving” in ways associated with Whiteness is associated with necessarily obtaining

when I am working with a survivor, and what I display. I know that it’s important to show that I’m present and listening but it’s important that I stay ‘balanced’ and display “neutral” emotions. Of course, I want the survivor to focus on what they are feeling and not have to deal with my emotions. That being said, I think that takes a toll as you hide that pain and you don’t always deal with it. Beyond that, I think that emotional labour is present when you go home in the evening. I think the hardest thing is that you go home and you don’t talk

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(or working towards obtaining) the benefits of White privilege. Winning these privileges, Black workers can pass, be accepted, and fit in with White colleagues and the overall organisational culture. In Marlese Durr and Adia Wingfield’s study, African American women reported the effects of routinely performing emotional labour, such as normative displays of feelings and behaviours that revere Whiteness (hegemony, Western attire, thoughts, and ideas). These displays left them feeling isolated, alienated, and frustrated. Both Patricia Chong and Marlese Durr and Adia Wingfield’s arguments demonstrate ways in which emotional labour naturalizes hierarchies within the workplace as well as on an individual level. It also has the effect of naturalizing internalized racism, as demonstrated by African American workers cited in the literature who think that they will “fit in” if they wear colonial attire or know their place, i.e. obedient and complicit.

For the purpose of this paper, we address emotional labour in its many iterations as is relevant to our intersectional identities as racialized cis-gender women workers engaged in sexual violence prevention and support work on postsecondary campuses. As such, recognition of emotional labour’s changing manifestations is required, especially in relation to who is doing the work and in what sector.

Interview

How do you experience emotional labour when preventing and responding to sexual violence on post-secondary campuses?

Toni: I experience it because for me there is a conflict often between what I feel, the pain, the sadness, the stress,

about these things to your family or to your friends or to other colleagues, so you carry the pain with you. And I think that’s been one of the hardest things for me. Of course, I go to counselling once a week and that’s a place that I can vent and debrief, but given the number of cases that we deal with, I can tell you that that’s not enough. I think vicarious trauma is something very difficult to navigate and its part of emotional labour because you need to also show strength and stability to people coming in that are sharing the story with you.

Jackie: I agree, hearing disclosures and witnessing a survivor’s pain, client after client, is difficult and it can trigger your own feelings of vulnerability in response to trauma. I find it’s also hard sitting with feelings, especially when you can’t change the outcome of a situation or forecast how long it will take before things get better for a survivor, in general. That’s when I’m reminded how much is out of my control, as well as a survivor’s control. But you’re right, we engage in emotional labour and perform professional boundaries and supportive counselling approaches in our *work* because we’re hiding our feelings to empower survivors. Placing the survivors’ needs in the centre translates in monitoring my own feelings and focussing on the survivor’s needs. I guess my well-being is put on the back burner; however, I would also add that there are benefits to performing emotional labour. In some ways, it also keeps me safe and helps me to be encouraging and hopeful with each survivor’s situation, even if I’m holding back my frustration or sadness about a survivor not seeing the potential that I see in them. For example, a study (Pasanen) done on intentional actions of shelter workers who are able to

reign in their personal opinions or strong reactions has actually shown to enable them to have boundaries and inform professional and personal choices that help the worker in terms of self-care. So one of the positive outcomes of emotional labour can be that it allows you to regulate feelings so that you maintain ethical obligations of support work.

Toni: The second place where I think emotional labour is present in my work and I have to manipulate my feelings is I am working within a system and I am trying to serve different communities and the system in which I am doing that does not serve the needs of one community as best as it could. I think that when you work within a system and you see its failures or even gaps but you are not allowed to critique that system because you are meant to represent it—well, that can result in emotional labour as well.

Jackie: Absolutely, manipulating my feelings when the institution doesn't recognize that we serve different communities experiencing sexual violence is hard work. Even as someone who has been in dual roles, representing community advocacy groups on campus and the institution, I have to be careful about my critiques. For example, I experience emotional labour when I mask my outrage for the directive for campus police to forward all reports of sexual assault to the local police services. Not every survivor wants to report an assault to the police and in fact, less than ten percent of assaults are reported to the police. For me, my identity as a racialized woman, and more specifically, as a Black woman, also plays into my ability to critique the institution. As a Black woman, in an effort to dispel myths of being an "angry Black woman" and losing credibility of being duly qualified for my position, I transition into performing emotional labour. I have to mask frustration and/or disdain and I try to calmly query how the institutional policy related to reporting supersedes the law of the land and particularly survivor's right to choose whether to report or not. I think the combined effect of performing professional etiquette and racialized emotion (Durr and Wingfield) leave me feeling exhausted. When the workgroup members are polite and ultra-professional, I mirror back the behaviour, but on the inside my blood is boiling. Emotional labour is also present in my work when having to straddle the tension between policies and practice in frontline work with survivors. For example, when informing a survivor of the option to report an assault they have experienced on campus or not, I carefully review the risks and benefits of reporting to campus police, including campus polices' limits to confidentiality. Nonetheless, I really feel caught between a rock and a hard place; on one hand, trying to advocate for survivors in a workgroup meeting

then and on the other hand, representing the institution when informing survivors of options for healing. Can I effectively do both? I cannot, hence the inner turmoil associated with having to choose.

How is emotional labour recognized in the work that you have done or are doing in sexual violence?

Toni: I think people are starting to talk about what is going to feel pain when they engage with somebody who's a survivor of sexual violence. I think the literature that is emerging is showing that we need to be thoughtful about impact on the service provider. That being said I think one of the problems is that we do not recognize how emotional labour is part and parcel of the job and that we are asking people to toe the line can have a cost on them emotionally and personally. I think one of the hardest things is when we institutionalize processes that people need to follow and there needs to be rigour so that we can make sure that people are receiving adequate services, but then if there's not flexibility and adaptability in the provision of the service, what happens is people are tied within the system that may not be serving the needs of their clients.

Jackie: I don't feel that emotional labour is recognized in the work that I've done. In my experience we just seem to do the work and we talk about how it can be frustrating doing the work under conditions where there might be a lack of recognition through change in policies or processes that feel like they are survivor centred or trauma informed, but I am feeling like the advocacy involved in trying to bring about changes in policies or processes on campuses goes unrecognized. It's almost as if our emotional labour is being done underground, much like the activism that tends to go underground in some cases, especially when you're employed by the institution versus when you have partnered in a community collaboration with the institution.

Toni: One of the realities that folks doing this work within the institution face is that there is a fear of speaking out and losing your job that can really limit your ability to do your job at its maximum. I think one of the things I have definitely experienced is that I want to respect the institution and I don't want to throw another colleague under the bus or critique a process that I know has been set up with good intentions, but sometimes you see where the gaps are and you would be risking a lot to call that out. In fact, I have colleagues who do this work that feel that if they do call things out, they could lose their job. So, do you risk losing your job or do you continue to work in an ineffective system because then at least you are doing something, versus not being there at all?

You spoke a little about what it is to sense that a system is supporting one community but not another. What do you mean by that?

Toni: I think another challenge that I face very often is that sometimes needs are actually conflicting, so what one community needs is very different from another. An example I can think of is for some folks, coming together in a group is very healing and very helpful and for others it is a space where they don't always feel that their voice is heard. And so what I find very fascinating with that is

related to sexual violence prevention and support work. Firstly, I identify as a Black cis-gender woman who cannot separate my race from my gender, as well as the privilege I hold identifying with the gender I've been assigned at birth. Having worked, studied, and engaged in activism on post-secondary campuses, all of my identities come into play, impacting my experience of day-to-day social interactions, privilege, and marginalisation. I think this has equipped me with a heightened sense of awareness for where the institution can do more and better to respond

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you can create a system that works very well for the needs of others and literally is contrary to the needs of some and both need to be met. And so I think very often institutions will try to have something like a group therapy session, as well as individual counselling, as well as outreach, but generally when resources are tight, we make choices that will better represent certain groups than others.

Jackie: I think the idea of meeting the needs of some survivors at the expense of others really resonates with me, because when we talk about resources in the service system, by default they are always limited. In my experience, when funding cuts occur, the “add on” supports which were not part of the conventional suite of sexual violence support services are what end up being offered through time-limited project grants. However, for various marginalized communities, when funding cuts occur and service providers return to what we know as the bricks and mortar, that is a conventional western model of counselling (individual counselling and crisis lines), then survivors in need of supports that respond to their unique needs are lost (volunteer trainings for outreach and education on campus, peer support groups, art groups, healing circles, immigrant women's drop-ins). You cut certain services that some groups need more than others. And these choices are difficult for me as they have disproportionate effects on under-represented groups.

What are the interactive effects of sexual violence prevention and support work on the emotional labour of racialized workers?

Jackie: My social location definitely has an impact on my performance of emotional labour in different contexts

to the needs of survivors of sexual violence on campus, as well as how and when I perform emotional labour to help me navigate my role as a worker. For example, simultaneously, I recognize that sexual violence on campus carries with it: liability for the institution (being sued for not making efforts to reduce risk for women on campus, including providing supportive responses to survivors seeking emotional supports); traumatic consequences for survivors (shame, difficulty concentrating on studies, fear, interrupted sleep, anxiety), and push and pull factors for workers/divided loyalties (fear of losing job, wanting to be in solidarity with survivors and own values or personal politics).

Toni: When I think about my social location, I am also aware of my race and gender. I am a racialized brown woman in an executive function, but there are few racialized bodies in the institution that are working in executive function. My limited power is very apparent to me and the reality is that I think about my social location, I think about my position of power within the institution, and I know that if I am somebody that wants to move across and up within an institution, I have to be careful about my critiques. Also, when I think about my identity as a racialized body, I am also uncomfortable critiquing some of the western style of support that is provided or critiquing the fact that so many of the service providers are White and working with racialized bodies, because I admire many of these staff and their work, and I do not want to raise a concern about representation and the importance of service providers also having some lived experience of our racialized students or clients that will likely be seen as a threat to their livelihood.

When I think about lived experience and how it affects emotional labour in my work, I have to say that being a survivor of sexual violence myself, I often put myself in the shoes of the folks that are coming to me, and so many of us that are drawn to this work or people that have survived themselves. And I advocate more ferociously because I know what it felt like to have nobody advocate for me. I am harsher with people who assign blame because I know what it felt to be blamed. I am conscious of social stigma and shame around accessing

How has emotional labour impacted your inner self?

Jackie: Emotional labour has caused me to feel a whole mix of emotions. I would say I have gone from feeling frustrated, angry, insecure; uncertain about my future, my career, uncertain about how effective I am as a worker, ally, and advocate. If my ideas are heard, or if I have thoughts that I feel I can't express, this has left me feeling dissatisfied with the work or dissatisfied with my ability to affect change in a positive way in the workplace. I must say, performing emotional labour during presentations or important

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services because I was ashamed to access service. And I think that lived experience helps me and propels me in the work because I have an understanding of what some of the folks are feeling when they come to my door. But sometimes it can make you seem zealous because you are relentless in your advocacy, and yet you know you need to be with folks who have not had that lived experience and can sometimes have a distance from it and misunderstand your passion and plight.

Jackie: Hearing you has made me think of my experience as a survivor. I did not access services for much the same reasons we talked about. For me, my job was to compartmentalize, to keep going, and to ignore experiences of systemic and gender-based violence....

Toni: It's interesting to me that emotional labour is not only in the workplace but is something that we experience in our daily lives.

Jackie: I don't know if I ever saw it as emotional labour. Early socialisation taught me that children must be seen and not heard. Oddly, as a young woman and adult the message had not changed; I should smile, serve those around me and put myself last! In the case of coping with the traumatic effects of violence we are told to mask our feelings and get through daily living, including working with a smile. How could I stop to feel and think about my experiences of trauma? I just carried on with day-to-day living. Thinking as far back as our colonial history, Indigenous and African women have had to get back up and keep going. It's part of the lived reality of being a woman, of being younger, of being racialised all in the one body. I saw gender-based violence as the norm, on TV, in the media, in my everyday life.

meetings with key decision makers within the institution, has left me feeling more confident and accomplished. As well as relieved because my helpful “suggestions,” rather than “critique,” did not put my job at risk.

Toni: However, I struggle with the reality that you are bound not to critique any system that has limits/gaps/failings because you are worried about a promotion or your paycheque or even losing your job. I know that campuses are not perfect but I think that the work that we do is so important and that it's crucial that I be here, doing this work. And so that discordance around wanting to serve at my maximum, and taking great care in what I say, impacts me and well, it frustrates me.

Jackie: I agree there is an inner conflict around wanting to serve. I get very impatient and want to see change happen quickly. I am frustrated when institutions are responsive rather than proactive. It should not take mandatory government legislation for us to do what we need to do and should have already been doing. This has an impact on me and turns me into a fierce advocate.

What are some self-care techniques and strategies you use to continue to succeed in this work?

Jackie. Self-care is an important topic in relation to emotional labour. Masking feelings, acting, and silently resisting is painful and hard work. Therefore, it is important for me to take care of my whole self. I intentionally nourish my mind, body, and spirit. Burning out is not an option; surrounding myself with supportive colleagues and allies and continuing to collaborate with the institution is vital to my self-care and helps me to do my best work. I think celebrating small steps in the right direction is another

important self-care technique and strategy used to succeed in my work. When I take the time to pause and reflect on the journey, I appreciate the outcome even more. I can't do this work in isolation and there isn't one path to get me there. It is ensuring that no one is left behind trying to do this work from the margins, is what's comforting to me. Audre Lorde supports me to "dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognise, accept, and celebrate those differences.

Toni: For me, writing this article is part of self-care - just being able to talk about the conflict and talk about it openly and acknowledge that this is the reality in which we live, and that we need to talk about the fact that emotional labour exists and that consequence of this work or, some may even say, that it can be integral to this work. Emine Ozmete talks about the importance of making emotional labour visible and valuable in order to engage in strategies to protect workers from the burden of hiding their emotions on the job (Ozmete, 2016) . We cannot always show a client/student what we are feeling and we need to provide the best service to them. I realize that for me, just being around other people and understanding that I am not alone in struggling; I am not alone in my exhaustion. I remember reading a quotation by Erma Bombeck that said, "When I die, I want to tell God, 'I used every single thing you gave me and had nothing left.'" And so sometimes when I come back from work and I am drained, I also know I have done everything that I can and that makes the work worthwhile for me. Just believing that things were better because of my presence and effort, that even though the institution is imperfect, I am there, that helps me to heal from the impact of emotional labour.

Conclusion

Increasing understandings about the effects of sexual violence work and emotional labour on racialised workers in post-secondary institutions contributes to a much-needed analysis of the issues. Specifically, this paper contributes an integrative anti-racist and African-Canadian feminist framework to the area of emotional labour. In doing so, the paper creates real possibilities for the experiences of the authors, as well as their theorisation and examples of praxis, to contribute to the currently vacant body of literature about racialised women workers in this area. This paper may also inform institutional responses to sexual violence prevention and support work to include the recognition of the emotional labour that racialised workers endure..

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¹In this paper a "woman" is a person who self-identifies as being female. Survivor is a feminist term for a woman who has experienced—that is, survived—gender-based violence, such as sexual violence, violence in a relationship, or violence based on gender or gender identity. Black refers to people of African Ancestry in this paper. The word White refers to people belonging to the dominant group who hold White skin privilege in North America (Arnold et al.) or "anywhere European colonialism has created racial inequity" (Thomas and Lopes 272). By capitalizing the word "White" in this paper, our goal is to interrupt the non-visibility and un-naming of Whiteness and White privilege among White people. The term Whiteness refers to various unearned privileges benefiting White people in a racist society, at the expense of racialized "Others." A marginalized person (or population) is one that is constructed as less-powerless or less-unimportant within a larger society. To be marginalised is to be thought of as

less powerful, less important, or less deserving of social supports. Notwithstanding, marginalized groups can and do resist situations of inequity, and aim to increase the power that they have by building their communities, making allies, pointing out inequities, and advocating for change. Racialized refers to persons of colour, including Indigenous persons. Cis-gender refers to a person whose sense of personal identity, sexual identify, and gender corresponds with their birth sex, as well as society's socially-constructed hegemony.

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