

Managing Emotions: White-water Rafting Guides and the Emotional Labor Theory

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Abstract

In 1983 Arlie Russell Hochschild published a book approaching the management of emotions in flight attendants and bill collectors. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* discussed the relationship between workers and emotions introducing the term 'emotional labor', a justification for the management of emotions as well as the techniques used to manage feelings. Hochschild's book was influential in many studies regarding different types of workers including lawyers, teachers and nurses. The purpose of this thesis was to understand the management of emotions in white-water rafting guides using the emotional labor theory elaborated by Hochschild (1983) as the theoretical framework. This study also aimed to explore the elements of emotional management in white-water rafting guides; to investigate white-water rafting guides' perceptions of emotional labor; and to comprehend the relationship between work and non-work and its influence in the emotional management of rafting guides. To achieve these aims an empirical research and data collection process was undertaken in Queenstown, New Zealand, where the author spent fifty days interviewing and observing white-water rafting guides.

Many elements of the emotional labor theory proposed by Hochschild (1983) were identified in the interpretation of the data collected including deep and surface acting and the burnout effects resulting from the management of emotions. However not all the data collected with rafting guides corroborate with the emotional labor theory. Indeed, the concept of work, vital for Hochschild's (1983) theory, was presented in a different way by white-water rafting guides when compared to the flight attendants and bill collectors analysed in the original theory. The results of this thesis indicate that white-water rafting guides approach their work activity in two different ways and for this reason they were divided in this thesis into two groups; namely 'occupational devotees' and 'lifestylers'. The 'occupational devotees' are committed to the organisational rules but at the same time they are passionate for their work; seen by themselves as a self-enhancing activity. The 'lifestylers' on the other hand are transient workers and their work is their leisure, their lifestyle, and it is incorporated in their personality and behaviour. To 'lifestylers' the work self is also their real, personal self and consequently they are committed to their own lifestyle.

After analysing and discussing the emotional management of white-water rafting guides using Hochschild's (1983) work and considering the incompatibilities between what is proposed in the emotional labor theory and the data collected, this thesis presented a new conceptual model called Emotional Life. While the idea of emotional labor regards specifically the management of emotion at work with limited connections to the non-work environment, the Emotional Life framework links, with blurred boundaries between them, the emotional performance at work and at non-work and the emotional performance originated by 'non-real' events (the emotional simulacrum).