

Coping with Emotional Labor: Challenges Faced and Strategies Adopted by Instructors

Joy Kadowaki and Mangala Subramaniam

Purdue University

Abstract

We build on the growing body of scholarship on emotional labor that originated from the seminal work of Arlie Hochschild to focus on instructors who teach courses about gender and its intersections with race, class and sexual orientation and their labor to manage and cope with classroom resistance. High emotional demands at work may compel instructors to find emotional labor strategies that are effective for managing their own feelings while enabling them to focus on other dimension of their work. Analyzing open-ended interviews with women instructors of different racial and ethnic backgrounds provides us insights into the challenges and resistance faced while teaching about gender, race, and class and the strategies instructors deploy to cope with and manage the labor. Much of the resistance encountered was the refusal to acknowledge the power and privilege enjoyed by some groups of people in society. The instructors' emphasize stress coping mechanisms they are compelled to use to enable them to focus on research and writing. In their effort to cope with resistance and meet their broader goal of enhancing learning, most of our study participants reject the tangible measures of teaching effectiveness and instead assert their commitment to the learning process.

This is a project of co-equals. Joy Kadowaki is a graduate student and Mangala Subramaniam is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology. Address correspondence to Mangala Subramaniam, Department of Sociology, Purdue University, 700 West State St., Stone Hall, West Lafayette, IN 47907. Email: Mangala@purdue.edu

Introduction

*Can you justify why I lost points?
[asks an undergraduate student] I
tried to explain ... but my answers
were never good enough for her. ...
It was horrible because I worried,
worried what she might do, what she
might say; if she went to the
department head. ... I was a nervous
wreck. ... I do not want to say she
had a bias against me but part of me
felt, deep inside me that's what it
was about, about race and part of me
felt that it was a gender bias. ...*

This excerpt is drawn from an interview with Rose, a young untenured faculty member of color, who works at a large Research I university. In addition to the research focus of the institution, Rose's department strongly values teaching and expects instructors to earn high teaching evaluations. Rose described some of the resistance she faced in the classroom from students who challenge her knowledge on the material she taught. She feared the consequences of negative evaluation from her students because she was untenured and had less than a supportive department head. Rose's challenge and concerns are not unique. Women instructors, and particularly women of color, experience resistance of all forms both inside and outside of the classroom.

Dealing with resistance can be emotionally draining. Instructors adopt strategies to cope with and manage the emotional demands of teaching, which may sap their energy if ignored. This paper examines how instructors who teach about issues related to gender, race, and class cope with resistance in the classroom. In what

ways do academics teaching courses about gender, race, and class experience resistance? What strategies do they adopt in order to cope with resistance? Our analysis of the strategies adopted by women instructors is theoretically grounded in the scholarship about emotional labor emerging from the seminal work of Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983 [2003]).

The concept of emotional labor is defined as, "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 2003, p. 7). High emotional demands at work may compel people to find emotional labor strategies that are effective for managing their own feelings while enabling them to focus on other dimensions of their work. The research on emotional labor originated in the study of interactional service work, but continues to broaden its focus and now includes almost all areas of work, including domestic work, care-giving work, and professional work.

We utilize primary qualitative interview data from a larger ongoing project gathered at a large mid-western research university between 2012 and 2013. The open-ended interviews with women instructors—faculty and graduate students teaching independently—of different racial and ethnic backgrounds provide us insights into the challenges and resistance faced while teaching about gender, race, class, and culture. We discuss the strategies that instructors deploy to cope with and manage the labor. Much of the resistance they encountered was the refusal by students to acknowledge the power and privilege enjoyed by some groups of people in society. Students expressed resistance vocally, through their demeanor, and

actions. Examples include arguing with the instructor, demonstrating disapproving body language in the classroom, or writing extremely negative reviews in end-of-semester teaching evaluations.

The instructors' strategies for coping include dismissing the resistance; placating the students, which often requires marginalizing the reliance on making the personal political, a central tenet of feminist politics; and finding personal stress-relief strategies to cope with the frustration and decompress in order to focus on their research. In their effort to cope with resistance and meet their broader goal of enhancing learning, most of our study participants reject the tangible measures of teaching effectiveness and instead assert their commitment to the learning process.

This paper contributes to discussions of emotional labor in two ways. First, it draws attention to the labor women instructors do in a research university, especially when covering content about gender, race, class, and culture. Second and more importantly, the analysis shows the ways in which women instructors use emotional labor to cope with the resistance they face in the classroom. This is significant because most women instructors are passionate about teaching, but the reliance on tangible measures of teaching effectiveness sometimes mars the work they do. Women instructors are often negatively evaluated by students who resist discussions of race, class, and gender differences as involving power and privilege. The consequences of these assessments may have detrimental effects on the tenure chances for women and particularly women of color.

Teaching and Emotional Labor

Scholarship on emotional labor has grown over the past few years to focus on service work such as domestic work and care-giving work (cf. Hall, 1993; Wingfield 2010; Ibarra 2002; Leidner, 1991, among others). Much of this research is influenced by the seminal work of Arlie Hochschild (1979, 2003). Emotional labor is a concept that refers to the impression management done by workers who labor to present their own emotions in an acceptable, workplace manner (Hochschild, 2003). The term also refers to the service conducted by those workers who labor to affect the emotions of customers or clients (Hochschild, 2003). "Feeling rules" are organizational or worksite regulations which "guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges" (Hochschild, 2003, p. 56). The "commercialization of feeling" especially within service work in a commercial setting is now a commonly valued commodity within organizations (Hochschild, 2003).

Due to the originality of Hochschild's work and the growing service sector in the United States, few qualitative studies of service work do not reference her scholarship. The process of employee emotion management is often diverse and uncertain as the variability of the customers with whom they work make interactions dynamic and emergent in nature (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Within paid work, the industry, organization, and/or occupation, service rendered, and the background and needs of the customers all shape the norms and expectations of emotion management (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Those providing services must manage their own feelings and the feelings of customers and clients, while simultaneously adhering to

organizational rules of display. This observation holds true in other settings, such as the classroom, as well.

The gender dimension of emotional labor and management is highlighted in the discussions by Hochschild (1979, 2003). Empirical evidence suggests that those in positions of relatively less power may be called on more often to provide service and care, and consequently their labor processes may require a higher reliance on emotional labor (Hochschild, 2003). Further, service and caring work is gendered work, and as a result, women workers often must rely on emotional labor as both a tool and a necessary means for conducting their work (Hochschild, 2003).

Emotional labor is not only gendered, but racialized as well. It is therefore meaningful to consider the intersections of gender, race, and class in understanding emotional labor in work. Feminist scholars have argued for the importance of the concept of intersectionality in capturing the complexities of social inequality (e.g., Andersen, 2005, 2008; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Spelman, 1988). To incorporate this intersectional lens, Hochschild (1979) noted that feeling rules “are likely to exhibit cultural differences associated with gender and ethnicity” (p. 572). However, while gender and emotional labor have been widely studied, very little research has been done that employs an intersectional lens to explore the role of race and ethnicity in the use of gendered emotional labor (Mirchandani, 2003).

Some recent works draw our attention to the intersectional lens in examining women’s lives by showing how cultural and racial expectations and stereotypes influence emotional displays (cf. Durr & Wingfield, 2011; Wingfield, 2010;

Ibarra, 2002; Kousha, 1999). Professional achievement requires successful integration into the work space, which includes the ability of the worker to meet expectations laid out by organizational feeling and display rules (Durr & Wingfield, 2011). However, organizational feeling and display rules reflect and reproduce social inequalities more generally, and consequently, organizations that have traditionally operated as white spaces may set in place feeling rules that place a larger burden on workers who do not identify as white (Durr & Wingfield, 2011; Wingfield, 2010).

People of color may need to labor more intensely to meet the expectations set by racialized feeling and display rules (Wingfield, 2010). For instance, data drawn from interviews with black professionals showed that racialized feeling rules imposed more restrictions on the emotional performances of black workers (Wingfield, 2010). Additionally, these professionals had less freedom in expressing emotions as their token status within firms increased their visibility and thus placed them under higher scrutiny than white colleagues (Wingfield, 2010). In addition to the expectations set by organizations, workers and clientele carry expectations as well. As a result, an employee’s emotional labor may vary in form, degree, and intensity depending not just on the gender, race, and class of the worker, but also on the gender, race, and class of customers (Kang, 2003).

Two specific studies have examined the emotional labor of professors and included a consideration of racial or ethnic differences (cf. Harlow, 2003; Moore, Acosta, Perry, & Edwards, 2010). Harlow (2003) examined the role of race in the college classroom by focusing on black professors' emotional management. She

found that black professors conducted “emotional impression management” in an attempt to convince students of “their competence and their right to be in charge” because students did not immediately identify black professors’ identity as representative of “intellect and professionalism” (p. 359). In contrast, white professors in the study did not report the need to conduct emotional labor to prove competence.

The emotion management conducted by the black professors involves “selective identity construction” defined as “selectively incorporating responses from interactions that confirm conceptions of self, while rejecting responses that conflict with such conceptions, regardless of the significance of that interaction in defining a highly central or salient identity” (Harlow, 2003, p. 36). In other words, the black professors “learned to ignore identity cues from interactions with students that challenged their professorial identity” and instead “maintained an internal focus so that their professor status was validated from within, not by students” (p. 361). It involved significant emotion management. Harlow’s (2003) study suggests that for black professors, maintaining their professional status calls for higher demands on emotional labor than for white professors. As this analysis is limited to black and white professors, its findings suggest the need for research that considers a broader analysis that includes other racial and ethnic groups.

Interviewing instructors who teach diversity-education courses at a Research I university, Moore, Acosta, Perry, and Edwards (2010) found that women and people of color shoulder a heavier burden in teaching and emotional labor work requirements resulting in fewer opportunities to advance careers. This

emotional labor tax results in a devalued secondary labor market made up of women and people of color. The creation of this devalued market fosters the formation of “a split academic labor market in which emotional work is a primary marker of gender and racial differences in the experiences of teaching” (Moore et al., 2010, p. 196). The sample of 29 individuals included Hispanic/Latinos, Native Americans, Africans, and African Americans, but no instructors who self-identified as Asian. This study also did not examine how instructors cope with resistance and the labor it involves.

Another relevant article affirms the gendered emotional labor of college professors across research, teaching, administration, and service (Bellas, 1999). According to Bellas, women typically spend more time on teaching and service, while men spend more time in the masculine characterized tasks of research and administration. This is in spite of the fact that in research-oriented universities, teaching and service make high demands on emotional labor and offer few rewards, while work in research and administration overlook demands on emotional labor while highlighting skills, and offer many more opportunities for recognition and rewards. In addition, because feeling and display rule expectations are gendered, women face difficulties exercising authority in the classroom and may be sought out to do more nurturing work by students.

As pointed out by Bellas (1999), we should expect women to experience more affronts to their authority than do men, who are protected from these challenges by what Hochschild (2003) refers to as “status shields.” But this is not entirely straightforward. Women professors are haunted by the paradoxical combination of

the structural power and authority vested in them by virtue of working in a faculty position and the sense of subordination that results from laboring to meet gendered expectations of nurturance and friendliness. The paradox faced by women professors is distinctly unique and different from the experiences of their men counterparts. This can also be said for the experiences of people of color.

Research suggests that women, and especially women of color, face unique challenges in the university setting (Vo, 2012). They are hesitant to self-promote, a skill that is important for hiring, promotion, and pay; they are often relegated to token status regardless of their qualifications; and they struggle to find mentors and build networks. In addition, women of color contend with criticism that is harshened by their marginalization, face difficulties achieving tenure, must contest gender and racial harassment and discrimination, labor to change policies, and face greater obstacles in becoming administrators (Vo, 2012). In addition to these challenges, women and people of color also face unique challenges in their role as teachers (Harlow, 2003; Moore et al., 2010).

While the above reviewed scholarly work focusing on university professors and emotional labor has begun a vitally important inquiry, it also has limitations. The analysis of emotional labor relies primarily on a gender analysis without mention of the role that racial and ethnic differences may play (Bellas, 1999); examines differences between only two racial groups such as African American professors and white professors (Harlow, 2003); or cannot account for the experiences of a major racial group (Asian and Asian Americans) because of a limitation in the sample (Moore et al., 2010). The limitations

suggest the need for research that considers wider diversity across racial and ethnic groups or more broadly women of color. A more diverse sample will allow for a broader analysis that is not limited to comparing the experiences of women of color against whites as the permanent reference group, but rather allows for a more dynamic analysis that engages with diversity rather than just positioning difference in opposition to whiteness.

In this paper we rely on a diverse sample of women professors who teach about gender, race, and class in order to explore what forms of resistance they face in the classroom, as well as what strategies they use to overcome or cope with this resistance. Using an analysis that is theoretically grounded in emotional labor, we find that classroom demographics affect the kinds of resistance faced by instructors and affect how instructors labor to cope. The ability of instructors to cope may vary based on rank, which also implies differential consequences leading to expending more energy and effort. The gendered and racialized nature of both the resistance they face and the coping strategies available to women instructors increases the labor of women instructors and intensifies the labor of women of color, women with disabilities, and young women. The increased amount and intensity of emotional labor while teaching may have deleterious effects on research and thus the professional success of women, particularly women of color, in academia.

Data and Methods

We use primary data in the form of qualitative interviews with women instructors gathered in 2012-2013 to examine their experiences in the classroom. The study is set in a large research oriented

mid-western university that had a student population of over 40,000 in 2012-2013.ⁱ Overall, 42% of this population was women, with the lowest at the graduate level (about 37%). The population of people of color was about 8.2%, while “underrepresented minorities” were close to 10% in 2012-2013. “Underrepresented minorities” from the United States included any indication of American Indian or Alaska Native, black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders, including a breakdown of those from the “Two or More Races” category. These proportions were slightly higher at the graduate level. About 10% of the graduate student population were people of color and close to 12% were “underrepresented minorities.”

The school has about 1,800 tenured/tenure track faculty and about 360 adjunct faculty distributed across various fields such as agriculture, engineering, social sciences and humanities, management, and sciences. Although a core mission of the university is to support and enhance diversity in the recruitment of faculty, the proportion of women, people of color, and “underrepresented minorities” is small. In 2012-2013, of the tenured and tenure-track faculty, about 26% were women, 17% were people of color, and 13% were “underrepresented minorities.” In fact, there has been little or no change in the proportion of women faculty (tenured and tenure-track) in the past three years.

The qualitative data for this paper are drawn from a larger ongoing project of the authors. In this project, we focused on one college within the large university with close to 300 faculty members, of which approximately 42% are women.ⁱⁱ About 16% of women are African American, Asian, or from countries other than the

United States. As no directory of this college is readily available, we compiled a list of all tenure-track or tenured faculty members in nine departments in the college using information on the Internet as of July 2012. Because the primary interest of the larger project is in experiences of women across racial/ethnic categories, we narrowed our list to tenured and tenure-track women faculty. We used this list to purposively sample interviewees for the study.

To minimize sample bias and maximize variability of perspectives, we used distinct and diverse starting points as the basis for selection. Adopting a purposive nonprobability sampling strategy, we first identified all faculty who were African American, Asian, or from countries other than the United States for potential interviews. We then purposively selected faculty members categorized as white in each of the three ranks (full, associate, and assistant) to include for interviews. In addition, we widely distributed an email specifically on the Women’s Studies listserv calling for participation in the project. This list included graduate students from various disciplines who at the time of the interview were teaching for the Women’s Studies program.

For this paper, we draw on primary data in the form of interviews with 15 instructors, which include tenured and tenure-track faculty and graduate students independently teaching a section of a course. These instructors teach in a variety of disciplines but all of them focus on women’s issues and feminism, specifically gender, race, class, and culture. Please see Table 1 for a profile of study participants. They include one full professor, five associate professors, six assistant professors, and three graduate student instructors. Of them, one instructor had received a teaching award at

the college and university level. Of the 15 instructors, 10 described themselves as white (one said European and another said Jewish white) and five categorized themselves as people of color (African American and Asian or Asian American). Unfortunately, we were unable to interview any women who identified as Latina. Their absence reflects the major underrepresentation of Latina women in the college from which we drew our sample.

An open-ended interview protocol was used to conduct the in-depth interviews. All the interviews were face-to-face and were conducted by the authors. The interviews took place on the university campus or in the offices of the participant. The average interview was two hours, but they ranged from one hour to four hours. The identity of interviewees is confidential and pseudonyms are therefore used for the interviewees. Other details that may identify the interviewees are also deleted from the quotes.

The unstructured format of the interview together with our promise of confidentiality, we think, put women at ease. Many of the participants were animated in describing their experiences, successes, and frustrations. Our open-ended questions covered details about their teaching background, courses taught, their perceptions of students expectations, challenging situations in the classroom (including frustrations and successes), the emotions involved in these situations, and the ways in which they dealt with them. We typically ended the interview by seeking the instructors' opinions about teaching evaluations and teaching awards.

Table 1

Profile of Participants

		N=15
Race		
Black or Asian		5
White		10*
Rank**		
Graduate Instructor		3
Assistant Professor		6
Associate Professor		5
Full Professor		1

* One participant identified as European and one identified as Jewish.

** Some of the faculty members are jointly appointed across two departments or programs. Joint appointments or department affiliations are not separately indicated because it could identify the participants.

A grounded theory approach was used to discern major themes related to the strategies adopted by instructors to manage emotional labor. We repeatedly listened to our interviews and read the transcriptions to derive the emergent themes. Both authors independently arrived at the themes and then discussed the data to finalize the themes. The authors did not differ in the content of the themes discerned. While many of our participants recognize the labor involved in preparing for and teaching issues related to gender and/or race and ethnicity, and/or class, the strategies they adopt may vary based on rank and age. We view rank—graduate student, assistant professor, associate professor, full professor—as denoting status in the classroom in terms of tenure. Status can be central to the fears and

uncertainty associated with being untenured or a graduate student whose funding is tied to teaching. Our analysis of strategies to manage emotional labor focuses on three main themes: being dismissive; placating students through performing and emoting; and coping with resistance through “claiming” oneself. We turn to discuss each of these themes.

Teaching Gender, Race, Class, and Culture

The participants in this study have been teaching anywhere between 1 and 20 years at this university. Many of them have taught at other universities and in some instances also at high schools and community colleges. While the graduate instructors and some untenured faculty members have taught only undergraduate courses, most of the participants have taught undergraduate courses and graduate seminars. Moreover, as noted above, less than 30% of the faculty are people of color, and with only a small proportion of students of color, classes are generally not very racially or ethnically diverse. The participants suggested that it was not uncommon to see only 1 or 2 people of color in a 30-person class, and sometimes none at all. However, courses offered by interdisciplinary programs, such as African American Studies, Asian Studies, or Women’s Studies, often see a larger proportion of students of color.

Overall, our data show that students are often unwilling to discuss issues related to gender, race, and/or ethnicity. Undergraduates are more likely than graduate students to resist discussion of topics related to gender, race, and ethnicity as involving power. While some students resisted vocally in the class, others expressed their negative opinions in the

written part of the course evaluations (including negative opinions regarding the instructor). We first discuss below the classroom experiences and strategies instructors adopt to cope with the accomplishments and frustrations of teaching issues of race, class, and gender. We then turn to consider the challenges that women of color face.

Strategies Adopted: Managing Labor and Coping with Emotions

The instructors we spoke with were largely in agreement that teaching is an emotionally taxing aspect of their work. We discuss below the three main themes pertaining to how the instructors managed their emotional labor: being dismissive, placating students, and coping with resistance.

Being Dismissive

One common strategy adopted by women instructors coping with resistance in the classroom was being dismissive. The women reported having a true concern and passion for educating, but many agreed that maintaining this passion often became difficult when students resisted their efforts. Student resistance was often expressed through silence or sometimes vocally and physically (through body language) in the classroom, as well as through negative feedback on evaluations. This resistance was shocking for many graduate instructors and assistant professors, while more senior, experienced professors had come to expect it. Less experienced instructors found that in order to deal with resistance effectively, they needed to become dismissive of difficult students and classroom frustrations—a strategy commonly used by their more experienced colleagues as well. For instance, an untenured professor of

color, Tamryn noted, “Last year, I was more emotionally invested, this year I did not care.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In the case of these instructors, dismissiveness was not born from apathy or ambivalence, rather being dismissive became a reactionary mechanism for coping with their own frustrations and disappointments. In other words, being dismissive functions as a self-preservation technique that allows instructors to continue teaching in the face of resistance while protecting themselves from personal emotional discomfort. For example, Anne, an assistant professor of color, said, “I *want* to hear what [the students] think, but if I feel like I'm constantly being attacked, I just shut down and I stop caring. And I leave the class just wanting to get through it.” She also went on to say, “And when you say things that certain students don't agree with you can visibly see that they don't agree with it. Some students will start laughing, they'll roll their eyes and so this all affects how you teach. And so when I see these things, I have to catch myself and tell myself that this does not matter.”

Another example came from Marie, a white tenured faculty member with 30 years of teaching experience, who talked about an instance early on in her teaching career when she became so frustrated due to her students' unwillingness to participate that she packed up her things and walked out of the classroom in the middle of the hour. After she had reflected on that action, she decided that she, “would never do that again. It was just, it was almost to the point of exploding and losing control of myself. So I owned it and I never did that again and instead when I get those feelings, when that happens, when I'm feeling frustrated with the class, I just manage it. I go on to the next point or I recognize what's happening and I

blow past it because I never want them to see me sweat.” By “blowing past” frustrations, Marie uses dismissiveness as a strategy for controlling her own emotions in the classroom.

Instructors also coped with what they considered to be unreasonable feedback on teaching evaluations by being dismissive of negative comments or simply ignoring them. A common form of negative feedback that these instructors considered to be unreasonable was the suggestion that in courses where race, class, and gender were part of the subject matter, the course material was too narrowly focused on the issues of women or people of color. While these comments were often irritating to instructors, most of them were able to dismiss these criticisms by reminding themselves of their students' inexperience. Elise, an assistant professor of color, provided an example of this when she related a student comment that suggested her class focused too much on race. Elise said, “But the commentary about content, I don't care about, because they're students, so not to denigrate their personhood, but to simply say, they're there to learn. They don't know what the content of this course should be . . . it's irritating but I had to learn to let that one go. They don't know. How would [they] know what this class should have in it?”

Untenured faculty members are somewhat concerned about their evaluations but find ways to cope with negative comments through several semesters. Several of the women of color, such as Tamryn and Elise, insisted that their department heads were sensitive to possible racial bias when reading their teaching evaluations. Such departmental support allows them to cope with any negative or racist feedback they may receive in a more confident manner. In contrast, Rose, a

faculty member ofc who works in a department that requires excellent teaching scores and offers less support, said that she was so “turned off” by her average evaluations that she has not even looked at her evaluations for at least two or three years now. She assumes that they are reasonably okay as her department head has not approached her to discuss teaching or any troubling student feedback.

At least one of the participants, Kirstin, a young white woman, was not entirely dismissive of teaching evaluations and instead noted that they carry “institutional weight” and sometimes have “fair critiques.” However, Kirstin also acknowledged that evaluations may not be entirely reliable in assessing quality of teaching and/or learning. Irrespective of whether instructors are dismissive or not, many of them try to manage the resistance in the classroom, particularly to discussions of gender, race, class, and culture.

Placating Students: Performing and Emoting

A second strategy adopted by instructors to cope with the challenges faced in the classroom was to placate students. Instructors sometimes attempted to placate students in the hopes that doing so would reduce resistance and create a more positive and constructive learning environment. Placating often required a great deal of impression management. Those instructors who attempted to placate students described performing and emoting in order to give the impression that they were caring and concerned. While many of the instructors genuinely care about their students, the successful and consistent display of these feelings required emotional labor and was at times very difficult for the instructors. Facing and dealing with resistance in the

classroom complicated the ability of instructors to maintain an impression of care and concern.

While most of the instructors disliked the university's teaching evaluation system, they were not averse to feedback and evaluation more generally. In fact, many of the instructors encouraged feedback from students in alternative forms. One example of an alternative form of soliciting feedback that was used by many instructors was the mid-semester evaluation. These evaluation questionnaires were usually written by instructors, were commonly open-ended in nature, and distributed to their classes sometime during the course of the semester. The instructors who used their own forms of evaluation suggested that the benefits of this alternative were that they could construct questionnaires in a way that would solicit more helpful feedback, but also suggested that these personalized, course-tailored evaluations operated to provide students with an outlet for their criticisms and commentary on the course, and provided instructors with an opportunity to respond to student concerns during the semester. Several of the instructors argued that this was personally helpful and a means of gaining constructive feedback, but they also acknowledged that in many cases, coping with mid-semester criticisms by addressing student complaints often increased their workload.

For most of the instructors, placating students also meant advising, counseling, and mentoring those students who sought them out as a source of support. This commitment to students requires both a great deal of time outside of the classroom, as well as a substantial amount of emotional labor. Instructors work to nurture and care for students, to show sympathy and concern, but must also carefully balance this

performance with maintaining boundaries and their authority. An additional complication is that the work is time-consuming, emotionally draining, and not a rewarded aspect of work as a college instructor. Erin, a white assistant professor, provides a typical, but poignant example of the challenges faced by women instructors who want to show care and concern for their students. Erin points out the difficulty she has with saying “no” to extra work and adds that this is not limited to committee work and writing letters of recommendation, for example, but includes conducting nurturing and caring work towards students. She stated:

So it's a constant stream of [students saying], "My parents are getting divorced," and "I just had an abortion," or "I was raped," "I had this" and "I had this." And of course, you need someone to talk to and I know that there are a lot of [other instructors] who don't care. And they don't have someone to talk to and I end up spending a lot of my time doing stuff like that, that unfortunately, isn't valued and isn't going to get me to where I need to be either. But I don't know how not to be that person either. So that's a tricky thing for me—juggling responsibilities and being able to say no, and then not feeling guilty if I do say no. Those are things that I think are challenging, for women.

Women of color also faced an added challenge. In addition to the usual load of student mentoring, instructors of color were also being called upon by students of color for support. Elise, an assistant professor of color provided an example of this when she told us, “I do know that many of my students of color end up being the students

that come spend time with me, that come sit and chat and come and have those conversations that extend outside [of the classroom].” Similarly to Erin, Elise noted that these mentoring relationships were extremely rewarding, but also time-consuming and not the type of work that was considered important for earning tenure.

Amelie, a white tenured faculty member, also referred to the time involved in such mentoring. Teaching about feminist issues at the graduate level, Amelie intently described the “approval” graduate students look for from women faculty members (not as much from men faculty members) and the labor that mentoring of graduate students involves. “I have to emote, literally emote in person, on paper—what a great job, what a great comment, you’re such a great student. ... I really think they need it.” Recognizing the need to manage such emotional labor has led Amelie to more carefully consider requests to serve on dissertation committees because she views this commitment as lasting “not just for the next 3 to 5 years but for the next 10 to 20 years.”

For many of these women instructors, the personal is political, and abiding by this philosophy means that they cannot easily separate their personal feelings from their professional responsibilities. They viewed it as their responsibility to care for students and to reaffirm confidence in other women and in students of color. They also viewed this as a helpful strategy in dealing with resistance to issues of racialized and gendered challenges in the classroom.

Placating students can be time-consuming. Amelie who teaches about women’s issues in the United States described the strategy she drew upon on the advice of a colleague. Amelie decided to

meet with each student in her class to get their feedback about the course, including asking, “What’s the biggest frustration with the class?” Students responded with a variety of issues, but Amelie did not believe in changing her course or the policies. As Amelie noted, “The fact that I had let them get it off their chest, often got the students on my side.” The strategy not only changed student evaluations but what she could accomplish in the second half of the course because she found that “some of the political analysis” central to the understanding of her course did “hit home.”

Instructors who incorporate feminist principles into teaching issues of gender, race, and class may find themselves challenged, compelling them to find ways to ensure engagement in the classroom and attention of students. Kirstin describes a challenging class she had one semester. Kirstin decided to organize her undergraduate class as a “feminist class,” to make it an “inviting space and giv[e] everyone an equal voice.” Her goal to decenter authority was viewed unfavorably by the students. “I think all they could read was I’m a radical liberal,” noted Kirstin. Consequently, the class turned out to be difficult as students struggled with the notion of decentered authority. In an effort to address this, Kirstin shifted back to using the assigned text as the authority in an attempt to diffuse resistance directed toward her “radical liberalism.”

They [authors of the text] are the authority, not just me, was one strategy I adopted. It changes, it changes sometimes from being about all of us arguing about this topic; so all of us arguing about race in America, it shifts it to what arguments does this [emphasized by Kirstin] author make about race in

these circumstances. Go back to the text.

This strategy adopted by Kirstin enabled her to manage the class by placating the students. But it also marginalized the important politics of feminism including recognizing that the personal is political. Such experiences can also be frustrating for instructors as they can recur in the same semester or across semesters. So, how have instructors coped with such resistance?

Coping with Resistance—Claiming Oneself

The third theme we identified was the instructors’ attempts to cope with resistance and challenges in the classroom by claiming themselves in an effort to prevent stress from interfering with their other duties, such as research and writing. Because their role as instructors requires them to placate students and maintain a professional demeanor, in many cases instructors (especially those who are untenured) could not call out racist and sexist attitudes with the anger or emotions that they were experiencing. While racism and sexism in the classroom frustrated and angered all of the instructors, women of color were faced with the added burden of viewing these attitudes as personal attacks and as threatening to their authority and status. The inability to express feelings like anger, outrage, or frustration in their authentic forms often created stress and tension for instructors when they left the classroom. This stress often interfered with their ability to complete other work.

Claiming themselves often occurred through spending time doing enjoyable and stress-relieving activities such as exercise, pottery, gardening, yoga, or spending time with friends and family. Anne, an assistant professor of color, described how her

feelings after a bad day of class needed to be “purged” before she could do other things. She told us,

[A bad day in the classroom] serves as a huge distraction because I find myself going back to it, but I have to say that I'm managing it much better now because I'm disengaging. Which is a bad thing, but the minute I leave the classroom I think about it. If it's a bad day I do think about it. But I do other things like I go to the gym and I run it out [laughs] and that helps! So that by the time I get home I've purged all the negative thoughts and I'm able to do my work, my other work.

While these activities were enjoyable and stress-relieving, they also serve the work-related purpose of acting as a refresher in between work tasks. In this sense, the boundaries between work and play become more tenuous as a result of the emotional costs of teaching.

Coping with the labor of teaching that is often intensely emotional when focusing on topics of gender, race, class, and culture sometimes makes instructors seek ways to “decompress,” a term used by both Kirstin and Laura. Kirstin's effort to adopt the feminist classroom principle proved difficult and “frustrating” when undergraduate students in her class failed to relate to the approach of “giving everyone an equal voice.” Kirstin shared her growing frustration with other instructors and tried to give herself a “pep talk” every day she went into this class. She had to find other ways to address her frustration. Kirstin explained,

I became obsessed about going to Goodwill. I discovered that I needed a buffer zone between school and

home. If I went right from teaching to go home I was just all kinds of itchy-twitchy restlessness. I couldn't focus, I was useless. ... I brought all that anxious energy home ... so I ended up going to Goodwill a lot. And I would walk around, there was something about the process like [pause] switching gears in the brain and sorting through the clothes and the piles and looking for maybe a find or maybe I find nothing but the process of going through that downshifted the gears in my brain enough so that I stopped the awful feeling in the pit of my stomach that said that class did not go well, what are you going to do on Friday or ... so I needed the buffer zone to decompress and then I could go home or then go work.

Laura, a woman of color, also remarked that not just on one or two occasions, but many semesters, she went home exhausted. The exhaustion deterred her from focusing on her research. She spoke of trying to schedule her teaching early in the week and then trying to “decompress” and “disconnect” so as to what she described as “claim myself.” Laura took to activities outside of research such as pottery making or basket weaving and that “repetitive” mode of work helped her to reconnect with the research mode. In addition, she often wrote down her experiences and thoughts in an attempt to “feel free.”

Our data show that women of color and those on a lower status (graduate student and untenured faculty member) were more likely to recognize the labor involved, feel emotionally invested, and feel compelled to find ways to unwind.

Added Challenges for Women of Color

While the resistance and themes described above were consistent across white instructors and instructors of color, there are a few notable differences between the experiences of white women and women of color. One important difference was how the instructors interpreted and internalized resistance. White instructors expressed frustration regarding resistance as much as instructors of color did, however, instructors of color were more likely to express that they felt personally attacked or offended by resistance. While all of the women often suggested that they wondered whether their men colleagues faced this type of resistance, women of color wondered whether their white colleagues had similar experiences. In other words, rather than just wondering whether their gender mattered, women of color wondered whether or not they were doubly burdened by their gender and their race. In this sense, women of color may face the added challenge of self-doubt in a more complex way than white women do, and thus may experience additional emotional challenges.

Women of color also referred to the added responsibility they feel of representing their racial or ethnic group. While white instructors discussed their sense of the need to serve on committees to make sure that women were represented or to mentor women students, they did not perceive it as being representatives for their racial group. In contrast, women of color often felt as though they had an additional responsibility to mentor women of color and to serve as representatives of their racial groups in the academic setting. Additionally, women of color observed the increased scrutiny they experience from students in the classroom. This was interpreted as resistance to instructors of

color and disapproval of their teaching techniques. While some white instructors felt vulnerable as women, they did not cite racial vulnerability, whereas this was a constant concern for women of color.

The narratives, interpretations, and experiences of our participants should be taken seriously because of the implications they have for women's career trajectories in the academy. The experiences of women of color should alert the academy to concerns about their retention in the academy. The challenges faced by the instructors and their stories suggest that we need to continue to critically interrogate the intersections of race, gender, and class, as well as other axes of diversity, and the role they play in the academy. These narratives also have implications for universities as they increasingly emphasize diversity of faculty and students as a major goal.

Conclusion

In this paper, we focused on the emotional labor that women instructors in a research university do particularly when teaching issues of gender, race, class, and culture and the strategies they adopt for coping with the resistance they face in the classroom. While still preliminary, the results shed light on the challenges faced by women when teaching content that critically interrogates power and difference. This resistance manifested in the refusal of students to participate in class discussion, vocal objections in class, or in negative feedback on evaluations. The instructors coped with this resistance through being dismissive, through placating students, and through reclaiming themselves. Our findings reiterate the fact that women of color face unique challenges and resistance in the classroom and coping with those challenges often interferes with their ability

to work on other responsibilities, such as research and writing. We contribute an analysis through the theoretical framework of emotional labor that allows for a more nuanced understanding of how emotions affect the work of academics in the classroom, in the office, *and* at home.

The conceptualization of emotional labor has provided researchers with a framework for exploring how most work in a service economy does not merely entail the completion of tasks, but includes a degree of impression management and performance. Successful emotional labor requires emotional control and the ability to cope with those emotions that are not considered to be professionally acceptable. While the study of emotional labor has highlighted the gendered nature of this kind of work, there has been much less focus on other axes of difference, such as race and ethnicity. Moreover, unlike earlier findings of black professors overlooking the challenges to their professorial authority (Harlow, 2003), we found that instructors of color often took student resistance to material about gender, race, and class personally and the emotion they expended compelled them to find ways to cope with it.

The academy offers researchers a setting that is ripe for the study of emotional labor and difference. It is traditionally a white and masculine organizational space. Women and people of color have made great inroads, but as is the case in the institution that we are studying, women and especially women of color frequently still find themselves significantly underrepresented. In addition to being part of a numerical minority, many women and people of color enter academia at lower ranks without much representation at upper ranks. This may result in professors and instructors in the early stages of their careers feeling

vulnerable and isolated when they are unable to find mentoring or guidance from similarly situated people. Most American universities have in common a great push for increased diversity. However, the appreciation for diversity has not always come with a clearer understanding for the unique challenges that women and people of color will face in the classroom. This lack of recognition in departments and institutions can lead to the departure of women and faculty of color, which in turn may contribute to a revolving door reputation and the inability of these departments and institutions to attract diverse candidates, as well as contribute to an inhospitable environment for those women and people of color who do work in these settings (Vo, 2012). One possible way for institutions to support women of color in this context is to consider the demographics of the instructor and the students in the classroom when utilizing evaluations for assessment of teaching.

Almost all of the women we spoke to share a passionate belief in the importance of their role as educators. Additionally, most people who work in academia have become successful by striving to do their best in every aspect of their work. It should not be surprising then, that the women with whom we spoke struggled to be both excellent teachers and excellent researchers. However, they often viewed the research focus of the university setting in which they work as in conflict with their ability to be excellent teachers. Additionally, they constantly struggle with the emotional challenges of teaching in a traditionally white, masculine space that often manifests in student resistance in the classroom. Coping with emotional labor limits the ability of the instructors to work on their research. Although the women faculty members are told that teaching does not

matter for tenure, their experiences suggest the contrary. They point out that negative feedback in their teaching evaluations will be held against them. We must consider the effects of the teaching evaluations on the tenure chances of women and instructors of color who may be negatively evaluated because of their focus on issues of difference in their course content, or because of their own gender, race, or ethnicity. Additionally, teaching certainly matters for tenure in the sense that the time and energy it consumes detracts from the time and energy spent doing more “tenure-worthy work” such as research and publishing.

Our preliminary findings suggest that when it comes to teaching, gender and race

matter. Women and people of color face unique classroom challenges that increase their emotional labor. Many of them do recognize the gendered expectations that students have of them—supportive and nurturing—which too involves considerable emotional labor. The extent to which the axes of difference matter is not limited to the gender and race of the instructor, but also includes the gendered and racialized context in which the university classroom exists. In other words, the institutional setting plays a large role in shaping the experiences of the students and instructors who work in them. As such, institutions need to accept greater responsibility in guiding and supporting women faculty and faculty of color.

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i These data are drawn from facts and figures compiled by the university. A citation is avoided to ensure anonymity.

ii The college is not identified because this may compromise the confidentiality assured to interviewees.

iii In the cases of those professors who did not identify as white, rather than specifically identifying the instructors by their self-described race or ethnicity, we have chosen to identify them more broadly as persons of color. This is done in order to ensure the protection of their identities, especially in light of the small number of people of color who work in the institutional setting from which we have drawn our sample. We promised our participants confidentiality and anonymity, which is also in accordance with the approval for the use of human subjects for this study.

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