

The Emotional Labour of Canadian Liaison Librarians in an Age of Austerity

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Academic libraries have frequently had to adapt as technology and staffing models have changed. These changes have been occurring more frequently as a result of a rise in the corporate model of academia. Canadian universities have adjusted to decreasing budgets by being more focused on external funding, helping to create this shift. There has been research done on the emotional labour of instructional, reference, and American liaison librarians but there has been little focus on the Canadian context. As part of a growing body of literature, I believe that looking at specifically Canadian liaison librarians within research intensive universities will enrich this literature.

The shifting needs of Canadian research universities have required librarians to be flexible but also resulted in a smaller workforce while there are ever increasing numbers of students and faculty. This has occurred while liaisons are also asked to take on new and evolving areas such as data management, scholarly communications, and knowledge synthesis which require new skill sets. Increasingly, tenured librarian positions are disappearing along with those of tenured faculty. Within this less stable environment, administrators are asking liaison librarians to carry heavier workloads that require more of their emotional labour. For purposes of my research I am using Arlie Russel Hochschild's definition of emotional labor.

"This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others ... This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality."

How do Canadian liaison librarians deal with the emotional labour required of them by their roles not only to an area, discipline, or subject but also to colleagues and administrators? How is the emotional labour of liaison librarians acknowledged by the administration, colleagues, students, and teaching faculty? What assumptions are made about the sustainability of the liaison model and do liaisons themselves value their own emotional labour? How do they manage expectations from multiple audiences while maintaining their own personal and professional goals? These are questions that I will try to answer in this paper.