"Everything is more intense":
the emotion work of delivering leisure experiences

Thematic areas:
> Management and Administration of Leisure Programs and Services
> Outdoor and Adventure Recreation
> Community Development (e.g., municipal recreation, community resources; building community)

Preference for presentation:
> Formal presentation only

Introduction

Managers rely on employees' use of emotions to deliver positive leisure experiences. While emotional labour, the management of one's emotion in order to achieve successful service delivery (Hochschild, 1983), has been extensively researched in disciplines such as management (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Morris & Feldman, 1996), nursing (Mazhindu, 2003) and psychology (Rustin, 2003), the embodied experience of emotional labour remains relatively unexplored in leisure contexts. Leisure scholars have, for example, considered the measurement of emotional labour (Chu & Murrmann, 2006), the correlation to organizational benefit (Van Dijk, Smith, & Cooper, 2011) and costs (Constanti & Gibbs, 2005; Kim & Han, 2009) but a critical analysis of how emotion labour is constructed and experienced remains under researched. Moreover, the service of emotions in producing leisure experiences for others is implicit and assumed in many workplaces. Emotions, therefore, need to be better understood as they are experienced both in the production of leisure experiences for others and in the effects they have on employees' wellbeing.

Our research problematizes the assumed nature of emotional labour and makes visible the nature of emotions at work in providing leisure experiences. Drawing on post-structural notions of self (Weedon, 2004), we argue that employees' experiences of emotion are multiple, fragmented and, at times, contradictory. Thus we utilize the term emotion work, rather than emotional labour, to conceptualize a more nuanced and complex understanding of embodied experiences of emotions at work. Taxing emotion work can result in burn-out, fatigue, and negative personal/social experiences for individuals and has implications for retention and employee satisfaction for employers (Grandey, 2003; Kim & Han, 2009). Therefore recruiting, managing, and maintaining quality employee performance is reliant on understanding of how emotion work is experienced by staff. We argue that reflexive management practices need to be employed in order to support emotionally healthy and sustainable leisure workforces.

Methods

We have chosen a qualitative case study approach because it allows exploration of individuals and organizations and the complex relationships of these within their respective contexts (Yin, 2009), it recognizes the "subjective human creation of meaning" and pluralism of experience (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 10) and makes it possible to better understand participants' experiences especially when "boundaries" of a phenomenon are unclear (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). This approach acknowledges a post-structural framing of the multiplicity of embodied experience and the construction of knowledge. The researchers reflexively engaged with multiple layers of meaning and meaning making processes (Stronach, Garrat, Pearce, & Piper, 2007) by drawing on 66 in-depth interviews (38 camp and 28 music festival), field notes and auto-ethnographic accounts of working in the respective leisure spaces to weave together a critical research narrative about emotion work.

While a community music festival in Queensland, Australia and summer camps in Ontario, Canada differ in many ways (genealogically, business objectives, etc.), these cases were chosen based on the shared characteristics of liminal leisure delivery spaces that were shaped by the emotion work expected and performed by employees. The leisure spaces considered for this article are unique in that they were both temporary communities focussed on the production of pleasurable leisure experiences for others. In both cases, employees were required to work within close-knit staff teams for short periods of time (approximately 1-2 months) with long work hours and unusual tasks. The commonalities and differences of the cases analysed in this study, offered ruptures (Foucault, 1982) to the assumed positive and beneficial employment experiences of those working to deliver recreational and leisure experiences to others (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). A number of sampling techniques were employed

for each case (e.g. convenience, purposive, and snowball) to generate and select a pool of camp and festival employee interview participants (Neuman, 2006). Interviews were transcribed and were coded manually at an initial stage and then again using NVivo software for more complex and detailed analysis. The data were analysed for themes as well as discursive practices that illustrate how the emotion work of employees' roles were experienced and how these are shaped by discourses. An instrumental multi-case study methodology (Stake, 1995) was employed to "provide insight into an issue" and where the case plays a "supportive role" in "facilitating an understanding of something else" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 549).

Findings

The findings suggest that both cases were delineated by certain social, emotional and even geographic parameters that made them unique leisure production and consumption spaces. They both contained elements of suspended reality by employees being (physically) removed from their everyday lives and plunging them into a new but temporary reality. Employees' level of commitment to delivering the benefits of festival or camp experiences acted as a focal and unifying agent (Sharpe, 2005). The boundaries between work and leisure became blurred, adding to an unconventional employment experience. While summer camp employees called this "the bubble" and festival staff members spoke of "the family", Turner refers to experiences of anti-structure, like these, as communitas (Turner, 1994). Interview participants from both cases stated that their employment experiences were rich and fulfilling and created powerful experiences of belonging. Experiences of communitas, or in this case intense working communities, are not always positive as is often assumed for those delivering leisure or recreational experiences to others (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). According to Olaveson, "a very intense social life always does a sort of violence to the individual's body and mind and disrupts their normal functioning. This is why it can last for only a limited time" (Olaveson, 2001, p. 100). Interview participants made statements about experiences exhaustion and/or being emotionally drained and the reason why some staff left early or didn't enjoy their employment experiences as much as they expected. From our analysis, we found three themes that illustrated the complexities and added to the "intensity" of leisure service delivery experiences; social demands, emotion work expectations and geographic liminality.

Social demands

Relationships in these environments are emotionally porous and intense. The stripping away of familiar roles and statuses necessary for anti-structural reality in which communitas can emerge makes participants vulnerable (Turner, 1994). Employees must find support in people they have only just met and who are also embedded in the same social reality as they are (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). This makes leisure employee spaces dangerous in a Foucauldian sense. That is, camp or festival social life is not bad, in fact the pervasive attitude of acceptance in both is highly revered, but individual vulnerability of employees cause their relationships to be more intense or, as one interview participants said, "fortissimo" (Daniel, music festival) than usual. People who have not had a camp or festival employee experience often underestimate this aspect; "I don't think people know…how intense it is because you are living there, and you are living in it" (Terri, camp). Although this is anticipated by some, "I've heard that it gets really really intense" (James, camp) nothing prepares employees for the closeness that is developed.

Emotion work expectations

The strong emotional connections with others in communitas (Turner, 1994) was unanimously assumed to be positive in both study populations. However several interview participants described the social festival or camp environment as being 'intense' in a negative

way. These statements referred to a kind of pressure that they felt about being expected to appear positive and emotionally in-control at all times. For example a festival employee said,

> We can't get emotional. We can't express our anxieties and we can't display our frustrations in front of them [members of the community]. They are sometimes quite powerful emotions, ... And even me. I mean, it wasn't quite working out…and it just pushed my button. I had to go off in the dark somewhere and swear a bit (laughs). As long as nobody could hear me… (Daniel, music festival).

Geographic liminality

Additionally, employees commented on the magnification of issues in such closed social environments.

> I think that a huge part of that is the fact that the camp community is usually, in a residential setting, such a closed community that things that wouldn't be issues in other professions get magnified because it's such a tiny environment. …in most professions you go home, have dinner, go to a movie, talk to your friends and come back the next day and have a fresh perspective but at camp, you stew about it and you get worried about it and it builds…. when you live where you work, you work a lot harder, and everything is more intense (Beth, camp).

With little time or options to be away from one another, camps and festivals become an emotional pressure cooker for staff.

Discussion & Implications

Our examination of leisure employees' embodied experiences illuminates possibilities for rethinking the emotional expectations of these roles. By drawing on post-structural insights our research considers the complex, multiple and contradictory nature of the emotion work embodied in leisure provision and employee communitas (Turner, 1994) experiences. A post-structural approach to leisure employment studies gives insight to how discourses and practices shape emotion work experiences. The use of 'family' and 'bubble' analogies, for example, shed light on discursive practices that shape and maintain certain expectations for employees' experiences. These camp and festival metaphors emphasize the nature of emotional relationships and friendships in their respective environments. Camp and festival employees being far from their home environments creates a kind of social and emotional vulnerability. Discourses of work pleasure and benefits obscures the emotional demands of their roles and, we argue, makes it all the more critical that managers engage reflexive management practices.

By making the emotion work of leisure service providers visible, camp managers and festival organizers may address the intangible needs of staff rather than the mainly regulatory approach currently taken in resolving management dilemmas. This research draws conclusions for leisure administrators, managers and policy makers in order that they may engage in reflexive management practices that support the emotion work of their employees (Frisby, 2005). Furthermore, we provide managers with in-depth understandings of the emotional demands on their staff and with it the sensitive nature of individual's interpretation of the effects of these experiences. This research supports recommendations for ground level applications in providing optimal employment experiences and informs reflexive practices for policy design and administration. More broadly, practitioners and stakeholders in the leisure industry can draw relevant insights on supportive and sustainable employment practices for employees' emotion work in other leisure service provision roles.

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