Emotional Labour and Occupational Identity: Passionate Rationality in the New Zealand Parliamentary Workplace

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This thesis explores parliamentarians’ emotional labour in their workplace, and argues the enactment of passionate rationality is crucial to how parliamentarians accomplish vocational authenticity. The New Zealand parliamentary workplace is characterised by an elaborate set of feeling rules and a complex emotional culture. On entry to parliament, parliamentarians go through a period of identity transformation akin to a moral career. Parliamentarians must manage emotion to achieve their occupational identities according to local feeling rules.

Based on analysis of in-depth group and individual interviews with parliamentarians, and focusing on the passage of the Civil Union Bill as an exemplar of parliamentarians’ emotion work, three interpretative repertoires were identified in their accounts of emotion in the workplace. These repertoires, The Game, The Performance and The Crusade are workplace specific meaning-making resources whose flexible deployment enabled parliamentarians to assert claims of occupational identity and vocational authenticity.

These repertoires show the emotional labour involved in parliamentarians’ negotiation of shared meanings around ‘entering’ the occupational role and asserting the authenticity of their new identities. In particular, The Crusade repertoire makes available the subject position of the Knight, the subject position important for accomplishment of being a passionately rational worker.

In this thesis, I introduce two new concepts for emotional labour in complex workplaces where that labour has both exchange and use value; emotional convocation and personified emotion. Together these concepts allow for a more thorough theorisation of emotion work than do existing concepts of emotional labour.

Although developed in relation to the work of parliamentarians, personified emotion and emotional convocation have utility for understanding other contemporary experiences of work where emotion management within a complex emotional culture is
fundamental to both occupational identity and the accomplishment of vocational authenticity.
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