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EMOTION MANAGEMENT AND THE PROFESSIONAL CULTURE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SOCIAL WORKERS IN RUSSIA: COMMON STANDARDS VERSUS THE MORAL MISSION OF SOCIAL CARE

In this article, I examine emotion work among administrative social workers in Russia, an activity vital to the on-going emergence of their professional culture. This examination focuses on administrative social workers; a particular group of largely office-bound social workers within the profession whose central job is to help people process the required documents needed to receive social assistance and benefits. Firstly, the article offers an overview of existing research on the sociology of emotions and professions, with a special focus on those studies exploring emotion management. The conclusion emerging from this review is that analysing emotion work in the field of social care can lead to a deeper and more complete understanding of its specific character and the ethical rules operating within it. Secondly, an analysis of administrative social worker interview transcripts was conducted as part of a larger research project on the professional culture of this occupation. This analysis was completed with help of NVivo software and reveals that although interviewees are not only clearly aware of emotion work, they do all the same try to reduce emotional expenditure in their communication with clients and strive to standardise how they work with their emotions. Carrying out emotion work has a key function in supporting professional identity among administrative social workers and furthering the development of a professional culture. On the other hand, the emotional expenditures involved and the challenge of 'making the profession

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worth it' are alleviated by the sense that one's work fulfils an important 'moral mission' in providing social care and assistance.

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The concepts of emotion management and emotion work (Hochschild 1983) have become integral to current sociological studies of various occupations and professions. The main objective of this article is to study emotion management among administrative social workers in Russia, which is an important driver in the emergence of their professional culture. Below, the emotional aspects of the everyday working experience of administrative social workers are outlined. The interviews considered in this article were collected as part of a wider research project entitled 'Professional culture in social work: a methodology of socio-anthropological research (the case of social work),' which is based on a qualitative research methodology (Iarskaia-Smirnova 2015). Initially, the research project did not aim to cover the study of emotion, but given the varied and rich material emerging from the interview transcripts on the emotionality of social work, we decided this data would be more than sufficient to form the basis of a detailed examination of emotion work and, in the process, allow us to deepen our understanding of this particular occupation.

The focus of this article is on one wing of the social work profession, what I term 'administrative social workers.' Their work largely consists of providing legal and formal documentary support for clients including orphans, children with disabilities, pensioners, veterans of labour¹ and war veterans, the unemployed, families and parents in difficult life situations. In providing social assistance to these vulnerable categories of the population, administrative social workers help organise care at home, set up leisure and vacation options, assist in finding jobs, offer mentorship for troubled teens, support families affected by alcohol and drug addiction issues, locate full-time residence for the elderly and children and take preventative measures against child abandonment.

The professional status of social work as a whole in Russia today remains unclear. On the one hand, the presence of special training courses and a core of experienced specialists marshalled by a set of professional guidelines and a code of ethics would suggest that social work is being actively professionalised. On the other hand, inadequate wages, the low prestige of the occupation and the high number working in the profession without a specialised social work education profile would seem to suggest that, from the point of view of the sociology of professions, it is too early to describe it in terms of a fully-formed professional culture in social work (Romanov, Iarskaia-Smirnova

¹ The 'Veteran of Labour' medal (in Russian Medal' 'Veteran truda') was a civilian labour award from the Soviet period.

2014). The emergence of this particular professional culture is one that is in need of careful study in both academic and practical terms.

This study owes much to the work of Arlie Hochschild, who argued that societies are characterised by 'emotional culture,' which provides the basic concepts and regulatory requirements in determining what one should feel and how one should express emotions in different situations and social contexts. Emotional culture is composed of various distinct 'emotional ideologies,' each of which corresponds to different social spheres of activity. Of these, one distinct grouping can be found in professional emotional ideologies, which have their own fixed rules concerning the expression of emotions (Hochschild 1983). Another important point is that people manage their emotions in all spheres of social life, particularly in those labour activities that involve direct interaction with clients. Given the high levels of client interaction, social work should be considered as part of this group of professions.

Emotion work in sociological studies of professions and occupations

The subject of emotion work or, as some experts prefer to term it, emotion management (see, Wharton 2009; Grandey et al. 2013) has been highlighted in sociological studies of various professions and occupations. Following the landmark work of Hochschild (1983), hundreds of studies on emotion work and emotional labour have appeared (Lively, Weed 2014; Wharton 2009).

Emotions carry out a signalling function in social interactions and provide pointers to the basic values and norms lying behind employee behaviour (Hochschild 1979). Emotions are complex phenomena, including physiological responses, body-facial gestures, linguistic symbols and cultural definitions, as well as the cognitive assessment of the situation (Thoits 1989). Given this, it should be noted that individuals manage these different components depending on the situation facing them. It is on the basis of a specific emotional culture that the regulations of feeling (feeling rules) and expressing emotions (display rules) are determined within each sphere of society, including the various trades and occupations (see, Hochschild 1983). Emotion work in the workplace can be understood as emotion management in accordance with a professional code. This is done in order to make the right impression, provoke the 'right' emotions from the client and, thus, sell a product or provide a service. Hochschild examined emotion work mainly within the context of the service sector in modern consumer society, where this work is transformed into emotional labour, which can be understood as performing emotion work in return for money (Hochschild 1983). The central point here is that a more rationalised management of emotions has become observable in modern societies. The study of emotion management allows one to reveal the rules or social norms that guide human behaviour, to observe the mechanisms that maintain

social order and relations of inequality, reinforce a hierarchy of relationships in certain areas, and, furthermore, help improve our understanding as to how these orders and relationships are changing (Lively, Weed 2014).

In addition, emotion work is closely connected with the identity of the worker (Hochschild 1983; Sloan 2007). Here in their direct interactions the worker regulates their emotions to confirm their professional identity. The performance of identity, especially for professional identities that are highly valued by the individual, is usually associated with the occurrence of relevant situations and the context of emotions (Hochschild 1983). Professional identity is made up of professional culture and a formal or informal ethical professional code. Therefore, by studying those emotions employees believe are appropriate to express, we can understand emotion norms (feeling rules and display rules), and subsequently the key characteristics of professional ethics.

Expressing emotions in strict accordance with the demands of professional culture can result in certain emotional problems; a discrepancy can emerge between what workers privately feel as individuals and what is deemed proper in a professional context. These difficulties have acquired names such as 'occupational burnout', 'emotional dissonance', 'emotional self-alienation' and are believed to hamper the effectiveness in professional work (Hochschild 1983; Wharton 2009; Maslach et al. 2001). In addition, moral issues arise: how can one maintain self-control and at the same time provide a service to the client? Can you simultaneously take care of yourself and the client without serious contradiction and what techniques can be employed to avoid moral and emotional quandaries (Weinberg 2014)? This problem brings us to one of the core values inherent to a professional code: how to take care of oneself and others in circumstances where professionalisation and formalisation of social work are gaining ground (Iarskaia-Smirnova 2015).

Considering the points made above, we would suggest that by exploring the emotional aspects of an occupation or profession, we can outline, clarify and update what professional values and norms are operating among administrative social workers, thus sketching the lines of their professional culture and professional identity. This is made all the more relevant given that, as studies have shown, 'emotion work' appears to be a rather understandable concept for interviewees (see, Chandler 2012). Many of the interviewees in this study proved capable of assessing the extent and features of their emotion work.

Data and Method

The following analysis is based on a series of transcripts of semi-structured interviews with administrative social workers carried out as part of a larger research project (see: Iarskaia-Smirnova 2015). Most interviewees were women, generally with higher education, although they usually lacking special qualifications in social care. Over fifty experts in the field of social work were interviewed in five Russian Federal Districts: the Urals, the Volga region, the

North, Siberia, Moscow and the Central District. Forty-seven transcripts were forwarded for analysis, with NVivo software employed to code along four broad themes: 1) how administrative social workers mention emotions (verbal markers); 2) how feelings are expressed and managed during emotion work in communication with clients and cases of burnout and fatigue caused by experiencing certain emotions; 3) emotions and the ethical code – which feelings are deemed appropriate, which moral or immoral; 4) how feelings are described in reference to professional identity.

The limitations of this analysis were fully recognised. Firstly, the interview guide initially contained no direct questions and suggestions about the role of emotions in this line of work; questions were only indirectly connected to experienced feelings. For example, the topic of emotion work was broached with the following questions: What clients are harder to work with? Which skills, necessary for a professional social worker, would you like to acquire? Nonetheless, this approach allowed interviewees to reveal much about their emotions and feelings and what it was like to 'work' with these emotions. This study is a grounded analysis done by means of Nvivo, which means that the research questions were not predetermined, but arose from the data. Therefore, rather than a limitation, it is a strength of this study that no direct questions about the role of emotions were included in the original interview guide. Rather, the spontaneous emotional responses of the interviewees show how social workers perceive emotions as an integral part of their work.

The second limitation of this study is that the description provided by interviewees on emotion work comes in the form of memory of expressed emotions in past situations and, therefore, may lack accuracy, even if it is well expressed in a conscious manner. The third limitation was that the stories interviewees told were, to a certain extent, shaped by a desire to appear in the best possible light to the interviewer. Therefore, given these limitations, our analysis of emotion work in the professional culture of our interviewees may be better viewed as an analysis of representations offered by workers themselves about the role of emotion work in their profession.

The features of emotion work and some impressions of the emotional norms used by administrative social workers

During the analysis of interviews it became clear that administrative social workers possess a keen awareness of the need for emotion work in their profession, and we discovered a strong desire to improve professional skills in this area. Interviewees acknowledge that one of the central components of their working activity is successful interactions with clients through employing emotion work to achieve professional goals. Some called their approach to work 'client-centred,' reflecting a general understanding that it is necessary to be professional: '*...they are not people under our charge; they are clients*' (Moscow 013 F).

In the majority of interviews interviewees had little difficulty describing cases the when emotion work with clients was necessary:

Another guy has come for an appointment and, once again, just starts behaving badly and tries to provoke a response, pull your emotions out of you, but you still try to maintain your reputation as a social worker, control your face and talk calmly, explaining for the hundred and fifth time the same thing to the same man (Siberia 003 F).

Especially in the case of pensioners, interviewees claimed they strove to present a softer and more attentive side:

We treat them [pensioners] with kid gloves. But here this warmth does not go far enough, we have some of those types ...well at this age they are easily offended, they just fly off the handle (Moscow 009 F).

The interviews contained a number of linguistic 'markers' for emotion work. When we asked about the general difficulties of working with clients, interviewees immediately referred to the varied means by which they control their emotions:

It is a very difficult crowd ... They can drag you into a verbal disagreements, you need to stop them in time ...people are standing behind them [in line] too, you need to handle them so that they won't get so worked up, so that that they will get help (Moscow 016 F).

In interviews it was reported that negative emotions and the moods of clients needed to be countered, and here it is clear that emotion work is an informal requirement:

Unfortunately, officially those under our care can say anything to us in any tone using any words, but we cannot respond in kind, even to an insult, we must smile, trying to calm them down because we know what this kind of thing this can lead to, what the consequences can be... no one talks about this but everyone knows (Moscow 009 F).

Interviewees described what kind of emotions should be expressed at the meeting with the customer and discussed different styles of emotion work that, rather than being of a standardised type, are taken, apparently, from personal experience:

It doesn't matter what client has come to the appointment, or how they are dressed... you can't show them how you feel about them, because I mean sometimes we really get those... with a smell [of alcohol] following them, but you can also find approaches to help (Siberia 005 F, head of the department).

Interviewees related how their feelings could be at odds with things they were expected to express, forcing them to control their actual emotions and show

only what is appropriate. Interviewees did not, however, all have clear ideas about exactly what kind of feelings to express, what techniques to use. They not only had to hide their true feelings, but also establish emotional dissonance:

...you start to feel sorry for them but, as they say, 'you can't feel sorry for them' [*zhalet' nel'zya*]. Some of the children, they rush into your arms... When I sat down on a chair, she [the girl from the orphanage] jumped on my lap and threw her arms around my neck. ...I even stopped breathing, I didn't know what to do... If you push them away, you can scare them, embrace them and it can scare them too, but I sat there for probably five minutes and didn't know what to do (Volga region 004 F).

Emotion work is associated with the informal ethics of the profession and, in almost every interview takes on a moral dimension:

I have heard the same thing a hundred times, about husbands, the dacha, the war, and all the same you listen to it, because she is saying it and it makes things easier for her, in other words, the social worker must possess internal qualities... kindness, warmth of feeling ...no matter how bad I feel, I have to smile, I must bring joy to this person (Moscow 006 F).

It becomes clear that the interviewees are proud of their work and want to make a good impression on the interviewer. There is an urgent desire to take pride in one's occupation, and in the case of administrative social workers this is seriously affected by low prestige, low salaries, and a lack of attention on the part of the state and society. Here, professional identity is tied to the 'moral mission' of the social worker, a mission that appears to be a vital resource in professional identity construction. This sense of pride is reinforced and constructed in interviews through the use of 'exaggeration', the numerous retellings of the tasks that make up this mission:

...she [the client, who was unemployed] got a job, I gave her all the information <...> I was so proud that I had just started this work and straight away managed to get a woman back to work <...> we hold a lot of events ...we arrange such a lot of special programs... we arrange things for the disabled (Siberia 003 F).

In every interview interviewees articulated an informal ethical imperative based on what kind of person a social worker should be. Part of this imperative is the need to carry out emotion work during communication with customers. It became evident that empathy is a recognised and essential part of professional emotion management for administrative social workers. Interviewees link empathy with the expression of sympathy and other moral qualities:

To be able to communicate with people who need to be able to sympathise with people, imagine yourself in their situation, to be humane, and treat others as you would have them treat you (Siberia 003 F).

Interviewees spoke of 'emotional burnout' when social workers become tired, lose their composure and are no longer able to communicate with clients. They also talked about how administrative social workers learn to cope with this condition. The interviews provide abundant evidence of emotional dissonance; such as when interviewees are not able to give the client anything else, they are aware of the emotional damage they feel, but recognise the need to improve their emotion management skills:

People do come to me with joy, but in most cases they come in a state of distress. And so in the beginning I got in terrible moods, I would come home and break down in tears... I would take it all so close to heart. This is also some indicator of a lack of professionalism, because you can't take everything so close to heart. Now I have learned my lesson (North of 002 F).

Interviewees understood the dangers of burnout and the need to alleviate this threat with the help of professionals: '*There is a very large purely psychological burden on a person, very large... And, as I told you, there is not even a psychologist on the staff*' (Volga region 009 F). The mention of burnout in the transcripts is found alongside the conviction of interviewees that emotional endurance levels have to be built up, especially given that on a daily basis they must deal with negative emotions and the hostility of socially disadvantaged population groups:

You need to have stress endurance. The client must realise that we are not treating him as if we were just filing away paperwork. All in all you need to put your heart into it, and to do this you need to know how to get rid of your own negative emotions (Moscow 005 F).

Emotion work is carried out according to certain professional requirements – the formal and informal rules existing in this field. In our case, since interviewees often found it difficult to precisely outline what their professional code of ethics was, they tended to improvise and rely on the rules of the general emotional culture such as 'being humane', 'sympathising', 'understanding', 'persevering' and 'restraining one's temper'. In this sense, professionalisation possesses an unfinished character, since in addition to education and experience; there is always the need to possess that one special human quality – the ability to show care and concern:

Firstly, a professional must be a person whose heart is open to people. One must be able to communicate with people the right way <...> even if the people who visit you are... aggressive. It is necessary to reduce this agitation in them, without getting wound up in the process, I mean there must be self-composure, calm. And, of course, you need professional skills (Moscow 016 F).

At the same time interviewees noted that management offers virtually no indication of and sets few rules for the emotion work of administrative social

workers. This means that emotion work here cannot become emotional labour, as there are no clear regulations or standard techniques employed.

The professional identity of an administrative social worker evolves on the basis of accumulated professional experience. Interviewees emphasised the importance of various kinds of knowledge, from expertise in regulatory documents to the psychological and medical training required for special situations, as well as the willingness to do personal development training and develop one's career. One respondent said she was proud simply of the fact she worked in such a field; here employment in this sphere is enough in and of itself and represents a moral act, a kind of self-sacrifice and 'moral mission'. According to one of the interviewees (Moscow 007 F), the ability to perform emotion work is one of the preconditions for promotion.

Interviewees express complex emotions of resentment when they are asked about the insufficient salaries and the low prestige of the profession (see, Romanov, Iarskaia-Smirnova 2014). Their answers revealed a perceived lack of respect on the part of the state, public organisations, individuals and society as a whole. Resentment towards society as a whole is largely due to the feeling that people underestimate or fail to recognise the 'moral mission' social workers perform. Their willingness to tolerate inadequate salary levels can be viewed as the foundation of their moral identity:

Even my friends, when they talk about our salary they say: 'Why do you still work there?' It seems that we do the work of altruists. Such a large amount of work, such responsibility, so many demands made of us, and the salary is so very small (Ural 004 F, head of the department).

The relative gender homogeneity of the occupation and the way emotional skills are described provide ample evidence that social work is, at least in the Russian context, a 'female profession.' This is linked to the institutionalisation of care for the socially vulnerable people. Moreover, at least on the level of cultural preconceptions, these tasks are traditionally reserved for women. Administrative social workers are often former schoolteachers or representatives of other 'female professions' such as psychologists, teachers of humanities and medical school graduates. This is informally reinforced in essentialising accounts on care in the profession:

Q: Tell me, why have you specified gender among the first qualities of a social worker? Do they have to be women?

A: Well, if you are working with children, well, women have more maternal feelings, women are more emotional, can understand the problems of others better than men. And often in our work, we have to protect the rights of women and children (North 001 F).

Here we can observe the point where gender stereotypes and gender inequalities interact. In the field of social work, the recruitment of women is a dominant

trend, as they are stereotypically viewed as the most apt at displaying empathy and doing the emotion work that is expected with deprived and marginal groups. Furthermore, as social work remains largely part of the state sector and is rather poorly paid, it suffers from a lack of prestige and, from the point of view of social workers, is unfairly undervalued by those from outside the profession.

The standardisation of feelings and the 'moral mission' as an integral part of professional culture in social work

An integral part of the professional culture of social work can be found in emotion management. Interviewees were deeply aware of the need for emotion work in communication with clients, and named it as one of the most important skills to have, seeing it as an obvious consequence of the evolution of professional ethics. At the same time, they were reflective about the techniques employed in emotion work, insisting on the need to gain qualifications in this regard and be trained to work more effectively with clients and hire an onsite staff psychologist for the workers themselves. According to the interviewees, they face emotional issues, which they refer to as 'emotional burnout', 'emotional breakdown' and 'psychological pressure' (see also: Erickson, Ritter 2001; Maslach et al. 2001). In our case, we have discovered that there are no formal requirements on how to perform emotion work; management has little control, either direct or indirect, over the emotional expenditures involved in working with clients. Instead the emotional problems of their workers remain a personal issue that each individual must deal with according to their own resources. Probably, this influences the efficiency of their work as professionals and creates human resources and recruitment problems in the profession as a whole.

Interviewees noted how often they found themselves in situations where they did not know how to manage their emotions. This suggests that standards for emotional behaviour are unclear; in other words, a professional emotional ideology has not been worked out. In this case, administrative social workers are left to make their own rules to govern emotion work based on the common emotional culture and their personal understanding of the situation. Therefore, emotion work does not become emotional labour, which has a well-known set of tools of emotion management techniques for interacting with clients (Hochschild 1983; Wharton 2009; Grandey et al. 2013). Instead, emotion work is often performed in an intuitive fashion in accordance with the moral norms existing in the general attitude towards the profession, including the expectations of clients and the wider Russian cultural context.

At the same time, the majority of administrative social workers are women not only because of professional gender segregation, but due to cultural assumptions about how women are best suited to provide services such as emotion work, compassion, understanding and care (Grandey 2000; Husso, Hirvonen 2012; Weinberg 2014). Therefore, the general emotional culture 'supplies'

the gender-biased emotional guidelines observable in the emotional ideology of administrative social workers. In this respect, 'care' for socially vulnerable categories of the population is institutionalised via the influx of women into the social support system. The idea that women are better able to cope with this work because of their greater tendency to emotion is also shared by administrative social workers themselves.

The moral dilemma of the social worker is that they are torn between the desire to look after their client and, at the same time, to protect their own emotional state by not becoming emotionally involved in the situation (Weinberg 2014). This dilemma, while often poorly articulated by interviewees, is present in the interviews. Interviewees increasingly sense a gap between their actual feelings and the feelings they are supposed to express. They demonstrate a desire to gain standardised skills in mastering their feelings as, in their words, they look to offer feelings and concern as a gift (see also: Bolton 2000; Simonova 2013). Thus, the professional identity of the social worker is closely connected to the moral identity of the worker as an individual. The relationship between these most valued images of the self, between the identities of the highly moral person and that of the professional (Sloan 2007; Stryker 2004), are reflected in the stories respondents told about their work, in the sense of pride they have in their work and the way they describe their job in terms of care, assistance, good deeds and carrying out a 'moral mission' in society. While low salaries and prestige of the profession are acknowledged by administrative social workers, the sense of fulfilling moral mission justifies taking this job and makes it feel good. It would appear that the professional ethics of this type of employment is based on the concept of a professional as a compassionate person, capable of selfless work, in spite of a low salary. We would argue that this situation reveals much about the process of professionalisation in modern conditions, where this professional group is searching for a foundation to support their claim to exclusivity through their unique and valuable experience.

Thus, the analysis of these interviews shows that administrative social workers support and justify the standardisation of emotion management. According to the ideas of interviewees, such measures would make their work easier and offer protection from emotional problems in their workplace. If previous studies have indicated that the professional culture of social work in Russia is formed 'from above' with the help of government agencies (Romanov, Iar-skaia-Smirnova 2014), in our case we can argue that perhaps part of the professional culture will emerge 'from below,' in as far as employees are concerned with standardisation, particularly in the sensitive work they do with clients.

Another important conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that emotion work should be studied not only as an analytical category, but also as an explanatory resource that interviewees can exploit (Chandler 2012). Administrative social workers not only use stories about emotion work to explain their problems; they also tell them to assert their status as active and morally

responsible actors (Frith, Kitzinger 1998). These are consistent with previous findings showing that administrative social workers fulfil an important 'moral mission' and thus, in their own subjective manner, raise the status of their professional activities (Romanov, Iarskaia-Smirnova 2014).

Conclusion

The professional culture of social work in Russia is in the process of formation, as evidenced by the desire of administrative social workers, regardless of the region, to raise the prestige of their profession and refine their own professional regulations and rules, while taking into account the specifics of their work, including standardised rules for emotion work in communication with clients. In a situation of uncertainty about emotional norms, administrative social workers resort to following the dominant, general rules of emotional culture in Russian society, where strong gender stereotypes are prevalent. Emotion work has important functions in the formation of professional culture and, for administrative social workers, emotion work provides an opportunity to realise their own professional role and their own needs and concerns. Emotion work sharpens the workers' sense of self while at the same time rendering them somewhat vulnerable to negative emotions and emotional burnout. Therefore, administrative social workers are in a constant state of moral dilemma: how can they take care of those in need of social assistance and at the same time protect themselves from emotional stress? This situation is largely resolved through assigning their work a special meaning; namely that they are fulfilling a vital moral mission by providing social assistance to the population. It is this moral mission that helps reconcile them with the low pay and prestige of the profession, as well as its relative lack of prospects and high emotional costs.

Looking at the prospects for further study, in terms of expanding our understanding of the content of the emotion work, it would be useful to create and implement a separate interview guide that could include questions about types of emotion work, and the various emotional problems faced by administrative social workers (Wharton 2009). In addition, the limitations of this study we referred to above reinforce the point that analysis of interviews is not enough to provide a full picture of emotion work in the workplace. This can only be overcome through the implementation of different types of observations in interview situations and the workplace. This would help contribute to further assessments on how far our ideas about emotion work correspond with the visions on the ground.

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