

# 'Ready for work': feeling rules, emotion work and emotional labour for people with disabilities

**Cornelia Schneider**

Mount Saint-Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, [cornelia.schneider@msvu.ca](mailto:cornelia.schneider@msvu.ca)

## **Abstract**

*This article explores on-the-task job training for youth with disabilities who are transitioning from High School towards paid community employment. The Neighbourhood Dollarstore in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is a training business, which prepares its trainees for work in customer service and retail. In an ethnographic study, the investigator has accompanied five trainees with disabilities from their arrival in the store until their departure into community employment. It appears that one of the essential experiences of "learning to labour" can be framed by the concepts of "emotion work" and "emotion labour" (Hochschild). Being "ready for work" means to be able to follow 'feeling rules' particular to the store environment. Youth with disabilities has to be able to control undesirable emotions and to enhance desired emotions in order to correspond to the required norms of the retail service.*

*Keywords: job training, youth with disabilities, emotion work, feeling rules, sociology of emotions*

## **Résumé**

*Cette recherche explore un système de formation professionnelle pour des jeunes en situation de handicap qui font la transition de l'école secondaire vers l'emploi dans la communauté. Le Neighbourhood Dollarstore à Halifax en Nouvelle-Ecosse est un magasin de formation qui prépare ses apprentis pour le travail dans la vente en détail et le commerce. Utilisant une approche ethnographique, la chercheure a accompagné cinq apprentis en situation de handicap de leur arrivée dans le magasin jusqu'à leur départ vers l'emploi dans la communauté. Il devient évident qu'« apprendre à travailler » contient essentiellement des expériences que l'on peut cadrer par les concepts de « travail émotionnel » et de « marchandisation des émotions » (Hochschild). « Etre prêt pour travailler » signifie donc d'être capable de suivre des « règles de sentiments » inhérentes au contexte commercial. Les jeunes en situation de handicap doivent maîtriser le contrôle des émotions non-désirées et renforcer des émotions désirées pour correspondre aux normes du monde du commerce.*

*Mots-clés : formation professionnelle, jeunes en situation de handicap, travail émotionnel, règles de sentiments, sociologie des émotions*

## **1. Disability and the transition into paid employment**

The inclusion of people with disabilities into the labour market is an endeavour with big challenges. Currently, internationally, one can affirm that the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is at least twice as high as for those who have no disability<sup>1</sup>. In the wake of the Declaration of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the promotion of inclusive education in educational systems<sup>2</sup>, the enhancement of labour market participation is another important step to social participation and economic self-sustainability of people with disabilities, as outlined in article 27 of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

However, the question of training of people with disabilities remains an important issue in the advancement of their employment. The able-ist work environment in most community employment turns work into a challenge for people with disabilities, in terms of flexibility and aesthetics (Wilton, 2004). How to prepare people with disabilities for this environment? How to accommodate the specific challenges they are facing in the labour market? Does school give them a thorough preparation for those challenges? What does it mean to be “ready for work and employment”? How do the people with disabilities themselves experience those challenges? The present study will draw on ethnographic material collected in a training business for people with disabilities. Using the framework of sociology of emotions (Hochschild, 1979; Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Wilton, 2008), the article will show the elements going beyond what we consider the necessary formal skills to obtain and retain employment in a capitalist environment.

## **2. Sociology of emotions, emotional work and emotional labour**

The sociology of emotions as a framework of research has been slowly growing since the 1970s with Hochschild’s groundbreaking work on emotion work and feeling rules analyzing the workplace of flight attendants (Hochschild, 1979 and 1983). For the current study, the concepts of emotion work, emotion labour and feeling rules provide an extremely interesting framework when it comes to professional training and employment of people with disabilities. Wilton (2008) has been the first to use this framework in his article “Workers with disabilities and the challenges of emotional labour”. The present article will expand on this framework within a training setting for people with disabilities.

The sociology of emotions uses an interpretive framework, referring back to the work of Goffman (1959) about the presentation of self in everyday life. Sociologists of emotions have made it clear that emotions are socially and culturally constructed and not simply innate: “Language [...] contributes to the cultural construction of emotions and is a means by which we participate in creating a shared sense of what emotions are” (Jackson 1993, p. 207). Thoits (1993, p. 318) summarizes the four different components that create an emotion: “(a) appraisals of a situational stimulus or context, (b) changes in physiological or bodily sensations, (c) the free or inhibited display of expressive gestures and (d) a cultural label applied to specific constellations of one or more of the first three components.” Hochschild (1979, p. 557) studies emotion work and feeling rules, positing “an actor capable of feeling, capable of assessing when a feeling is ‘inappropriate,’ and capable of trying to manage feeling.”

Amongst other social settings, the workplace, especially the service industry (e.g. retail) requires management of feelings at stake in interactions between customers and employee, the management and the employee as well as amongst coworkers. For example, we expect an employee to be friendly and supportive of a customer’s wishes, even if the customer is rude and very demanding. In the context of the work place, emotion work which is part of any person’s social life, turns into emotional labour, as it becomes part of the labour process. “It becomes patently obvious that organisations are, indeed, emotional arenas and that the management of emotion plays a large part in organisational life. Feelings are managed according to invisible social guidelines, emotions are controlled according to the organisation’s rules and regulations; and depending on occupational group, emotion management may be carried out according to professional norms.” (Bolton, 2000, p. 167). These invisible social guidelines might be extremely difficult to capture for persons with disabilities, if they are not made obvious to them.

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<sup>1</sup> See Factsheet “Employment of persons with disabilities” retrieved from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=255>

<sup>2</sup> See the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24

Emotion work can be defined as “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling. To ‘work on’ an emotion or feeling is [...] the same as to ‘manage’ an emotion or to do ‘deep acting’. [...] ‘emotion work’ refers to the effort – the act of trying – and not the outcome, which may or may not be successful.” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561). The cases presented below will show how difficult emotion work might be for people with disabilities. Hochschild recognizes that social actors are able to do emotion work which will be used in the labour process as a commodity. She distinguishes between ‘surface acting’ and ‘deep acting’: Actors act for the sake of their labour requirements. But only become really successful if they reach the stage of deep acting, if they are actually embodying the role they have taken on : “offering cynical performances in the form of ‘surface acting’ results in ultimate alienation from one’s ‘true self’ and deep acting, that is efforts to conjure up sincere performances, results in ‘altering’ one’s self” (Bolton & Boyd, 2003, p. 290).

Reconceptualizing Hochschild’s original framework, Bolton & Boyd (2003, p. 295) establish a typology of emotion management that distinguishes four types: pecuniary, prescriptive, presentational and philanthropic (the latter two can be considered together as social feeling rules). Pecuniary emotion management refers to the instrumental motivation of being commercially successful, while prescriptive emotion management is the one expected by one’s professional and organisational status. The presentational and philanthropic emotion management refers to what the actor already brings in from his/her lifelong socialization and goes beyond the concrete workplace situation. Actors, “[...] during a social encounter in the workplace may well perform ‘presentational’ emotion management, while in direct, face-to-face contact with a customer of the company, they may be expected to perform ‘pecuniary’ emotion management as a means of producing ‘customer contentment’ or, equally, they can decide on whether to offer ‘philanthropic’ emotion management as an extra ‘gift’.” (Bolton & Boyd, 2003, p. 295). Bolton & Boyd’s framework ultimately attributes more agency to the individual, as s/he can decide how far to go in the emotion work. Hochschild’s original conception only offered the possibilities of ‘surface acting’ and ‘deep acting’ which means that for doing successful emotion work, the individual has to reach the stage of deep acting, which means that individuals really embody the desired feeling, which in turn can lead to the individual’s alienation.

Given the aspects developed above, the question arises how young adults with disabilities, that we consider as actors in social settings, deal with those implicit challenges of emotion work when they ‘get ready’ for community employment. How do they become actors? Are they able to immerse themselves into a desired role? Is it their desire to play that role? This ethnographic study reveals that the formal skills required for working in a retail store are only one part of the learning process, and appear to be attainable in a shorter amount of time. The different formal tasks, as for example receiving, merchandising or working on cash, were acquired rather quickly over the observed period. But anything related to what we call here emotion work turned out to be a big challenge for many participants in this training programme.

### **3. “Getting ready for work”: managing emotions**

#### **3.1 The Neighbourhood Dollarstore**

The Neighbourhood Dollarstore is a training business located in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Canada) and run by Affirmative Industries Nova Scotia. It offers people with disabilities an opportunity to learn to work in a store that is open to the public. ‘Ready for work’ is the slogan of the programme, which can be found for example on the letterhead of the store. Trainees (who are called employees in the store, even if they are unpaid) benefit from a close accompaniment by several job coaches. They learn the basic principles of the retail (and customer service) industry, as, for example, receiving, pricing, merchandising, doing cash, doing customer service, inventory etc. The idea behind having a training business is to provide hands-on experience in a setting that allows mistakes and that gives trainees the time to get used to the expectations at their own pace.

The different tasks in the store are organized in a somewhat hierarchical manner. Trainees start off in the backroom receiving items, pricing, then starting to do merchandising in the store at the same time as being available for customer service. “Being on cash” is the last task employees usually start doing in the store, it comes after all the other things as receiving, merchandising, closing and cleaning duties. It therefore signifies a huge step forward for the employees once they are allowed to “do cash” with real money and real customers (before the “real cash”, there is also a training cash machine with play money with which coworkers train each other).

The store is located in a residential area in the northern end of the Halifax peninsula beside a grocery store and several other businesses. The area is home to a socially and ethnically diverse population who appreciates the existence of the store, as it offers a range of products (household, hardware, beauty, toys, gift cards and bags, stationary as well as seasonal items) to very competitive prices, around one dollar or a little bit more. Trainees are “recruited” from mainly two programmes. The first one being related to a Youth Transition Programme that supports and coaches youth with learning disabilities to transition from an inclusive school setting into

employment, a joint project of Affirmative Industries Nova Scotia, Independent Living Nova Scotia and Halifax Regional School board. The second one relates to a rehabilitation programme for people with a mental health history. Thus, the trainees have very diverse backgrounds and a broad age range, the youngest being 19 years old and the oldest 61. The store manager assigns them to shifts, which last in average 4 hours (generally shorter in the beginning, and longer once employees are getting closer to moving into paid employment). After a period of 12 weeks, they undergo a review with the store management and the job coaches giving a recommendation about future steps to be taken to move the person into paid employment, how much time and what additional support the trainees might need to get ready. The trainees are encouraged to set their own learning goals on a “Ladder of Success” (which is a poster in the lunchroom of the store depicting a ladder where trainees can leave sticky notes, containing for example: “speak up” or “improve on cash”) in order to reach their potential. It serves as a visual support for reminding trainees of what they want/need to attain as a next step. The employees are also writing job journals to keep track of what they did and how they evaluate their own performance from shift to shift.

The store management also puts a strong emphasis on peer support inside the store. ‘Senior employees’ helping the new ones to find their way in the store, and showing them how to accomplish the different required tasks. Over time, the employees are getting more autonomous and are generally able to work more by themselves, but the mutual support stays an important element in the conception of the work. This requirement of peer support is supposed to develop a sense of collegiality which will ultimately help them to connect with coworkers in their future workplaces.

### 3.2 Methodology of the study

Life in the store has been studied for over a year in an ethnographic approach<sup>3</sup>. In an effort to be as close as possible to the experience of the arriving trainees, the principal investigator and a research assistant<sup>4</sup> have been part of the employees in the store setting and started their job training at the same time with a cohort of youth with learning disabilities related to the programme at the Community College. The majority had just graduated from High School where they had been on Individual Programme Plans in an inclusive setting. It appeared to be important not to occupy a hierarchically higher role than the other employees were, as the focus of the study was on the lived experience of the employees themselves. Thus, both investigators underwent the same training with the same duties, assignments and tasks. Nevertheless, it was not an “undercover” investigation, as both had disclosed their identity to the store management, the trainees’ parents and the trainees themselves. All parties had signed letters of informed consent as approved by the University Research Ethics Board and had the right to pull out of the project at any time. Some trainees chose not to participate in the project but agreed to have the investigators in the store during their shift, as long as they would just work with other coworkers. Another trainee joined later in the project once she knew the investigators better and felt safe enough to participate. One parent would not give consent to her son’s participation despite his strongly expressed desire to be involved. This questions the role of parents as gatekeepers (Christensen & Prout, 2002 ; Alderson & Goodey, 1996).

Doing an ethnographic inquiry in a Dollarstore is a very challenging enterprise, as only a certain amount of employees and job coaches are present during any time of the day and the week. Customers enter and leave the store (and were informed by a poster about the ongoing project). Some of the employees left the store before the end of the observational period, for several reasons: some of them moved into paid employment, some continued working at another training business, and some of them considered that the programme did not fit their needs. Thus, the constellation of the observed group of participants could change frequently and quickly, which was a particular challenge to this ethnographic research project. There was no moment at any time of the research where all participants would be in one place at the same time.

Thus, altogether, the research project had 20 employees participating at one moment or the other, with some moving on into employment, some leaving the store because of health issues or family reasons, some continuing their education at Community College or in other settings. This article will focus on five of them in order to extrapolate types of emotion work that needed to be acquired in the store. This case study methodology aims at presenting five characteristic cases of the types of emotion work that were (or not) acquired in the store setting (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Throughout the year, the investigators attempted to do at least one four-hour shift per week in the store (and more during the first twelve weeks from September to December), as well as social activities (Christmas party, a hockey game, a dance evening). Activities, interactions and events were recorded in field notes once the shift was over. As the principal investigator is also living in the same neighbourhood, it was easy for her

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<sup>3</sup> The study is currently continuing under the form of semi-directed interviews with former trainees, job coaches and customer surveys.

<sup>4</sup> The author would like to thank her research assistant Kate O’Neill for her extremely valuable contribution to this research project.

to return home and quickly record the fieldnotes without forgetting too many details and therefore allow “thick description” (see Geertz, 1973) of the developments in the store. As the investigator had chosen to take on the role of an employee, she did not have any access to medical records, school files or other official documentation, as she chose to experience her coworkers as she would have in any other social setting. This methodological choice explains why the following descriptions of the different trainees do not include elements about their medical history or their educational past, as the participants themselves chose what they wanted to disclose to the investigators. It turns the focus away from a medical model of disability towards the social model, observing how disability is created (or not) in the interaction between the individual and its environment.

Once the first participants started to move on into paid employment, the investigator also started conducting semi-structured interviews with them about their experience, difficulties, past, present and future of their life course transition. It turned out that taking on the role of an employee was a very fruitful choice, as the employees generally connected well with the investigators, considering them to be “part of the crowd” (as one participant articulated it). However, some employees needed to be reminded in the beginning that the investigators were not job coaches, when, for example, they came over to ask them what to do next after having finished a task. Others, on the other hand, considered the investigators almost in the role of an “older sister” that they could share some secrets with (which was especially true for several 19-20 year old women who liked to talk with her about their boyfriends). Of course, stripping off the role of the university assistant professor or the student enrolled in the teacher education-programme and being part of the employees who start “from scratch” was at times a challenge for the investigators who tried not to correct, or to judge actions of her coworkers that obviously appeared to be going against store rules or assignments given by the job coaches. It could mean, at times, to be considered by customers as a trainee with disabilities or mental health issues. It appears that the investigators, too, had to do emotion work in order to fit with the group, as the professional habits of an educator or a professor did not fit the desired role in the store. The following analysis will mainly draw from the field notes taken during the year of participating observation in the store, as they reveal how five of the trainees were “getting ready” for employment. Obviously, the present study draws from a micro-sociological framework, focussing on a very specific context. Thus, it cannot claim to be a representative study of what job training is in any given setting and its generalization should be carefully considered. However, the five different cases represent strong characteristics of what has been observed in the store over the full year of observation. They appear to be “critical cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230) of doing emotion work in this training business, as they visualize well the implicit expectations of the training business.

### 3.3 Starting off – the investigator’s expectations

When starting to be trained with the other employees in the programme, the principal investigator discovered all the different tasks that need to be covered in the store: receiving, merchandising, customer service on the shop floor, cashier duties, closing duties, cleaning the facilities. Knowing that this is a professional training business, one would naturally expect that the main focus is on the skills that are to be learned for these tasks. Being part of the employees for several months, it turned out that most of the work is not about learning the tasks themselves. The element that makes them to be “ready for work” is in the field of what Hochschild and others qualify as “emotion work”, adjusting emotions and their expression in the given social setting. This endeavour might be more challenging for people with disabilities, supposedly for two reasons: firstly, their impairment and physical appearance: “recognizing that workplace cultures are often implicitly ableist draws attention to the fact that disabled workers must often expend considerable extra emotional energy in their efforts to conform” (Wilton, 2008, p. 371). Physical appearance and/or the particular impairment seem at times incompatible with the workplace norms. Secondly, we may also ask if their preceding socialization and education has helped them to learn and understand implicit feeling rules. Does the fact of being impaired actually exempt at times from doing certain types of emotion work? Do we allow children and youth with disabilities to play another role than being disabled? Do we consider them to be ‘trapped’ in their disabled body (phrases like “she does not know better” or “she can’t help it” would be characteristic for this observation)? Do we put enough emphasis on their ability to take up different roles, and to use this flexibility in different social settings? Ultimately, how much agency is possible for people with disabilities?

### 3.4 How to become a worker

The store orientation that the investigators participated in set immediately the tone on what will become part of emotion work. Dress code, organization of the shifts, accepting the supervisors’ authority, rules about bathroom

breaks are made explicit to the trainees, and mark a shift from what they are used to from their school environment. It is the normative environment of the workplace. Had they had more freedom in the school setting (except for some private schools, there is no dress code in schools, students are mostly leaving the classroom freely to go to the bathroom during class hours, absence policies are not consequently reinforced, and some teachers appear to be less strict than the store supervisors), the trainees are getting confronted from day one to the very different norms of the work environment. They have to learn to accept the assignment of shifts no matter if these occur early or late, on weekends or holidays. They are expected to be there on time and appropriately dressed. They have to learn to be responsible for themselves, which means for instance that the supervisors do not allow their parents to call in sick for them. They have to negotiate their issues with the supervisor herself, they have to learn to come to work themselves, without being dropped off by their parents. They are expected to have manners, and to be courteous with staff, supervisors and customers, even in case any of those is not respectful with them. It is about keeping the right distance with other staff and the customers, to be friendly without being invasive. Like Hochschild's flight attendants (Hochschild, 1983) who have to manage their emotions in the flight cabin and be able to deal with any type of passenger in a restricted space, trainees are expected to do similar emotion management in that store, in interaction with customers, supervisor and coworkers. This signifies in the first place to realize that, once in the store, their immediate needs, desires and feelings are becoming secondary to the customers' needs – the customer is king. Besides, there are also moments of boredom (Collinson, 1992) and fatigue (Wilton, 2008) that need to be managed. Resisting the desire to sit down, or not to do any work, or not to become disruptive (which might happen to bored children at school), also becomes part of emotion work in a store setting. The advantage of ethnographic work is that the investigators could experience the same temptations and challenges that every trainee underwent throughout the time in the store. Fatigue, the urge to sit down, to chat with coworkers or supervisors, to feel aggressive about other coworkers or to simply not show up at work were at times experienced by the investigators themselves and helped to understand the process of managing these emotions. Of course, as the store is a training business and gives the trainees a space to experience and train for community retail, most of these aspects are not acquired yet once the trainees enter the store. But in order to 'get ready' for work, trainees will need to master as much as possible all of the above in order to get a recommendation to move on into paid employment. And the faster they understand how to manage emotions in a store setting, the faster they will be ready to move on. In the following, the article will introduce five young men who participated in the research project with very different personalities – we will characterize them with an attribute that appears throughout the researchers' fieldnotes<sup>5</sup>: "Jonathan the talker", "James the bragger", "Neil the invisible", "Peter the grumpy", "Daniel the reliable". They represent the very different types and challenges of emotion work to be learned in the store. They all started working in the store around the same time with the investigators and attended the same orientation meetings with the exception of Neil. Neil, despite being in the same age category than his peers, was also not part of this cohort that had both school days at the Community College and shifts in the store. The following section will mostly draw from the investigators' fieldnotes, which display events that occurred over the year of observations. Although they might at times appear to be anecdotic, they exemplify the different challenges and evolutions that the five participants went through.

### 3.4.1 "Jonathan the talker"

Jonathan was 19 years old once he started the programme after having graduated from High School the year before. He was very visible from day one, as he attended the store orientation and would not stop asking questions and telling stories that he considered to be related to the aspects just evoked by the job coach. He considered himself to be "a good communicator", which had been encouraged over the years by his family. Starting to work in the store, one would hear him a lot engaging openly into conversations with customers and coworkers. Analyzing the field notes related to him, the words "talker", "talkative", "talking mood" are constantly characterizing his action in the store.

"[the jobcoach] assigns me first with Jonathan to do some merchandising, putting new items in the shelf. Jonathan is so talkative; he keeps talking about everything that comes to his mind, including stories about his father [...] He also talks very loudly, so that probably half the store can hear him." (Field notes 2008-11-20)

In regards to customer relations, Jonathan easily communicates with them, and is not shy to offer his help. However, engaging in a conversation for him does not signify a "pecuniary emotion management" (Bolton & Boyd, 2003, p. 299) to fulfill customer contentment, but rather to talk about his own needs:

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<sup>5</sup> all names have been modified in order to guarantee confidentiality.

“Towards the end [just shortly before store closure], Jonathan helps a customer who thanks him for his help. Jonathan answers: ‘yes, no problem, we are actually almost done tonight.’ The customer laughs and says: ‘so, you actually want us to be out so that you can go home...’” (Field notes 2008-11-24)

This interaction with a customer also reveals that the customers are mostly very lenient with the trainees, as most of them know that this is a training business. Jonathan’s answer does not offend the customer and rather makes him chuckle. However, Jonathan’s hurry to finish his shift and close the store is obvious, and goes against the required emotion work in the store. One might be reminded of students who, towards the beginning of recess, are getting impatient to leave the classroom and go on their break. Feeling rules in a store setting require an employee to have the same patience and kindness no matter the hour that a customer enters the store. Jonathan’s communicative abilities, which seem to be a “good fit” with a store requiring good customer service, turn into a challenge for him, as the feeling rules of the store allow openness to the customer’s needs but require discretion on the clerk’s side about his/her personal life, needs and desires. Over the year, the job coaches assign him more and more tasks with less customer interaction and an emphasis on a specific task to accomplish. Jonathan struggles with this expectation of talking less and thus managing his emotions, and ultimately returns to further education at the local Community College.

### 3.4.2 “James the bragger”

James (20 years) came to the store with the conviction that he already had what it takes to find employment, as he already had a paid job at a pizza restaurant chain while being a student in High School. He kept this job while having shifts at the store. This experience comes up during the common shifts in the store, but as an experience that, in his mind, ranks him somehow higher than his fellow employees (because he actually earns minimum wage there). He is a young man with a very pleasant physical appearance which gives him some preliminary advantage above some of his coworkers. In the beginning, the principal investigator actually was not sure if he was part of the employees because of his physical appearance. Several times, the field notes note “brags” and “bragging” when mentioning interactions with him. He dresses like a teenager; one would see him mostly wearing jerseys of his favourite hockey team, the Toronto Maple Leafs. He does what some of his coworkers refer to as ‘goofing around’, provoking coworkers and not staying on assigned tasks, and scuffling for fun with his fellow workers. He lacks a sense of appropriate proximity to coworkers and customers. It is interesting to see that the emotion work required for a ‘student job’ in the back of a pizza franchise restaurant is not the same as for professional training that aims at moving people into permanent employment. ‘Goofing around’ seems to be an integral part of certain student summer jobs that do not require much accountability, as people either leave that job soon, or others quickly rise in the hierarchy of the restaurant. It appears that James had difficulties distinguishing between the different settings and could ultimately not manage his emotions towards staff, coworkers and customers.

“James creeps up several times behind us, he is still taking a lot of space and talks about his ‘paying job’ where he has to go tomorrow. He keeps coworkers away from their job. He is wearing a huge Toronto Maple Leafs shirt [...], and he is going up and down the aisles, not making any effort to get out of the way of people.” (field notes 2008-10-25).

It turns out later that James’ bragging can be considered as a strategy of stigma management in order to hide the fact that he has a reading disability. Schneider (2007; 2009) has shown how children with disabilities manage their stigma in order to be “part of the crowd”.

“James seems to be a little bit tired, and not very motivated to do the receiving with the list. I wonder if we will get anything done, as he is hanging out (literally) on his chair, and seems not to want to work. We start working on the boxes, he finds (with some help for certain items) the numbers, checks them off, tells me the price. But when I ask him if he can tell me the item description, he blocks and then all the sudden admits that he can’t read. I am sort of stunned, I did not expect this after all the bragging he had done over the last weeks [...] He says that ‘they screwed up at school’, that they could not teach him to read, but that he does not need it at his job (dishwasher at Boston Pizza).” (field notes 2008-12-06).

James has built up strategies to dissimulate his reading disability, from his looks to his constant bragging about jobs. Emotion work as required in the store and those strategies hardly complement each other. Ultimately, James will pull out of the programme for that very reason, as he is not able to make the transition from the school and summer job environment to the permanent professional workplace environment. But he will keep his job at the restaurant, and also have a temporary job as a security guard at a summer festival. It appears that he is able to maintain short periods of “pecuniary emotion management” (Bolton & Boyd, 2003) but only in the short-term interest of quickly making some “pocket money” for his own needs. His case makes obvious to what extent the blurred notion of “professionalism” actually contains a strong emotion work component that is rarely made explicit in definitions of professional attitude.

### 3.4.3 “Neil the invisible”

While, for some trainees, emotion work consists also in recognizing boundaries and in reducing extroversion in order to respect what can be called “professional boundaries”, for others, rather introversion and shyness are becoming a challenge. One of those examples would be Neil (24 years) who the field notes characterize as “shy”, “quiet”, and “looks kind of lost”, which means that he would stand on the shop floor as if someone had forgotten him there. When he was talking, he was rather whispering than speaking. Two examples from the field notes show that while, for some, emotion management requires to limit the emotional expression in a certain setting, it can signify for other to expand their presence, especially on the shop floor.

“Some customer asks me about reading glasses, and I try to find them, ask Angela [one of the job coaches]. When she tells me where, Neil is already there pointing at them. He has heard the conversation, but did not jump in as he is still very shy I guess.” (field notes 2008-12-13)

“Angela assigns him [Neil] to bring the boxes that need to be received upfront (heavy with the batteries), so he starts doing that. I stand upfront talking with Jane [another trainee], in his way for dropping off the box that he is carrying, but he does not say a word. As I turn around, I realize that he is standing behind me waiting, and I tell him that he should shout at me to get out of his way. I ask him how long he stood there. He smiles and says that he is strong enough to have taken it... but then he adds that Sarah [another job coach] has told him that he should speak up.” (field notes 2009-05-30)

Neil slowly overcomes his shyness, as, in retail, it is expected of him to be available and communicative with the customers, to “speak up”. His goal can be found posted on the “ladder of success” on a sticky note (see section 3.1). Over the year, he starts to speak louder, and engages in more interactions with the customers. He looks less ‘lost’ while being on the shop floor (he has learned different ways how to keep busy, e.g. by fixing or reorganizing displays on the shelves). He also becomes more visible once he starts working as the cashier in the store, which is a highly exposed part of the store, as it is at the store entrance and elevated from the rest of the floor. The cashier in the store can usually be seen through the shop window. Standing up there gives the trainee a certain importance and makes visible his/her progress in the training process. The trainee is now responsible enough to handle real money and also the pressure that might come with it – in other words, the trainee is able to manage money as much as emotions in front of the customers. Neil visibly enjoys this recognition.

“We talk about cash, and he starts smiling (he has a gorgeous smile), and tells me how much he likes it.” (field notes 2009-06-21)

Once he engages into a conversation, he speaks louder and his voice contains self-assurance. Also, physically, his body language shows more presence and visibility. His job coaches, towards the end of the observation period, tell me that he is now “ready” to move on into paid employment and the job developers have started to look for possible positions for him. It appears that he has learned “pecuniary and prescriptive emotion management” (Bolton & Boyd, 2003, p. 295), but that the empowerment he received from this skill has helped him to engage into presentational emotion management, too. The positive reactions he receives from customers about him being friendly and accessible reinforces his friendly attitude which is one of the important desired traits in customer service. He becomes more outgoing, and in turn, is considered to be “ready for work”. Wilton (2008, p. 365) refers to the “positive sense of self” that disabled workers might receive by engaging into emotional labour.

#### 3.4.4 “Peter the grumpy”

Peter (19 years old) has a broad vocabulary and few difficulties to master the skills required in the store. It appears that his main challenge definitely lies in managing emotions. The field notes mark very often “grumpy”, “defensive”, “aggressive”, “rude” or “cranky” about him. During shifts, especially in the beginning, the investigators were often wondering if he would just run away or become violent. However, one could observe how he has set up some strategies to manage overwhelming emotions (asking to step out, going to the bathroom). Peter was very well aware about how far he could go in his behaviour, as the investigator could see how much energy it took him to keep things under control, to do “self-policing” (Wilton, 2008, 370). On the other hand, his rudeness and grumpiness were more difficult to overcome in interactions with staff and customers.

“Peter seems to be upset about everything I say, getting quickly defensive. [...] he seems to be very anxious about everything, even if he controls still quite well. The work in the store seems to a huge challenge for him. I understand his difficulties, but on the other side, I wonder how he will deal with a normative environment like a store or a regular workplace. As I said, I did not feel it would be fun to work with him, as he is very tense and his tone quite rude.” (field notes 2008-11-09)

“Peter shows up, [...], he is on the shop floor, sometimes very abrupt today. I am discussing with a customer, and he rushes into the conversation: ‘anything I can help you with sir?’ weird, that sometimes, he does not realize that there are situations where this is not appropriate.” (field notes 2009-05-24).

“Brigitte, a more recent employee, has to do cash training beside Peter and her presence upsets him. He tells me ‘I can’t stand her’ (hopefully silently enough so that she does not hear it), and at some point even asks me to take over so that he can calm down. [...] he cannot stand this distraction, as it puts him out of his routines. I simply tell him that I cannot help him about it, and the he should tell Angela [job coach] if he needs to. Later, once Brigitte is done, he tells me ‘I am doing much better now.’” (field notes 2009-05-24).

Peter is the one whose emotion management efforts are the most visible, as one can observe in his face how he tries to control strong and overwhelming emotions. According to Hochschild (1983), Peter is rather on the level of “surface acting” than “deep acting” as it is so obvious that he constantly tries to manage his emotions in the store setting. As an actor, he could be identified rather as a “bad actor” playing the role of a friendly retail employee. Being in the store and being assigned as a cashier, his management skills are improving, and he starts to show more often his humoristic side. But this learning process remains fragile and is complicated by family issues (his father suffers from Alzheimer’s disease and passes away towards the end of the observation period). This, of course, has a huge impact on his emotion management in the store, as it signifies to literally ‘leave at home’ another layer of emotions, as worries and grief. At the end of the year, Peter decides to return to school and take courses in information technology.

#### 3.4.5 “Daniel the reliable”

Daniel (19 years), like James, has had a dishwasher job in a restaurant, but it appears that this previous employment does not play out in the same way as it did for James. From the very beginning, he is a very smiling and cooperative coworker who makes a lot of effort to be on the task and to do things right (his writing and math skills appear to be weak). He realizes very quickly the implicit feeling rules of the store, and one can consider that he already possessed skills in presentational and philanthropic emotion management (Boyd & Bolton, 2003, p. 297), as he has been always very involved in athletic activity as for example Ice Hockey or Lacrosse. He learns to blend those skills with pecuniary and prescriptive feeling rules required in retail. The following shows how he struggled in the beginning with the acceptance to have a shift on Halloween evening. At the same time, the example shows that he has already figured out that he can negotiate such issues by switching shifts with other coworkers:

“Daniel is preoccupied by having to work on Halloween evening on closing shift, he says that no one will be in the store on that night, he tries with several people to switch shifts, but does not have success. James tells him ‘oh, you want to go get all the candy...’ Daniel asks every new person

coming into the storage room if they could not switch with him.” (field notes 2008-10-25)

Daniel ends up working on that evening, as his only alternative would be to skip the shift at the store<sup>6</sup>, which is not an option for him. He begins to realize that it is expected of him to be there, even if he would rather prefer to do “trick and treat” on the evening of Halloween. The field notes characterize him as “concentrated on the task”, “helping”, “friendly” and “supportive”. He appears to manage his emotions quite well in what is required in the store setting, he rather has to learn to be confident about his skills on cash or in the merchandising. In the interactions with his coworkers, he “seems to have a lot of maturity, in terms of keeping up conversations, of politeness, of work attitude.” (field notes 2009-10-25). During another conversation, he considers himself a “team player”, in sports as well as at work, which suggests once again that he has emotion work skills in the area of philanthropic and presentational emotion management.

Daniel will be one of the first ones to move on into paid employment, at a hotel’s parkade. Had he been a team player in the store, he has now to get used to working by himself, and the interview shows how he adopts a strategy suggested by his job coach in order to manage feeling of loneliness and boredom:

CS: yeah, do you miss having coworkers?

D: yeah, a little bit. Hehehe! It gets lonely down there. Haha! Lonely and boring [laughs].

CS: oh really? Already?

D: sometimes. It gets boring, it gets boring down there, not... because, sometimes, you work, you have stuff to do, but... you can’t find it, or, like if, you find and you’re done in... quickly.

CS: yeah. So what are you doing then?

D: ah... actually, Doris [job coach] has me reading, ah... she, she tells me to study up on, because I wanna do concierge, get into concierge, I’ve been reading, ah... little books that she got, like, from upstairs in the ... lounge and stuff. For... little facts around the city, and all of that, and... restaurants in the city.

CS: oh, so that you can tell people...

D: yeah, what to recommend, and stuff, yeah.

Daniel has learned over the time how to manage different emotions in the workplace including boredom and lack of social contact. He is “ready for employment”, he hopes to keep the job and even move into a better position by “sucking up” the current job, which leaves him by himself in a basement garage. He projects himself into a better-paid position, which makes it worthwhile to retain the current one. It shows that he has also situates himself in a time frame, managing immediate frustrations and needs for the sake of an improvement in the near future. This also hints towards the emotional aspect of professionalism.

### 3.5 What does it mean to be professional?

These observations have led the author to revisit the notion of what it means to be professional. The term of professionalism appears to be of a rather inflationary use and its meaning does not seem to be very clear. From a first perspective, being professional implies the necessary skills, habits and attitudes needed for being employed in the given field. Expectations of professionalism usually do not refer towards emotions; they rather talk about attitudes or the following of ethical standards. One can consider that the emotional component is included in the notion of attitude, but it is rarely made explicit. In order to change one’s attitude, the individual has to manage emotions of like or dislike. S/he has to contain emotions that are considered inappropriate for the given professional field.

This reflection might give elements on how to make professional education or training programmes more accessible by deconstructing the notion of attitude. ‘Change your attitude’, does not give enough elements for the participant to know what to do. By addressing the necessity of emotion work, the participant might get a better insight in the process that s/he needs to engage in. The participant examines his/her emotions in a given situation and then makes adjustments if necessary and/or desired.

In the case of persons with disabilities, learning to do emotion work appears to be even more important, as it addresses clear elements on how to proceed to change an attitude. People with disabilities frequently struggle with

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<sup>6</sup> Other trainees would at times not show up without an excuse, which is noted by the job coaches and will be addressed in the 12-week-reviews.

the normative expectations of the workplace, especially as they are often represented as a big bulk of expectations. The accommodation of people with disabilities also implies to scaffold as much as possible the access to the workplace. Learning to do emotion work could be one of these scaffolding elements. During several conversations at the Dollarstore, staff found the notion of emotion work to be extremely helpful for their work. Some of the staff told the investigator that they had started to replace the term of attitude change with emotion work and its implications. It is too early to evaluate if and how this shift made a difference, but it might give an additional tool for the professional training of people with disabilities.

#### 4. Juggling with emotions

*“The image that emerges of the individual is that of a juggler and synthesizer, an accommodator and appeaser, who fulfils one function while he is apparently engaged in another; he stands guard at the door of the tent but lets all his friends and relatives crawl in under the flap”.* (Goffman, 1961, p. 139)

The five young men introduced in this article stand for several forms of emotional labour required in customer service in our contemporary society. It reveals the strong normative environment that sets the stage for everyone who wants to participate in the labour market. The most successful participants are those who are able to juggle with the different types of emotion management, and are also able to give the “little extra” (Bolton & Boyd, 2003) to coworkers, supervisors and customers. It is obvious that this article shows the need of young people with disability to adapt to this work environment, but has not drawn a lot of attention to the need of accommodating the person with disabilities in the workplace. More than school culture, the workplace culture is deeply related to the economic capitalist structure, and excludes people who are deviant from its normative expectations. “Accommodation constitutes a challenge to the logic of contemporary capitalist economies, where flexibility is first and foremost a privilege of capital” (Wilton, 2004, p. 423). Those who do not possess this flexibility might quickly be recognized as “problem or fragile workers” (Wilton, 2004). Others might find themselves alienated by the normative expectations of the workplace. People with disabilities and the expectations they face for employment make it obvious how much implicit emotional labour is expected from all of us. It questions the way the workplace has been organized and if there are ways to change and adapt the workplace to people’s needs. On the other side, the Dollarstore is very realistic about what is currently needed to retain employment in the business world. Three of the five young men have not been able to master the emotion management required by the store. James keeps the precarious jobs he had before and Peter and Jonathan will return to community college and enrol in other programmes. It shows that, at this point, these young men have alternatives and that they might explore other options that do not require the same emotion management as retail service<sup>7</sup>. This does not necessarily signify a failure of these young men, as the store has allowed them to recognize if retail is a valid option for their future employment. Two out of the five (Neil and Daniel) have learned the necessary feeling rules in order to move on into paid employment. They had the time and the space to discover what it takes to be in retail. This, on the other hand, means that customers of the store have to be ready to offer philanthropic emotion management: accepting that an employee needs longer to do the cash register, that a clerk might not be as polite as expected, that their physical appearance might not meet their aesthetic expectations... A survey showed that 90% of the participating customers know that the store is a training business, and that they anticipate a slower pace and some extra help necessary for the employees. Thus, if this analysis has demonstrated the dis-abling side of the service industry, it also reveals the en-abling culture of a training business, which helps some youth with disabilities to make a successful transition into the workplace. It allows them to learn new forms of emotion management that they could not acquire during their previous socialization and schooling career and that they need to participate in the labour market. We can criticize capitalistic economic systems, but Goffman’s ‘juggler’ also implies the ability to participate in it if needed or desired. To make feeling rules obvious and use them to their own advantage gives people with disabilities more alternatives and the agency to accept them or not. School and job training need to take this into account and make it more explicit in their educational goals.

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<sup>7</sup> The author keeps of course in mind that this might not necessarily be the case for any person with disabilities, depending on the severity of their impairments. But it turned out that the social and transition services in Nova Scotia for these young people offered a range of alternatives, from sheltered workshops to educational offers at the Community College.

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