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The Emotional Side of Participatory Research Practices - Challenges, Impact and Extra Work

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Abstract. Participatory design in sensitive contexts involves substantial invisible extra work that rarely appears in project plans or publications. At the same time, close collaboration with groups in sensitive contexts can expose researchers to significant emotional demands. While both invisible work and emotional labour have been discussed in CSCW and PD, little attention has been paid to how they intersect.

In this reflection paper, we analyse four heterogeneous practice-based computing projects to examine the co-constitution of emotional labour and extra work. We thereby analyse how extra work shapes researchers' emotional experiences and how emotional demands generate additional work. Drawing on cross-case analysis in the tradition of design case studies, we identify three recurring emotional patterns: (1) responsibility and moral obligation, (2) uncertainty, insecurity, and lack of control and (3) frustration, anger, and ethical tension. We show how these patterns are closely tied to institutional and structural conditions such as funding precarity, sustainability gaps, and organisational instability. By conceptualising emotional labour and extra work as mutually reinforcing, we contribute a more integrated understanding of participatory research practice and argue for greater visibility and recognition of researchers' emotional work as a prerequisite for sustainable and responsible collaboration.

Keywords. Participatory Design, Emotional Labour, Extra Work, Participatory Research Practices

1 Introduction

Participatory research practices have long been considered a key approach to designing technical artefacts that fit into the lives of those affected (Muller and Kuhn, 1993; Schuler and Namioka, 1993; Wulf et al., 2018). By this, we refer to research approaches that actively involve stakeholders in the design and development of socio-technical systems, such as participatory design (PD), co-design, and related collaborative methods. However, this research approach involves a multitude of hidden, hardly formalised activities that are rarely visible in project plans and often only appear marginally in scientific publications (Schmidt, 2016; Schmidt and Bannon, 1992; Simone et al., 2022; Star and Strauss, 1999; Strauss, 1985; Suchman,

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1995). This invisible “extra work” (Weiler et al., 2025) is a constitutive part of participatory practice, but is only reflected to a limited extent in academic discourse.

At the same time, research from fields such as HCI and CSCW shows that participatory projects, especially those involving vulnerable groups, have a significant emotional dimension. Emotional stress, moral dilemmas, and forms of emotional labour shape not only the experiences of participants, but also those of researchers (Balaam et al., 2019; Hamidi et al., 2016; Slingerland and Wang, 2024). Here, researchers take on roles for which they are often not trained, such as moderator, adviser, emotional support, and crisis counsellor. These tasks are necessary but rarely recognised as part of the methodological repertoire.

While invisible extra work and emotional labour have each been examined in CSCW and PD, they are typically treated as separate analytical concerns. Little research has been done on the relationship between these two levels. Does additional organisational, social, or relational work lead to emotional stress, or, conversely, does the need for emotional care work create new extra work? And what consequences does this have for the well-being of participants and researchers, as well as for the quality of participatory collaboration?

In this reflection paper, we address this gap and examine emotional labour and extra work from two complementary perspectives:

(1) *How does extra work influence the emotional experiences of those involved?*

(2) *What forms of extra work arise from unavoidable emotional demands in participatory processes?*

To answer these questions, we reflect on four of our previous research projects. In the tradition of design case studies (Wulf et al., 2015, 2011), we extract cross-cutting themes from these cases that serve as an analytical lens for examining emotional labour in participatory research settings. Our goal is to contribute to a more open and transparent discourse about the often invisible stresses and demands in PD and thus to identify ways in which research teams can work more responsibly, caringly, and sustainably.

2 Related Work

2.1 Invisible Extra, Care & Articulation Work in Participatory Design

Invisible work describes activities essential to socio-technical systems that typically remain unacknowledged and undocumented. Classic CSCW studies show how such work becomes visible only during breakdowns or crises, where coordination and improvisation keep systems operational (Star and Strauss, 1999; Suchman, 1995). Thus, system stability relies on situated practices and competencies outside formal job descriptions (Schmidt, 2016).

Closely related is the concept of articulation work: ongoing activities coordinating tasks, aligning actors, and responding to contingencies so collective work proceeds (Schmidt and Bannon, 1992; Strauss, 1988). Often described as "work to make work work" (Schmidt, 2002, P. 9), it remains invisible because it is neither planned nor formally accounted for. In PD, articulation work is pervasive as researchers negotiate between diverse stakeholders, expectations, institutional logics, and values (Björgvinsson et al., 2010; Simonsen and Robertson, 2013). Much of this work is deeply relational and emotional, such as building trust, maintaining engagement,

moderating conflicts, managing disappointment, and navigating ethical dilemmas, especially in long-term or sensitive settings (Crabtree et al., 2004; Müller et al., 2012). These activities involve substantial emotional labour, yet are rarely recognised as research work.

Recent literature conceptualises these dimensions through care. Drawing on feminist care theory (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 2015), care sustains relations, practices, and socio-technical arrangements over time. Krüger et al. (2021b) argue that participation is maintained not through methods alone, but through ongoing care work, by maintaining relationships, supporting motivation, addressing asymmetries, and attending to conditions allowing participation to continue. Care in participatory contexts is not neutral as it enables participation but can similarly introduce asymmetries, dependencies, and moral tensions, particularly when care relationships become hierarchical or responsibilities are unevenly distributed (Krüger et al., 2021a). Despite its centrality, care work often remains invisible, unfunded, and individualised, falling disproportionately on researchers.

Weiler et al. (2025) introduce extra work to describe additional, often unplanned effort required to conduct and sustain participatory research in healthcare. Drawing on multiple case studies, they show extra work emerges across temporal and relational dimensions: (1) within projects, (2) at project boundaries, (3) before projects begin, (4) after they end, and (5) outside their scope. This can include participant acquisition, relationship management, sustaining infrastructures, and responding to responsibilities exceeding formal project goals or funding. While extra work can foster innovation and sustainability, it creates persistent tensions as researchers navigate institutional expectations, personal capacities, and ethical commitments. However, while their analysis acknowledges strain and responsibility, emotional dimensions remain largely implicit. It remains unclear how emotions shape extra work's emergence, how emotional labour and care practices are distributed, and how emotions contribute to this work's invisibility.

Our contribution builds on Weiler et al.'s (2025) framework by foregrounding emotional dimensions. We argue that extra work in participatory research is not only organisational or infrastructural, but emotionally charged care and articulation work entangling researchers in enduring responsibilities, moral tensions, and affective commitments. By analysing four former research projects in sensitive settings, we examine how emotional labour and extra work co-constitute one another across and beyond project boundaries, and affect sustainability and ethics of participatory research practice.

2.2 Emotional Work in Participatory Design

Emotions have long been recognised as central to PD. Early work foregrounds participants' lived experiences, affective responses, and well-being as integral to the design process (Wright and McCarthy, 2008, 2010). Researchers are required to work empathetically with participants' emotions, values, and everyday lives (Bowen et al., 2013; Chung and Gerber, 2010; Deitz et al., 2018; Gennari et al., 2017; Genç and Verma, 2024; Ho et al., 2011; Mulvenna et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2021). This includes emotional engagement in the form of building trusting relationships to enable participants to share personal stories or vulnerabilities (Battarbee and Koskinen, 2005; Howell et al., 2021; Wright and McCarthy, 2008). Consequently,

empathy has been framed as a core competency designers should actively develop (Ho et al., 2011). At the same time, participatory processes frequently require researchers to manage engagement, tensions, and expectations in ways that are emotionally demanding and rarely formally recognised.

These dynamics are particularly pronounced in sensitive domains such as disability (Hamidi et al., 2015a,b; Stangl et al., 2015), ageing and home care (Alaoui and Lewkowicz, 2015; Müller et al., 2012; Schorch et al., 2016; Tixier and Lewkowicz, 2015), mental health (Crabtree et al., 2004), and death and bereavement (Massimi et al., 2011). In such settings, researchers often face responsibility, and emotional distress while working closely with vulnerable groups (Moncur, 2013; Morrissey et al., 2017). Emotional and methodological adaptations made in response often remain undocumented and invisible (Crabtree et al., 2004; Howell et al., 2021). Similarly, Mentis et al. (2010) show that emotions play a crucial role in coordinating work yet remain invisible because they are excluded from formal work models. Building on articulation work (Schmidt and Bannon, 1992; Strauss, 1988) they conceptualise emotional regulation itself as a form of work. Building on this, we argue that researchers' emotions are integral to sustaining participation and navigating ethical tensions, yet remain invisible due to publication norms and professional ideals of emotional distance.

Historically, recommended strategies emphasised emotional distance and avoiding over-identification with participants (Ensign, 2003; Le Dantec and Edwards, 2008). Later work proposed identifying emotional risks and supporting researchers through debriefings (Moncur, 2013), but still discouraged reporting emotional experiences in publications. More recent work instead calls for greater reflexivity and transparency regarding researchers' positionality and emotional experiences (Berger, 2015; Ploder and Stadlbauer, 2016; Rode, 2011; Singh et al., 2025). Referring to Schön's (1983) notion of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, researchers increasingly acknowledge that personal experiences, emotions, and values shape both research practice and design outcomes. This is particularly relevant given evidence that emotions significantly influence creativity, decision-making, and design quality (Baas et al., 2008; De Dreu et al., 2008; Sas and Zhang, 2010). Sas and Zhang (2010) argue that enthusiasm and empathy can support creativity and engagement, while frustration and self-doubt may constrain design processes.

Recent CSCW and HCI scholarship has therefore begun to foreground researchers' own emotional experiences more explicitly. Balaam et al. (2019), for example, describe stories of doubt, shame, and moral conflict emerging in participatory work and argue that emotional labour is both burdensome and essential for sustaining long-term relationships. Similarly, methodological approaches such as subjective ethnography (Joshi et al., 2024), reflexivity frameworks (Berger, 2015; Ploder and Stadlbauer, 2016; Rode, 2011), and design memoirs (Devendorf et al., 2020) foreground researchers' emotional experiences as analytically relevant. Drawing on Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotion work, researchers conceptualise emotional regulation as a professional practice that may involve emotional strain, exhaustion, guilt, or self-doubt (Gibson, 2019; Holman et al., 2008; Kelly, 2019; Pugliesi, 1999).

While emotional labour and invisible extra work have each received growing attention in CSCW and PD, they are typically discussed separately. What remains underexplored is how both phenomena co-constitute one another in participatory research practice. Specifically, little is known about how emotional labour generates

additional work, and conversely, how invisible extra work contributes to emotional strain. In the following, we analyse four participatory research projects to examine how emotional labour and invisible extra work become intertwined across different stages and conditions of participatory research practice.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

In this article, we reflect on four past case studies to make visible the stories that are rarely told in accounts of participatory research practices (cf. Balaam et al. (2019); Tenenberg (2024)). Rather than focussing on outcomes or methods alone, these cases foreground the emotional work carried out by researchers to sustain participation, manage responsibilities, and navigate moral tensions. Our aim is to understand how such emotional work that is often taken for granted or relegated to the background, shapes participatory practices and gives rise to additional invisible work.

The idea for this paper emerged from ongoing discussions within the author team about participatory practices in technology development and the additional work they entail, including exchanges at recent ECSCW conferences. While prior work has conceptualised "extra work" in PD contexts (Weiler et al., 2025), our discussions highlighted its impact on researchers' emotional well-being. This motivated a retrospective examination of our own completed projects. The cases reported in this paper were generated through a bottom-up, reflective process. Drawing on shared experiences across multiple projects, we collectively revisited situations that had left a lasting emotional impact on us as researchers and had tangibly affected how the projects unfolded. As a selection criterion, we intentionally focussed on cases in which emotional experiences were particularly salient and where these experiences resulted in observable forms of additional work (e.g., adaptations in project design, extended engagement, or relational work). This purposive sampling enabled an in-depth exploration of the relationship between emotional labour and extra work, while introducing a bias towards more emotionally intense situations. We explicitly acknowledge this limitation, since the cases are not intended to be representative, but to provide analytically rich insights into often underreported aspects of participatory research.

The case documentation then proceeded iteratively. Based on initial discussions, candidate cases were identified and documented in a shared workspace. Each case was then collaboratively reviewed and refined by the author team to ensure clarity and comparability. To support cross-case analysis, we agreed on a common structure for all case descriptions, including (1) the project context, (2) the emotional experiences of the researchers, and (3) the forms of extra work that emerged in response. Through successive rounds of revision, the cases were consolidated into their final form.

The resulting four cases (Section 3.3) capture situations in which emotional strain, responsibility, or ethical uncertainty played a central role in shaping research practice and directly contributed to extra work. Together, they illustrate different configurations of emotional labour and extra work across practice-based research contexts. Table 1 provides an overview of the cases analysed.

3.2 Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted as a form of retrospective "reflection-on-action" (Schön, 1983), examining past experiences to generate insights into practice. In line with the design case study approach (Wulf et al., 2015, 2011), we treated the cases as situated accounts that can be made analytically comparable through systematic cross-case interpretation. We extend this approach by explicitly focussing on emotional labour, and invisible work as analytical categories.

The analysis proceeded in three steps: First, all case descriptions were collaboratively reviewed to identify situations in which emotional experiences and additional work were closely intertwined. These situations were marked within each case and served as initial units of analysis. Second, we conducted a cross-case comparison to identify recurring patterns in how emotional labour emerged and how it translated into extra work. In this step, we iteratively grouped similar experiences (e.g., responsibility, uncertainty, frustration) and examined how they were connected to specific project conditions and dynamics. Third, we related these patterns to existing conceptualizations of extra work (Weiler et al., 2025) by mapping the identified situations onto different project dimensions (see Section 4.1. This step enabled us to analyse how emotional labour contributes to additional work across temporal and organisational boundaries. Throughout the analysis, interpretations were continuously refined through collective discussion among the authors. This allowed contrasting individual perspectives, challenging interpretations, and developing a shared analytical understanding of the cases.

As both data generation and analysis are grounded in subjective experiences, they are inherently shaped by the authors' perspectives. While this subjectivity is intentional and allows us to foreground researchers' lived experiences, it also introduces bias in case selection, interpretation, and emphasis. We addressed this through ongoing collective reflection, though such bias cannot be fully eliminated. Rather than aiming for objectivity, our goal is to provide situated, experience-based insights into emotional labour and extra work in participatory research.

3.3 Case Studies

ID	Context	Structural Constraints	Example of Emotional Labour	Example of Extra Work
#1	IT accessibility in companies, organisations, and administrations	Funding delays; rigid project timelines; dependency on institutional funding structures; precarity of early-career contracts; participatory commitments tied to unstable organisational contexts	Frustration, powerlessness, moral discomfort when explaining delays; anxiety and precarity among project staff	Renewed partner acquisition; renegotiation of commitments; redesign of study goals; interim financing efforts; additional coordination with funder
#2	Waste management in multi-apartment buildings	Full membership role; spatial and social proximity; lack of exit-strategy; community expectations of tangible change; absence of boundary-setting mechanisms	Growing sense of responsibility and moral obligation; self-imposed pressure to "fix" issues; blurred boundaries between research and personal life; stress and overwhelm post-project	Continuous expectation management; translation between residents and housing board; informal support; post-project civic engagement; long-term administrative commitment
#3	Diagnoses of Post-COVID with digital technologies	Staff turnover; lack of continuity in participatory relationships; absence of training or debriefing structures; managing emotional strain independently; vulnerable health context	Insecurity, self-doubt, anticipatory anxiety; ethical uncertainty in responding to vulnerable participants; emotional exhaustion	Intensive preparatory measures; emotional self-regulation; additional individual reflection without institutional support
#4	Digital interfaces for community engagement with biodiversity	Institutional power asymmetries; consortium obligations; dependency on external stakeholders; responsibility for students	Frustration, anger, insecurity; protective concern for students' psychological safety; sustained stress from diplomatic balancing	Formal collaboration agreement; stakeholder mediation; protection work; shielding students from conflict; parallel relational management

Table 1. Overview of Case Studies and Examples of Emotional Extra Work

3.3.1 Case 1: Organisational Structures Restricting Participation

This case is situated in the application and early setup phase of a research project aimed at fostering inclusive corporate cultures. The proposal was submitted by a consortium consisting of a university research team and an expert team from an NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation). During proposal preparation, several companies were recruited as project partners and agreed to act as co-researchers by signing letters of intent (LOIs). These LOIs formed a central basis for the funding application and for planning a long-term participatory collaboration.

Following submission, the project sponsor delayed the funding decision considerably. Almost two years passed between the signing of the LOIs and the official project start. When the project finally started, most original partners withdrew their commitment, while the few remaining partners were only willing to engage selectively rather than participating in a continuous co-design process.

The delay and loss of partners caused strong frustration and feelings of powerlessness among the consortium. Researchers experienced moral discomfort when having to explain the situation to planned partners, despite having no influence over the delay. For early-career researchers, the situation was particularly stressful, since the delayed start threatened job continuity. In one case, the funding gap could not be bridged, resulting in one of the NGO's experts becoming temporarily unemployed. This created anxiety, insecurity, and a sense of precarity within the team.

The organisational breakdown triggered substantial unplanned work: renewed partner acquisition, repeated negotiations, re-explaining the project context, and

adapting the study design, goals, and milestones to reduced participation. Additional coordination with the funding body and interim financing efforts further increased workload. This extra work was not only administrative but also emotional, by managing disappointment, maintaining professionalism towards partners, and supporting colleagues facing existential uncertainty.

Due to the accumulated delays and restructuring, the originally envisioned participatory process became largely unfeasible. Instead of sustained collaboration, participation was reduced to sporadic, selective engagements. This demonstrates how institutional project structures can indirectly undermine participatory ambitions while shifting emotional and organisational burdens onto researchers and other project partners.

3.3.2 Case 2: Blurred Boundaries through Multiple Roles

This case is drawn from a three-year project on household waste management in a multi-apartment building in Sweden. The project involved extensive fieldwork, co-design workshops, and the development of prototypes to support residents' collective responsibility for waste management practices in four shared recycling rooms. One of the researchers was the principal investigator of the project, as well as a resident of the housing complex, thus engaging with the research site through complete participant observation and full membership (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). This dual role positioned her as a constant intermediary between the research project, the board of the condominium association, and the residents.

As the project was ongoing, it provided a context for both residents and board members to discuss problems with the recycling rooms and explore solutions to the waste problems that were being experienced (Lindrup et al., 2023; Rossitto et al., 2025). While neither board members nor residents expected the delivery of concrete results, the collaboration was often associated with an increasing emotional pressure to deliver tangible improvements - not only as a researcher, but also as a neighbour and resident. Balancing research interests, methodological constraints, and concerns to relate to residents as persons and neighbours, rather than research participants, was an emotionally loaded practice. The researcher experienced a growing sense of responsibility and obligation to "do something good" for people she encountered daily, intensifying feelings of accountability, responsibility, and (self-determined) pressure to deliver.

Acting as a middle person required continuous relational and coordination work beyond the planned research activities: managing expectations, translating between research goals and practical needs, and informally supporting residents' concerns. After the formal project ended, this emotional responsibility did not soften. Instead of "leaving the field", the researcher remained involved, feeling compelled to give back to the community. This led to accepting a position on the condominium board, which demanded significant time, emotional energy, and administrative effort, all undertaken alongside other professional obligations. While this role was not foreseen in the project (which had in the meantime ended), the invitation to join the board was related to the project and the opportunity to practically apply the research outcomes to the local context of household waste management.

While prolonged engagement strengthened trust and local impact, it also blurred boundaries between research, local commitments, and personal life. The ongoing emotional labour and additional responsibilities contributed to feelings of

overwhelm and stress, particularly as these obligations persisted beyond the project's scope. This case highlights how participatory research, especially under conditions of full membership, can generate a lasting sense of duty that extends emotional labour and invisible extra work during and well beyond the formal end of a project.

3.3.3 Case 3: Taking on an Emotionally Charged Project

This case stems from a two-year interdisciplinary research project aiming to improve the diagnosis of post-COVID syndrome through the use of an AI-based smartwatch. We collaborated with a software development company (providing hardware and software) and medical staff (introducing medical and regulatory expertise) and equipped participants diagnosed with post-COVID with the device to collect physiological data and complete daily questionnaires. The study design included three rounds of qualitative interviews. After the first two rounds, the two researchers who had established relationships with the participants left both the university and the project. Responsibility for conducting the final interviews was transferred to a researcher who had not previously been involved in the project. This role involved conducting the final interviews as well as taking responsibility for maintaining relationships with participants, representing the project, and handling sensitive health-related disclosures in an ethically appropriate manner.

Taking over the project at this late stage caused significant uncertainty. Participants had previously interacted with fixed contact persons, and stepping in as a new researcher, particularly for the final interviews, felt uncomfortable and intrusive. This unease was intensified by prior knowledge that some participants were dissatisfied with the early-stage technology. Anticipating resistance, and receiving an explicit rejection from one participant reinforced feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. Preparing for the interviews revealed further emotional challenges: the interview guide opened with the question "*How are you doing now?*", to which one participant responded simply, "*Bad.*" While methodologically appropriate, this moment raised immediate emotional and ethical questions about how to respond (empathetically, neutrally, or not at all) highlighting a lack of clear guidance for such situations.

To compensate for missing contextual knowledge and to prepare emotionally, the researcher invested substantial additional effort: studying transcripts, rehearsing possible responses, and reflecting on appropriate emotional conduct. This preparation was not limited to methodological readiness but involved managing personal emotions and anxiety in anticipation of emotionally charged interactions. While informal conversations with colleagues and supervisors were possible and supportive, the responsibility for navigating the emotional implications of taking over the field largely remained individualised. There were no established structures, training formats, or systematic debriefing practices specifically designed to support researchers in navigating emotionally demanding participatory encounters. Despite having several years of experience leading and completing participatory projects, the researcher felt a sense of insecurity about conducting interviews in such a sensitive context. At the same time, he had an internal professional expectation that an "experienced" researcher should be able to handle such situations without difficulty. This tension between professional self-understanding and emotional vulnerability contributed to the strain experienced.

Although the interviews were ultimately conducted successfully, the emotional strain of navigating participants' vulnerability, dissatisfaction, and illness without prior rapport contributed to stress and emotional exhaustion. This case raises broader questions about how well CSCW researchers, and especially early-career researchers, are prepared to take on emotionally demanding roles, and to what extent emotional labour is assumed rather than supported within project structures.

3.3.4 Case 4: Managing Stakeholder Relationships While Protecting Students' Psychological Safety

This case originates from a research project in which three student researchers, from two different design master programmes and with different nationalities, collaborated with two senior researchers to design digital interfaces aimed at empowering residents to enhance biodiversity in their neighbourhoods. The project was embedded in a larger, 4-year long quadruple-helix research programme involving public, private, and civic stakeholders. One consortium partner (a small citizen-science company) agreed to support the 8-month student project, with the intention that the designed interfaces could potentially be integrated into their existing platforms. The lead researcher, being part of the quadruple-helix project, was aware of the defensive and protective communication style of the company's representative person. Given the start-up nature of the company, the representative was also under pressure to navigate their limited resources towards a sustainable business model, yet the researcher felt that the student project could genuinely contribute to the product that the company was developing.

From the outset, managing the relationship with the company generated uncertainty and emotional strain for the researcher. To prevent conflict and shield students from potential tensions, a formal collaboration agreement was established, detailing mutual expectations and responsibilities. Negotiations around this agreement were marked by distrust from the company, which the researcher experienced as unexpected and personally unsettling, given the existing consortium relationship. This fostered feelings of insecurity, frustration, and anger, driven by concerns about jeopardising the broader consortium collaboration.

As the student project progressed, the researcher engaged in extensive anticipatory and protective work. Weekly meetings with students ensured a productive and supportive research environment, while parallel efforts were devoted to managing the stakeholder relationship, interpreting signals of distrust, and planning how to minimise students' exposure to potentially harmful interactions. When students needed to conduct observations in areas previously studied by the company, the researcher prepared them carefully, warning them of possible tensions and emotionally bracing for a difficult encounter. This mediating and safeguarding work through balancing institutional obligations, stakeholder diplomacy, and student well-being was neither planned nor formally recognised within the project, and had a significant impact on the project's outcomes.

The ongoing balancing act between maintaining consortium relationships and protecting students' psychological safety led to sustained stress and emotional exhaustion for the researcher. Ethical concerns about exposing students to hostile or distrustful environments remained unresolved. This case illustrates how participatory projects involving students can generate significant emotional labour for senior researchers, who must absorb relational tensions to protect others, while

navigating institutional power dynamics that constrain their ability to disengage.

4 Emotional Dimensions of Extra Work in Participatory Research

Weiler et al. (2025) conceptualised extra work in participatory research across five temporal and relational dimensions: (1) within, (2) at the boundary of, (3) before, (4) after, and (5) outside the project scope. We use this framework as an analytical lens and extend it by foregrounding its emotional implications. Across our four cases, we found that extra work is not merely organisational or relational, but deeply emotional. Emotions can shape when, how, and why extra work emerges, how long it persists, and why extra work often remains invisible. Rather than treating emotions as side effects of participatory research, our analysis indicates that emotional labour is constitutive of extra work across and beyond project boundaries.

4.1 Emotional Manifestations of Extra Work Across Project Boundaries

Extra work **within the project scope** refers to work that formally belongs to the project but was not anticipated in the original plan. In our cases, this form of extra work is strongly characterised by emotional labour (see also Hampson and Junor (2005)). Here, researchers engage in continuous self-regulation, emotional preparation, and uncertainty management in order to act appropriately in sensitive research contexts. In Case 3, this becomes visible in the emotional preparation for interviews with vulnerable participants, including concerns about empathy, professionalism, and moral responsibility. Similarly, in Case 4, senior researchers invest emotional effort in supporting students and moderating tensions with external partners. Therefore, we argue that emotional extra work within the project largely consists of handling responsibility, fear of doing harm, and concerns about acting "correctly" in morally charged situations.

Extra work **at the boundary of the project** lies between the formal project scope and its surrounding environment. Our analysis shows that this form of extra work is particularly shaped by power asymmetries and fragile relationships. Case 4 illustrates how researchers mediate between students and external stakeholders, balancing the need to protect students' psychological safety with the obligation to maintain collaborative relationships within a research consortium. Case 2 similarly demonstrates how project boundaries can become blurred when participatory engagement extends into the personal sphere of the researcher, intertwining professional responsibilities with everyday community life. The emotional labour at such boundaries is characterised by insecurity, vigilance, stress, and a heightened sense of duty, as researchers navigate competing responsibilities and limited room for manoeuvre.

Extra work **before the project** emerges even before formal research activities begin. Case 1 highlights how delayed and non-transparent funding processes generate emotional strain long before project work officially starts. Similarly, Case 4 involved drafting the collaboration agreement, which caused significant stress even before the project began, as the researchers anticipated mistrust from the project

partner and potential difficulties in the students' collaboration. Researchers engage in extensive relationship management, expectation handling, and damage control while facing existential uncertainties due to temporary contracts and potential funding gaps. Emotions such as frustration, stress, and fear are structurally produced by institutional conditions and give rise to defensive forms of extra work aimed at keeping projects viable.

Extra work **after the project** is closely linked to responsibility, relationships, and sustainability. In Case 2, the researcher experiences a strong sense of duty towards the local community beyond the project's formal end. Emotional attachment, spatial proximity, and long-term collaboration foster feelings of guilt associated with leaving the field. As a result, the researcher continues to support infrastructures and participants without funding, demonstrating that sustainability is not only technical or organisational but also emotional.

Finally, extra work **outside the project scope** refers to work that is neither temporally nor thematically planned as part of the project. Case 2 shows how professional and personal boundaries blur when researchers take on additional roles, such as joining a condominium board. This form of extra work is driven by moral obligation and a desire to give back, but it also leads to heightened stress and overload. Emotional labour here extends beyond research practice into researchers' private lives.

Across all five dimensions, emotions function as a connective element that shifts work temporally and relationally beyond its formal allocation. Extra work does not simply occur at discrete points in time but accumulates through emotional engagement.

4.2 Emotional Patterns Shaping Extra Work

Across the analysed cases, we identify recurring emotional patterns that shape how extra work emerges, intensifies, and persists. These patterns help to explain why certain forms of extra work become normalised and invisible.

Responsibility and moral obligation are central emotional drivers in participatory research (Cases 2, 3, and 4). While responsibility towards research participants, students, and collaborators was fundamental to participatory approaches in the analysed cases, it becomes intensified through proximity, vulnerability, and long-term relationships. These emotions are particularly associated with extra work after and outside the project scope, as researchers remain engaged beyond formal obligations, take on additional roles, and prioritise others' well-being over their own limits.

A second pattern is characterised by uncertainty, insecurity, and lack of control. In Cases 1, 3, and 4, these emotions were triggered by dependencies on institutional processes, sudden role changes, and/or power asymmetries between stakeholders. They can result in increased preparation, over-adaptation, and self-doubt. In these situations, extra work is performed under emotional pressure, often without sufficient support or recognition.

Cases 1, 3 and 4 revealed a third pattern involving frustration, anger, and ethical tension. These emotions arose from delayed decision-making, lack of transparency, institutional logics, and perceived unfairness. Rather than being openly addressed, such emotions were frequently suppressed to keep projects functioning. The resulting extra work takes the form of silent repair work (Hampson and Junor, 2005; Hansen,

2024) aimed at limiting damage and maintaining collaboration.

The case analysis has shown that emotions act both as triggers of extra work, such as when a sense of duty motivates continued engagement and as consequences of extra work, manifesting as stress, overwhelm, or burnout. At the same time, emotions such as shame and uncertainty can further reinforce the invisibility of extra work when researchers refrain from sharing their struggles with colleagues. Not every emotion generates the same type of extra work, and not every extra work feels the same, but together they reveal the emotional infrastructure that sustains participatory research practice.

5 Discussion

5.1 Organisational and Structural Barriers as Generators of Emotional Extra Work

Participatory research in CSCW does not take place in a neutral organisational vacuum. Instead, it is embedded in institutional structures, funding regimes, employment conditions, and power relations that profoundly shape how participation can be enacted (Bødker and Kyng, 2018; Vines et al., 2013). While prior work has shown that these structures constrain participants' involvement, our cases demonstrate that they also systematically affect researchers' emotional well-being and generate substantial forms of extra work.

We argue that organisational and structural barriers do not merely add complexity to participatory projects, but actively produce emotional strain, which in turn becomes a driver for additional, often invisible work. Emotions such as fear, guilt, uncertainty, and frustration are not incidental side effects but emerge at the intersection of institutional constraints and researchers' commitments to participants, collaborators, and project outcomes. Across our cases, we identify three recurring mechanisms through which structural conditions generate emotional extra work.

5.1.1 Precarity and Institutional Dependency: Existential Emotions and Defensive Extra Work

A first mechanism concerns researchers' dependence on funding bodies and institutional timelines. Participatory projects are often tightly coupled to external funding regimes, which means both parties must be able to understand and influence one another (George et al., 2006). Delays, as well as the lack of timely and thematic flexibility, can have severe consequences on the research itself (Ilse et al., 2023). As illustrated in Case 1, delayed project approval resulted in prolonged uncertainty, loss of partners, and significant emotional stress for the research team. Such delays can trigger existential fears regarding income, career continuity, and personal stability, particularly among professionals employed by NGOs and early-career researchers, whose precarious employment situation is often tied to fixed-term project contracts (Loveday, 2018; Raynor, 2019).

These structurally produced emotions lead to forms of defensive extra work (Weiler et al., 2025): researchers invest additional effort to bridge funding gaps, renegotiate partnerships, re-plan studies, and mitigate damage caused by circumstances beyond their control. This work remains largely invisible, as

institutional frameworks tend to individualise risk and treat precarity as a personal rather than systemic issue (Solomon and Du Plessis, 2023). Emotional strain can thus become both a consequence of organisational dependency and a catalyst for extra work aimed at keeping projects viable despite structural instability.

5.1.2 Sustainability Gaps, Moral Responsibility, and Care-Based Extra Work

A second mechanism emerges from tensions between project-based funding logics and the relational nature of participatory research. While projects are temporally bounded, participatory engagements often generate long-term relationships, expectations, and responsibilities that extend beyond the formal project scope (Armstrong et al., 2023; Rossitto, 2021; Saxinger and First Nation of Na-cho Nyak Dun, 2018). Case 4 illustrates how emotional labour can arise within a long-standing consortium structure: although the collaboration with one partner was experienced as defensive and mistrustful, the broader consortium had to be maintained for the overall project to succeed. This institutional dependency constrained the researchers' ability to disengage, intensifying emotional strain. Similarly, in Case 2, the researcher's deep entanglement with the local community fostered a strong sense of duty to stay in the field and continue supporting shared infrastructures after the project ended.

This phenomenon reflects a broader sustainability gap in participatory research: while funders and institutions focus on deliverables and timelines, there is an ethical responsibility (Light and Akama, 2014), with ongoing maintenance of relationships, practices, and infrastructures that is rarely accounted for (Simone et al., 2022). As a result, researchers experience emotions such as guilt, obligation, and responsibility when projects end without mechanisms for long-term support. We argue that these emotions motivate substantial forms of extra work after and outside the project scope, including unpaid maintenance, continued availability (see also Meurer et al., 2018), and the assumption of additional roles.

Drawing on care theory (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 2015), this extra work can be understood as care work that sustains participatory outcomes over time. As Krüger et al. (2021b) argue, such care work is essential for participation but remains structurally invisible and unfunded. In our cases, care-based extra work is not driven by methodological necessity alone, but by relationship-based emotional commitments, highlighting how sustainability in participatory research is an emotional endeavour.

5.1.3 Organisational Change, Power Asymmetries, and Emotional Self-Regulation

A third mechanism concerns organisational dynamics such as staff turnover, role changes, and power asymmetries within and across institutions. In Cases 3 and 4, researchers were confronted with fragile collaborations, shifting responsibilities, and unequal power relations, whether through sudden project handovers or mistrust between consortium partners. These conditions generated emotions of uncertainty, self-doubt, frustration, and anger, which researchers actively regulated to prevent conflict escalation or harm to participants and students.

In Case 3, the abrupt transfer of responsibility for emotionally charged interviews required extensive emotional preparation and self-regulation, raising questions about the need for additional training, standardization and support structures for researchers working in sensitive contexts (see also Ahmed et al., 2004; Taffere et al.,

2024). In Case 4, concerns about students' psychological safety, combined with the need to maintain institutional relationships, resulted in additional supervision, mediation, and protective labour. This form of extra work is closely linked to power asymmetries and highlights how participatory approaches can reproduce or intensify hierarchical dynamics under organisational constraints (Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen, 2016).

Across these cases, emotional self-regulation functions as a form of articulation work (Strauss, 1988; Suchman, 1996): researchers manage their own emotions and those of others to keep collaborations functional, often suppressing frustration or anger to maintain fragile alliances. Such work is rarely recognised as legitimate research labour, despite being essential for sustaining participation under unequal and unstable conditions.

Taken together, these mechanisms show that organisational and structural barriers are not external to participatory research practice but constitutive of the emotional and labour conditions under which it unfolds. Emotions act as mediators between structural constraints and extra work: they are produced by institutional arrangements and, in turn, motivate additional invisible work aimed at sustaining projects, relationships, and ethical commitments. By foregrounding these dynamics, we extend existing accounts of extra work, demonstrating how emotional labour is not merely intertwined with, but actively generated through, organisational and structural conditions in participatory research.

5.2 Handling Emotional Labour in Participatory Research Practices

Emotions are an inevitable consequence of close, long-term collaboration with people from sensitive backgrounds (Balaam et al., 2019; Hamidi et al., 2016; Slingerland et al., 2022; Slingerland and Wang, 2024). If emotional labour and extra work are structurally produced in such settings, the question is not whether they can be avoided, but how they can be handled responsibly and sustainably. Prior work in PD has oscillated between two positions: advocating emotional distance and boundary maintenance (Ensign, 2003; Le Dantec and Edwards, 2008), or calling for greater reflexivity and openness regarding researchers' emotional experiences (Balaam et al., 2019; Devendorf et al., 2020). Our findings suggest that neither emotional detachment nor individual reflexivity alone are sufficient. Instead, emotional labour and its implications need to be made visible at multiple levels (methodological, collective, and institutional) to enable recognition, shared responsibility, and long-term support.

A first step in this direction is the explicit visibility of emotional work, as initiated by scholars such as Balaam et al. (2019), recognising emotions as an integral part of participatory research practice. This can take multiple forms: explicitly reflecting on researchers' positionality in publications, fostering more open discussions of emotional challenges within the scientific community (e.g., in workshops or panels), and publishing accounts that foreground lived experiences from actual research practice. Storytelling offers a particularly promising approach in this regard. As prior work across CSCW and the social sciences has shown, storytelling can make tacit knowledge shareable, visualise invisible work, and support collective sensemaking (Dimond et al., 2013; Game and Metcalfe, 1996; Gelman and Basbøll, 2014). In participatory and collaborative contexts, stories enable researchers to articulate

complex, emotionally charged situations that resist abstraction, while still contributing to theory building and methodological reflection. At the same time, producing such narratives constitutes extra work in itself, often carried out alongside everyday research responsibilities (Karasti et al., 2002). Recognising storytelling as legitimate scholarly work can therefore contribute to making emotional labour visible without individualising responsibility.

Relatedly, structured forms of process-oriented reporting, such as design case studies (Wulf et al., 2015, 2011), offer opportunities to systematically integrate emotional dynamics into accounts of participatory research. Extending these formats to explicitly address emotional tensions, doubts, and adaptations would help situate emotional labour as part of professional research practice rather than as a personal burden.

Increased visibility and recognition of emotional labour can, in turn, lower the threshold for researchers to speak with colleagues about their experiences and to collectively develop coping and support strategies. Beyond the immediate research team, such visibility can also raise awareness at institutional levels, including departments and funding bodies, potentially opening up discussions about emotional labour as a legitimate and fundable component of participatory research practices. This is particularly relevant in sensitive contexts, where emotional demands are not exceptional but structural, as we have shown in the selected cases. Emotional labour in participatory projects, especially in sensitive settings, may also require additional organisational support services for researchers (see e.g. Case 3). For example, in fields such as social work, it is well established to offer formats like professional individual or group supervision. If computer science research increasingly takes place in sensitive contexts, where corresponding conflicts and role negotiations become the norm, employers must also consider what they can and want to offer in order to relieve and support their academic staff.

Finally, visibility is a prerequisite for improving preparation and training. Case 3 raised the question of whether researchers working in sensitive participatory settings require additional preparation. While PD resists rigid standardisation due to its situated and relational nature, the absence of shared practices for handling emotional strain leaves many researchers unsupported (Ahmed et al., 2004; Taffere et al., 2024). Rather than formalising participation through strict protocols, we argue for cultivating emotional competence as part of research training. This includes recognising early signs of emotional overload. With regard to our cases, this could mean reflecting on boundaries between professional responsibility and personal involvement, developing strategies for navigating moral dilemmas, and acquiring a shared language to articulate emotional tensions within teams and towards institutions. Such competence should not aim to eliminate emotions, but to acknowledge them as integral to participatory work, as they can be generative and support creativity and engagement (Sas and Zhang, 2010). The challenge, therefore, is not to suppress emotion, but to prevent emotional labour from becoming invisible, individualised, and unsustainable.

6 Conclusion

In this reflection paper, we examined the interplay between emotional labour and extra work in participatory research practices in sensitive settings. Responding to the

lack of research on how these two dimensions intersect, we analysed four heterogeneous design cases to explore (1) how extra work shapes researchers' emotional experiences and (2) how emotional demands generate additional extra work across project boundaries.

Our analysis suggests that emotions are not peripheral side effects of participatory research, but constitutive elements of its practice. Emotions can trigger extra work, such as care, coordination, mediation, or extended responsibility and, conversely, structurally produced extra work can generate emotional strain. Building on Weiler et al. (2025), we identified how specific emotions cluster within particular project dimensions and abstracted three recurring emotional patterns across our cases: (1) responsibility and moral obligation, (2) uncertainty, insecurity, and lack of control, and (3) frustration, anger, and ethical tension. These patterns were not merely individual experiences, but closely tied to institutional conditions such as funding precarity, sustainability gaps, organisational instability, and power asymmetries.

By conceptualising emotional labour and extra work as co-constitutive rather than separate phenomena, this paper contributes a more integrated perspective on the realities of participatory research practice. Emotional extra work can account for a significant portion of the labour invested in a project, yet it remains largely unrecognised in planning, reporting, and funding structures. As a result, researchers (particularly those in early career stages) often navigate emotional strain, moral dilemmas, and extended responsibilities without adequate acknowledgement or support.

We therefore argue for greater visibility of researchers' emotional experiences and its outcomes as a prerequisite for more sustainable participatory research practices. In practice, this could entail integrating emotional labour more explicitly into participatory research documentation, discussion, and support. For example, publications, case studies and design reports could include reflections on researchers' emotional involvement and its impact on decision-making, relationships, and project trajectories. At the collective level, creating spaces for sharing such experiences, e.g., through workshops, mentoring, or community discussions, can help normalise emotional challenges and enable mutual learning. At the institutional level, recognising emotional labour as part of research work could inform training, supervision, and funding structures, for instance by acknowledging the time and resources required for relational and care work in participatory settings. Recognising emotional labour not as a private burden but as a professional and structural component of participatory research practices is essential for strengthening methodological integrity, researcher well-being, and the long-term viability of participatory collaboration.

By opening up this discussion on the recognition of emotional labour and its entanglement with invisible extra work in practice-based research, we aim to contribute to a more transparent discourse on the hidden demands of this work. Specifically, we seek to foreground how emotional experiences shape research practices, influence decision-making, and generate additional, often unacknowledged labour. In doing so, we encourage the community to treat emotional labour not as an incidental by-product, but as a central, legitimate, and addressable dimension of our work.

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