Personality Differences in Emotional Labour Strategy Groups

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ABSTRACT

Prior research suggests employees use different combinations of surface acting, deep acting and genuine expression to regulate their emotions. Four emotional labour strategy groups have been identified: amateurs (low on all three strategies), masqueraders (high surface and deep acting), empathists (high deep acting and genuine expression) and chameleons (high on all three strategies). Discriminant analysis was used to examine personality differences among these four emotional labour groups. The amateurs had a higher need for social approval than did any other group and the empathists had higher positive affect. The chameleons and masqueraders, the groups with the highest use of surface and deep acting strategies, had greater negative affect. These results have important managerial implications that are discussed.

Keywords: emotions, interpersonal behaviour, attitudes

Substantial growth in the service sector, combined with growing evidence that emotional labour is associated with adverse consequences for employees, has made the study of emotional labour a research priority (Ashkanasy, Härtel & Daus 2002). Emotional labour has been variously defined as an external facial and bodily display (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993; Hochschild 1983), emotional dissonance (Mann 1999; Morris & Feldman 1997) and a process of emotion regulation (Grandey 2000). Most recent studies, however, have defined emotional labour as an internal process of emotion regulation that people engage in to conform to display rules in organisations (e.g. Brotheridge & Grandey 2002; Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Diefendorff, Croyle & Gosslerand 2005; Glomb & Tews 2004; Grandey 1999, 2003). The need to regulate emotions is driven by the emotional dissonance experienced as a result of complying with display rules (Glomb & Tews 2004). Display rules are pervasive in that they not only reflect occupational and organisational norms, but also societal norms (Syed 2008). Yet, little is known about the antecedents of emotional labour such as how personality, perception, emotions and cognitions might influence the process of emotion regulation (Spencer & Rupp 2009). Ashkanasy et al. (2002: 322) also observed that emotional labour research has still to provide a clear profile of the ‘successful emotional labor employee.’

Early research into emotional labour found people use two strategies to regulate their emotions to comply with display rules: surface and deep acting (Hochschild 1983). Surface acting, sometimes referred to as ‘faking in bad faith’, involves the adjustment of peoples’ outward emotional expression
to create the emotional display required by an organisation’s display rules (Rafaeli & Sutton 1987). This process is thought to be effortful because employees who engage in surface acting experience emotional dissonance as their expressed emotions are not congruent with their true feelings (Kruml & Geddes 2000). Consistent with this proposition, there is a growing body of research linking surface acting with emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002; Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Grandey 2000, 2003; Totterdell & Holman 2003; Zammuner & Galli 2005). The second strategy employees may use to comply with display rules is deep acting. Deep acting refers to the adjustment of internal feelings in order to express the appropriate and required emotional display. It differs from surface acting in that it involves an adjustment of inner feelings as well as the outward expression of the emotion. For example, the exhausted physician who strives to feel empathy for a difficult patient is deep acting. A key difference between surface and deep acting is that, in the latter case, the employee is making an effort to feel the required emotion. Although deep acting appears effortful, studies have not found it to be associated with negative consequences for employees (e.g. Diefendorff et al. 2005).

An increasing number of researchers consider the expression of genuine emotions to be an important third strategy that people use to manage the emotional demands of their work (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993; Diefendorff et al. 2005; Grandey 1999; Naring, Briet & Brouwers 2006; Zammuner & Galli 2005). Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) observed the problem with Hochschild’s (1983) original conceptualisation of emotional labour is that it does not allow for situations in which an employee spontaneously expresses an emotion that is consistent with display rules. For example, a counsellor who genuinely expresses sympathy for a bereaved client does not need to surface or deep act. The inclusion of genuine expression as an emotion regulation strategy suggests emotional dissonance is not a necessary condition for emotional labour to occur (Glomb & Tews 2004). Genuine expression has been linked to positive individual outcomes, including job satisfaction (Grandey 1999) and personal accomplishment (Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Grandey 1999; Naring et al. 2006; Zammuner & Galli 2005). Customers are also more satisfied when employees’ display positive emotions (Pugh 2001) and their smiles are perceived as authentic (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen & Sideman 2005).
Little is known about how the three emotional labour strategies (surface, deep and genuine) are related to each other. Grandey (1999) suggested people may engage in all three strategies in any given day, but provided no empirical evidence in support of this assertion. Studies of emotional labour strategies have almost exclusively focused on identifying relationships between variables, rather than between people. Indeed, person-centred approaches to studies of employees’ attitudes or behaviour are relatively rare (Sinclair, Tucker, Wright & Cullen 2005). It appears however, that there are groups of employees who use different combinations of emotional labour strategies on an average day as Jordan, Soutar and Kiffin-Petersen (2008) found four distinct groups across a diverse set of high emotional labour occupations. The groups were labeled amateurs (low on all three strategies), masqueraders (high surface and deep acting), empathists (high deep acting and genuine expression), and chameleons (high on all three strategies). An important defining feature of these emotional labour groups was the shared similarities of the people within each group and the significant differences between the groups. In this study we sought to understand the attributes of each group more fully by examining the relationship between certain personality factors and the four groups.

**Personality and Emotional Labour Strategies**

The attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework suggests people are attracted to work environments that fit their values, goals, personality and attitudes (Schneider 1987). Research and practice have commonly focused on personality factors in assessing this so-called person-vocation fit (Holland 1985). A ‘good’ person-vocation fit in emotional labour jobs will potentially allow people to be their authentic selves and to express genuine emotions in response to display rules. In contrast, a ‘poor’ match may result in their engaging in surface and deep acting, with the resulting emotional dissonance leading to physical and somatic symptoms (Schaubroeck & Jones 2000) and emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Grandey 2003). A recent paper by Gardner, Fischer and Hunt (2009) highlighted the dilemma experienced by leaders when they need to regulate their emotions in response to situational pressures while striving to maintain their authenticity. Grandey et al. (2005) also found the authenticity of employees’ smiles were important for customer satisfaction. Understanding the relationship between personality factors and the various emotional labour strategies
may assist in the recruitment and selection of people who are a good ‘fit’ with jobs that are high in emotional labour demands.

As self-monitoring, positive affect and negative affect appear to influence peoples’ ability to regulate their emotions (Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Diefendorff et al. 2005; Grandey 2000; Liu, Perrewé, Hochwarter & Kacmar 2004), the present study examined whether these factors are related to their preference for a particular combination of emotional labour strategies. We also provide a unique contribution to the literature by examining the relationship between the need for social approval or social desirability responding and the emotional labour strategy groups. The focus in this paper is on need for approval as a stable personality trait that occurs across time, situations and assessment tools, rather than a temporary reaction to a situation, such as responding to a survey (Paulus 1991). To date, no studies appear to have investigated a relationship between emotional labour and need for approval.

**Social approval.** The need for social approval or social desirability refers to peoples’ concern for securing the acceptance and approval of important others (Crowne & Marlowe 1960). Crowne and Marlowe (1964: 202) observed that the approval-dependent individual seeks out ‘social recognition and status, protection and dependency, love and affection’. People with a high need for approval strive to be accepted by others. They will therefore endeavour to express emotions and attitudes they perceive will result in approval or avoid disapproval. In other words, they are concerned with making a favourable impression. In contrast, people with a low need for approval are independent, have a strong self-concept and are therefore less likely to conform to societal norms. Prior research has found that high need for approval individuals tend to express less aggression when frustrated (Fishman 1965), give more help to others particularly when it is made public (Satow 1975), conform to social pressures to avoid being disliked (Crowl 2001), and strive to maintain the status quo rather than display a charismatic leadership style (Sosik & Dinger 2007). It seems likely therefore, that approval-dependent individuals would be more responsive to meeting display rules to ensure their acceptance from others, including their customers and management. Although self-serving, it also suggests high need for approval individuals may engage in more deep acting and expression of genuine emotions.
because of their need to authentically obtain approval. Such people may strive to conform to societal expectations and display rules to elicit support and acceptance from others.

**Self-monitoring.** Self-monitoring is the extent to which individuals monitor and control their self-presentation and expressive behaviour, including their facial expressions, in response to social cues (Snyder 1974). High self-monitors are adept at reading the cues of others and modifying their own emotional expression so as to be socially appropriate. A meta-analysis found high self-monitors tend to receive better performance ratings and are more likely to emerge as leaders (Day, Schleicher, Unckless & Hiller 2002). In contrast, low self-monitors are more likely to express their true emotions and attitudes regardless of the situation. High self-monitors are, therefore, also more likely to modify their emotional expression to conform to implicit or explicit display rules in jobs that involve emotional labour. Prior research has found that high self-monitors are more likely to surface act (Brotheridge & Lee 2002, 2003) and low self-monitors to express their true feelings (Diefendorff et al. 2005). There are two important differences between self-monitoring and need for approval (Snyder 1974). People with a high need for approval are motivated to modify their expressive behaviour but this is limited to situations in which they are seeking social acceptance. While the high self-monitor is highly skilled in self-presentation, people with a high need for approval are concerned with how they present to others, but may not have the necessary skills to create a favourable impression.

**Affectivity.** The extent of an individual’s positive and negative affectivity predisposes how intense peoples’ emotional responses will be to events that happen to them (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996). People with a positive affect are more enthusiastic and optimistic, whereas negative affectivity is associated with pessimism, irritability and depressed mood states (Watson, Clark & Tellegen 1988). Negative affect individuals respond to adverse events more intensely than those who are low in this personality trait. In situations that require the expression of positive emotions, such as in service interactions, people who are high in negative affectivity are more likely to have to act and hence, potentially experience greater emotional labour because of the emotional dissonance involved. Equally, since most service interactions require an employee to express positive emotions, such as being interested and attentive towards the customer, people who are high in positive affect are more
likely to express genuine emotions and to engage in deep acting. Affectivity may therefore be an important influence on peoples’ ability to regulate their emotions. Generally consistent with these propositions, studies have found negative affectivity is positively related to surface acting and that neither affectivity variable is related to deep acting (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002; Brotheridge & Lee 2003; Diefendorff et al. 2005). Diefendorff et al. (2005) also found positive affectivity was a significant predictor of the expression of genuine emotions and a negative predictor of surface acting.

The literature review has established the relevance of need for approval, self-monitoring and affectivity for the internal process of emotion regulation. Need for approval and self-monitoring explain differences in peoples’ self-presentation in response to display rules, while affectivity explains the extent to which people need to regulate their internal emotions and facial expression. The study undertaken to examine how these personality attributes are related to the four emotional labour strategy groups is discussed in subsequent sections.

**METHOD**

**Data and Sample Measures**

The sample included 625 Australians employed full time in high emotional labour demand occupations, as determined by Hochschild’s (1983: 147) three criteria (i.e. they involve face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public; the employee has to produce an emotional state in another person, and the employer, through training and supervision, exercises a degree of control over the employees’ emotional activities). The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations were used, together with Hochschild’s criteria, to select occupational groups with high emotional labour demands. The identified groups included professionals, community and personal service workers and sales workers.

The survey was completed by an online panel of participants obtained from a survey research company. Participants were full time employed in the identified occupational groups and received a small payment for completing the survey. To ensure a representative sample, data were collected from
an equal number of participants in each occupational group. The average age of participants was 38 years and the majority were female (65%). The average tenure was 6 years with their current employer and 11 years in their specified industry. On average, participants worked a 42-hour week.

Brotheridge and Lee’s (1998, 2003) 16-item Emotional Labor scale was used to measure participants’ use of surface and deep acting strategies. Genuine expression was measured using three items from Grandey (1999) and an additional three items developed by Diefendorff et al. (2005). Participants reported how often they engaged in surface acting, deep acting and genuine expression on an average day ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Need for social approval was measured using two psychometrically sound short forms of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe 1960; Reynolds 1982). The short forms developed by Reynolds (1982) and Strahan and Gerbasi (1972) were combined to give a total of 23-items (twelve false and eleven true), with higher scores indicating a higher need for approval. The revised 18-item self-monitoring scale originally developed by Snyder (1974) was used to measure self-monitoring (Snyder & Gangestad 1986). The revised scale has ten false and eight true items. A score of 10-18 suggests the person is a relatively high self-monitor. Day et al. (2002) found it made little difference empirically whether self-monitoring was measured using a true-false or a continuous scoring system. Affectivity was measured using the 20-item PANAS scale developed by Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988). Participants rated 20 positive and negative mood adjectives on a scale that ranged from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). Background information, including age, highest education level attained, hours worked per week, gender and tenure, was also collected.

Analysis

Discriminant analysis is a multivariate technique used to determine which variables discriminate between two or more groups or the specific attributes of a particular group. It is an appropriate statistical technique when the aim of the research is to test for differences between the group means of a set of independent variables for two or more groups (Hair et al., 2006; Klecka 1988). Evidence about the differences in the groups can be obtained from the group means or centroids. In this study,
A discriminant analysis was undertaken on the four emotional labour groups identified by Jordan et al. (2008) (i.e. amateurs, empathists, masqueraders and chameleons) to examine the differences between the groups on the personality variables of need for social approval, self-monitoring and affectivity. The means and standard deviations of the emotional labour strategies and the proportion of participants in each of the four groups are shown as Table 1.

RESULTS

The data was screened prior to analysis and outliers removed. The composite scales were computed and the scales were generally normally distributed. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, alpha reliabilities and correlations, were calculated for each of the scales and are reported in Table 2. As can be seen from the Table, participants reported moderate amounts of need for social approval, self-monitoring and positive affect, and low levels of negative affect. The standard deviations indicated reasonable variation in the data set. Cronbach’s alpha was above 0.70 for all of the scales, suggesting the scales had good internal reliability.

A series of ANOVAs were estimated to see if the personality factors differed across the four subgroups. The F statistics ranged from 5.45 to 30.65, all of which were significant well beyond the five percent level suggesting a discriminant analysis was likely to find useful differences. Two significant discriminant functions were found that using the I squared statistic (Peterson & Mahajan 1976) as a guide, explained 28% of the group differences. The F statistics between groups (Johnson 1977) ranged from 7.28 to 83.83. All of the differences, with the exception of the masqueraders and chameleons, were significant well beyond the one percent level. The structural correlations between the various personality factors and the estimated discriminant functions can be used to determine the nature of the group differences and, as two functions were retained, the relationships can be shown diagrammatically (Soutar & Clarke 1981). The structural correlations can be shown as vectors, as can
be seen in Figure 1. The direction of the vector shows the nature of the relationship (i.e. whether it is a positive or negative relationship), while the length of the vector shows the strength of that relationship (Johnson 1977). The groups can also be placed on this ‘map’ by using their group centroid values (Soutar & Clarke 1981) and these are also shown in Figure 1. The vectors suggest the first function may be interpreted as an affectivity dimension and the second function as a self-monitoring/need for approval dimension.

As can be seen in Figure 1, one group (empathists) were located in the positive quadrant which suggests they have high positive affect. It is interesting to note that this was the group least likely to use the surface acting strategy of emotional labour. The length of the vector indicates the importance of positive affect in separating the subgroups and providing information about the attributes of the empathists. Two groups (chameleons and masqueraders) were located in the negative quadrant with moderate levels of negative affect. These two groups engage in high levels of surface and deep acting, but were not separable in terms of the personality factors measured in this study. Chameleons have moderate levels of self-monitoring. However, since the chameleon group comprised only 4% of the sample it is difficult to reach conclusions about this group’s personality attributes. Lastly, the amateurs were best described as having a high need for social approval. The length of this vector is important in distinguishing the amateur group from the empathists, masqueraders and chameleons. The amateur group is noted for equally employing all three emotional labour strategies at relatively low levels.

DISCUSSION

In this study we examined the relationship between some personality factors and four emotional labour strategy groups (amateurs, masqueraders, empathists and chameleons). The amateur group, which had relatively low levels of all three emotional labour strategies had the highest levels of need for social approval. This seems reasonable as this group may be considered unskilled or inexperienced (the rationale for the label) and, thus, they may have a greater need for external reinforcement. Their high need for approval and acceptance may drive their need to employ all three emotional labour
strategies to please their customers. Such people lack the confidence to act independently and express their own opinions for fear of disapproval. Indeed, one study found that high need for approval teachers assigned significantly higher grades than did teachers with a low need for approval (Crowl 2001). The significant differentiation of the amateurs on the basis of their need for social approval is important in furthering our understanding of the attributes of employees who may successfully manage emotional labour.

The masquerader and chameleon groups had moderate levels of negative affect. These two groups are of particular importance because their high use of surface acting puts them at risk of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. Conservation of resources theory suggests that high negative affect individuals may find service jobs particularly stressful because of the requirement to express positive emotions when interacting with customers (Hobfoll 1989). The cumulative effects of the surface acting and negative affect among the masqueraders and chameleons have potentially serious consequences for employees and how they behave towards customers. People within these two groups must continuously monitor themselves to ensure they are displaying appropriate emotions (Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Diefendorff et al. 2005; Grandey 2000). Over time employees may experience difficulty regulating their emotions causing them to breach display rules and to direct inappropriate emotions, such as anger, at a customer. The moderate association between the chameleons and the self-monitoring dimension is consistent with the term ‘chameleon’ which is often used to describe people who are high in self-monitoring. Self-monitoring and negative affect were associated with the two emotional labour strategy groups most likely to experience emotional exhaustion from high levels of surface acting suggesting that these traits may not be conducive to the long-term success of employees in service occupations.

The empathists, with a greater preference for deep acting and genuine expression, had the highest levels of positive affect. This finding is consistent with prior research that found people who are higher in positive affect find it easier to genuinely express their emotions and engage in deep acting. The extent to which positive affect distinguished this group from the masqueraders and chameleons is interesting as previous research has found deep acting and genuine expression are positively related to
personal accomplishment (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002; Brotheridge & Lee 2003; Grandey 1999; Naring et al. 2006; Zammuner & Galli 2005) and job satisfaction (Grandey, 1999). The empathists, by virtue of their high degree of positive affect, may engage in a continuously reinforcing and self-satisfying cycle in their interactions with customers. The display of positive emotions may also lead to greater customer satisfaction with service quality through the process of emotional contagion (Pugh 2001). The findings suggest positive affect may be a key attribute of a successful service employee.

Emotional labour researchers need to consider whether need for approval or social desirability is theoretically important or a potential bias because this has research design and analysis implications. Prior research has established that social desirability is a substantive component of personality that is related primarily to the emotional stability and conscientiousness dimensions of the big five (McCrae & Costa 1983; Ones, Viswesvaran & Reiss 1996; Smith & Ellingson 2002). It has therefore been argued in this paper that the need for social approval is theoretically important and as such, it is not a contaminant and controlling for its influence is inappropriate. However, if there is no theoretical or empirical support for a relationship between the need for approval and emotional labour, social desirability bias may still contaminate survey data. If a bias exists, the need for approval may need to be controlled for when examining the relationship between emotional labour strategies and other variables (Diefendorff et al. 2005). If it is socially desirable to deny the use of surface acting because of its connotation with ‘faking’, a negative relationship would be expected. For the same reason, a positive relationship may be expected between genuine emotion and social desirability. Alternatively, it may be possible to rephrase some of the items in the Emotional Labor scale to make them less socially desirable as this has been shown to reduce bias in self-rating personality inventories (Bäckström, Björklund & Larsson 2009). Future studies of emotional labour strategies that include measures of social desirability are needed to investigate this issue further.

There is also a need for future research to examine the relationship between the emotional labour strategies and the two different types of social desirability (self-deceptive enhancement and impression management) (Paulhus 1984). Self-deceptive enhancement involves distorting one’s responses to appear more skilful, competent or attractive, while impression management refers to
peoples’ attempts to present a favourable image, which may involve faking, lies and deception. It is possible employees may seek to present themselves in a more favourable light by underestimating the extent to which they report engaging in surface and deep acting when responding to questionnaires. Since data on emotional labour strategies is typically obtained using self-report measures, this may affect the validity of the data. This has important implications for future research because it suggests such strategies may be more common than is presently suggested.

The practical implications of this study lie in furthering our understanding of the attributes of successful emotional labour employees. A good person-vocation fit for high emotional labour jobs ideally involves recruiting employees who are extraverted or high in positive affect as well as being emotionally stable or low in negative affect. The differential findings suggest that training programs tailored to the needs of specific employees may be more beneficial than a ‘one size fits all’ approach. For example, reducing the emotional dissonance of the masqueraders and chameleons by developing their deep acting abilities through techniques such as attentional deployment and positive self-talk would be a useful starting point (Grandey 2000; Totterdell & Holman 2003). The inexperienced amateur group with their high need for approval also could benefit from education about the desirability of deep acting and genuine expression early in their organisational tenure.

There are some limitations to this study that should be noted. First, the measurement of the frequency of use of the emotional labour strategies is cross-sectional, which presumes the data are representative of a typical working day. It is possible the use of emotional labour strategies may vary across the time of day and day of the week. Second, reporting may also be influenced by a social desirability bias, leading employees to underestimate their use of surface and deep acting, and overestimate how often they express genuine emotions. Third, this study was based on self-report measures which mean relationships between variables may have been influenced by common method variance (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee & Podsakoff 2003). Finally, further research should examine how the core self-evaluation constructs of self-efficacy, self-esteem, locus of control and emotional stability are related to the four groups because these traits have been found to be positively related to both job and life satisfaction (Judge & Bono 2001; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger 1998).
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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Emotional Labour Strategy Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Deep Acting</th>
<th>Surface Acting</th>
<th>Genuine Expression</th>
<th>Proportion in the Cluster</th>
<th>Cluster Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.58 (0.568)</td>
<td>2.40 (0.468)</td>
<td>3.64 (0.571)</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>Amateurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.35 (0.569)</td>
<td>3.47 (0.414)</td>
<td>3.45 (0.475)</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>Masqueraders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.84 (0.180)</td>
<td>4.56 (0.460)</td>
<td>4.61 (0.419)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>Chameleons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.95 (0.478)</td>
<td>2.39 (0.554)</td>
<td>4.20 (0.420)</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>Empathists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>3.20 (0.874)</td>
<td>2.81 (0.784)</td>
<td>3.84 (0.596)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SD= standard deviation; Alpha reliabilities in brackets; ** p < 0.01

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Alpha Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Positive Affect</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Negative Affect</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-.247**</td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Need for Social Approval</td>
<td>14.08</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.310**</td>
<td>-.253**</td>
<td>(0.77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-Monitoring</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.170**</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SD= standard deviation; Alpha reliabilities in brackets; ** p < 0.01

Figure 1: Personality Differences in Emotional Labour Strategies