Behind the Mask of Emotional Labour: An Integrative Model

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ABSTRACT

The recent inception of emotional labour research is due, in the most part, to the rapid expansion of the service sector. Emotional labour (EL) refers to the mechanisms employees use to adjust their outward expression of emotion in accordance with organisational and societal norms during employee-customer interactions. This is differentiated from emotion work which is the management of emotions during employee-employee interactions. There is little agreement on the definition, conceptualisation and measurement of emotional labour. Specifically, this research has four main streams: 1) emotional job demands, 2) emotional expression, 3) emotional dissonance, and 4) emotion regulation strategies. This paper seeks to understand what is behind the ‘mask’ of EL by presenting an integrative model that includes the four conceptualisations of EL. The model extends previous work with the inclusion of emotion work regulation processes, continuance and affective commitment, and extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction. Future research is required to empirically test the model in a variety of contexts and occupations.

Keywords: Emotions, interpersonal behaviour, job design, attitudes

INTRODUCING EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Emotions are a part of everyday life however the area of emotions in the workplace has only recently gained the attention of researchers and practitioners. Despite its recent beginnings, this area has grown rapidly, as can be seen with the growing number of edited books (Ashkanasy, Hartel & Zerbe 2000; Ashkanasy, Zerbe & Hartel 2002; Fineman 1993; Lord, Klimoski & Kanfer 2002), special edition journal issues (e.g. Journal of Organizational Behavior 2000, Organizational Behavior and Human Processes 2001, Motivation and Emotion 2002, Human Resource Management Review 2002, Leadership Quarterly 2002, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 1999), authored books (e.g. Hochschild 1983; Smith 1992), dedicated conferences (e.g. International Society for Research on Emotions, Asia-Pacific Symposium on Emotions in Worklife, Emotions and Organizational Life), and email groups (e.g. EMONET) that have examined emotions at work. This increased attention from researchers may be due, in part, to the rapid growth in the service sector and the need to explore in-depth the nature of EL and its relationships with important organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction and burnout.

The services sector has seen substantial growth in the past few decades. Figure 1 shows the increase in the number of workers in Australia’s service sector compared to the country’s manufacturing and other sectors (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005). It is clear that, while manufacturing and other sectors have remained relatively stable, the number of employees in the service sector over the past two decades has almost doubled. The growth and expansion of the service sector has meant increased competition that have led organisations to use EL strategies (e.g. ‘service with a smile’) to gain a competitive advantage (Rafaeli & Sutton 1989; Bailey & McCollough 2000).
This has resulted in a diverse and somewhat disjointed body of research into EL, which is not uncommon for a research area in its infancy. This diversity includes the methodologies that have been used (e.g. quantitative, qualitative and observational), the divergent definitions suggested, the different measures utilised and the different research streams that have evolved. This paper presents an integrative model of EL which is inclusive of the main theoretical approaches to studying EL. A unique contribution is also made with the inclusion of emotion work (surface and deep acting) and dimensions of job satisfaction (intrinsic and extrinsic) and organisational commitment (affective and continuance). This model provides a new level to understanding the complex relationships of EL.

**INTEGRATING EMOTIONAL LABOUR CONCEPTS**

The term ‘emotional labour’ was first introduced by Hochschild (1979; 1983). In her seminal work, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Hochschild (1983: 7) defined EL as ‘the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial or bodily display’. Hochschild (1983) provided three main contributions to the EL literature: 1) understanding the EL of particular occupations (e.g. flight attendants and debt collectors), 2) describing feeling rules, and 3) feeling management through surface and deep acting strategies. Hochschild’s book was the inception of the EL literature and the origin of almost all of the emergent research streams. Despite having the same foundation, EL researchers have drawn upon different aspects of Hochschild’s work and hence the area has developed into four main, and quite separate, streams of research: 1) emotional job demands (e.g. Morris & Feldman 1996; 1997), 2) emotional expression (e.g. Ashforth & Humphrey 1993;
Glomb & Tews 2004; Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini & Isic 1999), 3) emotional dissonance (e.g. Abraham 1999a; 2000; Adelmann 1995; Kruml & Geddes 2000; Mann 1999; Morris & Feldman 1997), and 4) emotion regulation strategies (e.g. Brotheridge & Lee 1998; 2003; Grandey 2000; 2003). To understand how the various conceptualisations are related to one another, there is a need to look behind the outward display of emotion or the ‘mask’ of EL, to how emotional expression and dissonance are linked to particular outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. Many researchers believe that the link is the internal regulation process that an employee engages in to express the appropriate emotional display.

Recent studies have focused on EL as a process of internal emotion regulation (Brotheridge & Lee 1998; Brotheridge & Lee 2003; Grandey 2000; Grandey 2003), as this provides the link between the dissonance experienced and the expressed emotion (Glomb & Tews 2004). Managing emotions to create an emotional display that conforms with specific display rules typically requires some form of self-regulation on the part of the employee. When employees attempt to regulate their emotional displays in order to meet societal, occupational or organisational norms they experience emotional dissonance (ED) (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993). To regulate their emotions employees engage in either surface or deep acting (Hochschild 1983). In surface acting, ‘employees try to manage the visible aspects of emotions that appear on the ‘surface’ and which can be noticed by the interaction partner to bring them in line with the organizational display rules while the inner feelings remain unchanged’ (Zapf 2002: 244). ED therefore exists between what the employee is feeling and the outward expression of the emotion. In deep acting, employees attempt to feel the emotions they are required to express as part of their job requirements. The key difference between the two strategies is that with deep acting, ‘not only the expressive behaviour but also the inner feelings are regulated’ (Zapf 2002: 244). Recent research has found that the strategies are independent of each other, which suggests that individuals may engage in both strategies in varying contexts (Beal, Trougakos, Weiss & Green 2006). The strategies have also been found to differentially predict organisational outcomes, supporting the need to conceptually and empirically distinguish between them (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002; Grandey 2003). Conceptualising EL as an internal regulation process (surface and deep acting) provides information regarding the link between 1) situational factors (emotional job demands), and 2) the expressed emotion and the experienced dissonance when this expression is not aligned with true feelings (ED). This conceptualisation has been adopted in this paper.

**AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF EL**

The proposed model, presented as Figure 2 overleaf, integrates all four conceptualisations of EL as different stages of the EL process, rather than opposing views. No research to-date has conceptually integrated all four research streams. In particular, there are four main models that have provided a significant contribution to understanding EL. Morris and Feldman (1996) developed and tested a model of EL which combined the dimensions of emotional job demands and ED. Similarly,
Glomb and Tews (2004) presented a four quadrant model of EL which combined the concepts of emotional expression, ED and emotion regulation strategies. This model explained the four different states that an employee may experience (‘nothing felt or displayed’, ‘appropriate suppressed display’, ‘appropriate faked display’ and ‘appropriate genuine display’). These two models provide a combined view of some EL concepts, however they fall short in providing an understanding of the relationship between EL and antecedents and outcomes.

Figure 2: An Integrative Model of Emotional Labour

In the literature, two more persuasive models of EL have emerged (Grandey 2000; Rubin, Tardino, Daus & Munz 2005). These models include variables that help explain the antecedents, outcomes and mediators of EL. Rubin et al. (2005), provided a theoretical model which integrated ED, EL, job-specific (job characteristics) and emotion-specific antecedent variables. The outcome variables include job attitudes, health and psychological well-being and job related behaviours. Grandey (2000) presented a model of emotion regulation based on Gross’s work (1998) on antecedent-focused strategies (similar to Hochschild’s 1983 ‘deep acting’), and response-focused strategies (similar to ‘deep acting’) whereby the individual adjusts their physiology or outward expression of emotion. These two strategies were central to Grandey’s model of EL. Grandey also included antecedents of emotional job demands and ED to further explain EL and its link with burnout. Only parts of this model have been tested to date (Totterdell & Holman 2003). These models are useful to understand the complex EL relations, but do not include all four facets of EL.

At the core of the integrative model proposed in this paper is the concept of emotion management as internal emotion regulation. According to Hochschild (1983), emotion management has two forms: emotion work and EL. Hochschild clearly refers to EL as emotion management undertaken as part of the job and emotion work as emotion management performed in private. Therefore, EL occurs during employees’ interactions with customer and emotion work occurs during
the employees’ interactions with co-workers (Callaghan & McCollum 2002). With respect to emotion work, there appears to be nothing in the current literature which has considered or examined the processes of emotional regulation that employees use to adjust their outward expressions of emotion during interpersonal interactions with other employees. Given previous research into EL and emotional regulation it seems reasonable to propose that employees may also engage in surface and deep acting during emotion work. Although emotion work is discretionary, there is use value in employees maintaining positive interpersonal relationships with their co-workers such as reduced conflict and more harmonious workplace relations. Therefore, the inclusion of emotion work in the model provides a more holistic approach to understanding the relationship between emotion management and antecedents and outcomes.

The conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll 1989, 1998 as cited in Brotheridge & Lee 2002) has been used to explain the process of EL and its link to emotional exhaustion. Specifically, this theory suggests that when there is an imbalance between demands and resources the result is stress, so when EL does not yield the desired response (from customers, co-workers etc) and thus is no longer a rewarding exchange then estrangement, strain and detachment may occur (Brotheridge & Lee 2002). This theory may help to explain why surface acting is more closely linked with burnout than deep acting. In particular, surface acting may not be as highly valued by customers, and thus there is a potentially greater depletion of emotional resources. An imbalance between investment and gain may lead to emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano, Rupp & Byrne 2003). The proposed model also suggests that the stress associated with managing EL may also influence employees’ attitudes including their job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. In the ensuing paragraphs each of the variables in the integrative model of EL will be discussed in more detail.

**ANTECEDENTS, MEDIATORS AND OUTCOMES**

Although the EL research is still in the early stages several antecedent, mediators and outcome variables have been studied. These studies have used different conceptualisations and measures of EL and hence different, and often conflicting, findings have emerged.

**Antecedents**

*Job characteristics*

According to the well-established research by Hackman and Oldham (1975) there are seven key job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feedback from the job, feedback from agents, and dealing with others. The more these factors are present in the job the greater is the potential for employees to be highly motivated and hence the potential for higher performance quality and employee satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham 1980). Humphrey (2000) provided a compelling theoretical argument for the inclusion of job characteristics. Specifically, Humphrey argued that job characteristics 1) impact the employee’s emotional display, 2) develop and
refine display rules, and 3) influence individual differences (such as emotional intelligence) which impacts the emotional display. To-date, only job autonomy has been studied with EL (Abraham 1998; Adelmann 1995; Erickson & Ritter 2001; Kruml & Geddes 2000; Morris & Feldman 1997; Pugliesi 1999; Totterdell & Holman 2003; Wharton 1993; Zapf et al. 1999). Empirical studies of job autonomy (also known as job control and job discretion) have not provided clear evidence of a link to EL. For example, several researchers found that the more job autonomy the less EL (Kruml & Geddes 2000; Morris & Feldman 1997). However, a study by Abraham (1998) found the opposite in that autonomy and ED were positively related. These studies have conceptualised and measured EL in different ways therefore it is unknown whether job autonomy is sample-specific or related to some measures of EL and not others. Further research is required to clarify this relationship.

Proposition 1: Job characteristics (i.e. task significance, autonomy and feedback from the job) will be negatively related to surface acting.

Proposition 2: Job characteristics (i.e. task significance, autonomy and feedback from the job) will be negatively related to deep acting.

Emotional job demands

Emotional job demands (EJD) are most commonly measured according to four dimensions proposed by Morris and Feldman (1996): variety, frequency, duration and intensity. Morris and Feldman (1996) proposed that the greater the demand for intense emotions, a variety of emotions and the greater the duration of required emotional displays, the greater the EL. Researchers are yet to establish this link empirically (Brotheridge & Lee 2003; Morris & Feldman 1997). Recent research has used EJD to further understand the emotional content of certain jobs and thus included EJD as an antecedent to surface and deep acting (Brotheridge & Lee 2000; Grandey 1999).

Proposition 3: Frequency, variety, and intensity of emotion will be positively related to surface acting.

Proposition 4: Frequency, variety, and intensity of emotion will be positively related to deep acting.

Positive and negative affect

Affect refers to an individual’s overall or general outlook on life (Watson, Clark & Tellegen 1988). Individuals with high positive affect tend to view situations and circumstances in a positive way and are considered optimistic. Alternatively, those individuals with high negative affect tend to be pessimistic and focus on the negative aspects of situations and circumstances. There are few studies that have included positive and negative affect as antecedents to surface and deep acting. Grandey (2000) included positive and negative affect in her theoretical model of the emotion regulation process. This was based on Morris and Feldman’s (1996) proposal that less ED will be observed when the individual’s expected emotional display is aligned with their predisposed affectivity. For example, an employee who has high positive affect, and is required to display positive emotions as part of their job, may experience less ED and require less emotional effort to display the ‘appropriate’ emotion than an individual high in negative affect. The relationship between negative
affect and burnout was then tested by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) who found that negative affect was a significant control variable in predicting all three dimensions of burnout.

**Proposition 5:** Positive affect will be negatively related to EL (surface and deep acting) when the required expression of emotion is positive.

**Proposition 6:** Negative affect will be positively related to EL (surface and deep acting) when the required expression of emotion is positive.

**Mediators and Outcomes**

*Emotional dissonance*

Emotional dissonance is ‘the degree to which employees’ expressed emotions align with their true feelings’ (Kruml & Geddes 2000: 19). The present model incorporates the sequence of EL predicting emotional exhaustion (EE) through its relationship with emotional dissonance (ED) or the ‘ELEDEEE’ sequence which has previously been discussed in the literature (for a review see Hartel, Hsu & Boyle 2002). Although various conceptualisations of the relationship between ED and EL have been posited, evidence from recent research suggests that ED mediates the relationship between EL and emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002; Erickson & Ritter 2001; Hartel, Hsu & Boyle, 2001; Hartel et al. 2002; Van Dijk & Brown 2006). When employees engage in surface acting they experience a conflict between their felt and expressed emotions or ED and this incongruence has negative consequences for the person involved. In contrast, employees who are able to express their genuine emotions will experience little or no ED, and hence are less likely to suffer from burnout.

**Proposition 7:** Surface acting will positively predict burnout through its relationship with ED.

**Proposition 8:** Deep acting will positively predict burnout through its relationship with ED.

**Proposition 9:** Genuine expression will negatively predict burnout.

*Emotional and cognitive effort*

Drawing on Gross’ (1998) emotion regulation theory Grandey (2000) suggested that employees may use attentional deployment and cognitive change techniques when deep acting. Both types of emotion regulation are considered to be ‘deep’ in that the internal processes, including the person’s *thoughts* and *feelings*, are modified in order to make their expression more genuine. In contrast, when surface acting employees engage in response modulation whereby they work to outwardly display the desired emotion without altering their actual feelings, the so-called ‘mask’ of EL. In this paper, we propose that attentional deployment, cognitive change and response modulation techniques require emotional and cognitive effort to enact. Emotional effort refers to ‘energy expended from processing feelings and their inherent impulses to act regarding all facets of the work demands’ (Shoaf, Genaidy & Karwowski 2001: 2635), and cognitive effort refers to ‘the energy expended through mental processing resulting from mental job demands’ (Shoaf, Genaidy & Karwowski 2001: 2635). The emotional effort involved in suppressing or expressing particular emotions, and the cognitive effort inherent in changing one’s thoughts and re-appraising the situation
may provide the missing link between the EL strategies and burnout, and a potential explanation for why surface acting has been found to be related to burnout whilst deep acting has not.

**Proposition 10:** Emotional effort and cognitive effort will positively predict burnout.

**Burnout**

The outcome variable that has received the most attention in the EL literature is burnout, and in particular the dimension of emotional exhaustion. Burnout refers to feelings of emotional drain or fatigue and has been defined as the consequence of ‘people work’ where individuals experience emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach 1982). Emotional exhaustion is when there is a depletion of emotional energy whereas depersonalisation is where an individual may distance themselves from a situation in order to cope with the emotional drain. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation are considered central to burnout whereas personal accomplishment is considered more of a personality variable related to the sense of achievement experienced through engaging in work (similar to self-efficacy) (Maslach & Jackson 1981). These three aspects of burnout have been found to be interrelated. A demanding job may result in increased emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment and individuals may cope with this situation through depersonalisation or distancing themselves from their job (Leiter & Maslach 1988). When conceptualised as an internal regulation strategy, EL seems to be related to burnout however, in contrast to Hochschild’s (1983) proposition, surface actors rather than deep actors responded with higher emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002; Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Grandey 2000; Totterdell & Holman 2003; Zammuner & Galli 2005). In particular, a study by Brotheridge (1999) attempted to further understand the relationship between EL and emotional exhaustion. It was found that authenticity fully mediated this relationship. Brotheridge argued that it is not the sheer volume of work, nor whether an employee engages in surface or deep acting, it is the personal authenticity that an employee feels towards the situation and their reaction. The less authentic an employee feels, the greater their emotional exhaustion. For this reason genuine expression is included as an additional strategy for managing EL in the proposed model.

**Proposition 11:** Surface acting will be positively related to emotional exhaustion through its relationship with the internal process variables.

**Proposition 12:** Surface acting will be positively related to depersonalisation through its relationship with the internal process variables.

**Proposition 13:** Deep acting will be positively related to personal accomplishment through its relationship with the internal process variables.

**Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction refers to the attitude an employee may have towards certain aspects of their job and work experiences. An employee may assess their job satisfaction based on whether their needs and expectations are met. This may relate to satisfaction with extrinsic rewards (external to the job) or intrinsic rewards (relate to specific aspects of the job) (Warr, Cook & Wall 1979). Although
Grandey (2003) included job satisfaction as an antecedent of EL and found that it negatively predicted both surface and deep acting, most studies consider job satisfaction to be an outcome of EL. However, these studies have somewhat mixed findings. Specifically, Morris and Feldman (1996b; 1997) found that ED, but not emotional job demands, was negatively associated with job satisfaction. Similarly, Abraham (1998; 1999a; 1999b) found support for a negative relationship between ED and job satisfaction. Specifically, in her three studies Abraham found that ED was negatively related to job satisfaction and this relationship was moderated by social support in high-support groups, negative affect and self-monitoring. In contract, Adelmann (1995) found that the significant, negative relationship between ED and job satisfaction was negated after controlling for job complexity, job control and income. In the present model, job satisfaction is considered an outcome of emotional job demands and EL strategies in line with most studies in this area. It is proposed that an employee who genuinely expresses their emotions is more likely to feel positive towards their work and have higher job satisfaction. Employees who engage in surface and/or deep acting may, as a result, experience less job satisfaction due to the experienced ED and emotional effort required to ‘act’ the appropriate emotion. Similarly, employees who genuinely express their emotions are more likely to be satisfied.

**Proposition 14:** Surface acting will be negatively related to job satisfaction through its relationship with the internal process variables.

**Proposition 15:** Deep acting will be negatively related to job satisfaction through its relationship with the internal process variables.

**Proposition 16:** Genuine expression will be positively related to job satisfaction.

**Organisational commitment**

The attachment an employee feels towards their organisation is referred to as organisational commitment. Of particular interest are the different types of commitment and how surface and deep acting differentially impact on them. Organisational commitment may be measured along three dimensions: affective, continuance and normative (Allen & Meyer 1990). Affective commitment relates to the emotional attachment an employee feels towards the organisation. Continuance commitment refers to the attachment to the organisation as a result of limited options to exit and therefore the employee remains more out of necessity rather than an emotional bond. Normative commitment occurs when an employee feels a certain obligation to remain with the organisation. Normative commitment was not included in the proposed model as many studies have found that it does not easily separate out from the other dimensions of organisational commitment (for a review see Bergman 2006). Two studies have included commitment as an outcome of EL (Abraham 1999a; Adelmann 1995). Adelmann conceptualised EL as emotional expression and found that job commitment was significantly related to EL, however after controlling for job complexity, job control and income these results were no longer significant. This finding suggests that it is the characteristics of the job that may result in organisational commitment, not EL directly. Abraham (1999a), who conceptualised EL as ED, found that ED negatively predicted job satisfaction and organisational
commitment. It is proposed in this paper that the two dimensions of organisational commitment will be differentially impacted by the EL strategy, through its relationship with the internal process variables particularly ED. Individuals who are more likely to deep act will have high levels of affective commitment as this strategy is more highly rewarded by customers during employee-customer interaction and is more closely aligned with genuine expression. Similarly, employees who surface act will have higher levels of continuance commitment.

**Proposition 17:** Deep acting will be positively related to affective commitment.

**Proposition 18:** Surface acting will be positively related to continuance commitment.

**DISCUSSION**

This conceptual paper has sought to integrate the different views of EL by proposing that they are complementary rather than opposing viewpoints. A model was developed which incorporated all four facets of EL together with antecedent and outcome variables. Antecedents included the characteristics of the job itself and its emotional demands. In addition, positive and negative affect were included to understand its influence on individual preference for surface and deep acting. Outcome variables included those commonly tested in previous research such as emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalisation. However, the model also extended this research by incorporating variables such as organisational commitment (affective and continuance), and job satisfaction (extrinsic and intrinsic) to understand the differential impact of EL on these attitudes. This paper also contributes to the EL literature in that it differentiates EL (which occurs between employee and client) from emotion work (which occurs between employee and employee), and posits that each may have positive and negative consequences for the individual. Further research is needed to test this model in a variety of contexts and occupations.
REFERENCES


