Work-family interference, emotional labor and burnout

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between emotional display rules/job focused labor, work-family interference (WFI) and burnout among a sample of workers in a Dutch governmental organization.

Design/methodology/approach – The research is a cross-sectional study of 174 workers from a Dutch governmental organization.

Findings – Emotional display rules and job-focused labor were related to burnout and psychosomatic complaints. More specifically, the need to hide negative emotions and engage in surface acting was related to negative outcomes. In addition, WFI partially mediated the relationship between the hiding of negative emotion/surface acting and burnout/psychosomatic complaints.

Research limitations/implications – The present study is cross-sectional and thus the postulated relationships cannot be interpreted causally.

Practical implications – In terms of training and/or interventions, there is a need for the worksite to provide structured opportunities for employees to decompress from the emotional demanding aspects of their jobs.

Originality/value – Emotional labor has been rarely examined as an antecedent of WFI. In addition, while emotional labor has been studied with individuals in the service sector, it has been rarely examined among individuals whose jobs are highly ceremonial in nature.

Keywords Stress, Government departments, The Netherlands

Although the role of emotional experiences in our physical and psychosocial well-being has long been recognized it has only recently received consideration within the broader framework of organizational behavior (Brief and Weiss, 2002; Barsade et al., 2003). An area that is receiving increased research attention is emotional labor, a construct first defined by Hochschild (1983, p. 7) as the “management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display”. To date, the issue of emotional labor has been studied both qualitatively (James, 1989; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1990; Stenross and Kleinman, 1989; Sutton, 1991; Tolich, 1993) and quantitatively (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge and Lee, 1998; Mann, 1999; Morris and Feldman, 1996; Wharton, 1993). Indeed, a recent quantitative review of emotional labor (Bono and Vey, 2004) indicates that it is associated with poor physical and psychological health. In regard to outcomes, Bono and Vey (2004) review 87 independent samples in their analyses, but none of the reviewed research specifically links emotional labor and
work-family interference (WFI). To date, the link between the two issues has been rarely studied (with the exception of Montgomery et al., 2005; Wharton and Erickson, 1995; Wharton, 1999).

The link between emotional labor and WFI
WFI is experienced when pressures from the work and family roles are mutually incompatible, such that participation in one role makes it difficult to participate in the other (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Studies of work-family relations have identified a range of both objective and subjective demands associated with WFI (Geurts and Demerouti, 2003), but little is known about the management of emotion and their consequences for work-family linkages (Wharton and Erickson, 1995). Indeed, according to Wharton and Erickson (1995), WFI should be highest when work and family both require high degrees of emotion management and are governed by dissimilar display norms. The link between emotional labor and WFI has been demonstrated most recently by Montgomery et al. (2005), who found that emotional labor, as measured by surface acting at work, was positively related to WFI among doctors, and surface acting at home was positively related to family-work interference among nurses. Additionally, Smith and Kleinman (1989), in a qualitative study of medical students, found that medical training created as many problems as new meanings for the body and for body contact that “go home with them at night” (Smith and Kleinman, 1989, p.65).

There is good reason to believe that for employees whose work particularly involves emotional labor, the need to adhere to job-mandated emotional display rules will exacerbate their feelings of WFI. For example, Schulz et al. (2004), in a daily diary study of couples, demonstrated an interesting example of emotional spill-over, in that negative emotional arousal at work predicted angrier marital behavior for women and more withdrawn behavior from men. Additionally, Montgomery et al. (2003), in a sample of Dutch newspaper managers, found emotional job demands to be the most significant predictor of both WFI and burnout in comparison with both quantitative and mental job demands. So, while there is a considerable amount of evidence identifying job demands as an antecedent of WFI (e.g. Aryee, 1992; Geurts et al., 1999; Voydanoff, 1988; Wallace, 1999), there is little research evaluating emotional labor/display rules as antecedent of WFI (with the exception of Montgomery et al., 2005). The present study is consistent with a recent review of the field that calls for researchers to identify more specific antecedents of WFI (Geurts and Demerouti, 2003).

Theoretical background
Grandey (2000) provides a comprehensive review of the theories underlying emotional labor, and defines emotional labor as the process of managing both the experience and expression of feelings to support or achieve organizational goals. In terms of linking emotional labor to burnout or psychosomatic complaints, emotional labor can be conceptualised within the rubric of theories on emotional inhibition and emotional repression. Several studies have shown that inhibition of emotions is associated with increased physiological arousal, which if it becomes chronic can have an adverse effect on health and well being (Gross and Levenson, 1997; Panagopoulou et al., 2002). Based on this research paradigm, hostility and anger suppression have been related to essential hypertension and coronary heart disease (Redford and Barefoot, 1988;
Weidner et al., 1989). Empirical evidence has related inhibition of emotions to cancer progression (Temoshok, 1985; Temoshok et al., 1985) and to reduced immune function (Schwartz and Kline, 1995). Additionally, the regulation of emotion for social interaction can lower behavioural activity, but has been found to increase autonomic nervous system activity (Gross, 1998a; Pennebaker, 1985).

So, the continued management of emotions for social situations can be toxic. Gross (1998a, b) has proposed a process model of emotion regulation, whereby emotional regulation can occur at two points in the process; antecedent-focused and response-focused. According to Grandey (2000), these processes correspond with the emotional labor concepts of deep acting and surface acting (employee-focused emotional labor), respectively. In this conceptualization, deep acting refers to changing the focus of personal thoughts and changing appraisals, and surface acting is concerned with modifying expression. Congruently, job-focused emotional labor or display rules such as displaying positive emotions and hiding negative emotions are postulated as processes of emotional control that reduce the feelings of emotional autonomy from the employee.

The present study will examine the direct relationship between emotional labor and burnout. In this sense, emotional labor is postulated as a stressor in this study and this is consistent with the research by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002), who argue that employee-focused emotional labor and display rules are stressful because they create the need to manage emotional states.

### Emotional labor as a predictor of burnout

Originally, burnout was measured in the human services (for reviews see Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998), but recently a general measure has been developed to access burnout outside the human services: the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS). Accordingly, burnout is viewed as a syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism and decreases in professional efficacy. Burnout, referring to the draining of energy and resources caused by chronic job stress is considered a work-related indicator of psychological health (Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998).

The common explanation of burnout suggests that it is the frequency or quantity of interactions with clients/customers that contributes to role overload and burnout (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993), but such interactions can also involve the need for employees to regulate their emotions in a mandated way (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989). A recent meta-analysis examining the relationship between emotional labor and burnout (Bono and Vey, 2004), indicated significant associations with both emotional exhaustion (weighted mean correlation = 0.30) and depersonalization (weighted mean correlation = 0.23). This need for emotional displays to be regulated is an important component of employees who work in the Dutch Government department being studied, where a high level of formality needs to be maintained at all times. The employees in the present study are in constant contact with high-ranking government officials, and their job is characterised by the need to perform ceremonial tasks and observe strict behavioural codes on a daily basis. The fact that the present sample involves employees whose job is almost entirely ceremonial means that they represent a unique sample to be studied.
Display rules and emotional-focused labor
Hochschild’s (1983) view that display rules are inherently stressful is not consistently found among the literature. For example, Best et al. (1997) did find a relationship between display rules and burnout, but not Brotheridge and Grandey (2002). Furthermore, the qualitative work of Tolich (1993) indicates that while emotional labor can be tiring, it can also be rewarding. The conflicting finding prompted us to also include a secondary outcome in the research. A review of the literature indicated that in addition to burnout, researchers have found that the requirement to express positive emotions and hide negative emotions is related to the reporting of physical symptoms (Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000; Zapf et al., 1999).

H1a. Perceived emotional display rules relate positively with burnout.

H1b. Perceived emotional display rules relate positively with psychosomatic complaints.

Unlike display rules, the evidence for surface acting is more conclusive. Surface acting, the process whereby employees modify and control their emotional expressions, is related to stress outcomes (Brotheridge, 1999; Brotheridge and Lee, 1998; Erickson and Wharton, 1997; Pugliesi, 1999; Pugliesi and Shook, 1997). Thus we expect, surface acting to relate to both exhaustion and cynicism. Deep acting, the process of controlling internal thoughts and feelings to meet the mandated display rules, has been found to be related to a greater sense of personal efficacy at work (Brotheridge and Lee, 1998). This finding was consistent with the view of Hochschild (1979, 1983) that successful deep acting may be experienced as positive, if the behavior is perceived as effective. Therefore, in the present study, we replicate the hypotheses of Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) that deep acting will not be related to the exhaustion component of burnout, but will be related to depersonalization (cynicism in the present study).

H2a. Surface acting relates positively to exhaustion.

H2b. Surface acting relates positively, and deep acting negatively to cynicism.

H2c. Surface acting relates positively to psychosomatic complaints.

H2d. Deep acting relates positively to psychosomatic complaints.

In the present study, we restrict ourselves to the exhaustion and cynicism dimensions of burnout. These two dimensions are generally considered as the “core of burnout” (Demerouti et al., 2001; Green et al., 1991), whereas professional efficacy reflects a personality characteristic rather than a genuine burnout-component (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Shirom, 1989). Empirically, this is reflected by the relatively low correlation of professional efficacy with both of the other burnout dimensions (Lee and Ashforth, 1996) and by the fact that cynicism seems to develop in response to exhaustion, whereas professional efficacy seems to develop independently and in parallel (Leiter, 1993).

WFI as a mediator
In general, a given variable is said to function as a mediator to the extent that it accounts for the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a variable functions as mediator when its inclusion in an
analysis results in a significant reduction in the relationship between the independent and outcome variable. Theoretically, the definition of WHI/HWI implies mediation, as there will be no WHI when there are no demands at work. Conceptually, WHI fits the characterisation of a response variable as suggested by Holmbeck (1997). In essence, variables such as WFI cannot exist in isolation. One cannot experience WFI if there are no job demands in the first place.

In general, the role of WFI as a mediator has been suggested by many studies (Frone et al., 1992; Geurts et al., 1999; Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998; Montgomery et al., 2003, Parasuraman et al., 1996; Stephens et al., 1997). However, the link between emotions, WFI and burnout has not been clearly indicated to date. Such a situation can be explained somewhat by the fact that while there is broad acceptance that employers have the right to ask employees to perform physical behaviors or engage in cognitive activities, emotional behavior might be outside what employers can reasonably demand (Briner and Totterdell, 2002). Therefore, it seems more likely that emotional demands will spillover from work to family. Empirically, this is indicated in the work of Schulz et al. (2004), which demonstrated negative emotional spillover on a daily basis. Consistently, Maslach (1982), pays special attention to making the transition from work to home by introducing the notion of “decompression”. Maslach argues that people working in an emotional and demanding environment need to “decompress” before moving into the normal pressure of their private life. Additionally, Grandey (2000) views emotional labor and display rules as a proximal predictor of stress, and this is consistent with the idea that people bring the emotional stress from work to home. Additionally, the idea that WFI may serve as a mediator between emotional labor and burnout is indicated by the study of Wharton and Erickson (1995), who found that women’s well-being on the job was threatened more by their involvement in family emotion work than by their actual performance of emotional labor.

In the present research, it follows logically that WFI is an important variable that mediates the ability of individuals to “decompress” from the work domain to the home domain.

\[H3a.\] WFI will mediate the relationship between showing positive emotions and burnout/psychosomatic complaints.

\[H3b.\] WFI will mediate the relationship between hiding negative emotions and burnout/psychosomatic complaints.

\[H3c.\] WFI will mediate the relationship between surface acting and burnout/psychosomatic complaints.

\[H3d.\] WFI will mediate the relationship between emotion deep acting and cynicism/psychosomatic complaints.

All the afore-mentioned analyses were carried controlling for sex, age and having children. Traditionally, no systematic differences have been found with regard to WFI and sex (Geurts and Demerouti, 2003), but there is a need to control for demographic variables such as sex and age with regard to burnout and psychosomatic complaints. Finally, controlling for a more structural variable such as the presence of children allows us to evaluate whether adds WFI any variance to the prediction of both burnout and psychosomatic complaints, beyond the need to attend to parenting demands.
Method

Participants and procedures
The study sample consisted of employees from the Dutch Governmental Organization. A total of 500 employees were contacted to participate in this study. 174 employees returned completed questionnaires. Given the nature of WFI, only employees who lived with someone and/or had children living at home were included in the study (N = 155, response rate = 31 percent). This compares favourably with the average response rate for published research in the managerial and behavioural sciences (55.6 percent overall, 36.1 percent for studies concerning top managers or representatives, see Baruch, 1999 for a review). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 64 years of age (M = 44, SD = 9.9), 53 percent were men. The majority of people (83 percent) lived with a partner, and 47 percent of people had a supervisory position. A total of 63 percent of respondents reported having a partner with a paid function and 50 percent of the respondents had children living at home. No statistical differences were found between men and women with regard to any of the study variables, even when respondents with working spouses were compared with respondents without working spouses. Confidentiality prevented direct comparison between the sample age and gender breakdown against the total sample to assess demographic differences between responders and non-responders. However, the organization being studied carried out the afore-mentioned analysis and concluded that no statistically significant differences existed.

Measures

Work-family interference (WFI). WFI was measured using the scale recommended by the Sloan Work-Family Researchers Electronic Network (MacDermid, 2000). The WFI scale is a nine-item work-home interference measure developed by virtual think tank comprising recognised experts in the field of work/life. The items in the scale represent a synopsis of the best published scales in the field, such as the scales of Netermeyer et al. (1996) and Gutek et al. (1991). All items are scored on a five-point frequency scale ranging from “1” (never) to “5” (always). The scale has been used in previous research with Greek health care professionals (Montgomery et al., 2005; α = 0.90 for both 180 doctors and 84 nurses). In the present study, internal consistency was good (α = 0.89).

Burnout. The Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory: General Survey (MBI-GS) was used to assess burnout (Schaufeli et al., 1996). Two sub-scales of the MBI-GS were assessed: Exhaustion (five items; e.g. “I feel used up at the end of the workday”, α = 0.87), and Cynicism (four items; e.g. “I have become less enthusiastic about my work”, α = 0.79). All items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from “0” (never) to “6” (daily). High scores on the exhaustion and cynicism sub-scales are indicative of burnout.

Psychosomatic health. Psychosomatic health complaints were measured with a Dutch questionnaire on subjective health (VOEG: Vragenlijst Onderzoek Ervaren Gezondheid (Questionnaire on Experienced Health)) developed by Dirken (1969). In this study, the 13-item version was used (Jansen and Sikkel, 1981), explaining 95 percent of the variance in the 21-item version. All items were scored on a four-point scale ranging from “1” (seldom or never) to “4” (often). The VOEG consists of items asking whether one suffers from a range of psychosomatic complaints, such as headaches, backache, an upset stomach, fatigue, dizziness, and pain in the chest or heart area (α = 0.84). The
13-item VOEG is used by the Dutch census office for monitoring psychosomatic health in the Dutch population.

*Job focused emotional labor: perceived display rules.* The Emotion Work Requirements Scale (Best *et al.*, 1997), a five-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = always required), tapped the level to which employees reported that their emotional displays were controlled by their jobs. Items ask the extent to which the employee is required to show (or hide) emotion in order to be effective on the job. These items form two factors (Grandey, 1998; Jones and Best, 1995), which taps the requirement to display positive emotions (four items, \( \alpha = 0.78 \)) and hide negative emotions (two items, \( \alpha = 0.54 \)). The alpha coefficient for the second scale was poor, but it was used and calculated on theoretical grounds.

*Employee-focused emotional labor.* Items measuring surface and deep acting came from the Emotional Labor Scale (Brotheridge and Lee, 1998; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). These ideas tapped the ideas of regulating emotions by hiding feelings, faking feelings, and modifying feelings as part of the work role. Three items measures surface acting (sample item: “Resist expressing my true feelings”) and three items measured deep acting (sample item: “Make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others”). Items were scored on a five-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = always required) and alpha’s were appropriate (\( \alpha = 0.74, \alpha = 0.90 \), respectively).

**Results**

*Confirmatory factor analyses and analysis strategy*

As a prerequisite to addressing the central hypotheses in this study, we examined the factor structures of the WFI and emotional labor scales using confirmatory factor analysis. To examine the appropriateness of computing uni-dimensional scores for each of the major constructs included in the study, each scale was submitted to a principal components analysis (results can be obtained from the first author). Examination of both the number of eigenvalues greater than 1 and factor loadings supported a decision to treat the hypothesized scales as postulated.

**Descriptive statistics**

Table I provides the means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients of the study variables. As expected, WFI is positively correlated with exhaustion (\( r = 0.64, \))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 WFI</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Surface acting</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.27*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Deep acting</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Display rules: show positive</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.41*</td>
<td>0.46*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Display rules: hide negative</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td>0.53*</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.57*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Exhaustion</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.64*</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.38*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Cynicism</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
<td>0.37*</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.36*</td>
<td>0.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Psychosomatic complaints</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.51*</td>
<td>0.33*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.61*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * \( p < 0.01 \), ** \( p < 0.05 \)
$p < 0.01$, cynicism ($r = 0.32, p < 0.01$) and psychosomatic complaints ($r = 0.51, p < 0.01$). The four emotional labor variables were related ($r \leq 0.26 \leq 0.57, p < 0.01$).

**H1. Emotional display rules**

H1a and H1b proposed relationships between emotional display rules and burnout and psychosomatic complaints. Table I provides the zero-order correlations. With regard to burnout, the display rule to hide negative emotions correlated significantly with exhaustion ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$) and cynicism ($r = 0.36, p < 0.01$), while the display rule to show positive emotions was significantly related to exhaustion ($r = 0.18, p < 0.05$), but not cynicism. With regard to psychosomatic complaints, both hiding negative emotions ($r = 0.29, p < 0.01$) and showing positive emotions ($r = 0.17, p < 0.05$) were related.

**H2. Emotion focused labor**

Table I provides the zero-order correlations. With regard to the second set of hypotheses, only H2a and H2c were supported. Surface acting was significantly related to exhaustion ($r = 0.28, p < 0.01$), cynicism ($r = 0.37, p < 0.01$) and psychosomatic complaints ($r = 0.33, p < 0.01$). H2b and H2d were not supported.

**H3. WFI as a mediator**

Table II shows the results of the mediation analyses, carried out in line with the methodology suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). Accordingly, a prerequisite for mediation is that the predictor, mediator and dependent variables must be significantly related. Mediation is demonstrated by a reduction in the impact of the predictor on the dependent measure after controlling for the mediator (see column $\beta^t$ in Table II). In addition, the statistical significance of the mediation was calculated using the Sobel Test (Preacher and Leonardelli, 2001).

Sex, age and having children have been entered as control variables. Using the methodology recommended by Eckenrode et al. (1995) reduction of the coefficient to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Exhaustion</th>
<th>Cynicism</th>
<th>Psychosomatic complaints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1 $\beta^i$</td>
<td>Step 2 $\beta^i$</td>
<td>Step 1 $\beta^i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (male = 1, female = 0)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having children (1 = yes, 0 = no)</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface acting</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep acting</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display: show positive</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display: hide negative</td>
<td>0.35*</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFI</td>
<td>0.61*</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ Change</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ Change</td>
<td>92.06*</td>
<td>14.35*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; $\beta^i$, initial beta weight when first entered; $\beta^t$, final beta weight after WFI entered

**Table II.** Mediation analysis of WFI, between emotional labor and burnout/psychosomatic complaints ($N = 155$)
zero equals full mediation and reduction of the coefficient is equivalent to partial mediation. This is consistent with the view of Baron and Kenny (1986) who suggest that as most areas of psychology have multiple causes, a more realistic goal is to seek mediators that significantly reduce the relationship between the predictor and dependant measure.

No support was found for $H3a$. With regard to $H3b$, Table II indicates that WFI partially mediated the relationship between hiding negative emotions and exhaustion (from $\beta = 0.35$ to $\beta = 0.32$, Sobel test, $z = 3.01, p < 0.01$), and the relationship between hiding negative emotions and cynicism (from $\beta = 0.31$ to $\beta = 0.29$, Sobel test, $z = 2.28, p < 0.01$). For $H3c$, WFI was found to partially mediate between surface acting and both cynicism (from $\beta = 0.27$ to $\beta = 0.22$, Sobel test, $z = 2.33, p < 0.05$) and psychosomatic complaints (from $\beta = 0.29$ to $\beta = 0.19$, Sobel test, $z = 3.02, p < 0.01$). No support was found for $H3d$.

**Discussion**

The current research made the following contributions:

- it expanded on our knowledge of the relationship between emotional labor, WFI and burnout;
- it examined the mediational role of WFI between emotional labor and burnout/psychosomatic complaints; and
- it provided data on a rarely studied phenomena within governmental workers.

In terms of the first hypothesis, the need for employees to hide negative emotions was consistently related to all three outcomes. The results in the present study were in contradiction to the Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) study, which found that the hiding of negative emotions was only related to the personal accomplishment dimension of the MBI. This difference in findings may be a reflection of the different samples studied, with the Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) focusing on a variety of different occupations and the present study looking at “ceremonial” workers, who operate in a highly idiosyncratic and highly formalized environment. Additionally, in the present study, showing positive emotions was related to exhaustion and psychosomatic complaints, but the correlations were weak. Taking these results together indicates that the need to regulate the display of emotions was most probably experienced at a proximal level.

In terms of the second hypothesis, surface acting was significantly related to all three outcomes. Such a result is consistent with the research of Brotheridge and Grandey (2002), who found surface acting significantly related to emotional exhaustion. Additionally, this result is consistent with the idea that suppressing anger can be costly to physiological and immune functioning (Gross and Levenson, 1997; Pennebaker and Beall, 1986). The consistent relationship with all three outcomes confirms that idea that surface acting represents a way of detaching from others while at work. In contrast, deep acting was not related to any of the outcomes. This is consistent with work of Brotheridge and Grandey (2002), who did find that surface acting was related to emotional exhaustion beyond deep acting. In terms of the occupational group studied, this result makes sense as compared to other occupational groups (e.g. police officers) the need to use impression management in a formal setting.
Emotional labor as a demand

Until recently, most studies concerning the relationship between job demands and job stress have focused on quantitative demands (e.g. workload). One of the most prominent models in this area, Karasek’s (1979) demand-control model has received critical attention with regard to the possible multifaceted nature of job demands. Different types of job demands have been rarely examined within the framework of the model (with the exception of some examples; De Jonge et al., 1999; Söderfeldt et al., 1996, 1997). The aforementioned evidence is consistent with recent reviews in the WFI literature that has called on researchers to identify more specific antecedents of WFI (Geurts and Demerouti, 2003). The need to evaluate a range of demands is prompted by the fact that the nature of work is changing and some professions have a specifically emotional component. Such a contention is supported by researchers who have identified three types of emotional displays required by jobs: integrative, differentiating and masking (Jones and Best, 1995; Wharton and Erickson, 1993). Such work prompts us to more carefully consider emotional labor as a significant job demand.

Limitations

With regard to the assessment of mediation, in the present study all variables measured (emotional labor, WFI, burnout and psychosomatic complaints) are in fact appraised, and thus measured subjectively. Therefore, we should keep in mind that it is difficult to demonstrate a mediational effect in time, as suggested by the S-O-R model of Woodworth (1928). Additionally, cross-sectional data prevents us from assessing causal relationships. For example, it is possible that surface acting may cause individuals to suffer from burnout and increased psychosomatic complaints and thus this may be associated with higher levels of WFI.

The present study did not assess affectivity, which has been identified as an important component of emotional regulation (Morris and Feldman, 1996). However, the relationship between emotional labor and affectivity is not entirely clear, with Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) finding significant (but weak) relationships between NA and hiding negative emotions and surface acting, but not with either displaying positive emotions or deep acting. Within the wider literature on the stressor-strain relationship, some researchers call for the inclusion of NA (e.g. Watson and Clark,
1984), while some are opposed to it (e.g. Moyle, 1995; Schonfield, 1996). Indeed, Dollard and Winefield (1998) even warn against its inclusion as this may lead to an under-estimation of the impact of the work environment on strain.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) have suggested that employees who strongly identify with their job role will feel more authentic in complying with display rules and hence are likely to find it less effortful to display the required emotion. The present study did not assess level of identification with job, which may have been an important individual difference.

Finally, the present study is cross-sectional and thus the postulated relationships cannot be interpreted causally. Longitudinal studies and/or quasi-experimental research designs are needed to further validate the hypothesised causality of the relationships.

Practical implications for both employees and managers
The practical importance of WFI is highlighted by a national US study (Bond et al., 1998), which found that 85 percent of employees have some day-to-day family responsibility, and virtually identical proportions of men and women report WFI problems. Additionally, this research suggests that emotional labor is an important antecedent of both WFI and burnout. In terms of the literature on job demands, the results highlight the need to recognise that emotions and job-related emotional regulation (e.g. customer interaction or management) is an increasingly important part of work cultures. In terms of training and/or interventions, the need for employees to decompress from their job before going home is particularly important in jobs with high demands for emotional displays (e.g. civil servants in jobs that are highly ceremonial). Such decompression can be aided by training, and indeed Smith (1999) argues that the skill involved in displaying emotions be should valued in exactly the same way as any other skill. Finally, Briner and Totterdell (2002) point out that interventions focused on how employees feel (e.g. anger or contempt) is more likely to focus interventions more precisely than knowing they are “stressed”.

There is considerable evidence demonstrating that managers and supervisors can influence the emotional experiences of their employees (Ashkanasy, 2003; McColl-Kennedy and Anderson, 2002). Managers can help employees to internalize their roles and reduce the need for employees to feel compelled to fake or hide genuine emotion (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). This is consistent with research showing that leaders who express a clear vision and positive expectations for performance affected employees’ identification with their work (Bono and Judge, 2003). A recent paper by Vinson et al. (2005) indicates that employees experience fewer positive emotions when interacting with their supervisors, except when interacting with supervisors rated high on transformational leadership style. All of the aforementioned evidence points to the fact managerial and supervisory training should include awareness regarding their influence on employee’s emotional experiences.

References


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