Patient Care with a Smile: The Role of Emotional Labour in Delivering Quality Patient Care

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What is "emotional labor"?
Emotion Regulation: Theoretical Background

- “Management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983)
- Emotional labour is a significant but often unacknowledged part of service work
- Organizational display rules
  - Norms and standards of behaviour indicating which emotions are appropriate in a given situation but also how these emotions should be publicly expressed
- Emotional regulation strategies
  - Surface acting: expressing emotions not actually felt, involves suppression and faking
  - Deep acting: modifying felt emotions in order to express genuine emotions
Display rules at McDonald's

SMILE GUARANTEE
If we don’t smile before you pay
you get a free small French Fries
or Hash Brown
(on your next visit)
Please play.... Try to catch us!
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Emotional labor: Theoretical background

- Effects of emotional labour on employee well-being are well documented:
  - Burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Erickson & Ritter, 2001; Grandey, 2003; Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005; Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Simpson & Stroh, 2004; Totterdell & Holman, 2003; Wharton, 1993; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005)
  - Job satisfaction (Adelmann, 1995; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Côté & Morgan, 2002; Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005)
  - Organizational commitment (Adelmann, 1995; Pugliesi, 1999)
  - Physical symptoms and stress (Mann & Cowburn, 2005; Pugliesi, 1999; Williams, 2003; Schaubroeck & James, 2000)
  - Job involvement (Kruml & Geddes, 2000)
  - Role internalization (Morris & Feldmann, 1997)
  - Organizational identity (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000)
  - Inauthenticity (Erickson & Ritter, 2001; Simpson & Stroh, 2004)

- Extending emotional labour research by focusing on:
  - Linking emotional labour and customer and organizational outcomes:
    - Job performance (Totterdell & Holman, 2003)
    - Absenteeism, turnover/intentions to quit (Côté & Morgan, 2002)
    - Customer outcomes (Groth et al., in press; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006)
  - Prior research often focuses on emotional display in service delivery, not differential emotional labour strategies (Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002; Mattila & Enz, 2002; Grandey, 2003)
  - Link multiple sources of data to avoid limitations of same-source data
Emotional safety climate

- Psychological safety climate: extent to which group members believe that there are interpersonal risks for asking for assistance from group or raising questions about how things are done
  - Linked to effective organisational learning and performance (Edmondson 1992, 2002)
  - “If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you”
  - “Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues”

- Emotional safety climate: shared climate regarding whether team members feel safe expressing emotions with the team
  - “If you show anxiety or distress with this team, it is held against you”
  - “Members of this team are able to discuss how they feel about problems and issues”
Ego Depletion (Muraven & Baumeister)

- Regulation depletes resources that are unavailable for subsequent tasks.
- Regulation can be affective, physical, cognitive and influence any form of performance.
- Breaks give chance to recover ego “muscle” strength.
Climate for Patient Care

- Climate for service (Schneider, 1990; Schneider et al., 2002)
- Climate for patient care: shared perception of policies, practices, procedures and the behaviours that get rewarded, supported, and expected with regard to patient care and quality of care
- Critical in the context of nursing
- “Effort to measure and track the quality of patient care provided by the team”
- “The leadership shown by management in this team in supporting the quality of patient care"
Methods

- Survey of 491 nurses and doctors of large Australian hospital
  - Nested within 47 cross-functional teams (ranging from 3 to 29 team members)
- Demographics
  - 85% female, 15% female
  - Mean age: 37.9 years (SD=10.7)
  - Mean tenure: 4.5 years (SD=4.8)
- Employee survey included measures of:
  - Surface acting, deep acting, emotional safety climate, burnout, job satisfaction, job involvement, job autonomy
Results: Hierarchical Regressions
Employee Well-Being

- **Burnout**
  - Controls (first step): age, gender, job tenure
  - Second step included surface and deep acting
    - Explained amount of incremental variance (5%, \( p < .01 \))
    - **Surface acting (\( \beta = .11, p \leq .05 \))**
    - **Deep acting (\( \beta = .15, p \leq .05 \))**

- **Job satisfaction**
  - Controls (first step): age, gender, job tenure
  - Second step included surface and deep acting
    - Explained amount of incremental variance (ns)
    - Surface acting (\( \beta = -.03, ns \))
    - Deep acting (\( \beta = -.07, ns \))

- **Job involvement**
  - Controls (first step): age, gender, job tenure
  - Second step included surface and deep acting
    - Explained amount of incremental variance (1%, \( p < .05 \))
    - Surface acting (\( \beta = -.06, ns \))
    - Deep acting (\( \beta = .09, p \leq .05 \))
Results: Moderating Role of Climate for Patient Care

- **Surface acting**
  - **Perceived autonomy**
    - Low climate for service
    - High climate for service

Graph showing the relationship between perceived autonomy and surface acting under low and high climate for service conditions.
Results: Moderating Role of Emotional Safety Climate

- Individual burnout
- Surface acting
  - low emotional safety (-1SD)
  - high emotional safety (+1SD)
- low surface acting (-1 SD)
- high surface acting (+1 SD)
Discussion and Future Research

- Emotional labour plays a critical role in health care context and predicts employee well-being.
- Support that emotional safety as a shared team climate buffers the strain of individual emotion regulation.
- Emotional safety is distinct from team supportiveness.
- Climate for patient care buffers relationship between job design and emotion regulation.
- Ongoing on future research examining role of emotion labour in health care delivery.