WHEN “THE SHOW MUST GO ON”: SURFACE ACTING AND DEEP ACTING AS DETERMINANTS OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND PEER-RATED SERVICE DELIVERY

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Affective delivery, or expressing positive emotions in service interactions, helps satisfy customers. But employees cannot always feel positive and, to avoid breaking display rules, may act. Surface acting (modifying facial expressions) and deep acting (modifying inner feelings) were tested as predictors of stress and of coworker-rated affective delivery. Consistent with a dramaturgical perspective, affective delivery ratings were negatively related to surface acting but positively related to deep acting. Surface acting, but not deep acting, was related to stress.

Employers are wise to want workers to be sincere, to go well beyond the smile that’s “just painted on.” Hochschild, 1983: 33

Research has shown that positive affective displays in service interactions, such as smiling and conveying friendliness, are positively associated with important customer outcomes, such as intention to return, intention to recommend a store to others, and perception of overall service quality (e.g., Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001). Service providers do not always feel positive, however, and qualitative research has demonstrated that they engage in acting to produce their affective displays (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Parkinson, 1991). A dramaturgical approach to service delivery suggests that this acting takes two forms: surface acting, which is “painting on” affective displays, or faking, and deep acting, which is modifying inner feelings to match expressions (Grove & Fisk, 1989; Hochschild, 1983). Research further suggests that surface acting is associated with job burnout and depression (Abraham, 1998; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Erickson & Wharton, 1997) and may result in negative reactions from observers (Ekman, Friesen, & O’Sullivan, 1988). It is unclear if deep acting has similar effects. This study compares deep and surface acting as determinants of job burnout and the quality of affective delivery to customers, as rated by a peer. Efforts to appear authentic (deep acting) should receive higher ratings than intentionally faking (surface acting), which should have a negative impact on ratings of affective delivery. This research tests previous propositions (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983), extends the dramaturgical perspective on service encounters by measuring actors’ efforts as well as their performances (Grove & Fisk, 1989), and suggests methods of training service providers.

THE DRAMATURGICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE PROPOSED MODEL

The dramaturgical perspective provides a way of thinking about service encounters as a performance directed by an organization. On the work floor stage, using carefully designed lighting and costumes/uniforms, service employees perform for a customer audience to garner a positive response to their organization (Grove & Fisk, 1989; Hochschild, 1983). As part of this performance, service employees follow a script that includes display rules about acceptable and proscribed expressions (Grove & Fisk, 1989). Specifically, employees are expected to appear approachable and friendly (Parasuraman et al., 1985) and to display a positive attitude “regardless of circumstances” (Bettencourt, Gwinner, & Meuter, 2001: 41). How do employees enact such demanding roles?

The Acting Approach: Surface and Deep Acting

Good person-job fit may lessen the extent to which acting is needed in general (Arvey, Renz, Watson et al., 1998); however, qualitative research shows that all employees find their true feelings do not always conform to their roles (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000). How do they respond when they do not naturally feel like smiling? Deep and surface acting are two dramaturgical approaches that effortful modify displays: “Feelings do not erupt spontaneously or automatically in either deep acting or surface acting. In both cases the actor has learned to intervene—either in creating the inner shape of a feeling or in shaping the outward appearance of
one” (Hochschild, 1983: 36). Though both forms of acting are internally false, and both involve effort (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), they represent different intentions. When engaging in deep acting, an actor attempts to modify feelings to match the required displays. The intent, then, is to seem authentic to the audience; thus, deep acting has been called “faking in good faith” (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987: 32). For example, a hotel clerk may imagine herself in a difficult customer’s shoes to try to feel empathy and look concerned. This good intention may not always be present in employees, particularly those who do not identify with and accept their work roles (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). In addition, people may not do deep acting if they do not know how to regulate their emotions (Grandey, 2000). In surface acting, the alternative strategy, employees modify their displays without shaping inner feelings. Doing this entails experiencing emotional dissonance, or the tension felt when expressions and feelings diverge (Hochschild, 1983). For example, the same hotel clerk may put on a sympathetic face, but actually be irritated. Surface acting is “faking in bad faith” (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987: 32). The employee conforms to the display rules to keep the job, not to help the customer or the organization.

Given these conceptual differences between surface and deep acting, we propose the model shown in Figure 1 to test if the two forms of acting have different associations with stress and service. The far left of the model illustrates predictions about the relationships of acting with two aspects of an actor’s perception of her or his work role, display rules and job satisfaction. Next, deep acting is shown as related to surface acting, as suggested by previous theories (e.g., Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998). The good-faith effort of deep acting modifies internal states to keep any negative reactions from becoming full-blown, and surface acting (faking) follows to cover any remaining leakage of negative feelings. Thus, deep acting may be sufficient for some, but for many both forms of acting will be reported, creating a positive relationship. Finally, the model associates the extent and type of acting with job burnout (emotional exhaustion) and peer-rated service performance (affective delivery and breaking character).

**Actor’s Perception of Display Rules and Job Satisfaction**

Many different aspects of a situation and an employee may shape the need to act (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Grandey, 2000). Previous researchers (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Parkinson, 1991) have suggested two in particular: display rules and job satisfaction.

**Display rules.** Frontline service employees are typically expected to express positive emotions (e.g., Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), as opposed to anger (expected of bill collectors, for example) or neutrality (expected of judges or therapists). Actors’ awareness of such expectations, or display rules, is important for predicting the likelihood of their acting: An ideal standard has been communicated and may be enforced through supervision, which may motivate them to act (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Taking either acting approach—surface or deep—conforms to display rules, since they both involve acting out the role. As Ashforth and Tomiuk stated, “The prevalence of acting in service roles is not surprising, given the ubiquity of display rules and the fact that even service agents who identify strongly with their role will not always feel precisely what is expected of them” (2000: 189). Assuming that when employees perceive display rules they are motivated to conform to them, I predict the following:

**Hypothesis 1a.** Awareness of display rules positively relates to deep acting.

**Hypothesis 1b.** Awareness of display rules positively relates to surface acting.

**Job satisfaction.** Employees who feel positive at work should be less likely, on the average, to act. This is because their natural feelings are typically in line with the expressions normally demanded by frontline work. The research suggests that those with high job satisfaction perceive higher person-job fit (see Brief [1998] for a review) and are more likely to have positive moods and emotions while at work (Fisher, 2000). For these reasons, those with higher job satisfaction should act less in service jobs. In previous studies, job satisfaction has been found to be negatively related to emotional dissonance and faking expressions to customers (Abraham, 1998; Adelmann, 1995; Morris & Feldman, 1997). For example, Parkinson (1991) found that dissatisfied trainee hairstylists were more likely to report acting with customers than satisfied employees. Thus,

**Hypothesis 2a.** Job satisfaction is negatively related to deep acting.

**Hypothesis 2b.** Job satisfaction is negatively related to surface acting.

This relationship between job satisfaction and acting should be more pronounced for surface acting. As employees become more dissatisfied with
FIGURE 1
A Dramaturgical Perspective Model for Front-Line Service Workers

$H_6$ (-.10)

$H_2a$ (-.21*)
$H_2b$ (-.37**)
$H_1a$ (.23*)
$H_1b$ (-.03)

$H_3a$ (.09)
$H_3b$ (.32**)

$H_4a$ (.18*)
$H_4b$ (-.27*)

$H_5a$ (-.12)
$H_5b$ (.07)

$H_7$ (-.12)
$H_7$ (.34**)

The Actor's Role
Display Rules

The Acting Approach
Surface Acting

The Actor's Stress
Emotional Exhaustion

Peer-Rated Role Performance

Affective Delivery
Breaking Character

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$^a$ Standardized regression coefficients are shown, with supported hypothesized paths in boldface. Error variances were allowed to covary for job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion and for the two peer ratings. Hypotheses 6 and 7 refer to mediation hypotheses, which were further tested with a nested models approach (see the text).

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$
their jobs, they may be more likely to perform at the minimum level and “fake in bad faith.”

**Actor’s Work Stress: Emotional Exhaustion**

Emotional exhaustion is the state of depletion and fatigue that is considered the main component of job burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Acting as part of one’s work role may create emotional exhaustion for two key reasons: (1) the experience of tension from emotional dissonance and (2) the draining of resources while effortfully acting (Hochschild, 1983; Wharton, 1993). While surface acting, an individual experiences emotional dissonance owing to the discrepancy between expressions and inner feelings. Studies have found that emotional dissonance is associated with emotional exhaustion (e.g., Abraham, 1998; Morris & Feldman, 1997); therefore, surface acting would be expected to relate to emotional exhaustion as well (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Modifying internal states, or deep acting, requires attention and effort (Grandey, 2000). The depletion of cognitive and energy resources, in addition to the alienation from oneself that might result from “selling” feelings for a wage (Hochschild, 1983), suggests deep acting positively relates to emotional exhaustion. However, since deep acting by definition minimizes emotional dissonance by bringing feelings in line with expressions, deep acting’s relationship with emotional exhaustion should be weaker than the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion. Therefore,

**Hypothesis 3a. Deep acting is positively related to emotional exhaustion.**

**Hypothesis 3b. Surface acting is positively related to emotional exhaustion.**

**Role Performance: Affective Delivery and Breaking Character**

As stated earlier, the affective tone of service encounters is an important aspect of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Two outcomes of interest were tested in this study. First, affective delivery refers to the extent that service delivery is perceived as friendly and warm, which relates to desirable outcomes (e.g., Bettencourt et al., 2001; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001). Second, breaking character refers to the extent to which employees reveal negative moods or reactions to customers, an act that may damage the customer-organization relationship (Bailey & McCollough, 1998). Though both deep and surface acting involve putting on an act to conform to positive display rules, they should have differing associations with these two outcomes on the basis of the differences in the authenticity of the display.

**Affective delivery.** A key factor of good affective delivery is the perceived authenticity of affective displays (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). An authentic smile, also called a Duchenne smile (Surakka & Hietanen, 1998) engages different facial muscles than an inauthentic smile; a certain muscle around the eye, for instance, is used only in an authentic smile (Ekman, 1992). There are mixed findings as to whether inauthentic smiles can be detected and as to whether they negatively influence observers (DePaulo, 1992). Most of these findings derive from short-term experiments using pictures rather than dynamic interactions. However, some evidence suggests that people recognize authentic smiles and have less positive reactions to inauthentic ones than to the authentic ones (Ekman et al., 1988; Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993). For example, when shown a picture of an authentic smile, people reported a more positive mood than they did when they saw a neutral picture, but a picture of a faked smile did not have this positive effect (Surakka & Hietanen, 1998).

Though both surface and deep acting modify expressions, Hochschild proposed that “deep acting has always had an edge over simple pretending in its power to convince” (1983: 33), because deep acting changes internal states so that the resulting expression is perceived as authentic. Ekman and Friesen acknowledged deep acting’s “edge” when they wrote that effortful affective displays are more likely to be successful if “the person, like a Stanislavsky actor, remembers a felt experience from which the smile emerges” (1982: 245). Such techniques are part of deep acting; they bring the feelings in line with the necessary expression. Thus, I propose:

**Hypothesis 4a. Deep acting is positively related to ratings of affective delivery.**

Conversely, a service provider conforms to display rules when surface acting, but she or he is consciously inauthentic (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). The experimental research suggests that these expressions may produce less positive reactions in the audience (e.g., Frank et al., 1993). Even worse, in service work the falseness of surface acting denies the sincerity and individual attention that customers desire as part of quality service (Parasuraman et al., 1985). In the words of a flight attendant, “I worked with one flight attendant who put on a fake voice. . . . I watched passengers wince. What the passengers want is real people” (Hochschild, 1983: 108). Thus, the following is proposed:
Hypothesis 4b. Surface acting is negatively related to ratings of affective delivery.

Breaking character. Customers’ desires for “real people” in service encounters do not extend to their wanting service providers to show authentic negative feelings. By doing so, an employee breaks character and reveals to the audience that the encounter is staged. The performance is ruined (Bailey & McCollough, 1999; Grove & Fisk, 1989), like a performance in which the actor suddenly forgets his or her lines. Deep acting is similar to method acting, in which the actor tries to feel what the character would feel (Ekman & Friesen, 1982; Grandey, 2000). Those who act deeply should have more firmly defined roles and should thus be less likely to break character in the face of problems (Hypothesis 5a). Surface acting is an attempt to avoid breaking character by pasting on a smile. Ironically, there is evidence that suppressed negative feelings can leak out by “micro-expressions” (Ekman et al., 1988). If an employee typically engages in surface acting to simply suppress negative moods or reactions, this superficial expression may be very fragile, and so breaking character becomes more likely. Thus,

Hypothesis 5a. Deep acting is negatively related to ratings of breaking character.

Hypothesis 5b. Surface acting is positively related to ratings of breaking character.

Job Satisfaction and Emotional Exhaustion as Predictors of Service Performance

Figure 1 includes direct paths from both job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion to affective delivery. Job satisfaction represents a positive reaction to a job and should enhance the authenticity of affective delivery. Research supports a link between job satisfaction and customer service (e.g., Schmit & Allscheid, 1995). For example, BettenCourt and coauthors (2001) found that job satisfaction was robustly related to a measure of service delivery for a sample of library workers. Thus, I included the direct link on the basis of previous findings. A mediated path through acting is proposed: job satisfaction has an effect on affective delivery because satisfaction diminishes the amount of acting needed.

Hypothesis 6. Acting mediates the relationship of job satisfaction and affective delivery.

Similarly, higher levels of emotional exhaustion may directly impact ratings of affective delivery and breaking character (see Figure 1). An emotion-ally exhausted person is less likely to be seen as sincerely warm and pleasant and might easily experience a “last straw” that breaks the acted façade. Longitudinal research has supported a direct negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and service performance (e.g., Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Thus, any relationship between acting and service outcomes may be the consequence of a relationship with emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 7. Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship of acting with affective delivery and breaking character.

METHODS

Sample and Procedures

A sample of 131 university administrative assistants participated in this study. Administrative assistant has been categorized as a “high emotional labor job” (Hochschild, 1983; Wharton, 1993), and it has been noted that “clerical workers are routinely evaluated for their attitude and ability to get along with other people” (Eaton, 1996: 296). One administrative assistant whom I interviewed stated, “It’s frustrating at times to always be courteous and helpful to those who may not act as such in return. We need to keep smiling when we really don’t feel that way.” Thus, there is evidence that clerical workers have display rules, act to perform their work roles, and are rated on their affective delivery to the public (in this study’s setting, students, parents, and visitors).

Surveys were sent to 600 administrative assistants in all departments at a large midwestern university. Each respondent was asked to give a one-page survey to a coworker who had the opportunity to watch the respondent interacting with the public. Ratings of service delivery require a rater who observes an employee regularly and is unbiased. Customers, supervisors, self, and peers, the potential raters here, all have their own limitations (Tornow & London, 1998). I viewed respondents’ coworkers as reasonable source of service delivery ratings because their observations may be more representative and reliable than those of supervisors or customers, and the shared method variance inherent in self-ratings is minimized. The drawback of a coworker as rater is that a friendly relationship with the respondent may produce a lenient rating. To minimize this possibility, I sent the coworkers identified by the respondents a letter assuring anonymity and requesting honest, accurate ratings. No names were used—a code number that matched the target’s survey number was on each rater’s survey—and ratings were returned directly to me. I
assessed the handwriting on the surveys to ensure that the same individual did not complete both surveys.

Two weeks after the initial mailing, a reminder letter and additional copies of the survey were sent to the administrative assistants in all departments. One-hundred and sixty-eight administrative assistants returned the main survey; this 28 percent overall return rate is a typical level for mailed responses to organizational surveys (Paul & Bracken, 1995). The data for 131 respondents were usable, because completed coworker surveys were not returned for all respondents. There were no significant mean differences between those with a returned coworker rating and those without one. The final sample was 97 percent women, and the mean age was 45, with a range of 19 to 66 years. Eighty-five percent were full-time employees, and the average tenure was about five and a half years. Nineteen males and 111 females completed the coworker ratings, with one coworker providing no gender information. Gender was not related to the variables of interest.

Measures

All responses were given on a five-point Likert-type scale with either frequency or agreement anchors. Means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients can be found in Table 1.

**Deep and surface acting.** No established scales measuring deep and surface acting existed at the time of this study. Two pilot studies were performed with working items developed by the author and other researchers (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998). Following the first pilot study, which was conducted with 73 working students and 23 initial items, 7 items were selected. These items met both empirical (strong loadings and small cross-loadings in an exploratory factor analysis) criteria and the following conceptual criteria: (1) they specified working on changing internal feelings or working on modifying behaviors but not internal feelings and (2) they focused on the public as the audience, not coworkers. The instructions asked respondents the average extent to which they performed certain behaviors to be effective at their jobs. Responses were on a frequency scale (1 = “never,” 5 = “always”). Surface acting items included “Just pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job” and “Put on an act in order to deal with customers in an appropriate way,” and two deep acting items were “Try to actually experience the emotions that I must show” and “Work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to others.” Complete scales are available from the author by request.

In a second pilot study conducted with 141 working students in service positions, a confirmatory factor analysis on these seven items revealed that the two-factor model was a good fit with the data (GFI = .93, CFI = .96, RMSR = .07), was a significantly better fit than a one-factor model ($\Delta \chi^2 = 100.22$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$), and had item loadings on separate factors as expected. The surface and deep acting scales had means of 2.79 and 2.68 and good internal consistencies (.89 and .78, respectively). For the current study, I added one surface acting item on the basis of qualitative data (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). A confirmatory factor analysis on these eight items indicated a good fit with the data for the two-factor model (GFI = .93, CFI = .96, RMSR = .05), high alpha coefficients for surface acting (.88) and deep acting (.79), and moderately related scales, as was expected ($r = .43$). The mean levels (see Table 1) were lower for the current sample than for the

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<td>1. Display rules</td>
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<td>(.75)</td>
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<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
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<td>2. Job satisfaction</td>
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<td>(.88)</td>
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<td>3. Surface acting</td>
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<td>.72</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
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<td>-.21**</td>
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<td>(.79)</td>
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<td>-.64**</td>
<td>(.58**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
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<td>-.35**</td>
<td>-.57**</td>
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<td>.33**</td>
<td>-.47**</td>
<td>(.72)</td>
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a Values on the diagonal in parentheses are alpha coefficients. 

b All variables were assessed on a five-point scale.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$
working students, who mainly held restaurant server positions (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

**Display rules.** Three items were used to measure employees’ perceptions that their role required positive displays (1 = “disagree,” 5 = “agree”). The items were written to represent Hochchild’s (1983) criteria for emotional labor jobs: “Part of my job is to make the customer feel good.” “My workplace does not expect me to express positive emotions to customers as part of my job” (reversed), and “This organization would say that part of the product to customers is friendly, cheerful service” (α = .75). To ensure that these employees had the opportunity to conform to display rules, I asked them about the frequency of their contact with “nonemployees.” A mean response to this question of 4.37 (s.d. = 0.80) suggested high levels of public contact among the respondents. The display rule items were formed into a composite used in further analyses.

**Job satisfaction.** This scale was from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire and used the same agreement anchors noted above. The items are “Generally speaking, I like working here,” “In general, I like working here,” and “In general, I don’t like my job” (reversed).

**Emotional exhaustion.** The emotional exhaustion scale was from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). These nine items were answered on the same frequency scale described above. Examples are “I feel emotionally drained from work” and “I feel frustrated by my job.”

**Affective delivery and breaking character.** A coworker who regularly observed a respondent interacting with customers completed two sets of items. Affective delivery was measured with six items regarding the sincerity, enthusiasm, warmth, friendliness, and courtesy of the focal employee during service encounters; these items were adapted from a “secret shopper” service rating scale by McCellan and colleagues (1998). Items included “This person treats customers with courtesy, respect, and politeness” and “This person shows friendliness and warmth to most customers.” Four items based on qualitative research (Bailey & McCollough, 1998) measured breaking character, which, as noted above, refers to revealing negative affective states to the public. Examples include “This person has revealed their true feelings to the public when upset or angry” and “When in a bad mood, this person has trouble hiding those feelings from customers.” A confirmatory factor analysis on the ten items revealed that a two-factor model was a significantly better fit than a single factor of service performance (Δχ² = 73.23, Δdf = 1, p < .001). One breaking character item with a low factor loading and frequency of response was removed, leaving three items. The final two-factor model fit the data for these nine items well (GFI = .91, CFI = .97, RMSR = .05).

Self-ratings of these same measures were also gathered as evidence that the peer ratings measured a unique aspect of service interactions. Self-ratings of role performance may represent participants’ intent or perceptions of self, whereas a coworker rating should be based on multiple observations of behaviors with customers. This pattern should be especially true with the current sample: administrative assistants work at desks that are open to the public, and coworkers can observe interactions. Thus, there should be a positive relationship between self and peer ratings, since the ratings use the same items to rate one target, though this relationship should be only a moderate one if the peer rating is providing a unique assessment of the employee. The bivariate correlations of the peer and self-ratings for the measures of affective delivery (r = .36) and breaking character (r = .33) were consistent with this prediction. Paired t-tests on the means revealed significant differences for affective delivery (p < .01), though not for breaking character (p < .08). On both dimensions, peer ratings provided a wider range of responses for affective delivery (coworker = 1.67–5.00, self = 2.33–5.00) and breaking character (coworker = 1.00–5.00; self = 1.00–4.33).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the bivariate correlations of the variables. I used the AMOS path-modeling program with the observed variables to analyze the data. All paths were freely estimated, and error variances were constrained to one. The error variances for the two peer-rated outcomes and the error variances for job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion were each allowed to covary to account for variables that are omitted from the model (Cortina, 2002). The hypothesized model was estimated with maximum likelihood procedures, which provide accurate estimations of parameters with sample sizes of 100–200 (Gerbing & Anderson, 1985). Nested models were used to test the mediation hypotheses.

The proposed model was a good fit (χ² = 7.84, df = 5, n.s.; GFI = .98, NFI = .97, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .066). (See Figure 1 for the path coefficients.) Display rules significantly related to deep acting (β = .23; Hypothesis 1a supported), but not to surface acting (β = −.03; Hypothesis 1b not supported). Job satisfaction was negatively related to deep acting (β = −.21), and was more strongly
related to surface acting, as expected ($\beta = -0.37$; Hypotheses 2a and 2b supported). Regarding emotional exhaustion, surface acting had a significant, positive path ($\beta = 0.33$; Hypothesis 3b supported), but deep acting did not (Hypothesis 3a not supported). Paths to affective delivery from surface acting ($\beta = -0.27$) and deep acting ($\beta = 0.18$) were significant in the predicted directions (Hypotheses 4a and 4b supported), even when the effect of job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion was accounted for. Lastly, surface and deep acting did not have significant paths to breaking character beyond emotional exhaustion (Hypotheses 5a and 5b not supported). In summary, six of ten hypothesized direct relationships were supported.

To test the mediation hypotheses, I examined nested models. Job satisfaction had a nonsignificant path in the hypothesized model, though it had a significant bivariate correlation with affective delivery, suggesting mediation by acting. Emotional exhaustion had a significant relationship to peer-rated breaking character ($\beta = 0.34$), but acting did not, suggesting emotional exhaustion may mediate the effect of acting on breaking character. The path between emotional exhaustion and affective delivery did not have a significant coefficient. To test whether these relationships are partially or fully mediated, I compared three nested models to the proposed model. In the test of Hypothesis 6, the path from job satisfaction to affective delivery was constrained to zero. The fit of the model did not change significantly ($\Delta \chi^2 = 1.16, \Delta df = 1$, n.s.), supporting the prediction that the job satisfaction–affective delivery relationship ($r = 0.18, p < 0.05$) is fully mediated by acting. To test Hypothesis 7, I fixed the paths from surface acting to both affective delivery and breaking character to zero. Constraining the path from surface acting to affective delivery decreased the fit significantly ($\Delta \chi^2 = 6.19, \Delta df = 1, p < 0.05$), suggesting that surface acting has a direct impact on affective delivery ratings. Constraining the path from surface acting to breaking character did not change the fit significantly ($\Delta \chi^2 = 0.48$, change in $df = 1, p < 0.05$), supporting full mediation through emotional exhaustion. Deep acting was not significantly related to emotional exhaustion, so therefore it cannot be mediated by emotional exhaustion (Baron & Kenny, 1986); however, its impact on affective delivery could be partially mediated by its relationship with surface acting. To test this possibility, I constrained the path from deep acting to affective delivery to zero; this operation resulted in a significant decrease in fit ($\Delta \chi^2 = 3.90, \Delta df = 1, < 0.05$), supporting the proposed direct relationship. Overall, the mediation hypotheses were partially supported.

**DISCUSSION**

Previous qualitative research has demonstrated that employees in a wide variety of service jobs engage in acting in order to conform to the service role (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000). Two aspects of an employee's job have been associated with high levels of acting: job dissatisfaction and display rules. The direction of relationships with job satisfaction has indicated that more acting is performed when employees are displeased with their jobs (Adelmann, 1995; Parkinson, 1991), and surface acting in particular is likely to increase. The mediation test with a nested model conducted here showed that the relationship between job satisfaction and affective delivery demonstrated in customer service research was fully mediated by acting. Liking one's job impacted affective delivery with customers to the extent that it related to surface or deep acting. This pattern of findings gives new meaning to the importance of the “happy worker”: a happy worker may be less likely to need to put on an act with customers. Employees’ perceiving display rules reported higher levels of deep acting, but not surface acting, supporting the idea that deep acting is a response to work demands (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

It is likely that surface acting occurs in response to work events rather than general rules (Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002).

Deep acting, or working on inner feelings to appear authentic to customers, was, as predicted, found to have a positive influence on observed interactions with customers that goes beyond the effect of job satisfaction, surface acting, and emotional exhaustion. This result supports the idea that deep acting has the power to convince an audience, as the Stanislavsky method theory of acting and Hochschild’s (1983) work imply. But is this effortful process stressful for employees? The deep acting and emotional exhaustion relationship was not significant when the effects of surface acting were taken into account. This is interesting given the level of effort inherent in performing deep acting to feel certain emotions. It seems that the payoffs of deep acting—reduced emotional dissonance and positive reactions from customers—may restore an employee's emotional resources in a way that surface acting cannot. An implication is that employees would benefit from training in deep acting that would entail learning techniques of emotion regulation (Totterdell & Parkinson, 1999). Another question addressed here is whether observers recognize the inauthenticity of surface acting and view service workers engaged in such “faking in bad faith” as less skilled at affective delivery (perceived warmth, sincerity, and friendliness
with customers). In the frontline employee sample observed here, the more surface acting an employee reported, the lower the rated affective delivery. Employees perceived as engaged in more surface acting were also more likely to be seen as breaking character with customers, a pattern that seemed to be due to the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was more likely to be experienced when employees engaged frequently in surface acting, as suggested by previous research on emotional dissonance (e.g., Abraham, 1998; Morris & Feldman, 1997), and this state of depletion leaves one with few resources to keep from breaking character. Another possible explanation is that employees may try to cope with emotional exhaustion by revealing their negative feelings to customers in order to reduce the emotional dissonance experienced. The current study thus provides further support for the view that burnout in service work is a critical problem (e.g., Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Limitations and Future Directions

Previous studies on emotional effort in service work have focused on hospitality and food services (Eaton, 1996), and this study extended that research to other types of service work. However, the sample used in this study was homogeneous in gender and job type. The return rate on the surveys was lower than would have been ideal, but comparison analyses showed that the final sample did not differ significantly from the broader surveyed sample. The mean coworker ratings of service performance were high, perhaps as a function of leniency owing to friendship. Future researchers may want to measure these relationships with a different source of delivery ratings. Another possible explanation for the high performance ratings is a ceiling effect; most of these employees had long tenures in the administrative assistant job studied here, and it is expected at this workplace that those who remain at service jobs are a good “fit.” Skewed service performance measurement is common and actually leads to an underestimation of relationships (Peterson & Wilson, 1992). Range restriction and shared method variance in the self-reported variables also impose a need for caution in interpreting these relationships. Affective disposition, which includes aspects such as work mood, dispositional affectivity, and expressivity, was not tested here. It would be of interest to understand what type of person is more likely to deeply act, rather than superficially act; no known relationships have been tested. A “fit” interaction effect could also be pursued in a study with a wider range of display rules and dispositional variables, as my earlier work (Grandey, 2000) and that of others (e.g., Arvey et al., 1998) has suggested. The current cross-sectional data cannot be used to test causality, but longitudinal data could be collected to test for the possibility that a spiraling relationship occurs in which deep acting contributes to emotional exhaustion, and then an employee uses surface acting as a lower-investment way to meet display rules. Experimental research would also help tease out the relationships between affective displays and observer reactions. The variables included in this study are not exhaustive: Research is needed that controls for other known predictors of emotional exhaustion and service delivery, such as role stress. Service workers may act with coworkers and supervisors as well as with customers; this acting may be considered more “extra-role” than “in-role,” and it may have different outcomes (see Grandey & Brauburger, 2002; Pugliesi, 1999).

Positive affective displays seem to be vital to quality service. Although good person-job fit and high job satisfaction will help decrease a service employee’s need to act, it is doubtful that any service employee will always have positive feelings toward customers. Thus, it is important to communicate to employees that all acting is not created equal. This study provides evidence for encouraging and training service personnel in deep acting when “the show must go on.”

REFERENCES


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