The effects of emotional labour on wellbeing: Contrasts between health care settings

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution and, to the best of my knowledge or belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in text.

Stephen Brown
Table of Contents

List of Tables .................................................................................................................. viii

List of Figures .................................................................................................................. ix

List of Appendices ........................................................................................................... x

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................... xi

Abstract ............................................................................................................................ xii

Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale for the Research ................................................. 1

Chapter 2: Emotional Labour: A Critique of Current Theoretical Perspectives ... 7
  2.1 Hochschild’s Original Dramaturgical View of Emotional Labour .............. 7
  2.2. Emotional Labour as Observable Behaviour .............................................. 10
  2.3. Emotional Labour from an Interactionist View ........................................... 15
  2.4. Antecedent and Response Focused Emotional Regulation ....................... 17
  2.5. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory .................................................. 21
  2.6 Control Theory ............................................................................................... 23
  2.7 Action Theory ................................................................................................. 27
  2.8 Summary of Theoretical Perspectives ........................................................... 30
  2.9 Emotional Labour in Health Settings ............................................................. 32

Chapter 3: Emotional Labour: Outcomes, Moderators, and Antecedents ........ 38
  3.1 Emotional Labour and Wellbeing Outcomes ................................................. 38
     3.1.1 Burnout ........................................................................................................ 38
        3.1.1.1 Components of burnout ................................................................. 39
        3.1.1.2 Emotional labour and burnout .................................................. 40
     3.1.2 Job satisfaction .......................................................................................... 43
     3.1.3 Psychosomatic associations with emotional labour ............................... 45
     3.1.4 Performance and organisational outcomes of emotional labour .......... 46
3.2 Moderators of Emotional Labour ................................................................. 47
  3.2.1 Social support ......................................................................................... 47
  3.2.2 Personality and affective disposition ...................................................... 50
  3.2.3 Emotional intelligence ........................................................................... 52
    3.2.3.1 Emotional intelligence and emotional labour ....................................... 54
  3.2.4 Gender ...................................................................................................... 55
3.3 Display Rules and Other Antecedents of Emotional Labour ..................... 56
  3.3.1 Perceived display rule requirements ....................................................... 56
  3.3.2 Antecedents, emotional labour, and outcomes ....................................... 59
3.4 Conclusions ................................................................................................. 60

Chapter 4: Study 1: Interviews with Health Care Workers: Setting the Scene
(Study 1) ............................................................................................................. 65
  4.1 Research Focus ......................................................................................... 65
  4.2 Method ........................................................................................................ 67
    4.2.1 Participants .............................................................................................. 67
    4.2.2 Research settings ................................................................................... 68
      4.2.2.1 Palliative care ...................................................................................... 68
      4.2.2.2 Emergency nurses ............................................................................. 69
      4.2.2.3 Patient registration clerks ................................................................. 70
      4.2.2.4 Renal nurses ...................................................................................... 70
    4.2.3 Procedure ............................................................................................... 71
  4.3 Analytic Approach to Interviews ............................................................... 73

Chapter 5: Interviews with Health Care Workers: Data Analysis (Study 1) ..... 75
  5.1 Emotional Engagement .............................................................................. 76
    5.1.1 Palliative care ......................................................................................... 76
    5.1.2 Patient registration clerks ................................................................. 77
    5.1.3 Emergency nurses ................................................................................. 79
    5.1.4 Renal nurses ......................................................................................... 81
    5.1.5 Overview of emotional engagement ................................................... 83
5.2 Emotional Management ........................................................................................................... 84
  5.2.1 Emotional labour .................................................................................................................. 84
    5.2.1.1 Management of natural emotion ............................................................................... 85
    5.2.1.2 Surface acting ............................................................................................................. 91
    5.2.1.3 Deep acting ................................................................................................................ 94
    5.2.1.4 Summary of emotional labour .................................................................................. 97
  5.2.2 Emotional deviance ............................................................................................................. 97
  5.2.3 Non-expressive emotion management ............................................................................... 100
    5.2.3.1 The provision of information ................................................................................. 102
    5.2.3.2 Proximity and space ................................................................................................. 106
    5.2.3.3 Summary of non-expressive emotional management ........................................... 108
  5.3 Antecedents .......................................................................................................................... 109
    5.3.1 Expectations/display rule requirements .......................................................................... 109
      5.3.1.1 Emotional intelligence .......................................................................................... 109
      5.3.1.2 Social referencing ................................................................................................. 114
      5.3.1.3 Organisational and professional influences ......................................................... 115
      5.3.1.4 Overview of display rule perceptions ................................................................. 119
  5.4 Moderators .......................................................................................................................... 121
    5.4.1 Social support .................................................................................................................. 121
      5.4.1.1 Palliative care nurses ............................................................................................ 121
      5.4.1.2 Emergency nurses ................................................................................................. 129
      5.4.1.2 Patient registration clerks ..................................................................................... 136
      5.4.1.3 Renal nurses .......................................................................................................... 143
      5.4.1.4 Overview of social support .................................................................................... 149
    5.4.1 Emotionally demanding interactions ............................................................................. 153
    5.4.2 Work demands ................................................................................................................ 159
    5.4.3 Individual differences ..................................................................................................... 161
  5.5 Outcomes .............................................................................................................................. 165
    5.5.1 Job satisfaction and employee wellbeing ....................................................................... 165
  5.6 Overview of Interview Analysis. .......................................................................................... 170
  5.7 Limitations ............................................................................................................................ 179
Chapter 6: Survey of Emotional Labour in Health Care Workers (Study 2).... 181

6.1 Introduction........................................................................................................ 181

6.2 Method .................................................................................................................. 184
   6.2.1 Participants...................................................................................................... 184
   6.2.2 Procedure. ....................................................................................................... 185
   6.2.3 Materials. ......................................................................................................... 186
      6.2.3.1 Duration .................................................................................................... 186
      6.2.3.2 Emotional labour/emotional demands. ................................................. 186
      6.2.3.3 Emotional engagement .......................................................................... 187
      6.2.3.4 Support .................................................................................................... 187
      6.2.3.5 Burnout .................................................................................................... 188
      6.2.3.6 Turnover intentions and job satisfaction .............................................. 189

6.3 Results................................................................................................................. 189
   6.3.1 Structure of emotional labour ....................................................................... 189
   6.3.3. Group differences......................................................................................... 192
      6.3.3.1 Emotional engagement .......................................................................... 194
      6.3.3.2 Emotional labour ................................................................................... 194
      6.3.3.3 Emotional demands and duration .......................................................... 195
      6.3.3.4 Support .................................................................................................... 195
      6.3.3.5 Outcome variables. ................................................................................ 196
   6.3.4 Correlations between variables ................................................................... 197
   6.3.5 Multiple regressions ....................................................................................... 199
      6.3.5.1 Duration of interaction .......................................................................... 200
      6.3.5.2 Emotional demands ................................................................................ 200
      6.3.5.3 Emotional Labour. .................................................................................. 202
      6.3.5.4 Emotional Engagement. ........................................................................ 204
      6.3.5.5 Social Support ......................................................................................... 205

6.4 Discussion ........................................................................................................... 209

6.5 Limitations .......................................................................................................... 215
Chapter 7: General Discussion................................................................. 217
  7.1 Major Findings................................................................................. 217
    7.1.1 Emotional labour................................................................. 218
    7.1.2 Outcomes of emotional labour.............................................. 220
    7.1.3 Social support................................................................. 223
    7.1.4 Emotional engagement...................................................... 228
    7.1.5 Emotional intelligence and display rules ......................... 232
    7.1.6 Non-expressive emotional management.............................. 235
    7.1.7 Emotionally relevant interactions ...................................... 237
  7.2 Organisational Implications ....................................................... 238
    7.2.1 Emotional labour and emotional autonomy ....................... 238
    7.2.2 Emotional expectations in the role...................................... 239
    7.2.3 Social support................................................................. 241
  7.3 Limitations..................................................................................... 243
  7.4 Future Research ........................................................................... 244
  7.5 Concluding Comments............................................................... 245

References............................................................................................. 247

Appendix................................................................................................. 271
List of Tables

Table 4.1  Categories, themes, and, sub-themes identified in the Study 1 interviews.  

Table 6.1  Extracted components and component items following the three factor principle component analysis with varimax rotation.  

Table 6.2  Group means and standard deviations for all variables  

Table 6.3  Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations of variables  

Table 6.4  Regressions predicting outcome variables using emotional demands, group membership, and their interaction  

Table 6.5  Regressions predicting outcome variables using emotional labour, group membership, and their interaction.  

Table 6.6  Regressions predicting outcome variables using emotional engagement, group membership, and their interaction.  

Table 6.7  Regressions predicting outcome variables using co-worker support, group membership, and their interaction.  

Table 6.8  Regressions predicting outcome variables using supervisor support, group membership, and their interaction.  

Table 6.9  Regressions predicting outcome variables using organisational support, group membership, and their interaction.  

Table 6.10  Regressions predicting outcome variables using family/friend support, group membership, and their interaction.
## List of Figures

| Figure 2.1 | Model based on Hochschild’s (1983) emotional labour theory. | 8 |
| Figure 2.2 | Model based on Ashforth and Humphrey’s (1993) theory of emotional labour. | 13 |
| Figure 2.3 | Antecedents and Consequences of Emotional Labor | 16 |
| Figure 2.4 | The proposed conceptual framework of emotional regulation performed in the workplace setting | 18 |
| Figure 2.5 | Sequential model of emotional labour and burnout. (Source: Testing a conservation of resources model of the dynamics of emotional labour. | 23 |
| Figure 2.6 | Control Theory Model of Emotional Labour. (Source: Understanding the emotional labor process: A control theory perspective | 25 |
| Figure 2.7 | Model based on Diefendorff and Gosserand’s (2003) theory of emotional labour. | 26 |
| Figure 2.8 | Model based on Zapf et al (1999) and Zapf’s (2002) theory of emotional labour. | 29 |
| Figure 6.1 | Scree plot of eigenvalues in the principal components analysis of emotional labour items. | 192 |
List of Appendices

Chapter 4
APPENDIX A  Study 1 Advertisement
APPENDIX B  Study 1 Information Sheet
APPENDIX C  Study 1 Consent Form
APPENDIX D  Study 1 Interview Protocol
APPENDIX E  Study 1 Transcribed Interviews (on disk)

Chapter 6
APPENDIX F  Study 2 Advertisement
APPENDIX G  Study 2 Questionnaire
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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the emotional labour requirements of nurses and clerks with different interaction requirements to assess whether the context or the perceived role identity affects the conduct, and/or outcomes of, emotional labour. Emotional labour has become an important focus for researchers since Hochschild’s (1983) groundbreaking research. Emotional labour has been associated with mainly poor outcomes for employees; however, there is still uncertainty as to the components and consequences of emotional labour. The health industry is one field where emotional interactions between employees and clients are often typified as an important part of the various roles.

Study 1 involved interviews with 21 nurses from three distinct nursing groups (emergency, renal dialysis, and palliative care) as well as emergency clerical workers to explore the dimensions and associations of emotional labour. Study 2 sought to generalise findings from Study 1. Three hundred and twenty five employees from the same groups were surveyed.

The main findings were as follows;

- **Emotional Labour**: The management of natural emotion is a distinct and prominent emotional labour strategy.

- **Outcomes of Emotional Labour**: The management of natural emotion and deep acting are preferable to surface acting due to more favourable well-being associations.

- **Social Support**: Organisational sources of support are crucial for the well-being of employees engaged in emotional labour.

- **Emotional Engagement**: Employees who perceive the emotional engagement in their role as high, may be better prepared for emotional interactions and have better well-being outcomes.
• **Emotional Intelligence and Display Rules**: Employees from all groups used emotional intelligence to guide their emotional interactions with clients.

• **Non-expressive Emotional Management**: In addition to emotional labour, employees from all groups used non-expressive means of emotional management such as the use of information, and space and proximity to control the emotion of themselves and clients.

• **Emotionally Relevant Interactions**: Employees found clients that held some emotional relevance as the most emotionally difficult to deal with.

Together the results show that the management of natural emotion should be included as an emotional labour strategy and, along with deep acting, should be considered preferable to surface acting for the well-being of employees and for organisational outcomes such as turnover intention. Employers can assist employees by preparing employees for interactions and by ensuring adequate support.