

# The Sociology of Emotional Labor

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## Abstract

Emotional labor refers to the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with organizationally defined rules and guidelines. Hochschild's (1983) *The Managed Heart* introduced this concept and inspired an outpouring of research on this topic. This article reviews theory and research on emotional labor with a particular focus on its contributions to sociological understandings of workers and jobs. The sociological literature on emotional labor can be roughly divided into two major streams of research. These include studies of interactive work and research directly focused on emotions and their management by workers. The first uses emotional labor as a vehicle to understand the organization, structure, and social relations of service jobs, while the second focuses on individuals' efforts to express and regulate emotion and the consequences of those efforts. The concept of emotional labor has motivated a tremendous amount of research, but it has been much less helpful in providing theoretical guidance for or integration of the results generated by these bodies of work.

During the past few decades, the study of emotions has become increasingly central to sociology. It is now a field of study in its own right, and a range of sociological specializations have incorporated the study of emotion into their theories and research agendas (Stets & Turner 2007). Although sociological interest in emotion takes a variety of forms, a fundamental concern is understanding how emotions are regulated by culture and social structure and how emotional regulation affects individuals, groups, and organizations.

Sociologists of work and organizations have been especially engaged with these issues. They have had a long-standing interest in people's emotional reactions to their jobs, and the publication of Hochschild's (1983) *The Managed Heart* provided researchers with a new vantage point from which to understand emotion in the workplace. As part of her case for a "social theory of emotion," Hochschild argues that emotions not only are shaped by broad cultural and societal norms, but also are increasingly regulated by employers with an eye on the bottom line. She introduces the concept of emotional labor to describe the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with employer-defined rules and guidelines. *The Managed Heart* inspired an explosion of research on emotion in the workplace, and it continues to serve as an important touchstone for this literature. The concept of emotional labor, in particular, has resonated with sociologists of work as well as researchers in management, psychology, communications, nursing and health, leisure and hospitality, and many other fields (Briner 2004).

In this review, I survey theory and research on emotional labor, paying particular attention to work by sociologists or work with strong sociological implications. After briefly describing the concept of emotional labor as originally formulated in *The Managed Heart*, I discuss two broad thematic areas of research that account for most of the literature on this topic. These include studies of interactive work and individual-level research on expressed emotions and emotion management. My discussion of these

literatures focuses less on the degree of support they provide for Hochschild's initial formulations of this concept than on researchers' efforts to put the concept of emotional labor to sociological use. Although some of the research examined here has implications for the sociological study of emotions more generally (see Lively 2007 and Thoits 1989 for reviews of the sociology of emotions), or for the study of emotion in organizations (e.g., Ashkanasy et al. 2000, Panayiotou 2006, Smollan 2006, Briner 2005, Fineman 1996, Van Maanen & Kunda 1989), my primary aim is to examine how research on emotional labor has informed sociological understandings of workers and work.

## EMOTIONAL LABOR IN *THE MANAGED HEART*

*The Managed Heart* contributed to two key streams of theory and research. The first involves Hochschild's efforts to understand the social foundations of emotion and her interest in redirecting sociological attention to this issue. A second is the American economy's transformation from one organized around the production of goods to one based on the delivery of services and a need to make sense of the nature and consequences of work in a service society. The themes came together in the concept of emotional labor. Virtually every current study of emotional labor positions itself in relation to one or more of the book's claims. It is thus important to outline some of the key themes in this work.

Publication of *The Managed Heart* occurred as the concept of emotion was penetrating the sociological literature through a variety of pathways (e.g., Franks 1985, Gordon 1981, Kemper 1978, Shott 1979). Hochschild's particular contribution to this literature includes the idea of emotion management (or emotion work), a reference to how people actively shape and direct their feelings, and a recognition that social structure and institutions impose constraints on these efforts. Hochschild uses the term "feeling rules" to describe societal norms about the appropriate type and amount of feeling that

should be experienced in a particular situation. Emotion management occurs as people work to accommodate these norms. This work involves attempts to align privately felt emotions with normative expectations or to bring the outward expression of emotion in line with them. Hochschild (1983) refers to the first process as “deep acting” and the second as “surface acting,” aiming to convey the fact that the first involves an attempt to change what is privately felt, while the second focuses on what is publicly displayed.

For Hochschild (1983), however, social processes not only are implicated in the managing of emotion, but also are fundamental to emotion itself. Although emotions function as signals for understanding an experience or situation, these signals are filtered through people’s expectations about themselves and the world. As a result, Hochschild argues, “when we do not feel emotion, or disclaim an emotion, we lose touch with how we actually link inner to outer reality” (Hochschild 1983, p. 223).

The nature of work in a service society represents another important theme of *The Managed Heart*. Emotion management is essentially a private act, influenced by broad cultural and social norms about what is appropriate to feel and express, but not directly regulated by other people or organizations. Emotional labor, by contrast, is Hochschild’s term for this process when it moves from the private realm to the public world of work. She defines emotional labor as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display,” calling attention to how people manage their own feelings as a way to create a particular emotional state in another person (Hochschild 1983, p. 7). Hochschild sees emotional labor as increasingly relevant, given the particular demands of service jobs. Because these jobs depend heavily on workers’ ability to manage their emotions, service employers have sought to control this process, thereby transforming emotion management into emotional labor as a formal job requirement.

Hochschild uses the highly feminized occupation of flight attendant as the basis for

her exploration of emotional labor in a service economy, and she suggests that jobs requiring emotional labor are much more likely to be performed by women than by men. This association in part reflects deep-rooted stereotypes about which gender is best suited for particular kinds of jobs. The form of emotional labor most common in the jobs Hochschild discusses involves creating in others feelings of well-being or affirmation, responsibilities typically assigned to women. Gender also enters into Hochschild’s argument about how workers perform emotional labor and the ways in which gender shapes the social interactions between worker and customer that it entails. Hochschild (1983) argues that women’s higher representation in jobs requiring deference—in the form of niceness, sociability, and the like—coupled with their lower overall social status, gives women a weaker “status shield” against others’ negative emotions than men have.

One theme of the book that generated the most attention from later researchers concerns the possible consequences of emotional labor for workers. Drawing analogies with alienation as described by Marx and with the psychological concept of cognitive dissonance, Hochschild (1983, p. 90) suggests that performance of emotional labor threatens to produce what she calls “emotive dissonance.” Workers who are required to display emotions regardless of whether these are congruent with their feelings may over time develop a sense of self-estrangement or distress. More generally, because of the deep connection between emotion and the self, Hochschild suggests that those who perform emotional labor are susceptible to a range of identity-related issues that impinge upon their psychological well-being.

Sociological research on emotional labor continues to reflect many of the broad themes that motivated *The Managed Heart*. Studies can be broadly divided into those that use emotional labor as a vehicle to understand the organization, structure, and social relations of particular kinds of service jobs and those focused more directly on emotions and their management at

work. The former line of research proceeds from the vantage point of the occupation, treating emotional labor as a feature of jobs involving interactive work and examining it in the context of other features of these jobs. These studies tend to be primarily qualitative and ethnographic in their approach. The second line of research on emotional labor focuses less on specific occupations than on emotions themselves and workers' attempts to manage them. Quantitative methodologies predominate in research on these issues.

## EMOTIONAL LABOR AS INTERACTIVE WORK

One important stream of emotional labor research involves qualitative case studies of interactive work. Frontline service jobs were an initial focus, but research has gradually expanded to consider interactive work in its broadest sense; this includes professionals' interactions with clients and coworkers, as well as interactions involved in caring and family work. Because much of this research proceeds from the vantage point of a particular job or kind of job, its focus on emotional labor is somewhat indirect. Jobs involving interaction with others are presumed to require significant amounts of emotional labor, but this labor is examined in relation to other aspects of the job, most especially the dynamics of power, status, and gender. These studies thus collectively demonstrate the distinctive features of interactive work, while at the same time linking these elements to broader work structures and processes.

### Power, Control, and Resistance in Frontline Service Jobs

There is a large and growing sociological literature on service work, with much of it focused on the dynamics of the service encounter (Korczynski & Macdonald 2009, McCammon & Griffin 2000). Many service jobs involve a high level of contact between workers and customers. Like classic sociological studies of service encounters (e.g., Whyte 1948, Gold 1952),

research on frontline or interactive service jobs focuses on the social relations of work and the balance of power and control in these low-level jobs.

Frontline service jobs have been extensively studied by researchers interested in emotional labor, who link this issue with more longstanding issues related to workers' experiences in jobs formally lacking in skill and power. A lack of autonomy is not unique to interactive service jobs, but it is assumed to be especially problematic for these workers. Employers' attempts to control workers' interactions with customers are viewed as directly impinging on workers' sense of themselves, thus creating threats to self and identity not present in other types of jobs. Despite the potential dangers of interactive service work, however, this research emphasizes the ways that workers strategically manage these interactions so as to resist degradation and gain power and dignity on the job.

For example, in her study of waitresses Paules (1991) examines how these workers assert control and protect their sense of self in their interactions with customers. In restaurant work, Paules argues, workers' subordination to customers is reinforced through cultural symbols and a code of interaction that derive less from employers' active efforts to organize work than from more deeply rooted historical practices and assumptions about domestic service. In Paules's observations, restaurant managers had little direct authority over workers' interactions with customers, nor did they attempt to closely regulate these interactions. In the absence of these forms of control, waitresses' interactions with customers were directed largely by the workers' themselves. Although they are stigmatized by the images of servitude surrounding restaurant work, the waitresses Paules (1991) studied were not negatively affected by their interactions with customers. Instead, they viewed their ability to manage their emotions as a valuable skill that could be used to gain the upper hand in the balance of power with customers.

Paules's focus on the tripartite relations of control between workers, customers, and

employers in the service encounter can also be seen in Leidner's (1993) classic study of fast-food and insurance sales. Unlike the restaurant work studied by Paules, however, fast food represents a more modern frontline service industry in which the historical legacy of domestic service has been pushed aside for assembly-line methods of standardization and routinization. Using participant observation and interviews, Leidner examined how employers in fast food and insurance attempt to regulate workers' interactions with customers and workers' responses to those efforts.

Interaction with customers is a feature of work in both fast food and insurance, and Leidner describes how both sets of employers attempt to control workers' and customers' behavior by routinizing their interactions. Unlike low-level production jobs, however, where routinization and deskilling represent effective strategies for employers, routinization in interactive service jobs is not always possible or desirable. Employers will seek to routinize workers' interactions with customers only under some conditions. They must believe that "the quality of the interaction is important to the success of the enterprise"; that workers are "unable or unwilling to conduct the interactions appropriately on their own"; and that the tasks themselves are not too complex or context-dependent (Leidner 1993, p. 26).

Even if these conditions are met, routinization will nevertheless assume a different form than in production jobs. Rather than standardizing how workers perform a physical task, routinizing interactive service jobs involves standardizing workers' personal interactions with customers. In extreme cases, such as the McDonald's outlets in Leidner's (1993) study, these interactions are tightly scripted, and workers' compliance with the routines are closely monitored. In cases in which the conditions for routinization are not fully met, such as in the insurance firm described in Leidner's study, employers may opt for other ways to insure control over workers' interactions with customers. Leidner (1993) describes how insurance salespeople are trained such that

they embrace company values and an identity aligned with the company's goals.

In addition to examining employers' attempts to routinize interactive service work, Leidner examines how fast-food and insurance workers' and their customers respond to these efforts. Meeting employers' expectations requires workers in both settings to engage in some form of emotional labor. McDonald's workers are expected to greet customers with a smile and friendly demeanor regardless of their own mood or temperament. At Combined Insurance, workers are encouraged to fully transform themselves so as to become effective salespeople.

Leidner suggests that rigid compliance with these expectations is at least potentially damaging to workers' sense of self and identity but that she did not necessarily see these negative consequences in the workers she studied. McDonald's workers attempted to individualize their responses to customers in small but personally meaningful ways, or they used humor or exaggeration to demonstrate their distance from the script to which they were expected to adhere. Reliance on scripts also served as a way for workers to protect themselves from having to engage directly with customers. Customers, whose primary goal was getting their food quickly, were mostly indifferent to routinization and to workers' scripted interactions with them. Salespeople at Combined Insurance came to see the direct benefits of company training strategies, as they found that it helped them to become more successful salespeople. Workers gained valuable techniques for controlling customers and thus had the upper hand in the balance of power.

### Gender, Race, and Personal Service Work

Many other frontline service jobs have been the focus of research, including retail clerks (Tolich 1993, Godwyn 2006), phone sex workers (Flowers 1998), strippers (Chapkis 1997), and child care workers (Macdonald 1996), among others. Macdonald & Sirianni (1996,

p. 3) use the term “emotional proletariat” to describe these service jobs in which workers exercise little formal power, are often subject to employers’ attempts to monitor and control their interactions, and are required to display friendliness and deference to customers. Because of the latter characteristic, these occupations tend to be gender-typed as female jobs, regardless of their actual sex composition.

The deference expected of workers in frontline service jobs raises important issues of race and class, as well as gender, and a growing body of research on emotional labor takes up these topics. Deference—or the capacity to place oneself in a “one down” position vis-à-vis others—is a characteristic demanded of all those in disadvantaged structural positions, including women, racial-ethnic minorities, and others in subordinate statuses. When deference is made a job requirement, members of structurally disadvantaged groups are likely to be overrepresented in such jobs or even be seen as better suited for the work than members of more advantaged groups. Macdonald & Sirianni (1996, p. 15) claim that “[i]n no other area of wage labor are the personal characteristics of the workers so strongly associated with the nature of the work.” Hence, although all workers employed in frontline service jobs may have a difficult time maintaining their dignity and engendering respect from customers, such issues may be especially potent for workers from more disadvantaged social groups.

Several studies examine the intersections of gender, class, and race in the service expectations of frontline jobs. Kang (2003) uses the terms “body labor” or “beauty service work” to describe jobs in which workers’ physical and emotional labor are jointly directed toward enhancing women’s bodies. Although these jobs are highly feminized, body labor is performed differently depending on the racial and class backgrounds of the female customers. Kang suggests that the gendered form of service most associated with frontline work—personal, sociable, and attentive to customers—is less generic than assumed; its expression depends instead on the race and class dynamics of the

setting in which it occurs. This conclusion is consistent with Macdonald & Merrill’s (2009, p. 122) more general observation that workers’ gender, race, and other status characteristics “serve as signifiers in the service encounter,” shaping customers’ expectations about the service they are to receive. The link between workers’ characteristics and customers’ expectations has resulted in the creation of gender and ethnic niches within the service sector and contributed to subtle forms of employment discrimination for these frontline workers (Macdonald & Merrill 2009).

## Professionals and Expert Service Work

Studies of emotional labor have been gradually extended to a wider variety of interactive occupations, including professions such as lawyer and doctor. Professions are characterized by their expertise, power, and authority (Abbott 1988, Freidson 1994), qualities that are reproduced in part through interactions on the job. Professionals interact with clients rather than customers and have a much greater degree of autonomy than workers in more routine, interactive service jobs. Rather than being part of the emotional proletariat, professionals engaged in interactive work are what Orzechowicz (2008, p. 143) calls “privileged emotion managers.” They receive extensive training in techniques of emotion management and have more resources available on the job to support their efforts. Further, Orzechowicz argues that professionals’ emotional labor is given recognition and support by peers to a greater degree than that performed by interactive service workers.

Given the importance of professional training, studies of emotional labor among professionals tend to focus on the professional socialization process and on how these workers learn strategies for managing their jobs’ interactional requirements. For example, Smith & Kleinman (1989) examine how medical school students learn the affective neutrality or emotional detachment expected of physicians. These authors suggest that an informal hidden curriculum of medicine teaches medical students ways



to manage their emotional reactions to patients' bodies. Developing the right degree of emotional detachment pays off for students as this emotional demeanor enables them to establish their professional authority. In addition, Smith & Kleinman (1989) note how students' ability to convey professional detachment may interfere with their ability to express more openly their feelings in their personal relationships. In a related study of mortuary science students, Cahill (1999) refers to the processes through which students learn the appropriate emotional demeanor for their job as a process of "emotional socialization." He suggests that workers select jobs in part based on their stock of "emotional capital" and its fit with specific occupational demands.

Pierce (1995) also explores the professionalization process in her study of the legal profession but argues that these processes should be understood from the perspective of the gendered structure of the law firm. Litigators are expected to display a particular emotional demeanor in order to elicit cooperation from others in the courtroom and to achieve their broader objectives. Pierce examines how lawyers learn techniques of intimidation and "strategic friendliness" as strategies for effective courtroom behavior. She suggests that the "gamesmanship" and adversarial posture at the center of the litigator's presentation of self is a highly gendered style. Because it is a historically male-dominated profession, definitions of good lawyering and expectations for professional behavior have come to be expressed in masculine terms. Pierce thus shows how gender is embedded in the professional expectations for emotional labor.

How professionals or aspiring professionals use emotional labor to establish their authority can also be seen in George's (2008) study of personal trainers. George (2008) suggests that personal trainers are part of an emerging category of expert service workers, whose jobs are significantly less routinized than those on the frontlines but who lack the full autonomy of professions. Expert service workers' emotional labor is oriented to the creation of an intensive, highly

personalized experience for customers. In the case of personal trainers, George (2008) shows how these workers' interactions with their customers are shaped by the occupation's tenuous professional status and commission-based pay structure. Trainers rely on their interactional abilities to assert and establish their expertise to a client base that does not necessarily acknowledge the occupation's professional status or the trainers' authority. Trainers thus need to avoid appearing deferential or acting too emotionally close to their clients. Studies of adventure guides (Sharpe 2005) and cruise ship directors (Tracy 2000) provide other examples of emotional labor in expert service work.

Pierce's (1995) and George's (2008) research reveals the different challenges women and men face in negotiating the interactional requirements of professional jobs. As George (2008, p. 124) explains, the women in her study were forced to perform emotional labor that either involved "do[ing] professionalism" or "do[ing] gender." The emotional detachment required by the former was at odds with the more personalized emotional demeanor associated with femininity. Similarly, Pierce (1995, p. 121) shows that the female litigators in her study did not embrace the gamesmanship model of the profession, but instead performed what she calls a "relational form of emotional labor emphasizing a caring orientation toward others."

Professionals interact not only with clients, but also with other workers. Pierce devotes particular attention to paralegals' interactions with attorneys. Paralegal is a predominantly female occupation, and this characteristic shapes its job requirements, including the type of emotional labor workers are expected to perform. Although not present in paralegals' job descriptions, expressing deference and behaving as caregivers is an expectation in paralegals' interactions with attorneys. And, although their emotional labor is largely invisible as a formal job requirement, those who fail to perform it are less likely to be seen as competent. Furthermore, Pierce (1995) shows how women paralegals perform different types and amounts of emotional labor than their male counterparts.

For women, caregiving involves an expectation that they be nice, friendly, and supportive of male attorneys. These expectations for giving support are different for men, who are supposed to be considerate, helpful, and polite. In another study of paralegals, Lively (2002) argues that these workers' obligation to perform caretaking emotional labor for attorneys is contingent upon features of the work, including characteristics of the clients and the type of legal work to be performed. In contrast to those employed by commercial law firms, paralegals in consumer-oriented law firms have greater emotional labor demands placed upon them by clients but perceive their relations with attorneys to be more egalitarian.

### Care Work and Emotional Labor

In making explicit the caregiving women perform as part of their jobs, studies of interactive work treat caregiving as a specific type of emotional labor. Caregiving has been understood both as an expectation or norm with which female and male workers are differentially expected to comply, as well as an informal aspect of workers' interpersonal relationships at work. Focusing on the latter, Lively (2000, p. 33) suggests that workers respond to the emotional labor demands of their jobs by engaging in "reciprocal emotion management" for one another. Caretaking thus is understood not only as a job requirement, but as an informal coping mechanism. Some research on social support in the workplace also emphasizes the ways in which this support involves emotion management (McGuire 2007).

The emphasis on caregiving as a type of emotional labor represents an important link to the literature on care work more generally (England 2005). For example, Pierce's (1995) contention that paralegals' emotional labor has been unacknowledged or devalued has been examined in a series of quantitative studies by England and colleagues (England 1992, 2005; Kilbourne et al. 1994). This research finds that occupations involving care pay less on average than comparable occupations where this

activity is not required. Although these studies vary somewhat in how they operationalize care work, there is considerable overlap between how it has been defined in this research and emotional labor researchers' use of this concept.

In addition to their shared focus on the devaluation of care work, the care literature converges with emotional labor research in a mutual interest in understanding the dual nature of caring. As a job requirement or expectation, caregiving is emotionally demanding and often performed in unequal relationships in which recipients' needs are primary and providers are disadvantaged. However, as studies of reciprocal emotion management and social support show, not all caregiving in the workplace is exploitative. In addition, even in jobs in which workers' involvement in caregiving is an expectation, providing care may be experienced as emotionally satisfying and intrinsically rewarding.

Research on caring occupations, such as nursing or midwifery, shows how changes in the structure, practice, and professional norms guiding these fields have the potential to increase or diminish workers' positive experience of caregiving (Hunter & Deery 2008, Huynh et al. 2008, Hunter 2001). Lopez (2006, p. 137) argues that employers can self-consciously create conditions that "encourage relationship building and emotional honesty" in the workplace. What he calls "organized emotional care" is an approach in which, rather than prescribing expectations for workers' interactions with others, employers instead aim to create opportunities for caring relationships to emerge on their own. On the basis of his analyses of three nursing homes, he suggests that care work can be organized on a continuum, ranging from an approach that requires workers' compliance with organizational expectations for emotional labor to one that is less prescriptive.

Research on emotional labor as caregiving has prompted greater attention to emotion work at home, or unpaid care work. Whether paid or unpaid, care work is more likely to be the responsibility of women than of men. Erickson



(2005) suggests that studies of the household division of labor should be as attentive to the division of emotion work in the home as they are to other kinds of household work. She argues that, like the emotional labor involved in paid caregiving, unpaid emotion work requires time, energy, and effort. Other researchers have begun to examine emotion management and emotional expression across the work-family boundary (Lively & Powell 2006; Wharton & Erickson 1993, 1995). Attention to these links between public and private life reveals the ways in which families increasingly rely on paid services as substitutes for caregiving in the home (Hochschild 2005).

### **Interactive Work and Interaction at Work**

This line of emotional labor research has called attention to the interactional demands of jobs, treating these demands as a proxy for a job's emotional labor requirements. Emotional labor is thus represented as part of the occupation itself; it is reflected in job expectations and requirements, the everyday performance of work tasks, and the structures and processes that govern how work is done and evaluated. As a formal and informal job requirement, emotional labor also shapes the organization and experience of work, especially the dynamics of power and status and the ways in which these are negotiated and reproduced. As this research has expanded from its initial focus on low-skill, routine jobs to many different forms of interactive work, it has helped to make social interaction—especially as it is linked to formal and informal work processes and expectations—more central to sociological examinations of the contemporary workplace.

In focusing on jobs and their interactional demands, this literature devotes less attention to the individual-level processes involved in managing emotion or performing emotional labor. To the extent that these issues have been addressed, a central question has been whether jobs involving emotional labor pose psychological hazards for workers. Most research

discussed above suggests the dangers of interactive work, but it also identifies ways workers act to reduce them, often to the benefit of themselves and their employers. However, these studies cannot answer the question of whether workers who perform emotional labor are psychologically worse or better off than those in other kinds of jobs, nor can they shed light on the mechanisms through which emotional labor may influence workers' well-being. Both issues are central to the second area of emotional labor research.

### **EMOTION-FOCUSED APPROACHES: EXPRESSED EMOTIONS AND EMOTION MANAGEMENT**

The second major area of emotional labor research shifts the focus from occupation-based analyses to emotions themselves. Almost exclusively quantitative, these studies are not concerned with interaction or interactive work per se, but rather focus on the role of emotion management in both arenas. This stream of research includes studies of expressed emotions in the workplace and workers' private experience of emotions and their efforts to manage them. Although both are concerned with the consequences of workers' efforts to display or manage emotion, the former literature is most interested with the effects of displayed emotions on customers, whereas the second aims to understand the effects of workers' efforts to regulate their emotions on their own psychological well-being and job attitudes.

#### **Emotional Labor as Expressed Emotions**

Like the occupation-based studies discussed above, research on expressed emotions in the workplace grew out of an interest in frontline service encounters. This research has been conducted primarily by managerial-focused organizational researchers, who argue that workers' expressed emotions should be the focus in emotional labor research. Because expressed

emotions shape others' reactions and behavior, they are presumed to be particularly important in understanding the outcomes of workers' interactions with customers. Furthermore, expressed emotions are public, making them easier for employers to monitor and researchers to observe than are internal states or feelings (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993). In this research, emotional labor is defined in behavioral terms as "the act of displaying the appropriate emotion" (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993, p. 90), and it is typically measured by observing workers' interactions with customers in natural settings.

What determines the emotions that workers express on the job? Rafaeli & Sutton (1989) argue that these expressions reflect three sets of factors: (a) norms regarding what emotions should be displayed in a particular situation; (b) characteristics of workers, including demographic characteristics (such as gender or race), individual temperament or disposition, and the worker's felt emotional reactions to a situation; and (c) features of the interaction, including characteristics of the target, as well as the setting within which it is taking place.

Norms (or display rules) are shaped by employers' specific requirements for emotional display and by societal and cultural beliefs about emotional expression. Sutton (1991) studied these norms in a bill collection agency. He found that the employer actively selected and socialized collectors to display a sense of urgency in their dealings with debtors and that most collectors did attempt to internalize these norms. Compliance was also obtained by creating incentives for doing so and by monitoring workers' behavior on the job.

Other research by Sutton and Rafaeli examines the effects of worker characteristics and the setting on workers' expressed emotions. Rafaeli (1989) directed a study of almost 600 grocery stores in which researchers observed over 11,000 transactions between clerks and customers. Clerks were expected to display positive emotions so that customers would perceive them as courteous, friendly, and helpful. The researchers coded each transaction according to whether clerks greeted customers, thanked

them, smiled, and made eye contact. Rafaeli hypothesized that compliance with these display rules would vary depending on characteristics of the employee, including his or her gender and whether or not a uniform was worn, and characteristics of the context, including the presence or absence of other employees or customers and the time of day when the interaction took place.

Women and employees wearing uniforms were more likely to display positive emotions than were men or nonuniformed employees, and Rafaeli showed that gender moderated the relationship between wearing a uniform and emotional display. Positive emotions were less likely to be expressed in the presence of other customers or employees. Using the same data, Sutton & Rafaeli (1988) examined the relations between employees' display of positive emotions and store sales. They found an unexpectedly negative relationship between these two variables, an effect attributed to clerks' greater willingness to display positive emotions at less busy times than when sales were occurring at a faster pace and customers were more prevalent (see also Rafaeli & Sutton 1990).

In more recent studies, Pugh (2001) extends this focus to understanding the antecedents and consequences of emotional expression. He argues that two aspects of workers' emotional dispositions should predict the degree to which they comply with employer display rules emphasizing positive emotion: (a) emotional expressiveness, defined as a person's ability to display emotion nonverbally; and (b) the degree to which workers are experiencing "a positive affective state" at work. Workers who are generally more positive are thus expected to be more likely to display positive emotions.

Pugh (2001) also examines the effects of these variables on customers' emotions and their assessment of service quality. As Pugh and others note, employers enforce display rules because they assume that workers' compliance with them is beneficial for the organization. Whether these positive effects exist is an empirical question, however. Pugh (2001, p. 1020) argues that emotional contagion is one mechanism through which these effects might occur:

Emotional contagion rests on the idea that “exposure to an individual producing a positive or negative emotion can produce a corresponding change in the emotional state of the observer.” Analyzing data collected from bank tellers and their customers, Pugh shows that employee emotional expressiveness is associated with displays of positive emotion, as predicted, and that employees’ display of positive emotion positively affects customers’ affect. Tsai (2001) found that customers’ behavior, including a willingness to return to a store, is also affected by workers’ display of positive emotions.

This perspective shifts the emphasis from the interactive requirements of jobs to workers’ (and customers’) behavior. In contrast to studies that view emotional labor as an inherent feature of interactive work, research on expressed emotions suggests that whether and how much emotional labor workers perform is an empirical question. Although a job’s interactive requirements may increase workers’ willingness and ability to comply with expected emotional displays, the emotions expressed in the workplace are a function of multiple factors.

These researchers are more interested in understanding the behaviors associated with expressing emotion and complying (or not) with display rules than they are in the underlying processes that may have produced those behaviors. Hence, this line of research does not consider the effort workers expend to produce a particular emotional display. It examines neither the processes of deep or surface acting nor any attempts by workers to regulate their emotions. Ashforth & Humphrey (1993, p. 90) suggest that workers’ compliance with emotional display rules may not require emotion management at all.

### Emotional Dissonance and the Consequences of Emotional Labor

We turn now to research concerned with the psychological consequences of emotional labor. This is one of the largest bodies of emotional labor research and the one most explicitly

concerned with operationalizing this concept. In taking up this issue, researchers have increasingly opted for a multidimensional definition of emotional labor that incorporates many of the elements contained in previously discussed studies. Emotion management, or workers’ efforts to regulate their feelings, has been a particular focus of measurement efforts, however.

#### Operationalizing emotion management and emotional dissonance.

Hochschild (1983) suggests that a job requires emotional labor when its performance involves making voice or facial contact with the public; when its performance involves producing an emotional state in the client or customer; and when the employer has an opportunity to control workers’ emotional displays. Using these criteria, she identifies a list of detailed occupations from several major occupational groups that require substantial amounts of emotional labor (see Hochschild 1983, appendix C). Several of the occupations on Hochschild’s list have been the subject of case studies, as discussed above. Hochschild’s list has also been used in quantitative studies designed to compare workers employed in occupations requiring emotional labor with those employed in other types of jobs. For example, in one early study Wharton (1993) used Hochschild’s list to construct a dichotomous variable indicating whether an occupation did or did not require workers to perform emotional labor. Erickson & Ritter (2001) use a similar variable but treat it as a measure of interactive work rather than emotional labor per se.

These types of categorical measures treat workers’ occupations as proxies for their performance (or nonperformance) of emotional labor. In this respect, they represent attempts to operationalize the occupation-based approach to emotional labor addressed above. Although a useful starting point, these measures are limited by their inattentiveness to specific aspects of jobs or behaviors on the job. More recent attempts to operationalize emotional labor have used a variety of strategies to identify and measure these factors. Although there is no

consensus on the best approach, the many measures in use contain some common elements, including the interactional requirements of jobs, the nature of workers' efforts at emotion management, and the existence of and compliance with display rules.

There is broad agreement that jobs requiring emotional labor are those in which workers must interact with others, and survey researchers have used measures of the frequency and type of these interactions as one element of measuring emotional labor. For example, Bulan et al. (1997) measured interactive work by asking workers about how much time they spend in voice or facial contact with the public and how much time they interact with others on the job, such as coworkers, supervisors, subordinates, etc. In their survey of Canadian workers, Brotheridge & Grandey (2002) included measures of the average duration and frequency of workers' interactions with customers (see also Morris & Feldman 1996, 1997).

Noting that emotion management seems to be a feature of "nearly all occupations in which the worker must interact with people," Sloan (2004, p. 49) uses an occupation's *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (U.S. Dep. Labor 1991) "working with people" score as a measure of the degree to which workers in that occupation engage in emotion management. This measure distinguishes between the complexity of one's interactions with others on the job (i.e., from giving or receiving instructions to other things), but it does not differentiate between jobs requiring interactions with coworkers from those that involve customers or clients.

Measures of whether and how often workers must interact with others on the job represent only one aspect of emotional labor, however. Many researchers also want to know about the degree to which workers must manage their emotions on the job and have increasingly sought to differentiate emotion management from interactive work per se. Hence, drawing from Hochschild, several researchers have developed measures of the extent to which workers engage in surface or deep acting. Grandey (2003, p. 91) measures both surface and deep

acting by asking workers to indicate the average extent to which they perform certain behaviors, such as "just pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job" or "work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to others" (see also Brotheridge & Grandey 2002). Related measures tap emotional dissonance, referring to the frequency with which a person displays positive (or negative) emotions that "do not correspond to what is felt in the situation" (Zapf & Holz 2006, p. 13), and inauthenticity, understood as a disjuncture between who one is expected to be at work and the person's "real" self (Erickson & Ritter 2001, Bulan et al. 1997).

Still another way to capture the degree to which workers manage emotions on the job is to ask them about the display of specific emotions or categories of emotions. Erickson & Ritter (2001, p. 153), for example, asked people about their experience of specific emotions on the job, such as anger, shame, calm/relaxed, etc., and the degree to which they attempt to hide or cover up each of these feelings. A measure used by Zapf & Holz (2006) asked workers to report how often they must display positive or negative emotions toward customers or clients and the degree to which these displays are at odds with the workers' true feelings.

Many studies also include measures of display rules or the affective requirements of jobs. Here, the emphasis is on the degree to which workers' perceive their jobs as requiring them to display certain emotions or to be sensitive to the emotions of others. For example, in a survey of university employees, Pugliesi (1999, p. 135) uses respondents' level of agreement with four statements, such as, "I am required to be artificially friendly to clients or students" and "I have to be nice to people no matter how they treat me" as indicators of what she calls "self-focused emotional labor." Research by Erickson and colleagues (Wharton & Erickson 1995, Bulan et al. 1997, Erickson & Wharton 1997) measures the affective requirements of jobs by asking survey respondents the degree to which their jobs require them to "handle people well." Others have used more general measurements, such as whether workers are expected to display

or feel certain emotions (e.g., Zapf & Holz 2006) and the degree of explicitness in those expectations for emotional display or feeling (e.g., Morris & Feldman 1997).

Few studies operationalize emotional labor with a single measure. Multidimensional measures are useful in enabling researchers to specify the various characteristics presumed to represent the construct of emotional labor and begin disentangling their effects (e.g., Glomb & Tews 2004). At the same time, the proliferation of measures makes generalizations across studies difficult. This is compounded by sampling issues, as almost all the studies to date rely on relatively small, nonrepresentative samples, often drawn from a single workplace or from a small subset of workplaces.

### **The consequences of emotional labor.**

Quantitative researchers interested in the consequences of emotional labor have devoted most of their attention to burnout. Most studies rely on some variant of Maslach and colleagues' (2001) measure of this concept, which encompasses three distinct elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Although workers in many kinds of jobs may be at risk of job burnout, the early research on this topic focused heavily on workers in interpersonally demanding human service occupations, such as social work, policing, counseling, and child care (e.g., Maslach 1982). As Brotheridge & Grandey (2002) note, workers in these jobs were presumed to be susceptible to burnout as a result of the amount of interaction their jobs entailed. Emotional labor researchers have expanded the focus from human service occupations to other jobs that involve interaction with others. In addition, they have focused attention on how burnout may be related to workers' efforts to manage their emotions during interaction, not to the amount of interaction per se.

The most consistent findings in this body of research concern the relationship between surface acting (or emotional dissonance) and the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout.

Numerous studies, using different samples and somewhat different measures, show that workers who report regularly having to display emotions that conflict with their own feelings are more likely than others to experience emotional exhaustion. For example, Dijk & Brown (2006) found a positive relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion and suggest that this relationship is partially mediated by the degree to which workers feel psychological discomfort with the gap between what they display and their true feelings. Analyzing data from several different samples of workers, Zapf & Holz (2006) also report a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and emotional dissonance.

Glomb & Tews (2004) found that workers' levels of emotional exhaustion are positively associated with having to fake or suppress emotions, regardless of whether the emotions themselves are positive (i.e., contentment, concern, happiness, enthusiasm, liking) or negative (i.e., fear, anxiety, sadness, irritation, distress, disliking, aggravation, hate, anger). Erickson & Ritter (2001) found that having to hide or cover up feelings of agitation at work is associated with higher levels of burnout and inauthenticity, but hiding or covering up other emotions does not have this effect.

Researchers have also identified other negative consequences for workers who regularly engage in surface acting (or regularly experience emotional dissonance). Brotheridge & Grandey (2002) found that surface acting enhances workers' feelings of depersonalization, while reducing their sense of personal accomplishment at work. Emotional dissonance has also been linked to lower job satisfaction (Morris & Feldman 1997) and increased job stress (Pugliesi 1999).

It is important to note that other dimensions of emotional labor included in these studies do not show this relationship to emotional exhaustion. For example, Grandey (2003) found that surface acting is positively related to emotional exhaustion but that deep acting is not. This is consistent with an early study by Morris & Feldman (1997), who conclude that workers



who are required to display particular emotions on the job are not at greater risk of emotional exhaustion than other workers. Rather, emotional exhaustion increases only when workers experience emotional dissonance—a disjuncture between displayed emotions and those that are genuinely felt.

The negative consequences of emotional labor as reported in these studies thus appear to be fairly specific and involve only one aspect of this multidimensional construct. Other dimensions of emotional labor appear either to have no effects on workers' psychological well-being or to affect it positively. Most important, there is little evidence that job characteristics or work demands related to interaction are themselves sources of burnout or dissatisfaction. Employment in jobs requiring interactive work, such as those discussed earlier or in one designated by Hochschild (1983) as requiring significant amounts of emotional labor, does not put a worker at greater risk of burnout or other forms of psychological distress. Similarly, most studies fail to show a relationship between the frequency or type of interaction required at work and these outcomes (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002, Morris & Feldman 1997, Wharton & Erickson 1995, Wharton 1993).

Furthermore, many studies report positive consequences for workers whose jobs require high levels of interaction with others (i.e., Bulan et al. 1997, Adelman 1995, Wharton 1993) or the display of positive emotions at work (Zapf & Holz 2006, Brotheridge & Grandey 2002). Even deep acting, defined as an effort to truly feel the emotions that one is expected to display, has been shown to positively affect workers by increasing their sense of personal accomplishment (Brotheridge & Grandey 2002). In general, then, although jobs vary in their emotional demands and interactive requirements, it is workers' responses to those demands—what Zapf & Holz (2006, p. 3) refer to as workers' "emotional regulation strategies"—that seem most consequential in shaping the psychological consequences of emotional labor. Workers who engage in deep acting or who genuinely experience the emotions they are expected to

display on the job seem better able to resist the kinds of negative consequences studied by researchers.

The cross-sectional design and analytic approach of most of these studies has precluded much attention to issues of causality, however. For example, although most treat job satisfaction as one possible consequence of emotional labor, Grandey (2003, p. 93) suggests that workers' feelings about their job may instead influence how they regulate their emotions at work: "[A] happy worker may be less likely to need to put on an act with customers." Similarly, burnout may be as much a cause of a worker's strategies for managing emotions as a consequence. Because these studies on the consequences of emotional labor tend to use measures of workers' subjective states as both independent and dependent variables, researchers must pay greater attention to the underlying processes involved and the dynamic relations between concepts being studied.

A related issue involves the need to look more closely at moderators and mediators of the relationship between emotional labor and its consequences. Almost all the studies discussed above include controls for other characteristics of jobs and workers that may be associated with the outcome under study, and several look systematically at interaction effects. These analyses suggest that the consequences of workers' efforts to regulate their emotions are likely to depend on job characteristics long known to affect workers' well-being, such as their levels of job autonomy (Wharton 1993); individual characteristics, such as "emotional expressivity" (Grandey 2000, p. 106); and other factors, such as the characteristics of customers or the specific type of emotions workers are expected to display. Although many studies have looked for gender differences in the consequences of emotional labor or have examined the role of gender as a mediating or moderating factor, these results have not yielded consistent findings.

At a broader level, strategies of emotional regulation may also be shaped by the domain in which they occur, the role expectations of participants, and characteristics of the targets



of interaction. In her study of homeschooling mothers, Lois (2006) shows how these women's attempts to balance the emotional demands of their mother and teacher roles are sometimes in conflict: Avoiding burnout in their roles as teachers is difficult for women because the emotion management strategies that would have been effective in their teacher role are at odds with the emotional commitments they are expected to display as mothers. In another study of teachers—in this case, college professors—Harlow (2003) suggests that the emotion management strategies of black and white professors and the consequences of those strategies are shaped by students' characteristics, especially their social and cultural expectations about race.

## BEYOND EMOTIONAL LABOR

A wide spectrum of occupations requires their incumbents to interact intensively and significantly with others. The concept of emotional labor offers researchers a lens through which these interactions can be conceived of as job demands rather than as a medium through which work tasks are accomplished or as informal social relations. This powerful insight has informed studies of interactive work in all its forms, as well as called attention to the many ways that interaction at work is organized, regulated, and enacted. The concept of emotional labor has led other researchers to examine how workers manage and subjectively experience emotion on the job. By studying the display and regulation of emotion at work, this latter research contributes to an understanding of people's reactions to work and the role of emotional regulation in this process.

The concept of emotional labor has motivated a tremendous amount of research, but it has been much less helpful in providing theoretical guidance for or integration of the results generated by these bodies of work. Jobs requiring interaction with others are numerous and diverse. All interactive jobs may require emotional labor in some generic sense, but these jobs differ from one another in important ways.

The predominant methodological strategy of focusing on a single job or set of jobs makes these differences all the more salient.

These studies have laid the foundation for more theoretically integrated analyses in some areas, however. The gendered nature of interactive work has provided a framework for understanding a variety of issues, ranging from body labor to global service work, and the growing literature on care work provides another example of a theoretically coherent research stream. But neither relies on emotional labor as a central, integrating concept.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from studies of workers' expressed emotions and emotion management. This literature has helped to identify and measure numerous factors associated with experiencing, regulating, and expressing emotions at work. There is little consensus on the construct or constructs underlying these factors, however. Over ten years ago, Smith-Lovin (1998) argued that the study of emotional labor required a firmer analytical foundation. Recent commentators echo these sentiments, urging those interested in individual-level aspects of emotion in the workplace to devote greater attention to social-psychological theories of emotion (see Stets & Turner 2007), as well as to the growing literature on emotional experience (e.g., Lively & Heise 2004, Simon & Nath 2004). The study of emotion—rather than emotional labor—thus may be the best way forward for this line of research.

Despite these limitations, the concept of emotional labor has given sociologists a lens through which to examine a wide variety of issues, many of which will continue to be relevant in the years ahead. Understanding how interactive work is organized and the factors that shape it remains a necessary task, and research that identifies how expectations about emotion and emotional expression are built into formal job requirements, informal expectations, and other aspects of work organization can contribute to this effort. Moreover, an investigation of these issues can shed light on a range of workplace processes and dynamics, including the

reproduction of power, authority, and inequality. Similarly, a greater understanding of individuals' emotional experiences at work can yield insights about fundamental social-psychological processes related to well-being and interaction in a service economy.

Globalization provides researchers interested in emotional regulation and expression at work with an additional set of questions to explore. For example, although service jobs in general have not been immune from the outsourcing of labor, less is known about the conditions under which this process has affected interactive work in particular (Ritzer & Lair 2009). How are service encounters and the interactions that animate them altered when

workers and customers are radically separated by space and time? Recent studies that focus on the globalization of care work (Parrenas 2009), the gendered construction of interactive service work in non-U.S. settings (Otis 2008, Hanser 2008), or the emotion management required of Islamic women employed by Western organizations (Syed et al. 2005) highlight other fruitful avenues for research. As interactive work and workers move across geographic and cultural boundaries, it is important that researchers follow suit. Understanding the intersections between local and global influences on the construction and regulation of emotion at work are important challenges for the future.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any biases that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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## Errata

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