

# Is Emotional Labor Easier in Collectivist or Individualist Cultures? An East–West Comparison

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/ppm](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ppm)**Sharon Mastracci<sup>1</sup>**  **and Ian Adams<sup>1</sup>**

## Abstract

Emotional labor is the effort to express job-appropriate emotions and/or suppress inappropriate emotions. The effort manifests in interpersonal interactions, whether face to face or voice to voice, and can increase stress and burnout. Most research in emotional labor is based on North American samples. Could public servants in different cultures experience emotional labor differently? We test the provocative hypothesis that emotional labor is less stressful for people in collectivist cultures, due to the predominance of harmony and interdependence in such cultures. Our results confirm that emotional labor via surface acting leads to burnout to a lesser degree for respondents in collectivist cultures compared with individualistic cultures. Emotional labor via deep acting actually lowers burnout in collectivist cultures. We also find that emotional labor theories based on North American studies may be used in Eastern contexts, and that public servants in collectivist cultures are more responsive to display rules compared with those in individualist cultures.

## Keywords

comparative research, emotional labor, individualism/collectivism, structural equation modeling

Emotional labor is the effort to express job-appropriate emotions and/or suppress inappropriate emotions. Most research in emotional labor is based on North American samples. Is emotional labor experienced differently in different countries? From

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Hulsheger and Schewe (2011), we know that decades of emotional labor research confirms that surface acting leads to burnout in the private sector. From Guy, Newman, and Mastracci (2008), we know this finding holds in the public sector too. However, Ashkenasy and Daus (2013) question whether the surface acting/burnout link in emotional labor theory applies in non-Western contexts: “Emotional labor research should consider literature from diversity-related and cross-cultural studies. How would collectivistic versus individualistic societies differ regarding emotional labor norms and outcomes?” (p. 286). In their comparison of private-sector workers in China and the United States, Allen, Diefendorff, and Ma (2014) warn “models of emotional labor generated in a Western culture may not apply in other cultures” (p. 21). Mesquita and Delvaux (2013) provocatively posit that workers in other cultures may find emotional labor *easier*: “Cross-cultural evidence . . . suggests that emotional labor is less stressful and less costly for people in interdependent than in independent cultures” (p. 263). Regulating emotions to sustain social harmony may accustom people in interdependent/collectivist cultures to monitor and adjust their affect constantly, so emotional labor may fail to generate the stress found in independent/individualist cultures. Does a public-service ethos make a difference (Guy et al., 2008; Sloan, 2017)? Does concern for the public good confound differences found among workers in for-profit organizations? The purpose of our study is to examine the effects of emotional labor across cultures among public servants. Two studies to date have examined emotional labor cross culturally in the private sector (Allen et al., 2014; Eid & Diener, 2001) but none has studied public servants.

## Review of the Literature

### *Emotional Labor*

Physical labor is needed in jobs where people work with *things*. Cognitive labor is needed in jobs where people work with *information*. Emotional labor is needed in jobs where people work with *people*.

As we move further and further away from organizations that are designed to operate assembly lines, we must devise new structures that capture today’s work and skill requirements . . . Making emotional labor visible is the first step, making it compensable is the next. (Guy & Newman, 2004, p. 296)

Emotional labor is the effort to suppress inappropriate emotions or express appropriate emotions within oneself or another person, where “appropriate” and “inappropriate” are dictated by the demands of the job. Emotion *work* is the day-to-day effort to feel, or at least appear to feel, context appropriate: happy at weddings and sad at funerals. Sometimes that requires no effort, other times it does, but in all cases, emotion *work* is done for the benefit of personal relationships. Emotional *labor* is the effort to feel or appear to feel context appropriate at work. It is done for the benefit of the employer to conform to professional expectations and to keep the citizen/customer happy (Lopez, 2006). Work display rules are more restrictive than day-to-day interpersonal display

rules (Moran et al., 2013). Emotional labor is part of the exchange of work effort for pay between employee and employer. In public services, to fail to engage in emotional labor is to fail to do the job (Guy et al., 2008; Mastracci, Guy and Newman, 2012). A police officer cannot betray anxiety or fear to suspects or victims. A social worker cannot cry in front of her clients. An emergency responder cannot panic or recoil from a patient's gruesome injuries as she arrives on the scene of an accident. Emotional laborers can pursue one of two approaches: They can convince themselves that the display rules are objectively right and true (deep acting) or they can fake it (surface acting). Emotional labor research on private-sector workers shows that surface acting is more stressful and produces more negative outcomes such as burnout and emotional exhaustion compared with deep acting (Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011). Emotional labor research on public-sector workers (Mastracci, Guy and Newman, 2012) reveals that first, emotional labor is fundamental to quality public service and is undertaken during face-to-face and voice-to-voice interactions. Second, both new and long-tenured employees engage in emotional labor; neither exerts more or less. Years on the job improves one's capacity for emotional labor, not unlike how consistent exercise improves one's capacity for physical labor. Emotional labor is not specific to an agency or department; it is located in the job and not the jobholder, and the frequency and intensity of emotional labor varies by job. Third, emotions in the workplace are not antithetical to professionalism or to reasoning (Damasio, 1994). On-the-job emotion regulation takes skill, takes significant effort, is key to getting the job done, and is the very expression of professionalism. Like its private-sector counterpart, however, research on emotional labor in the public sector mainly uses U.S. samples.

Recent research on emotional labor in public service has emerged from outside the United States: Lu and Guy (2014) survey Chinese public servants and determine that ethical leadership moderates the effects of surface acting on job engagement. Mastracci (2016) confirms the moderating effect of ethical leadership on surface acting and burnout among new nurses in England's National Health Service. Interestingly, gender appears to matter in contexts *outside* the United States but not within the United States: Yang and Guy (2015) survey municipal government employees in Seoul, and confirm the relationship between authentic emotional expression and job satisfaction. Faking emotion, however, decreases job satisfaction and increases turnover intention for women but not for men. Also studying Korean public servants, Wilding, Chae, and Jang (2014) find varying effects of the frequency and variety of emotional expressions on job satisfaction and burnout. Hsieh, Hsieh, and Huang (2016) reveal complex and counterintuitive relationships between emotional labor efficacy and job satisfaction among government workers in Taiwan. As research on emotional labor evolves from U.S.-based to other cultural contexts and findings diverge from the U.S. case such as those related to gender, it is unclear whether or not theories based on U.S. data can explain emotional labor outside the United States. The absence of cross-cultural comparisons means that the effects of emotional labor—that it can not only lead to stress and burnout if unsupported but also contribute to job satisfaction and fulfillment—may be generalized across national and cultural boundaries without empirical support. Differences between cultures on Snyder et al., 2013 individualism index (IDV) are

particularly relevant to emotional labor research (Ashkenasy & Daus, 2013), and is the most studied cultural construct of all the Snyder et al., (2013) cultural dimensions (Taras & Kirkman Steel, 2010). We explore this further in the next section.

*Individualism, collectivism, and display rules.* Matsumoto (1990) notes, “Individualism-collectivism has been identified by several writers as a stable dimension of cultural variability” (p. 197). The mechanism by which cultural differences manifest in individual responses to display rules is *the cultural difference in self-construals* (Eid & Diener, 2001):

In cultures where an *independent self* is predominant, people are expected to become independent from others and pursue and assert individual goals . . . people with an independent self are found in *individualistic* (e.g.: Western) cultures more often than in collectivist ones (e.g.: Eastern cultures). The *interdependent (relational) self*, on the other hand, is characterized by the belief that the self cannot be separated from others or from the social context . . . in *collectivist* cultures, in which this construal of the self is predominant, the social norm is to maintain harmony with others. (p. 870)

Differences in emotional labor experiences may manifest in individualist and collectivist cultures. Interestingly, Ekman (1972) reports that study participants were instructed to control their emotions when viewing disturbing images. No differences were found between U.S. and Japanese participants when they were alone, but results confirm an anticipated East/West split when participants are in the presence of others. This “suggests the importance of display rules as *social phenomena*” (Matsumoto, 1990, p. 210, emphasis supplied) and, therefore, can be influenced by broader culture. Allen et al. (2014) confirm the link between display rules, emotional labor, and burn-out for U.S. service workers but not those in China. Similarly, Eid and Diener (2001) observe “in China, there is a general attitude to consider emotions as dangerous, irrelevant, or illness causing. The moderation or suppression of emotions is generally highly valued in China” (p. 883). New public management (NPM) reforms introducing competitive market dynamics to public-sector service delivery and emphasizing the citizen as customer and a customer-service ethos may exacerbate emotional labor demands in public services (Thomas, 2013). Mimicking private-sector service delivery, public-sector workers might experience emotional labor similarly to their counterparts in private-sector customer service. Where public-service workers are assessed on customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction derives from how a citizen perceives her or his interpersonal interaction with public servants (National Performance Review, 1993), NPM increases the emotional labor demands on public servants beyond what has been established already (Guy et al., 2008). Greater emphasis on running government like a business allows us to invoke theories on emotional labor generated from research on retail trade (Johnston & Sandberg, 2008). NPM reforms have manifested variously around the world, with a relevant East/West split (A. B. L. Cheung, 2012):

Whereas public sector reforms in the West were originally driven by a distrust of the state and its bureaucracy, seeing government as the “problem” (inefficiency, crowding out the

market, etc.) and seeking to install market supremacy, government in East Asia is arguably still held as the solution to problems, where people expect a competent and selfless bureaucracy to help drive social progress and economic prosperity; this resonates the centuries-old Confucian tradition of harmonious governance. (p. 211)

The public-sector context holds further interest because although cross-cultural comparisons of the effects of emotional labor on private-sector service workers have been conducted, no such comparison in public services has been done to date. Studying the private sector, Allen et al. (2014) find that

the relatively robust sequence of display rules to surface acting to burnout was observed in a US sample but was not observed in a Chinese sample, with some relationships being *significantly weaker* in the Chinese sample and others exhibiting relationships with the *opposite sign*. (pp. 21-22, emphases supplied)

This important result suggests emotional labor is easier for workers in collectivist cultures compared with those in individualist cultures. Does this finding hold in the public sector? We use samples of public-sector workers from five countries and find weaker relationships between surface acting and burnout in collectivist countries compared with individualist countries, and we find inverse relationships between deep acting and burnout in collectivist countries. The models fit well in both contexts, further suggesting that the predictions from emotional labor theory may be applied across cultures, contrary to researcher concerns arising from the parochial contexts within which emotional labor models have been developed.

Our hypotheses are informed by Allen et al. (2014) as well as studies of emotions across cultures (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007; R. Y. M. Cheung & Park, 2010; Snyder et al., 2013; Eid & Diener, 2001; A. Y. Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Mauss, Bunge, & Gross, 2009; Mesquita & Albert, 2007; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992; Snyder, Heller, Lumian, & McRae, 2013) and tests of Western models in Eastern contexts (Lu & Guy, 2018). Emotional labor—specifically surface acting—increases burnout in Western contexts. Mesquita and Delvaux (2013) speculate emotional labor is easier for workers in collectivist cultures due at least, in part, to the role of harmony. To test this in a public-sector context, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1:** The effect of emotional labor on burnout is less positive for respondents in collectivist countries compared with respondents in individualist countries.

The applicability of emotional labor models to contexts outside their origins and development remains contested: “Much of what we know about emotional labor comes from one specific cultural context” (Mesquita & Delvaux, 2013, p. 251); “Models of emotional labor generated in a Western culture may not apply in other cultures” (Allen et al., 2014, p. 21). To test this, we state a second hypothesis related to model fit:

**Hypothesis 2:** Emotional labor models can predict employee burnout in individualist (Western) cultures but not in collectivist (Eastern) cultures.

A third hypothesis tests whether individuals in collectivist and individualist cultures respond to display rules differently from one another. In this, we are guided by previous research. Prior research suggests

Emotion regulation may be a normative process in collectivistic cultures that stems from the need to maintain harmony and cooperation among groups . . . as a result of this normative expectation, emotion regulation in these cultures may be less dependent upon work-specific display rules. (Allen et al., 2014, p. 24)

That is, people in collectivist cultures are subject to day-to-day display rules that compel them to harmonize their outward affect with others, such that workplace display rules in collectivist cultures are less overt than in individualist cultures. This is what Allen et al. (2014) find among private-sector workers. To test this in a public-sector context, we state the following:

**Hypothesis 3:** Respondents in individualist (Western) countries are more responsive to display rules—whether to suppress or express—than are respondents in collectivist (Eastern) countries.

We test these hypotheses using data from public servants in five countries, representing both collectivist and individualist cultures.

## Data and Analysis

Individuals with full-time, paid work experience in public-service organizations were asked to complete the survey. Data were gathered via group-administered, hardcopy surveys (Fowler, 2009) to student and community convenience samples of individual public servants. A convenience sample of midcareer practitioners as well as those in graduate-level Master of Public Administration (MPA) classes is appropriate for an exploratory study such as ours. We targeted public servants in front-line service delivery roles, and for this reason, regional and local governments receive greater representation in our data than do central-government workers. Cross-cultural comparisons of emotional labor in public service have not been done, so this research develops the theory beyond its current bounds. The questionnaire was piloted and revised, and data were gathered between February and April 2015 in each country. Respondents self-reported their degree of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements related to display rules, emotional labor, job attitudes, behavioral outcomes, and their organizations, along 7-point Likert-type scales. Demographics were gathered as well. The questionnaire was originally drafted in English and backtranslated by a native speaker

**Table 1.** Constructs, Survey Items, and Alpha Coefficients (East  $n = 592$ , West  $n = 458$ ).

Latent variable and components	Factor loading (East)	Factor loading (West)
Display rules: express (West $\alpha = .8827$ , East $\alpha = .8739$ )		
My employer expects me to express positive emotions to clients/customers as part of my job.	0.7389	0.8255
My employer would say that part of the product for clients/customers is friendly, cheerful service.	0.8762	0.8117
My employer expects me to be enthusiastic in my interactions with clients/customers.	0.8546	0.8376
Deep acting (West $\alpha = .8360$ , East $\alpha = .9058$ )		
I try to actually experience the emotions that I must show at work.	0.8573	0.7004
I work hard to actually feel the emotions that I need to show at work.	0.9041	0.8447
I work at developing the feelings inside of me that I need to show at work.	0.8116	0.7715
Surface acting (West $\alpha = .6639$ , East $\alpha = .6608$ )		
I hide my true feelings so as to appear pleasant at work.	0.7360	0.6301
In my job, I act confident and self-assured regardless of how I actually feel.	0.4818	0.5092
I wear a "mask" to deal with clients/customers in an appropriate way.	0.5978	0.6280
Burnout (West $\alpha = .9067$ , East $\alpha = .9011$ )		
I leave work feeling run down.	0.8668	0.8353
I leave work feeling emotionally exhausted.	0.8718	0.8668
I feel "used up" at the end of the workday.	0.8268	0.8662

for questionnaires administered in China, Korea, and Taiwan (Yang et al., 2018). Sample sizes are China ( $n = 211$ ), Korea ( $n = 208$ ), Taiwan ( $n = 173$ ), United Kingdom ( $n = 204$ ), and the United States ( $n = 254$ ). These sample sizes are appropriate for structural equation modeling (SEM) (Iacobucci, 2010). Latent constructs, validated in prior research, include display rules (express), surface acting, deep acting, and emotional exhaustion. Latent variable factor loadings using confirmatory factor analysis are in Table 1.

Three of four latent variables possess high levels of construct validity for both West and East regions. Lower reliability scores on surface acting mirror problems others have had with this construct: Comparing service workers in the United States and China, Allen et al. (2014) note

Items pertaining to faking emotions had factor loadings close to zero in China, suggesting that . . . faking emotions simply does not translate well . . . the idea of faking emotions

**Table 2.** West Descriptive Statistics (United States and United Kingdom  $n = 458$ ).

Latent variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Display rules: express	5.94	1.02	1	7
Deep acting	4.25	1.36	1	7
Surface acting	4.94	1.21	1	7
Emotional exhaustion (burnout)	4.32	1.54	1	7
Respondent characteristics				
Age (years)	40.08	11.15	20	67
Percent female	62.22	0.49	0	1
Years of public-sector experience	13.20	10.40	0	41

**Table 3.** East Descriptive Statistics (China, Korea, and Taiwan  $n = 592$ ).

Latent variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Express (display rule)	5.95	1.09	1	7
Deep acting	5.37	1.17	1	7
Surface acting	5.19	1.12	1	7
Emotional exhaustion (burnout)	4.28	1.63	1	7
Respondent characteristics				
Age (years)	40.23	9.92	20	73
Percent female	58.78	0.49	0	1
Years of public-sector experience	9.02	7.52	0	35

**Table 4.** East/West Countries Ranked by IDV Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010).

Country	IDV score	Rank
United States	91	1
United Kingdom	89	3
China	20	63
Korea	18	65
Taiwan	17	66

Note. IDV = individualism index.

may be considered grossly inauthentic and potentially conflict evoking in a collectivist culture. (p. 32)

We employ the surface acting construct in our SEM with this shortcoming in mind. Tables 2 and 3 provide descriptive statistics and demographic information for each region. Table 4 ranks all five countries by IDV.



To test whether latent variables can be compared directly between East and West, Yang et al., (2018) finds configural and partial metric invariance, but not scalar invariance: “The fact that scalar invariance is not achieved means that a meaningful comparison of latent *mean* scores . . . across the countries cannot be achieved” (p. 9). Configural and partial metric invariance have been established. *Relationships* among the key constructs (arrows to and from latent variables, and the path coefficients) may be analyzed, but *mean values* of individual key constructs cannot. So, although we cannot compare mean values of the four constructs measured by the latent variables in Tables 2 and 3 due to a lack of scalar invariance (Yang et al., 2018), demographic characteristics may be compared: Respondent groups are similar in age and are majority female, but differ in years of public-sector experience. Whereas respondents in collectivist cultures average 9 years of public-sector experience, those in individualist countries have worked in the public sector for 13 years, however, the 4-year difference is less than one standard deviation. Multivariate ANOVA indicates that respondent demographics do not explain variations in emotional exhaustion. See the appendix for detail on this multivariate analysis. To capture the complex web of relationships among these constructs and test hypotheses about them, we turn to SEM.

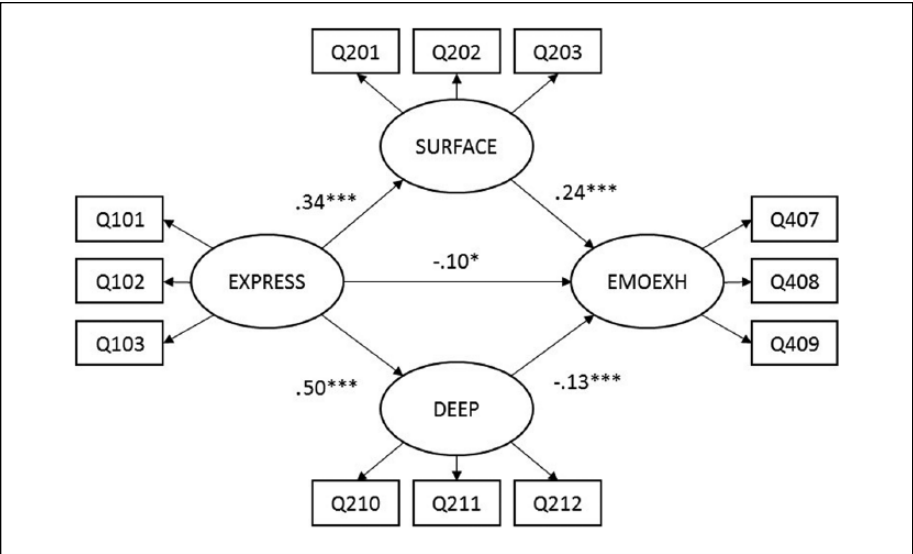
Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) rank dozens of countries along several dimensions of national culture, including the extent to which cultures are predominantly individualistic (independent self-construal) or collectivist (interdependent self-construal). Individualism–collectivism (IDV) scores range from 91 (most individualist) to 6 (most collectivist).

Of 76 countries, the United States and the United Kingdom are ranked first and third, and are the most individualist countries in their regions. Gualmini (2008) likens governments in individualist countries to private-sector, market-based organizations and notes that “the US and UK bureaucracies generally tend to be the closest to the entrepreneurial model” (p. 86). Public servants in these cultures are expected to face substantial emotional labor demands, given their entrepreneurialism and NPM reforms. China, Korea, and Taiwan are three of the most collectivist countries in the Asian region. NPM reforms in East Asia

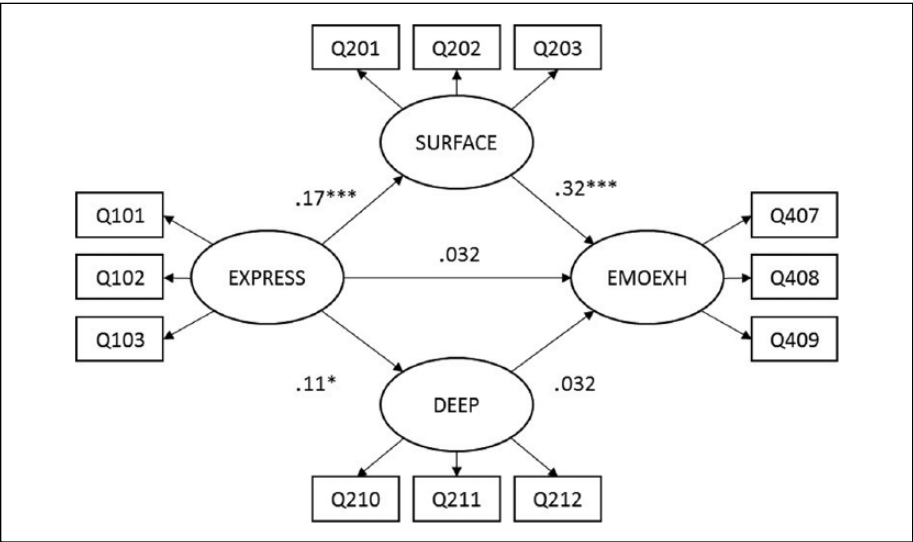
share a common Confucian heritage of administrative culture . . . [that] has sustained a paternalist form of pro-state or even “statist” practice, supported by politics/administration fusion with the bureaucratic elites playing a key policymaking role, quite distinct from the modern liberal democratic practice of politics/administration separation. (A. B. L. Cheung, 2012, p. 211)

Although market-based reforms have been held at arm’s length in East Asian countries and, therefore, the citizen-as-customer ethos is less evident than in individualist countries, emotional labor remains a key aspect of public-sector service delivery in the West.

Comparing results from path analysis between SEMs in East and West test our hypotheses. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate results from maximum-likelihood estimation of our mediated model. SEMs are estimated as a single model with separate path coefficients produced for East and West.



**Figure 1.** Results of path analysis, East ( $n = 545$ , standardized path coefficients).  
Note. Statistically different from zero at the \*10%, \*\*5%, and \*\*\*1% levels.



**Figure 2.** Results of path analysis, West ( $n = 431$ , standardized path coefficients).  
Note. Statistically different from zero at the \*10%, \*\*5%, and \*\*\*1% levels.

In Figure 1, express has a small (0.10), negative (denoted by the sign on the path coefficient), and statistically significant (\*) direct effect on emotional exhaustion. Express has a direct impact on emotional exhaustion (Grandey, Rupp, & Brice, 2015) independent of the effects of surface or deep acting. We compare this direct effect with mediated effects through surface and deep acting. Express has large (0.50), positive (+), and statistically significant (\*\*\*) effects on deep acting in collectivist cultures. Express has a moderate (0.34), positive, and statistically significant effect on surface acting. In collectivist cultures, display rules mediated by both surface and deep acting have small effects on emotional exhaustion (0.24 and  $-0.13$ , respectively) and both are statistically different from zero. Importantly, deep acting *reduces* emotional exhaustion among respondents in the East, consistent with prior research (Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011). We rely on Suhr's (2006) definitions of large ( $\geq 0.50$ ), moderate ( $\geq 0.30$ ), and small ( $\geq 0.10$ ) effects of standardized path coefficients. Figure 2 shows results for respondents in individualist cultures.

In Figure 2, express has a small (0.032) and positive direct effect on emotional exhaustion, but this result is not statistically significant. Comparing this direct effect with the mediated effects, express has small (0.17), positive, and statistically significant effects on surface acting and small (0.11), positive, and statistically significant effects on deep acting among public servants in individualist cultures. In turn, surface acting has a moderate (0.32), positive, and statistically significant effect on emotional exhaustion. Responses to display rules are positive and statistically different from zero in both East and West. Magnitudes of positive effects are greater in East in both instances: Express to surface acting is twice as large in collectivist cultures ( $0.34 > 0.17$ ) and express to deep acting is nearly 5 times as large in collectivist cultures ( $0.50 > 0.11$ ). The effect of surface acting on emotional exhaustion is less in the East (0.24) than the West (0.32). Whereas the relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion is not statistically different from zero in the West (0.032), it is negative and statistically significant at the 1% level in the East ( $-0.13$ ). Finally, whereas the direct effect of express on emotional exhaustion is positive in individualist countries (but not statistically significant), this direct effect is negative and statistically significant in collectivist countries. In both East and West, most of the effect of express is explained by the mediating roles of deep and surface acting.

Next, we test whether it is appropriate to run East and West in a single model, and, thus, assume that the structure of the error terms is equal across groups. Parameter invariance tests are run for each constraint; and, statistically significant chi-square statistics on individual constraints reject the claim that the constraint is valid. Of the 12 parameter constraints in the measurement model—three observed variables for each of four latent constructs—only three achieve statistical significance. When all constraints are relaxed, the model fails to converge; so, we interpret these results as supporting parameter invariance. In other words, the choice to run East and West in a single model rather than in two separate models is valid.

Moreover, we may compare path coefficients in Figures 1 and 2, because both configural invariance and partial metric invariance are achieved. Using multigroup

confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA), Yang (n.d.) determines whether measurement invariance for the constructs of interest exist across countries. The models test whether the data demonstrate configural, full, or partial metric, and scalar invariance. That is, does deep acting mean the same thing in the United States as it does in China? Recall that Yang finds configural and partial metric invariance but not scalar invariance, so relationships between key constructs—arrows to and from latent variables, and the paths' coefficients—may be analyzed, but mean values cannot. Results from hypothesis tests follow.

## Hypothesis Testing

Comparing path coefficients between Figures 1 and 2, the first null hypothesis is rejected: Differences exist between respondents in collectivist and individualist cultures. Emotional labor via surface acting leads to burnout less so in collectivist cultures than individualistic cultures. Emotional labor via deep acting lowers the incidence of burnout in collectivist cultures. Emotional labor is less stressful and less costly to individuals in collectivist cultures. Allen et al. (2014) speculate, "Perhaps culture is the 'third variable' that explains the lack of previous support in Western samples for the display rule to deep acting to burnout relationship" (p. 32). Eid and Diener's (2001) "results confirm the role of Taiwan as a nation that is historically and philosophically strongly linked to China but now is more oriented to individualistic values" (p. 884). Our results are not consistent with this interpretation, however. Estimating by each country individually, we find results from Taiwan to mirror China and not the United States in terms of respondents' reactions to display rules. The difference may be sector: In Taiwan, public-sector employees may conform to traditional Chinese attitudes toward government, whereas private-sector employees are more heavily influenced by individualistic trading partners and traditions.

Comparing goodness-of-fit statistics between Figures 1 and 2, we reject the second null hypothesis: Models in both cultural contexts fit similarly well, suggesting that models can be applied across cultural contexts. Model-level squared root mean residual (SRMR) statistics indicate that Western models fit somewhat better than Eastern when models are run both regionally and by country, which stands to reason, given that the models were developed initially with North American samples. SEM lends itself to these comparisons and confirms that collectivist cultures experience emotional labor differently than those in individualistic cultures.

We do not reject the third null hypothesis, but it may be that the hypothesis should have been stated differently. Individuals in collectivist cultures may be more *responsive* to display rules than are those in individualist cultures. Allen et al. (2014) focus on the *delivery* of display rule norms, whereas we focus on the *receipt* of display rule norms. Allen et al. (2014) hypothesize that workers in collectivist cultures would not need to be reminded of work-related display rules due to ongoing, day-to-day emotion regulation to preserving social harmony. Workers in individualist cultures, by contrast, require more display-rule reminders. We find the opposite: Individuals in collectivist cultures are more sensitive to display rules; reactions range from 2 to 5 times greater

than in individualist countries. Although Eastern respondents may not need to be reminded of work-based display rules, display rules, nonetheless, exist and individuals in the East *respond* to them—take them seriously—to a much greater degree than do their counterparts in the West. The cultural emphasis on authentic, felt emotions in the West may lead respondents to give lesser importance to work-based display rules, or rules may be more muted from the outset. Matsumoto (1990) distinguishes *interpretations* of display rules by culture from *behaviors* in response to display rules. He finds no difference in the interpretation of display rules between Japanese and American respondents. However, he suspects he might have arrived at a different result had he focused on behavioral outcomes, as we have: “If subjects were asked to tell us what they would show on their face if they actually felt those emotions (behavioral response), different results might have been obtained” (Matsumoto, 1990, p. 212). To test the robustness of the results in Figures 1 and 2, we estimate a country fixed-effects model and find only the coefficient on the indicator variable for China to be statistically significant when the United States is the reference category. None of the other country dummies are statistically significant, however, suggesting that the East/West differences found in reactions to surface and deep acting are not explained by individual country characteristics, but rather, by the broader East/West regions. Finally, comparing different model specifications reveals the best performing model (Kline, 2010) via modification indices, which recommend three approaches to increasing goodness-of-fit statistics:

1. allow errors between deep acting and surface acting to covary,
2. add a path from deep acting to surface acting, and
3. add a path from surface acting to deep acting.

Figures 1 and 2 show results from estimating Model A. Table 5 provides goodness-of-fit statistics for Model A and three variations: Models B, C, and D specified according to the modification indices above. Model B reduces chi-square, SRMR, and the coefficient of determination (“CD,” last column) slightly; Model C improves chi-square as well, but other goodness-of-fit indicators are almost identical. Model D, in comparison, offers a compelling improvement to SRMR in the East results. However, this result is likely a statistical artifact driven by the reduction of model variables from four to three, with the resulting reduction in model complexity expected to result in less overall residual variance. Furthermore, alternative model selection should not only improve goodness-of-fit statistics but also be theoretically sound, and in the specific case of emotional labor, simply dropping surface acting has no theoretical basis, as the established model is robust, and in the both East and West, the latent construction proves to have statistical significance as expected theoretically. Otherwise stated, although alternative modeling allows for specifying a model with fewer constructs for testing purposes, to adopt such a model is not simply atheoretical, but antitheoretical.

Model A, therefore, performs just as well as its alternatives, it is more parsimonious, its structure comports with theory, and its explanatory power remains high. Retaining Model A is justified on the basis of specification, identifiability,

**Table 5.** Structural Model Comparisons.

Model	Specification		<i>n</i>	SRMR	CD
A	Four-factor measurement model (EXP, DEEP, SURF, EMOEX) w/path from EXP to EMOEX Ungrouped $\chi^2(df = 117)$ for the model = 680.97***	East	545	0.097	0.899
		West	431	0.061	0.887
B	Four-factor measurement model (EXP, DEEP, SURF, EMOEX) w/COV between DEEP and SURF Ungrouped $\chi^2(df = 117)$ for the model = 654.11***	East	545	0.090	0.899
		West	431	0.057	0.886
C	Four-factor measurement model (EXP, DEEP, SURF, EMOEX) w/path from DEEP to SURF Ungrouped $\chi^2(df = 117)$ for the model = 649.55***	East	545	0.090	0.900
		West	431	0.054	0.886
D	Three-factor measurement model (EXP, DEEP, EMOEX) Ungrouped $\chi^2(df = 117)$ for the model = 654.11***	East	545	0.030	0.899
		West	431	0.057	0.886

Note. SRMR = squared root mean residual; CD = coefficient of determination; EXP = display rules: express; DEEP = deep acting; SURF = surface acting; EMOEX = emotional exhaustion (burnout); COV = covariance.

and explanatory power. In group modeled SEM, fewer postestimation goodness-of-fit statistics are available for comparison, and researchers must examine underlying structures of path and measurement models. Despite gains in chi-square, Models B and C lack theoretical bases, and Kline (2010) warns against chasing fit statistics by adding paths. Models become overidentified and SEM loses analytic significance when models are selected by fit without prior theoretical justification, likewise when chasing higher  $R^2$  statistics in ordinary least squares regression.

## Discussion of Results and Directions for Further Research

We find that emotional labor is less stressful and less costly to public servants in collectivist cultures than individualist cultures, confirming that the consequences of emotional labor do, indeed, vary by culture (Butler et al., 2007). These results suggest a number of practical solutions for public-sector managers to motivate employees. First, management could shape the culture of their agencies by emphasizing the collective nature of public service. Second, our results confirm the well-established sequence from display rules to surface acting to burnout as well as the role of deep acting to not increase the likelihood of burnout. Public-sector managers could instill a strong sense of organizational commitment among public servants to increase the use of deep acting rather than surface acting in their encounters with citizens and clients (Balfour & Weschler, 1996). Strengthened psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1989) could bring about this effect as well. Third, the “How” of emotional regulation in collectivist cultures is presumed to result from the cultivation and maintenance of harmony, but is this a Western understanding of harmony as uniformity? Sundarajan (2013) characterizes this as typical of the “either-or, dualistic thinking in the West” (p. 25). Research

into the processes of maintaining harmony and restoring social balance would allow greater understanding of these dynamics. We also find that collectivist cultures experience emotional labor in a manner that can be successfully modeled using the framework first established in individualistic, Western nations. Public-sector workers differ from the private-sector workers examined by Allen et al. (2014), who find poor fit among Eastern workers, whereas we found the fit adequate. Further research could compare private- and public-sector workers across cultures, as well.

### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

Our conclusions are insightful, but not without limitations. First, all latent constructs were created using data gathered at a point in time and using the same questionnaire, making common method bias a concern. Both latent and observed variables possess discriminant validity, which is one approach to mitigating common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Systematic measurement error would provide a rival explanation for the variance between East and West. We employ scales that have been tested and verified in prior research, and we have no reason to anticipate widespread measurement error. Second, surface acting demonstrates reliability problems, due to measurement, language, or the concept itself. Future research should address these issues through qualitative research asking public servants in different cultures how faking emotions is understood. Third, cultural variables underlie country-level differences, but diversity among individuals is found throughout:

Cross-cultural researchers need to consider not only average cultural differences but also the variability within cultures. China . . . shows a large variety in norm types . . . this might be a sign that there is a movement to more diversity. (Eid & Diener, 2001, pp. 879-880)

Newnham (2017) concurs: “Studies that rely on generalized descriptions of national culture, specifically individualism and collectivism, fail to take into account cultural heterogeneity within societies and consequently, the value of their findings may be limited” (p. 208). In-depth, country-specific research would address the “how” of emotional labor and reveal intersections across cultures within countries. Fourth, use of convenience samples threatens external validity.

Fifth and finally, given the varying origins of NPM reforms worldwide, how might the status of government workers affect emotional labor? Status differences are found to affect the perception of emotions, emotional expression, and interpretations of display rules (Matsumoto, 1990), all of which shape the experience of emotional labor. Status differences define the limits within which public servants may express their emotions beyond work-based display rules. Our study is a first step toward a broader understanding of emotions in public-sector organizations, but an important one as cross-cultural comparisons have not been done to date, and emotional labor as a social phenomenon is shaped by culture.

## Appendix

### Multivariate ANOVA

Results from multivariate ANOVA confirm that respondent demographics do not explain variations in emotional exhaustion (burnout). This allows us to employ structural equation modeling (SEM) for the purpose of capturing the complex relationships between latent constructs, and configural and partial metric invariance allows us to compare those relationships between groups of respondents, in this case, East and West. Table A1 below shows that the effects of sex and educational attainment on emotional exhaustion (the dependent variable) are statistically no different from zero. Only surface acting is significant at the 1% level. The effect of surface acting is positively and significantly related to emotional exhaustion, which is the “robust sequence” (Eid & Diener, 2001) established in the emotional labor literature. The model does a poor job of explaining the variation in emotional exhaustion: These explanatory variables capture only 6.5% of the variation in emotional exhaustion. The poor fit of the model and the absence of explanatory power of any of the independent variables allows us to pursue a different method to capture the relationships among surface and deep acting, emotional exhaustion, and culture.

**Table A1.** Results From Multivariate ANOVA: Emotional Exhaustion =  $f(\text{Educational Attainment, Sex, Surface Acting, Deep Acting, Culture, Display Rules [Express]})$ .

Independent variable	Effect on Y (SE)	M (SD)
Display rules (express)	-0.052 (0.051)	5.948 (1.060)
Surface acting	0.300*** (0.044)	5.083 (1.164)
Deep acting	-0.052 (0.042)	4.881 (1.374)
East	0.142 (0.150)	0.564 (0.496)
Female	0.074 (0.100)	0.603 (0.490)
High school or less	-0.693* (0.357)	0.198 (0.399)
Some college	-0.167 (0.352)	0.249 (0.432)
College degree	0.042 (0.352)	0.209 (0.406)
Graduate degree	-0.062 (0.354)	0.321 (0.467)
Constant	3.407*** (0.475)	

(continued)



**Table A1. (Continued)**

Independent variable	Effect on Y (SE)	M (SD)
Number of observations	1,022	
Model F	7.82***	
(p)	(.00)	
R <sup>2</sup>	.0650	
(Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> )	(.0567)	

Note. Statistically different from zero at the \*10%, \*\*5%, and \*\*\*1% levels.

The following variables are index variables (latent constructs) measured as combinations of at least three survey items on a 7-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*: emotional exhaustion, display rules, surface acting, deep acting. The following variables are dichotomous (0/1, no/yes): East, female, educational attainment. Emotional exhaustion,  $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ .


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