Journal of Vocational Behavior 76 (2010) 105–117

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Vocational Behavior

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jvb

The impact of emotional labor on work–family outcomes

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 15 April 2009
Available online 18 May 2009

Keywords:
Work–family conflict
Work–family enrichment
Emotions
Emotional labor

ABSTRACT

Theory and research on emotional labor at work is applied to the study of the work–family interface to explore how emotional experiences in both the work and the family domain relate to the experience of work–family conflict and work–family enrichment, and ultimately attitudinal and health outcomes. Emotional intelligence is also examined as a moderator of the relationship between emotional labor and affective responses to work and family life. A model focusing on emotional experiences in the both the work and family domains is proposed and tested using path analysis. Results indicate that emotional labor in both the work and family domains relate to affective responses to each respective domain, which in turn relates to work–family conflict and work–family enrichment. In turn, consistent with previous research work–family conflict relates to domain-specific satisfaction (job, life) and health outcomes (burnout, depression). Partial support was found for the proposed moderating effect of emotional intelligence.

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1. Introduction

There is increasing scholarly and practitioner interest in the relationship between work and family life (see Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). This is due in part to shifting demographics, including more working women, dual-career couples, and single parent families (Jalilvand, 2000; Major & Germano, 2006; Richie, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Given these changes in family structure, more employees report difficulty juggling responsibilities in the two most important domains of life for adults: work and family (Grzywacz, Frone, Brewer, & Kovner, 2006; Major & Germano, 2006). Scholars have responded with increasing research on the work–family interface.

Research on work and family has examined a wide range of issues such as work–family conflict (e.g., Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992a; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992b; Thomas & Ganster, 1995), the effect of work role stress on family functioning (e.g., Barling, Dupree, & Hepburn, 1998) and work–family support and assistance (e.g., Allen, 2001). There is also increasing recognition that work–family interactions relate to important health outcomes such as work role stress, psychological distress, and physical health complaints (see Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). More recently, research has focused on the positive aspects of work and family interactions (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Although researchers have extensively studied the work–family interface, there are several gaps in the existing literature. While research on the emotional experience of work and family life is starting to accumulate (Eby, Maher, & Butts, in press), the primary focus is on the negative aspects of the work–family interface (e.g., Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; William & Alliger, 1994; Williams, Suls, Alliger, Learner, & Wan, 1991). Moreover, much of the existing research has explored intra-individual differences in emotional experience (e.g., Judge et al., 2006; William & Alliger, 1994; Williams et al., 1991) and not considered domain-specific satisfaction or health outcomes in relation to specific emotional experiences (e.g., Rothbard,

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doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2009.05.001

2001; William & Alliger, 1994; Williams et al., 1991). This is curious since there is increasing awareness that emotions are important in understanding organizational behavior, emotional expression is a significant component of both work and family life, and emotions can influence health outcomes (Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000; Salovey, Detweiler, Steward, & Rothman, 2000). The limited literature linking emotions with the positive aspects of work–family interactions is also surprising since experiences in the family are a major source of happiness and emotional well-being (see Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Another gap is that emotional intelligence has not been examined in the work–family literature even though the ability to regulate, appropriately express, and manage one's emotions is logically related to effective functioning within the family domain, just as it is within the work domain (Giardini & Frese, 2006).

The present study addresses these gaps in the literature by integrating the literature on emotions, work–family conflict, and work–family enrichment to propose a process-oriented model to explain how emotional experiences at work and in the family relate to a wide range of attitudinal and health outcomes. Given the central role of emotions in the present study, we use the construct of emotional labor as the theoretical underpinning. Emotional labor refers to the act of expressing feelings and emotions in ways that are considered appropriate for a particular role (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) and has been examined in relation to *display rules* associated with various jobs, particularly those in the service sector (Hochschild, 1983). We extend the construct of emotional labor to the family domain by arguing that there are also display rules, or expected behaviors, in the family which can create another form of emotional labor for role occupants. This responds directly to Judge and colleagues question, "...do individuals perceive such display rules at work and *at home*, and how do these rules relate to emotions..." (Judge et al., 2006, p. 805, emphasis added).

2. Overview of research on emotional labor

Hochschild's (1979, 1983) research was the first to identify emotional labor as the behaviors required by those working in the service industry; specifically, the necessity of regulating one's emotional expression to fit the requirements of service-related interactions. From an organizational standpoint, it is often assumed that requiring employees to express positive emotions will increase organizational profits. However, research indicates that there are mixed or at times even negative results associated with requiring employees to display certain service-oriented behaviors (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989), perhaps because sometimes the emotions required by these interactions are not genuinely experienced by the role occupant.

As research on emotional labor evolved, it began to include other organizational behaviors in addition to those of service-oriented professions and a model has emerged that more precisely delineates the how and why emotional labor may occur (Grandey, 2000). By incorporating emotional regulation theory and research (see Gross, 1998a, 1998b), this model presents emotional labor as an emotional regulatory process, which includes antecedents of emotional labor, the emotional labor itself, and the long-term consequences of emotional labor. In Grandey's (2000) model, the antecedents of emotional labor include situational cues in the work environment such as interaction expectations and emotional events. Interaction expectations are defined as the frequency, duration, variety, and emotional display rules that characterize the interaction between employee and client. The emotional display rules required differ from job to job. For example, flight attendants should be calm and attentive to passengers whereas trial lawyers should be assertive, combative, and confident.

2.1. Dimensionality of the emotional labor construct

Emotional labor has two distinct dimensions. *Surface acting* occurs when individuals manage their *observable expressions*. It involves response modulation whereby an individual may feel a particular response to a situation but rather than reveal it, they alter their emotional expression or reaction to the situation so that it reflects another, more organizationally acceptable or required emotion. This is the revising of emotional expression via faking or by using facial and bodily signs of emotion (Grandey, 2000). For example, a customer service representative may have to act concerned and empathetic with an irate customer even though s/he actually feels as if the customer is over-reacting and being rude. In contrast, *deep acting* occurs when individuals regulate their *true feelings* or change their *appraisal* of the situation. It involves attentional deployment, where the events that triggered a particular emotional reaction are recalled when that emotion is required in a new situation. It also involves cognitive change, whereby the situation is reappraised to decrease its emotional impact. An example is telling flight attendants to re-imagine that difficult airline passengers are children, making it easier to develop the necessary emotional response to deal with them (Grandey, 2000).

Interestingly, negative outcomes are typically associated with surface acting, whereas deep acting can lead to positive outcomes. For example, several studies find that as surface acting increases so does burnout, suggesting that there is emotional strain involved in masking one's true feelings (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). However, greater use of deep acting is related to role identification (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003), feelings of personal accomplishment (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), less burnout (Grandey, 2003), and greater service performance (Totterdell & Holman, 2003), suggesting that adjusting one's emotions to be congruent with what is felt and displayed can result in positive outcomes. One explanation for these differential effects might be the distinction between effects of emotional dissonance and emotional congruence. When engaging in surface acting, individuals use the emotional regulatory strategy of response modulation, or faking emotional expression. This can create a dissonance between felt and expressed emotion (see Hochschild, 1983). In contrast, when engaging in deep acting individuals employ emotional regulatory strategies that reduce the

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