

## Emotional Labor and Creativity: Testing a Moderated-Mediated Model in Banking Sector

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### Abstract

*Emotions and organizations' are inseparable. Keeping in view this important perspective the study intends to inspect the impact of emotional labor strategies which are surface acting and deep acting on employees' creativity with emotional exhaustion as a mediator. Since, Pakistan is thought of as a country having masculine culture, thus the study attempts to investigate the role of masculinity as moderator between surface acting and emotional exhaustion relations as well deep acting and emotional exhaustion relations. Step-wise Hierarchical regression revealed negative connection concerning surface acting-employee creativity relation as well positive connection between deep acting and employees' creativity. Moreover, the mediated role of emotional exhaustion is confirmed in both surface acting-employees' creativity and deep acting-employees' creativity relations. Contrary to expectations, masculinity did not serve to moderate any proposed relation that is between surface acting and emotional exhaustion as well deep acting and emotional exhaustion relations. The implications of the study are discussed.*

**Key Words:** Emotional Labor, Emotional Exhaustion, Creativity, Masculinity

### Introduction

Previous numerous years witnessed the significance of feelings/emotions at the work (Hochschild, 1983). Indeed, emotions and organizations are inseparable as it is impracticable to provide emotion-free workplaces, thus organizations' needs to take appropriate measures to enhance organizations' image by projecting appropriate emotions. In view of the fact that emotions impact how employees perform their roles thus expression of positive or negative emotions can affect their ability to perform. In this context organizations' need to ensure proper display of

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appropriate emotions as service providers represents the organizations. No doubt, employees require energy to display emotions required by the organizations' and this form of labor is referred to as emotional labor. The conception of emotional labor was first presented by Hochschild (1983) who referred it as regulation of emotions and expressions as part of work life.

Since proper display of emotions is highly desired by organizations as service providers are the only connection between customers as well organizations. Moreover, the rapidly changing complex as well as competitive environment necessitates organizations to spot and meet complex business requirements with the help of emotionally managed as well creative employees. Since creative workers' are becoming incredibly important for organizations (Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997) in same context extant research too stressed and affirmed the impact of emotions on employee creativity (Fredrikson& Joiner, 2002) as idea creation and performing emotional labor both require huge effort thus compete for scarce cognitive resources of employees (Muraven&Baumeister, 2000). Drawings on theoretical justifications of Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resource (COR) theory; employees' have limited cognitive resources. Then in situations where workers' do not handle self as well as others' emotions, emotional exhaustion occur (Copp, 1998). Besides when emotional labor is performed regularly workers' becomes emotionally exhausted (Mashlach, 1982). This situation becomes worse in masculine cultural context. As culture particular standards concerning when and how emotions need to be displayed also have immense impact (Mann, 1997).

The previous literature reaches out the fact that minimal theoretical as well empirical investigation of emotional labor on creativity with mediated mechanism of emotional exhaustion has been carried out. Though recurrent emotional regulation is innately stressful during service encounters thus causes emotional exhaustion. In this perspective, numerous studies have been carried out on service providers (Zhang & Zhu, 2008) yet banking sector is ignored. Meanwhile the past research failed to address comprehensively the connection between emotional labor strategies and creativity of front line female service providers of banking sector of Pakistan. As this pertinent relation holds importance in Pakistani context which is masculine, where female service providers not only have to deal with challenging customers, they also have to comply with display rules requirements. By suppressing negative emotions or expressing positive emotions while performing their services they may undergo emotional dissonance. Thus the current

study is going to explore whether frontline female employees' emotional labor (banking sector) differs across masculine cultures.

### **Literature review**

#### *Emotional labor & creativity*

Front-line service providers deliver services which ultimately contribute to customer satisfaction as well organizational performance. Successful delivery of services further relies on how capable and creative the service providers are to work effectively. Creativity is vital for organizations as they need to remain competitive and to serve this purpose they need creative as well adaptive workers. Rapidly changing complex environment not only requires workers to do their job but to do it creatively. Creativity has been referred to as "producing novel as well useful ideas" (George & Zhou, 2002). But it is not just a straight forward process to generate new ideas easily it is obviously complex as it involves an optimal mix of rational, social as well as emotional processes (Easterby-Smith, Crossan & Niccolini, 2000). In similar vein, Fenwick (2003) demonstrated vital role of emotions regarding employees' willingness to generate new ideas. Numerous studies inspected the role of emotions influencing creativity. Prior research evidenced that positive emotions can facilitate problem solving as well promotes divergent thinking (Hirt, Devers & McCrea, 2008).

From the perspective of emotional labor-creativity relation Frederickson (1998) argued that positive emotions widen the range of attention as well cognition. Furthermore, individuals' perceive positive emotions as a state to explore more allowing minds to turn out to be more creative (Frederickson, 2001) generating new, creative as well un-descriptive paths of thought as well action (Frederickson, 1998). However, inverse will be in another case. In emotional labor context, as contended earlier that employees who act at surface need plenty of cognitive resources to deploy which may impair employees' cognitive performance (Richard & Gross, 2000). In similar connection the theoretical underpinning of conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 1989) supports that in an effort to monitor oneself on continuous basis consumes enough resources that may harm surface actors' creativity. Contrarily, deep actors do not need to manage as well monitor their emotional display as they are better at bringing into line their inner feelings and emotions with outer emotions (Groth, Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2009). Additionally, deep acting entails positive emotions which may bring positive work related outcomes like creative ideas (Grandey, 2003). The previous existing literature did not focus to address the

association between emotional labor strategies as well employee creativity hence the present study theoretically as well empirically contributes to inspect the connection between them.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Surface acting impacts negatively on employee creativity.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Deep acting impacts positively on employee creativity.

#### *Emotional Exhaustion As Mediator*

A frontline service provider is an employee who builds, manages and maintains good customer relations by directly interacting with the customers (Miao & Evans, 2013). Thus, managing service providers' emotional reactions is critical for organizations. However, front line service providers' less like interacting with customers; indeed they attribute it with adverse emotional state causing emotional stress (Dormann & Zapf, 2004). In fact, the way service providers' exhibit their emotions is significant aspect concerning customers' evaluation of an organization. Thus managing and regulating emotions is highly important for service providers. As they are required to display emotions in well controlled and organized manner (Wharton, 1993). In doing so they may experience emotional dissonance which generally depletes their emotional resources.

In similar context when front line service providers' perform emotional labor by engaging in strategies contributes to have differential impact on work-related outcomes like employees' creativity. For instance, as evidenced by Richards and Gross (2000) acting at surface requires additional effort and cognitive resources which may harm workers' (surface actors) cognitive performance. Similarly, as per conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 1989) continual self-monitoring as well self-correction necessitate extra effort thus resources are consumed at higher level which damage surface actors' (employees) creativity. On contrary, deep actors' felt and displayed emotions are aligned so they do not need monitoring or emotional regulation (Groth, Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2009). These positive emotions helps in bringing fruitful outcomes such as creative ideas (Grandey, 2003). Thus emotional exhaustion can mediate the connection between emotional labor strategies and employee creativity. Hence, the stated arguments speaks about the facts in hypothesizing that:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** The relation between surface acting and employee creativity can be mediated by emotional exhaustion.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** The relation between deep acting and employee creativity can be mediated by emotional exhaustion.

*Masculinity As Moderator*

Culture matters as emotional labor is culture bound (Fischbach, 2008). However there exists universality regarding many emotions related processes even though there exists cultural differences relating to emotion regulation processes, psychological as well as behavioral reactions (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). Moreover, cross cultural research has confirmed differences concerning work related values and attitudes across countries. Previous research in this regard suggested the impact of culture on work outcomes (Dickson, Den-Hartog & Mitchelson, 2003). Specifically, Shani et al., (2014) explored the impact of contextual, cultural factors on emotional labor and confirmed the impact of culture/context. Thus organizations' needs to provide inclusive work environment where workers' display deeply felt, authentic emotions.

In addition to this, emotional labor is also profession bound. Certain professions are labeled to exhibit more emotional labor like nursing and caring as these jobs are highly gender segregated (Guy & Newman, 2004). In similar connection Fabes and Martin (1991) demonstrated that women while displaying fake emotions experience more emotional exhaustion than men. This notion is further supported and confirmed by Kruml and Geddes (2000). Lately, Johnson & Spector (2007) also established that engaging in surface acting is more disadvantageous for women than men. However, it has been also confirmed that women are better at engaging in deep acting than men as they fabricate genuine smiles (Merton, 1997). Thus on above provided arguments we may hypothesize that masculinity moderates the relation between emotional labor strategies and emotional exhaustion:

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Masculinity moderates the relation between surface acting and emotional exhaustion of front line female workers.

**H<sub>6</sub>:** Masculinity moderates the relation between deep acting and emotional exhaustion front line female workers.

**Methodology***Participants & Procedure*

Emotional labor conception has been seen as tremendously relevant as well applicable to various customer service providing occupations (Soares, 2003) mainly in the banking sector. Thus the target population for the current study was front-line female service providers of banking sector of Pakistan. It is for sure that frontline female service providers in banks come across difficult as well demanding customers. But banks' desired display rules requires them to be polite as well kind to customers thus may experience emotional dissonance. In banking sector, frontline

service providers are required to perform their role in right and desired way. So, selection of target population seems relevant. The sample of current study was only frontline females of banking sector of Pakistan. Non-probability sampling technique was adapted to select sample which were about 500. As the study intended to capture the responses of only frontline as well females working in different banks of Pakistan, thus purposive sampling technique was used to select appropriate sample.

The data was collected in two stages to lessen issues relating to common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). First of all, the Human Resource Department of selected banks were formally approached. To serve this purpose, a prior meeting was arranged with the HR Head of respective banks. They were explained in detail purpose of conducting research. Moreover, they were guaranteed that data would be only used for research purposes. After getting formal permission, first contact was made with frontline females' service providers working in their respective banks. A total of around 500 questionnaires were distributed to them to get their responses relating to emotional labor strategies, emotional exhaustion as well as masculinity. The participants' instead of writing their names were encouraged to write last four numbers of their mobile numbers (assigned code). Moreover, respondents' were encouraged to drop their filled responses in a wrapper (provided to them) in a box placed at a central location in their respective banks.

A formal list was maintained regarding employees' codes with the help of HR department of concerned bank to avoid any mistake in matching dyads as employees' creativity component was filled out by their respective heads. Then at stage 2, the concerned heads of female respondents' were approached after six weeks who gave their responses concerning their creativity. The head-employee ratio was 1:5, means 1 head filled out creativity component of their 5 female subordinates. Thus the head participants were 68. A total of about 500 questionnaires were distributed for data collection. 343 questionnaires were received back constituting a response rate of 68%. Out of 343 questionnaires 23 response forms (questionnaires) were rejected because they were unfinished. Thus for conducting data analysis a total of 320 questionnaires were used.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis was carried out. The data for current study was analyzed by conducting stepwise, hierarchical regression analysis. In step 1, control variables were entered (age & tenure). In step 2, surface acting and deep acting were entered. In step 3,

we entered emotional exhaustion. In step 4, we entered masculinity. In step 5, the interactive relationship between surface acting and masculinity for emotional exhaustion was predicted and lastly in step 6, the interactive relationship between deep acting and masculinity for emotional exhaustion was predicted. To avoid issues relating to multicollinearity, the independent variables (surface acting and deep acting) as well as masculinity (moderator) were centered (Aiken & West, 1991).

## Results & Discussion

### *Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

For evaluating distinctiveness of variables confirmatory factor analysis was conducted (table 1). The current study used a combination of several fit indices for evaluating model fitness like root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI) and comparative fit index (CFI). The results of measurement model specified good fit of the model like RMSEA = 0.04 which is less than 0.05 indicating excellent fit (Kline, 2005). Similarly, TLI = 0.95 and CFI = 0.93 indicating model good fit as TLI and CFI > 0.90 confirms a good fit (Hair et al., 1998). Lastly, IFI = 0.96 which is closer to 1 indicates model good fit (Bollen, 1989). Besides, all item loadings from the latent constructs were found to be significant which further confirms convergent validity.

Table 1: Measurement Model

Model	RMSEA	IFI	TLI	CFI
	0.04	0.96	0.95	0.93

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics & Correlation Analysis

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Age	36.89	7.33							
2.Tenure	4.35	3.16	0.55**						
3.Surface Acting	2.21	0.69	0.01	-	(0.90)				
4.Deep Acting	2.52	0.69	0.02	0.04	0.09	(0.92)			
5.Emotional Exhaustion	4.57	0.71	0.04	-	0.15**	-0.13*	(0.95)		
6.Creativity	3.79	0.64	0.02	0.07	-0.11*	0.27**	-	(0.76)	
7.Masculinity	4.69	0.79	-0.01	0.05	0.07*	0.19**	0.21*	-0.24	(0.72)

Each scales' Cronbach's alpha value is in brackets presented diagonally.

\*  $p \leq 0.05$  and \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$

The descriptive statistics entailing mean and standard deviation as well as correlation analysis are shown in table no.2. Surface acting and

emotional exhaustion is positively correlated as  $r = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Similarly surface acting is positively correlated with masculinity as the value of  $r = 0.07$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . On the other hand it is negatively correlated with creativity indicating  $r = -0.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Deep acting correlation with emotional exhaustion is negative ( $r = -0.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and positive correlation with creativity and masculinity ( $r = 0.27$  &  $0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$  respectively). There is negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and creativity as indicated by  $r = -0.35$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and positive correlation with masculinity ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The correlation between creativity and masculinity is also negative ( $r = 0.24$ , ns).

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis

	Creativity			Emotional Exhaustion		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Age	-0.08	-0.07	-0.06	-0.08	-0.07	-
Tenure	0.17*	0.15*		0.10	0.09	0.09
Surface Acting		-	0.13*	-	-	0.11
Deep Acting		0.24**	-0.14	0.34***	0.32**	0.30**
Emotional Exhaustion		0.26***	0.17	0.32**	0.31***	0.28**
Masculinity			0.28**			
SurfaceActing* Masculinity				0.10**	0.20	
DeepActing* Masculinity						0.22
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04					
Δ R <sup>2</sup>		0.09	0.17	0.15	0.18	0.19
		0.05	0.07	0.02	0.03	0.04

The values provided are standardized regression weights

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

For hypotheses testing, hierarchical regression analysis was performed (table 3). H<sub>1</sub> predicted the negative impact of surface acting on employees' creativity was supported ( $B = -0.24$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). H<sub>2</sub> predicted the positive influence of deep acting on employees' creativity was also supported ( $B = 0.26$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). H<sub>3</sub> predicted the mediating role of emotional exhaustion between surface acting and employee creativity was also supported ( $B = 0.28$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ), as the relationship between surface acting and employees' creativity became non-significant ( $B = -$



0.14, ns) when emotional exhaustion was included in the regression model. Similarly,  $H_4$  predicted the mediating mechanism of emotional exhaustion between deep acting and employee creativity was also supported, as the relationship between deep acting and employees' creativity became non-significant ( $B = 0.17$ , ns) when emotional exhaustion was included in the regression model.  $H_5$  proposed and predicted that masculinity moderates the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion was not supported as ( $B = 0.20$ , ns). Similarly,  $H_6$  proposed and predicted that masculinity moderates the relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion was not supported as ( $B = 0.22$ , ns). The moderation results suggested that surface acting as well as deep acting do not interact with masculinity to influence emotional exhaustion.

### **Conclusion& Implications**

The findings revealed satisfactory support for bulk of our hypotheses. The study results depicted negative association between surface acting and employees' creativity as well confirmed positive relation between deep acting and employees' creativity which confirmed  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  of the current study. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion mediated the relation between surface acting-employee creativity as connection between deep acting-employee creativity which further supported  $H_3$  and  $H_4$ . These study results are consistent with previously conducted research studies (Dormann& Zapf, 2004; Grandey, 2003; Groth, Hennig-Thurau& Walsh, 2009; Richards & Gross, 2000). Contrary to expectations masculinity could not serve to moderate any proposed relation neither surface acting-emotional exhaustion nor deep acting-emotional exhaustion, thus  $H_5$  and  $H_6$  are rejected. These study findings suggest that masculinity neither strengthened nor weakened proposed relations. Pakistan is considered as masculine culture country at moderate level (Hofstede, 1984) however masculinity did not serve to moderate proposed relations. This represents distinct theoretical contribution of the current study for banking sector. It shows that the culture of banking sector of Pakistan compels female staff to adhere bank norms and values on priority basis and in doing so they need not to sacrifice national cultural norms and values but banks' culture binds them for compliance. Moreover, the stronger the connection between emotional labor as well societal norms, the greater the probability of workers' to positively internalize their work roles and emotional labor (Ashforth& Humphrey, 1993). Hence, we may say that frontline female staff of banking sector of Pakistan too internalized their work roles as well societal norms consequently bears no cost. In

emerging countries like Pakistan, minute researches comprehensively explored the casual influence of emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting) on employees' creativity. Thus the study supports to expand the literature relating to emotional labor as well creativity with moderated-mediated mechanism where little understanding regarding these facts in Pakistani context exists. Moreover, the results of current study will help banking sector to provide such an inclusive work environment to employees' where employees' need not to alter inner feeling and emotions to confirm display rule requirements. In doing so both (employees-banks) flourish.

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