# An empirical analysis of emotional labour, job satisfaction and job burnout

Smaranda BOGDAN, Cornelia MĂIREAN, Mădălina AVRAM, Otilia STAN<sup>1</sup>

Abstract: The aim of this present study was to examine the link between job satisfaction, emotional labour and job burnout. Specifically, we focused on the relationship between two forms of emotional labour – surface acting and deep acting – and the three dimensions of job burnout – emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Participants in this study (N = 121) completed questionnaires for measuring job burnout, emotional labour and job satisfaction. The results of our study revealed the fact that a greater use of surface acting and deep acting is associated with a higher level of emotional exhaustiveness and depersonalization, whereas a higher level of job satisfaction is associated with a lower level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and more personal accomplishment. Also, the regression analysis showed that job satisfaction is a significant predictor for all forms of job burnout. Results highlight the need to pay attention to not only the clients but also to the job environment in order to mitigate the possible harmful effects of their work.

**Keywords:** burnout, deep acting, surface acting, job satisfaction

#### Introduction

The "burnout" concept was first known as "grassroots", which described a prolonged occupational stress of service for workers. These workers gradually suffered from loss of energy, became overwhelmed from emotional exhaustion and even quit their jobs. This description was given in the mid 1970s by Freudenberger (1974). Later, in 1981, Maslach and Jackson described "burnout" as a condition which is characterized by the loss of a sense of personal accomplishment, exhaustion and a detached attitude toward others. The concept of "burnout" appeared for the first time in human services, which requires face-to-face contact with other people. This definition underlines the importance of interpersonal dynamics as a source of burnout. According to Hasenfeld (1983), the professional in human services needs to maintain the well-being of the individuals with whom they come in contact, by emphasizing or altering their own personal attributes. The concept of burnout was operationalised based on the theoretical framework of Maslach (1982), which divides burnout in three components; depersonalization, the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion describes the state of depletion, loss of energy, debilitation and fatigue. Depersonalization refers to negative and cynical attitudes toward one's consumers or work in general. A reduced sense of personal accomplishment involves negative self-evaluation of one's work with consumers or overall job effectiveness (Stalker

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, « Al. I. Cuza » University, Iasi, Romania

<sup>- (</sup>for correspondence: bogdan smaranda@yahoo.com)

& Harvey 2002; Morse, Salyers, Rollins, Monroe-DeVita, &Pfahler, 2011). In the research literature on burnout, exhaustion is the most widely reported and the most thoroughly analyzed dimension of this syndrome.

Burnout appears from the accumulation of stress that exhausts individuals making them unable to cope with a stressful situation (Galanakis, Stalikas, Kallia, Karagianni, & Karela, 2009; Rupert & Kent, 2007, Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Ahola et al. (2008) said that burnout leads to psychological and physical effort which results in high rates of absenteeism, no matter the individual's type of job. Other burnout side-effects are the following: dissatisfaction, cynicism and turnover (Sethi, Barrier, & King, 1999). Swider and Zimmerman (2010) consider that antecedents of job burnout have been classified into three broad categories: occupational, organizational and individual (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Shirom, 2003). At the organizational level, we can consider the effect of organizations' psychological climate on employees' job burnout (Pretty, McCarthy, & Catano, 1992). Occupational-level predictors of burnout focused on the characteristics of relationships between employee and clients (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Later, quantitative job demands were found to be significant predictors of burnout, whether those demands were interpersonally based or not (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). At the individual-level, demographics have been the primary individual differences used to predict job burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

It is known worldwide the fact that both the individual and job characteristics influence the levels of stress presented by the employees. In particular, researchers suggest relationships between burnout and emotional labour (Tolich, 1993). In the emotional labor literature, the most-often-cited consequences are burnout (Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996) and job dissatisfaction (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Wharton, 1993). Emotional labour is one of the most important job characteristics and it is a relational work. It involves knowing how to manage others' emotions in order to obtain a specific state of mind or course of action. But, besides all that, emotional labour also refers to managing one's own emotions in order to obtain the desired ones from the clients or co-workers (Hochschild, 1983). In order to perform emotional labour, employees need to have relation and communication skills which are essential in dealing with clients and subordinates.

According to Hochschild (1983), there are two central aspects of emotional labour—surface acting and deep acting—that represent processes concerning how employees manage emotions in order to accomplish work role demands. This perspective expands studies that have reduced emotional labour at a state of tension, called emotional dissonance (Abraham, 1998). Surface acting refers to a transformation of the emotional expression without changing the original feelings, whereas deep acting refers to a cognitive change in order to bring the felt emotions in balance with the required emotions (Grandey, 2000). Surface acting corresponds to managing observable emotional expressions in order to comply with display rules, and deep acting corresponds to managing feelings in order to actually feel the

emotion required by the display rules. As surface acting only modifies the apparent expression, the employee is probably going to continue to experience the uncomfortable state of emotional dissonance. On the other hand, deep acting brings the felt emotion in line with the expressed emotion, so this strategy should serve to reduce emotional dissonance. Deep acting is more efficient and beneficial to the employees than surface acting. The choice of deep acting over surface acting is beneficial to the employee because while both forms of emotional labour require effort, surface acting implies more effort as it entails the restraint of the real emotions that the employee is experiencing at that moment (Richards & Gross, 2000).

Cordes and Dougherty (1993) believe that the quantity and frequency of interactions with customers are the major cause of burnout. Maslach (1978) discovered that the employees who were not emotionally charged during the interactions with their customers reported lower levels of emotional exhaustion, than the employees who were emotionally charged. Many researchers have been concerned with the potentially negative impact of emotional labour on service employees (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Totterdell & Homan, 2003). In particular, field research has established a clear association between surface acting and burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), while deep acting has been positively associated with service performance (Grandey, 2003; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). Several researches among different occupational groups have related emotional dissonance to the core dimensions of job burnout, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Bakker & Heuven, 2006; Heuven & Bakker, 2003). In light of the previous research in the field, it can be concluded that although emotional labour seems to be helpful for the accomplishment of organizational goals, it may be damaging for the employees' psychological wellbeing (Gelderena, Konijnb, & Bakker, 2011).

Burnout occurs in nurses working in hospitals, teachers, mental health services, anyone who is stressed, overwhelmed with responsibilities and any individual who exceeds their limits while they pursue their goals and their ideals. Many researchers have questioned why two people, who are working in the same conditions, with the same responsibilities see that only one experiences burnout (Buhler & Land, 2003). One of the possible explanations is pointing to the link between burnout and personality, without excluding the role of the person's work environment (Buhler & Land, 2003). Job satisfaction is one of the most studied variables in relation with different aspects of work climate. It can be defined as "the fulfilment or gratification of certain needs that are associated with one's work" (Hopkins, 1983, pag. 7). It provides an estimation of how an employee feels about his or her job (Spector, 1996). Like emotional labour, job satisfaction has significant consequences. Low levels of job satisfaction have been found to be related to burnout, absenteeism and turnover (Byrd, Cochran, Silverman, & Blount, 2000; Lambert, Edwards, Camp, & Saylor, 2005; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986; Mudor & Tooksoon, 2011).

Regarding the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, most studies showed an inverse relationship between the two variables in the majority of professions (Jackson et al., 1985; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Öncel, Özer, & Efe, 2007): public workers, lawyers, rehabilitation workers, doctors, etc. Elit, Trim, Mand-Bains, Sussman, and Grunfeld (2004) studied job satisfaction, stress and burnout among oncologists and discovered that 26% of doctors experience depersonalization, high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion; they also discovered high levels of burnout and low levels of personal accomplishment.

The main findings of previous studies showed that a high workload and a high level of emotional demands predict emotional exhaustion. Also, researchers believe that the frequency or quantity of interactions is the main cause of burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). The expectations for long interactions with clients and the level of intensity and variety of emotional expressions needed to have also been proposed as defining dimensions of emotional labor and predictors of burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Hochschild's research (1983) also suggested that emotional labor may be predictor of burnout.

## *The present study*

One of the main objectives of the present study was to examine the link between job satisfaction, emotional labour and job burnout. Specifically, in this study we focused on the relationship between the two forms of emotional labour – surface acting and deep acting – and the three dimensions of job burnout – emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. In order to explain the associations between these variables, it can be hypothesized that:

- **H1**: There are significant differences between males and females regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced of personal accomplishment.
- **H2**: There are significant differences between participants with lower levels and higher levels of job satisfaction regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.
- **H3**: There are significant differences between participants with lower levels and higher levels of surface acting regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.
- **H4**: There are significant differences between participants with lower levels and higher levels of deep acting regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.
- **H5**: Job satisfaction, surface acting and deep acting will be significant predictors of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.

#### Method

# **Participants**

The sample of 121 respondents participated in this study, with a mean age of 35.10 (SD=10.29), ranging from 22 to 60 years old. A criterion for participation in the study was that participants must have engaged in a significant amount of customer interaction as a part of their job. The sample was composed of teachers (46.3%), medical staff (32.4%), and bank employees (21.3%). While 18.2 % of the sample is composed of male employees, the remaining 81.8% of the sample is composed of female employees.

#### Measures

Emotional Labour Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998) was used to measure surface and deep acting. Surface acting was measured using three items (alpha 0.52) and refers to modifying and faking expressions. Three items measure deep acting (alpha 0.64) and they tap the extent to which the employee modifies feelings to meet display rules.

Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The MBI is designed to assess the three components of the burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. It contains 22 items with the three mentioned subscales: (a) emotional exhaustion (nine items), (b) depersonalization (five items) and (c) the feeling of personal accomplishment (eight items). The MBI produced three separate scores, one for each of the three subscales. Cronbach alphas for the current sample were 0.87, 0.72, and 0.82, respectively, for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of personal accomplishment.

The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967) is designed to measure an employee's satisfaction with a particular job. We used short version of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. This form consists of 20 items from the long-form MSQ that best represent each of the 20 scales. The questionnaire is arranged in a five point Likert format ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. Cronbach alpha for the current sample was 0.90.

#### Procedure

Data was collected from participants during one session. Participants were informed that they would be participating in a study on the ways in which the characteristics of their job influence and well being. The questionnaires were administered at the work place by the researchers. Participants completed the Emotional Labour Scale, Maslach Burnout Inventory and The Minnesota

Satisfaction Questionnaire. At the beginning of the session, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential. They were instructed to complete the questionnaire anonymously. The importance of answering truthfully was emphasized.

#### Results

## Preliminary analyses

Descriptive statistics for the target study variables and correlations among these variables are presented in Table 1.

	Correlations					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Emotional exhaustion						
2. Depersonalization	.714**					
3. Feeling of personal accomplishment	.390**	.397**				
4. Surface acting	.206*	.232*	.140			
5. Deep acting	.224*	$.197^{*}$	.141	.404**		
6. Job satisfaction	340**	281**	180*	175	179 <sup>*</sup>	
Mean	21.52	10.23	9.66	8.45	7.41	58.83
SD	11.31	6.14	7.73	1.89	2.41	8.41

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1. Pearson correlations and descriptive statistics for all variables

The study of differences between participant groups

In the first part we proceeded to the investigation of possible differences for the three dependent variables: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of personal accomplishment. We considered gender, level of job satisfaction, deep acting, and surface acting as independent variables.

H1: There are significant differences between male and females regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.

We found no significant differences between men and women regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of personal accomplishment. Hypothesis 1 received no support.

<sup>\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

	Gender			
	Male	Female	T	Df
Emotional exhaustion	19.90	21.87	73	119
Depersonalization	8.50	10.61	-1.46	119
Feeling of personal accomplishment	12.04	9.13	1.60	119

Table 2. T-Test Differences between men and women referring to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of personal accomplishment

H2: There are significant differences between participants with lower levels and higher levels of job satisfaction regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.

We also analyzed the possible differences based on the level of job satisfaction of the participants. We observe that participants with a low level of job satisfaction have a higher level of emotional exhaustion, compared to participants with a high level of job satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 received partial support.

	Level of job satisfaction			
	Low	High	T	Df
Emotional exhaustion	23.70	19.07	2.28*	119
Depersonalization	11.06	9.29	1.58	119
Feeling of personal accomplishment	10.01	9.26	0.53	119
Note: *p<.05, **p<.01				

Table 3. T-Test Differences between participants with low level and high level of job satisfaction referring to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of personal accomplishment

H3: There are significant differences between participants with lower levels and higher levels of surface acting regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.

When we analyzed the differences between participants with a lower level of surface acting and participants with a higher level of surface acting regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of personal accomplishment, we found no significant differences. The results are presented in table 4.

	Level of surface acting			
	Low	High	T	Df
Emotional exhaustion	20.66	22.54	90	119
Depersonalization	9.42	11.20	-1.59	119
Feeling of personal accomplishment	8.81	10.67	-1.31	119

Table 4. T-Test Differences between participants with a low level and high level of surface acting referring to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of personal accomplishment

H4: There are significant differences between participants with lower levels and higher levels of deep acting regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.

Finally, our results revealed that participants with a high level of deep acting have a higher level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Hypothesis 4 received partial support.

	Level of deep acting			
	Low	High	T	Df
Emotional exhaustion	19.31	24.16	-2.39*	119
Depersonalization	9.16	11.50	-2.11*	119
Feeling of personal accomplishment	8.42	11.14	-1.91	119

Table 5. T-Test Differences between participants with a low level and high level of deep acting referring to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of personal accomplishment

## Linear Regressions Analyses

Participants` scores on emotional exhaustion were positively and significantly correlated with surface acting (r = .20, p = .023) and deep acting (r = .22, p = .013). There was also a negative and significant correlation between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (r = -.34, p < .001).

Depersonalization correlated positively and significantly with surface acting (r = .23, p = .011), deep acting (r = .19, p = .030) and negatively and significantly with job satisfaction (r = .28, p = .002).

The feeling of reduced personal accomplishment correlated negatively and significantly with job satisfaction (r = -.18, p = .048).

These results revealed the fact that a greater use of surface acting and deep acting is associated with a higher level of emotional exhaustiveness and depersonalization, whereas a higher level of job satisfaction is associated with a lower level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.

H5: Job satisfaction, surface acting and deep acting will be significant predictors of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment.

Next we conducted three Stepwise Linear Regressions introducing the following variables (on a continuous scale): deep acting, surface acting and job satisfaction. The criterion variables are: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of personal accomplishment.

The influence of Gender was examined on preliminary analysis. Gender was not significantly related with the three forms of job burnout. Therefore, gender was not included in the final analysis.

Surface acting, deep acting and job satisfaction as predictors of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment

Only one variable was a significant predictor for emotional exhaustion: job satisfaction. The model is highly significantly (Adjusted R2=0.10, F (1; 119) =15.58, p<0.01). The model explains a total of 10% of the variance. For depersonalization, there were two significant predictors: job satisfaction and surface acting. The final model (Model 2) is significantly better than the first (Adjusted R2=0.09, F (2; 118) =7.52, p=0.001). For the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment, only job satisfaction had significant predictors. The final model is significantly (Adjusted R2=0.02, F (1; 119) =3.97, p=0.048).

	Job burnout				
Predictor variables	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	The feeling of personal accomplishment		
Surface acting	-	.18*	-		
Deep acting	-	-	-		
Job satisfaction	34**	24*	18*		

Note: The tabled values are standardized coefficients from a simultaneous regression analysis.

Table 6. Predictors of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the emotional labour process, job satisfaction and the job burnout. Specifically, in this study we focused on the relationship between the two forms of emotional labor-surface acting and deep acting- and the three dimensions of job burnout- emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

Among the more notable findings is the role of job satisfaction as a significant predictor of the three outcome variables, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the feeling of personal accomplishment. Our results are in line with the results of previous studies which showed that job satisfaction and burnout have an inverse relationship (Melchior et al., 1997) in most professionals, such as lawyers (Jackson, Zedeck, & Summers, 1985), rehabilitation workers (Riggar, Godley, & Hafer, 1984), and public service employees (Zedeck, Maslach, Mosier, & Skitka, 1988). The results of our study revealed the fact that a higher level of job satisfaction is associated with a lower level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of reduced personal accomplishment. Also, the regression analysis showed that job satisfaction is a significant predictor for all forms of job burnout. This finding suggests that providing job satisfaction to customer service employees would annihilate potential negative effects that may occur from their performance of emotional labour. Looking specifically at the

<sup>\*</sup>p<.05, \*\*p<.01

components of the burnout construct, previous studies have shown that high levels of emotional exhaustion are correlated with low levels of job satisfaction, and feelings of personal accomplishment are positively correlated with job satisfaction (Brewer & Clippard, 2002). Depersonalization also has been shown to correlate with job satisfaction (Belicki & Woolcott, 1996), but other studies have failed to find such a correlation (Brewer & Clippard, 2002). We can conclude that the findings of our study are largely consistent with previous research (Kumar, Fischer, Robinson, Hatcher, & Bhagat, 2007) that showed that as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization increased, overall job satisfaction decreased, whereas there is a positive correlation between personal accomplishment and job satisfaction. A theoretical argument for this link between burnout and job satisfaction is that because burnout is the outcome of an individual's evaluation and that the demands of the job exceed the personal resources, the same evaluation would affect the individual's psychological well being, including job satisfaction (Fogarty, Singh, Rhoads, & Moore, 2000).

In our study, emotional labour displayed almost no relationship with the feeling of personal accomplishment, however the two mechanisms of emotional labour, surface acting and deep acting, displayed positive and significant relationships with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Surface acting was significantly related to emotional exhaustion, which is consistent with previous research on suppressing anger; this is costly to the function of the immune system (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Kruml and Geddes (2000) suggest that employees who engage in surface acting are more emotionally exhausted than those engaging in deep acting. The regression analyses showed the same result. As predicted, surface acting was a significant predictor of depersonalization beyond the other variables: the more employees reported faking their emotional expressions at work, the more they also reported distancing themselves from customers and they treated them as objects. Surface acting can be seen as a way of detaching from others at work (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

The results of the current study are less consistent with past research when considering the relationship between deep acting and job burnout. Our results revealed the fact that participants with a high level of deep acting have a higher level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. It was expected that deep acting related to lower depersonalization and more personal accomplishment because deep acting involves treating the customer as someone deserving of authentic expression, and this fact may increase a sense of personal efficacy. In this study it is obvious that the duration of emotional labour, whether in job tenure or hours worked, requires either emotional dissonance (surface acting) or emotional effort (deep acting) both of which may lead to emotional exhaustion.

Compared with the research of Jackson (1993) in which there are significant differences in levels of burnout, relative to factors like gender, age, marital status, academic rank, we found no significant differences between men and women regarding the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of

reduced personal accomplishment. Generally, gender is not a strong predictor of burnout, and gender differences are not consistent across studies (Cordes & Dougherty 1993; Maslach et al. 2001). For example, the female sex was found to be a risk factor for burnout in nurses in Mexico (De Los Rios-Castillo et al. 2007) and in the study of Galek, Flannelly, Greene, and Kudler (2011), but no effect was found regardless of the sex when it came to emotional exhaustion in Italian (Bressi, Manenti, Porcellana, & Cevales, 2008) and Austrian (Lederer, Kinzl, Traweger, Dosch, & Sumann, 2008) nurses. Kowalski et al. (2010) found that sociodemographic variables, such as age, sex, years of professional experience, and job tenure did not have a significant impact on job burnout.

In conclusion, this study examines some individual and organizational factors that moderate the relationships between emotional labour and its potential consequences. Partially consistent with the stated research, this study found that job satisfaction is a significant predictor for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feeling of reduced personal accomplishment, as well as surface acting which is a significant predictor for depersonalization; this is consistent with previous research. The more employees reported faking their emotional expressions at work, the more they also reported distancing themselves from customers and treating them as objects (Grandey, 2000).

# Limitations and future directions

Some possible limitations of these findings should be noted. First, the organizations that contributed to this sample were drawn from a number of different institutions, from hospitality, from financial services and from the public schools. Consequently the diversity of sources for this sample should contribute to the generalization of these findings. In addition, organizational display rules will differ across organizations, so collecting data from a number of organizations can facilitate the examination of emotional labour processes across varied organizational contexts but can also influence the internal validity of our results. Second, this recent study is not a longitudinal study but a cross-sectional one. The results might be different in a longitudinal study.

Overall, this study provides a valuable contribution to the literature when it comes to emotions in the workplace, and in particular it serves to clarify how emotional labour affects the service employee. This study lends further empirical support to the use of job satisfaction as a predictive tool in the service context. Understanding the emotional labour process and how it can result in negative consequences for employees is an important step in attempting to ameliorate the negative aspects of service work and reduce the related personal and organizational costs.

This current study has implications for both the burnout and emotional labour literature. The results suggested from the burnout literature that there are emotional differences in the nature of "people work". Surface acting and deeper emotion

work was related to feeling exhausted and detached. Hochschild (1983) recognized deep acting as having potential benefits for the employee and customer outcomes but warned against organizations treating employees' feelings as a commodity.

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