

Emotion work and emotional exhaustion in teachers: The job and individual perspective.

Gérard Näring

School of Psychology, Open University, The Netherlands and Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Peter Vlerick & Bart Van de Ven

Department of Personnel Management, Work and Organizational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium

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Address correspondence to
G.W.B Näring, PhD
Open Universiteit Nederland
Postbus 6870
6503 GJ Nijmegen
The Netherlands

g.naring@psych.ru.nl

Tel +31 24 3612706

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Teaching requires much emotion work which takes its toll on teachers. Emotion work is usually studied from one of two perspectives, a job or an individual perspective. In this study we assessed the relative importance of these two perspectives in predicting emotional exhaustion. More than 200 teachers completed a questionnaire comprising the DISQ, the D-QEL, and the UBOS. In line with previous studies our findings indicated that emotional exhaustion is positively associated with emotional job demands and surface acting. The relative importance of the two operationalizations of emotion work was assessed by comparing the results of two regression analyses. Whereas the model with job demands explained 18% of the variance, the model with emotional labour only explained only 5%. In understanding what might contribute to emotional exhaustion in teachers the emotional job demands might be much more important than the self-regulation perspective that is measured with emotional labour.

Keywords: emotion work; teaching; emotional exhaustion; job demands; emotional labour

Teaching usually comprises face to face interaction with students. In order to teach well, teachers have to draw students' attention, they have to motivate their students and they have to ensure the orderly conduct of classes. Most of these teaching aspects require that teachers show certain emotions (Ogbonna and Harris 2004) and suppress others (Ybema and Smulders 2002). Hochschild was the first to draw attention to this job aspect and labelled it *emotional labour* (Hochschild 1983). She described that especially in service jobs workers often have to control their emotions in order to reach a certain job performance standard. Hochschild also introduced the terminology for two types of emotional labour, surface acting and deep acting. When workers are surface acting, they try to modify the expression of emotions, when they are deep acting, they manipulate internal thoughts and feelings in order to actually feel a desired emotion (Brotheridge and Grandey 2002; Näring *et al.* 2007).

Hochschild (1983) hypothesized that managing emotions would come at a personal cost and teachers themselves also report that the faking of emotions is stressful (Ogbonna and Harris 2004). Several studies found evidence of a link between emotional labour and emotional exhaustion (e.g. Brotheridge and Lee 2003; Näring *et al.* 2006; Zammuner and Lotto 2001). Such findings are in line with the more general idea that emotional job demands may lead to burnout (Maslach 1982). Burnout refers to “a psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job”. The three key dimensions of this response are “an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment” (Maslach *et al.* 2001). Increasingly, the exhaustion component is regarded as the essential and often sufficient dimension of burnout (Shirom and Melamed 2006). Although some researchers argue that occupational fatigue is not characterized by exhaustion only, but also by withdrawal (Schaufeli and Taris 2005), we will focus on emotional exhaustion in the present study,

thereby referring to “feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources” (Maslach *et al.* 2001).

A refinement in the study of emotional labour emerged when Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) introduced the distinction between job-focused emotional labour and employee-focused emotional labour. With job-focused emotional labour they referred to the perceived level of emotional requirements in an occupation. Employee-focused emotional labour on the other hand captured the process of managing emotions and expressions. The latter process was similar to the emotional labour process that Hochschild described but the job-focused emotional labour captured something new. The more objective perspective that is represented by the concept job-focused emotional labour, was also taken by Zapf and colleagues (Zapf *et al.* 1999) who introduced the term emotion work. Zapf’s research group defined emotion work as the emotional requirements of a job, such as the requirement to express and handle negative emotions, the requirement to be sensitive to clients' emotions, and the requirement to show sympathy. A similar approach resulted in a ranking of jobs on “emotional labour demands” with police and sheriff’s patrol officers at number one of the list, and school social workers at number two (Glomb *et al.* 2004).

In some studies both perspectives seem to be taken together when the term emotional job demands is used to refer to both the effort needed to deal with job inherent emotions and/or organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions (van den Tooren and de Jonge 2008). Such a perspective seems to be useful when researchers are mostly interested in distinguishing emotional job demands from cognitive and physical job demands. In the present study we will use the term *emotional labour* for the self-reported self-regulation perspective and *emotional job demands* for the more objective job perspective.

The person perspective and the job perspective parallel two important psychosocial theories about work stress: the Person-Environment Fit or Michigan model (Edwards 1991)

on the one hand and the Demand-Control-Support model (Karasek 1979) on the other hand. Using the person perspective a relation of emotional labour, especially surface acting, with emotional exhaustion was reported for a variety of professions, such as nurses (Näring and van Droffelaar 2007), teachers (Näring *et al.* 2006), workers in hospitals, banks, post-offices and stores (Zammuner and Galli 2005), and university administrative assistants (Grandey 2003). Studies with a job perspective measured emotional job demands and found a relation with emotional exhaustion in a wide range of occupations such as employees of an insurance company, pension fund company, and employees of a home-care institution (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004; Ybema and Smulders 2002). How the perspectives are related to one another is not exactly known and it is also not clear which perspective is most useful in catching the elements of emotion work that are most relevant to our understanding of emotional exhaustion.

Whereas there is sufficient evidence that both emotional labour and emotional job demands are related to emotional exhaustion, there is only little known about how exactly their separate contribution is and how the concepts themselves are related to each other. In a convenience sample of young workers in a variety of professions, emotional job demands were related to emotional labour, especially to deep acting (Brotheridge and Grandey 2002). In the same study both emotional job demands and emotional labour each explained a negligible 1% of the variance in emotional exhaustion. This small proportion of explained variance emerged after the researchers statistically controlled for negative affectivity in the analysis, which is controversial because negative affectivity is regarded as a personal resource for emotional labour strategies (Liu *et al.* 2004; Liu *et al.* 2008; Spector *et al.* 2000). Without controlling for negative affectivity a larger percentage of emotional exhaustion can legitimately be ascribed to emotional job demands as several studies reported.

In a study in nurses both surface acting and deep acting were significant predictors of emotional exhaustion, independent of emotional job demands (Näring and van Droffelaar 2007). Together they accounted for an impressive 30% of the variance in emotional exhaustion. In a study in home care employees, emotional job demands predicted an additional 6% of the variance in emotional exhaustion over and above the effect of quantitative demands, control and support (Taris and Schreurs 2009). The comparison of the results in a convenience sample (Brotheridge and Grandey 2002), in a sample of home care employees (Taris and Schreurs 2009) and in a nurses sample (Näring and van Droffelaar 2007) makes clear that the estimate of the relevance of emotional labour and emotional job demands in understanding their possible role in the origin of emotional exhaustion shows a wide variation between professions, but also between research methods. An estimate for teachers is not available yet.

The concept emotional labour captures the person perspective and this perspective apparently does not coincide with the job perspective from which the concept emotional job demands was derived. Moreover, it is unclear what the relative contribution of the two perspectives is in identifying possible mechanisms that lead to emotional exhaustion. A study in which both measures are used can clarify this issue. The objective of the current study is to assess the relative importance of emotional job demands and emotional labour in predicting emotional exhaustion. We hypothesize that emotional job demands and emotional labour will incrementally contribute to emotional exhaustion.

Method

Subjects

Teachers from seven secondary schools in Flanders, Belgium, participated in this research project. An invitation letter and accompanying questionnaires were put in the pigeon holes of the teachers, who responded on voluntary basis. In the letter the purpose of the research was

explained and anonymity was guaranteed. We distributed 366 questionnaires and received 219 back, which results in a response rate of 61.5 %. Most of the respondents, 53.7 %, were female. The mean age of the teachers was 40 years, $SD = 10.5$. Most of the teachers, 71.9 %, had a tenure position, 10.6 % had a partial tenure position, and 17.5 % a temporary position. The majority had a full time contract, 80.7%, and was married or living together with a partner, 77%. A remaining 15.2 % lived alone, and 7.4% lived with family or friends.

Measures

Emotional Labour was measured with the Dutch Questionnaire on Emotional Labour (D-QEL) (Briët *et al.* 2005; Näring *et al.* 2007). All items could be answered on a scale ranging from 1 “never” to 5 “always”. The subscale *surface acting* consists of five items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$. An example item is: “I pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job”. The subscale *deep acting* consists of three items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$. An example item is: “I make an effort to actually feel the emotions I need to display toward others”. The scales for surface acting and deep acting are mainly derived from the Emotional Labor Scale (Brotheridge and Lee 1998; Lee and Brotheridge 2006). The subscale *suppression* consists of three items. An example of a *suppression* item is: “I hide my anger about something someone has done”. After removal of the item “I hide my fear for a schoolchild”, the Cronbach’s $\alpha = .72$.

Emotional Job Demands were measured with six items from the DISQ 2.0 (de Jonge *et al.* 2007). Respondents were asked to estimate to which degree another teacher would find him/herself in a certain situation after one year of experience. An example of an item is: “After having had one year of experience in a job similar to mine, employee X will have to do a lot of emotionally draining work.” All items could be answered on a scale ranging from 1 “(almost) never” to 5 “(almost) always”. Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$.

Emotional Exhaustion was measured using the subscale for emotional exhaustion of the Dutch Version of Maslach Burnout Inventory for teachers, (UBOS-L, (Schaufeli and van Dierendonck 2000)). This scale consists of eight Likert-type items with response possibilities on a 7-point scale subscale varying from 0, “never”, to 6, “always”. Sample items are “At the end of the day I feel empty” and “Working with people all day long constitutes a serious burden for me”.

Method of analysis

For all (sub)scales scores were calculated by dividing the sum of the score on the individual items by the number of items. Correlations between the study variables were calculated. All variables were centred before entering them into stepwise hierarchical regression analyses with emotional exhaustion as criterion (Aiken and West 1991). In the first step the control variables gender and age were always entered first. Subsequently, various models were tested.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

In Table 1 the means, standard deviations, Cronbach’s alpha, and Pearson correlations are given. The teachers in this sample reported an average score of 14.71 on emotional exhaustion, which indicates that this is a fairly normal sample as the scores are lower than the scores from a heterogeneous sample of teachers, $M = 16.30$, $SD = 9.43$ (Brouwers and Tomic 2000), but higher than those from a sample of teachers of mathematics, $M = 13.96$, $SD = 8.13$ (Näring *et al.* 2006).

Insert Table 1 about here

In line with previous findings from other studies both emotional job demands and emotional labour were related to emotional exhaustion. Emotional job demands were significantly related to emotional exhaustion, $r = .41$, $p < .01$, both surface acting and deep acting were

moderately related to emotional exhaustion, $r = .21, p < .01$ and $r = .16, p < .01$, respectively.

Suppression was not significantly related to emotional exhaustion.

Regression analyses

In order to assess the relative importance of emotional job demands and emotional labour several regression analyses were performed. In first analysis we entered emotional labour after entering the control variables. The results are given in Table 2. In a first step we entered the control variables gender and age. In the second step emotional labour was entered.

Emotional labour, specifically surface acting, explained 5% of the emotional exhaustion, $Beta = .174, p = .043$.

Insert Table 2 about here

In the next regression analysis the control variables were similarly entered in the first step, but now first a model with emotional demands only was tested. The results are given in Table 3.

In this model emotional job demands were highly significant predictors of emotional exhaustion, $Beta = .451, p < .01$. This model explained 18% of the variance in emotional exhaustion. In the third step the emotional labour variables were entered additionally, but they did not improve the model.

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

This study was set up to study the relation between emotion work and emotional exhaustion in teachers using a person and a job perspective. We assessed the relative importance of emotional labour and emotional job demands in predicting emotional exhaustion. First of all our study is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that emotional exhaustion is positively associated with emotional job demands (Ybema and Smulders 2002) and surface acting (Näring *et al.* 2006). The relative importance of the two operationalizations of emotion

work could be derived from the results of two regression analyses and revealed that in teachers the job perspective that is measured with emotional job demands is much more important than the self-regulation perspective that is measured with emotional labour. Whereas the model with job demands explains 18% of the variance, the model with emotional labour only explains 5%.

In the prediction of emotional exhaustion, emotional job demands were more important than the individual emotional labour strategies. Emotional job demands measure the requirement to interact with people that have unrealistic expectations, and the requirement to deal with students that have problems that have an impact on the teacher too. Emotional job demands also capture having to deal with people that easily get angry. These are all facets of teaching that increasingly are becoming a part of teaching in schools in problem areas (Paulle 2005). Our findings can easily be related to the finding that contextual variables as teaching in an underprivileged area and number of pupils taught were both significantly related to emotional exhaustion (Vercambre *et al.* 2009). They are also in line with findings from a multi-level analysis of 1939 teachers within 198 schools that showed that disciplinary problems at the school level were predictive of between school variability in emotional exhaustion (Klusmann *et al.* 2008). Probably, contextual variables are reliable predictors of the amount of emotional work that a teacher can expect and might therefore take a toll independently of the emotion regulation capacities of the individual teacher.

Our study also aimed to investigate how emotional labour and emotional job demands are related to each other in teachers. The correlation analysis indicated that emotional job demands are related to surface acting and deep acting, but not to suppression. Furthermore, the correlations are significant, but only moderate, just above .20. In another recent study in Dutch teachers a correlation of .23 between emotional job demands and surface acting was reported, whereas the correlation between emotional job demands and deep acting was .15

and not significant (Stringer *et al.* 2009). The emotional requirements of the organization are thus only marginally relevant for an understanding of the frequency with which individuals use emotion regulation strategies. Individual emotion regulation strategies may be much more dependent on the psychological make-up of the individual than upon the organizational make-up of the school. This notion is supported by findings that in general, individuals scoring high on negative affectivity are more likely than others to surface act (Liu *et al.* 2008).

The emotion work that teachers are expected to perform increasingly seems to mirror the emotion work that is seen in the service sector because it is also increasingly prescribed (Hebson *et al.* 2007). When we acknowledge that teachers will often try to motivate, help or inspire their students, it is only logical to describe these activities as caring (O'Connor 2008). Nevertheless, differences in the interrelationships of the variables can be observed between professions. In our study, the level of emotional job demands was related to both surface acting and deep acting, but not to suppression. Emotional job demands were equally strong related to surface acting in a study in nurses but a relationship with deep acting was absent (Näring and van Droffelaar 2007). As the nurses reported a lot less deep acting than the teachers in the present study, this may suggest that deep acting plays not only a more important role in teaching than in nursing, but also a more taxing role.

The two conceptualizations of emotion work together explained a large amount of the variance in emotional exhaustion. Semmer, Zapf and Greif (1996) argued that job stressors will seldom explain more than 10% of the variance in work-related outcome measures. In our study almost 20% of the variance in emotional exhaustion was explained. Next to this strength we have to mention that our study has the limitation that we used cross-sectional data and that no conclusions about causality can be drawn.

Our study indicated that we should focus more on the structure of the emotion work of teachers than on the individual teacher's emotion regulation. The emotional job demands that

teachers have to face will usually be about the same for all teachers in a school (Klusmann *et al.* 2008). We live in a time where the work of teachers is being evaluated in more and more detail and this has also led to an increase in the emotional demands of teaching (Jenkins and Conley 2007). As at the same time many countries will have a culture that underemphasizes emotional labour as a dimension of teacher work (Nias 1996) this contradiction poses a challenge to school principles and managers.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations of emotional job demands and emotional labor (n = 225)

	<i>N</i>	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional Job Demands	225	2.73 (.73)	.80			
2. Emo. Lab: Surface acting	225	2.25 (.89)	.21**	.88		
3. Emo. Lab: Deep Acting	223	2.32 (.96)	.22**	.52**	.84	
4. Emo. Lab: Suppression	224	2.69 (.88)	.04	.23**	.18**	.72^a

^a Pearson Correlation – initially measured with 3 items (alpha = .54) –item: “I hide my fear” deleted.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Emotional exhaustion: Results of hierarchical regression analysis with emotional labor as predictor

	Step 1	Step 2
Control variables		
Gender ^a	-.013	-.017
Age	.008	.010
Main effects		
Surface Acting		.174*
Deep Acting		.097
Suppression		.003
<i>R</i> ²	.006	.055
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	-.004	.033
ΔR^2	.006	.050**

Values in table are unstandardized weights (B)

^a 0 = male, 1 = female.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3. Emotional exhaustion: Results of second hierarchical regression analysis with emotional demands and emotional labor as predictors

	Emotional Exhaustion		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Control variables			
Gender ^a	-.013	.012	.001
Age	.008	.002	.003
Main effects			
Emotional Job Demands		.451***	.418***
Surface Acting		-	.117
Deep Acting		-	.032
Suppression		-	.009
<i>R</i> ²	.006	.179	.195
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	-.004	.168	.172
ΔR^2	.006	.174***	.016

Values in table are unstandardized weights (B)

^a 0 = male, 1 = female.

*** $p < .001$