

Why do emotional labor strategies differentially predict exhaustion?

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Why Do Emotional Labor Strategies Differentially Predict Exhaustion? Comparing Psychological Effort, Authenticity, and Relational Mechanisms

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Surface acting has repeatedly been found to harm employee well-being, but weak or inconsistent findings have been reported for deep acting. A theoretical explanation put forth by researchers to explain this is that opponent processes may be involved in deep acting. Accordingly, there are countering processes in place for deep acting, effectively yielding a weak or null relationship with indicators of strain or well-being. Although often cited, this claim has never been tested empirically. The current study addresses this question by exploring the relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion via 3 underlying mechanisms: (a) psychological effort, (b) feelings of authenticity, and (c) rewarding interactions. Specifically, we expected that although being effortful, deep acting also results in feelings of authenticity and rewarding interactions with customers. However, contrary to expectations, results from an experience-sampling study (involving 3 daily surveys over the course of 7 days) revealed that deep acting did not relate to any of these mechanisms, nor was it directly or indirectly related to emotional exhaustion. These findings challenge previous suggestions that there are countering processes in place for deep acting. In addition, analyses revealed significant indirect relationships of surface acting with emotional exhaustion that were mediated by psychological effort and felt authenticity. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords: emotional labor, mechanisms, emotional exhaustion, surface acting, deep acting

Today's economy is more oriented toward services than ever before. However, service in itself does not suffice to qualify as high in quality. In fact, the emotion with which a service is delivered is a major contributor to service quality. To deliver services with the appropriate emotion, employees may, at times, need to engage in emotional labor—the modification of emotional expression as part of the work role. Emotional labor is an important aspect of most jobs that involve regular interaction with

people. For example, many service and health care workers are expected to laugh and smile, to show care, and to generally display positive emotions despite what they may truly be feeling (Hochschild, 1983). Consequently, service workers who do not feel the required emotions may need to engage in one of the two emotional labor strategies: surface acting or deep acting. When surface acting, the actual feelings are not adjusted, and emotions are faked to align with requirements. On the other hand, when deep acting, feelings are actively adjusted so that the underlying emotions that are felt and displayed are in line with the required emotions (Grandey, 2000).

Since Grandey's (2000) seminal article, research has accumulated showing that surface acting is strongly and positively related to work strain, whereas deep acting has revealed weak and sometimes inconsistent relationships with strain (Bono & Vey, 2005; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Mesmer-Magnus, DeChurch, & Wax, 2012). A central notion is that surface and deep acting may have different effects on work strain and well-being because they differentially impact three important underlying mechanisms, namely, psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Holman, Martínez-Iñigo, & Totterdell, 2008; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011).

Previous studies have identified these processes as mechanisms underlying the differential effects of surface and deep acting. However, these studies have several limitations. First, only a few studies have actually tested these mechanisms empirically (for

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exceptions, see Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; English & John, 2013; Martínez-Iñigo, Totterdell, Alcover, & David, 2007; Zhan, Wang, & Shi, 2016). Second, despite it having been argued that these mechanisms are not independent of one another (Holman et al., 2008), emotional labor researchers typically only focus on one or two of the mechanisms without considering all three mechanisms in conjunction (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; English & John, 2013; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009; Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007; Zhan et al., 2016). Psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions are unlikely to be independent of one another. For instance, when employees feel more authentic internally, their customers are likely to experience their emotional display as more authentic and therefore react more favorably, thereby creating more rewarding interactions (Côté, 2005). Third, these mechanisms have been used to explain the effects of the habitual use of surface and deep acting (for an exception, see Zhan et al., 2016), while leaving the question of how adequately these mechanisms account for the dynamic nature of emotional labor, and to what extent these mechanisms explain the short-term within-person effects of surface and deep acting. Thus, the current literature is fragmented. Different researchers highlight different processes without considering multiple mechanisms in conjunction and giving disproportionate attention to the habitual use of surface and deep acting at the expense of explaining the effects of within-person fluctuations in emotional labor.

Our research contributes to the emotional labor literature in two ways. First, we provide the first empirical investigation to simultaneously test three theoretical mechanisms underlying surface and deep acting: psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions. By considering all three theoretical mechanisms in concert, our study sheds light on the relative importance of each mechanism for employee emotional exhaustion. Being the most central dimension of the burnout syndrome (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) emotional exhaustion is a core indicator of work strain and a well-established consequence of emotional labor (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

Importantly, our approach also addresses a longstanding yet unresolved question in the emotional labor literature concerning the relationship between deep acting and work strain (Gabriel, Daniels, Diefendorff, & Greguras, 2015; Grandey, 2003; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Holman et al., 2008; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). Specifically, empirical findings on the deep acting–work strain relationship have been mixed (cf. Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). For instance, studies have reported positive (Grandey, 2003; Holman, Chissick, & Totterdell, 2002; Totterdell & Holman, 2003), negative (Huang, Chiaburu, Zhang, Li, & Grandey, 2015; Johnson & Spector, 2007; Zhang & Zhu, 2008), and null relationships with emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Holman et al., 2002; Johnson & Spector, 2007; Totterdell & Holman, 2003; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). In an attempt to explain these inconsistent findings, it has repeatedly been suggested that deep acting may simultaneously have negative (it involves effort) as well as positive effects (it leads to feelings of authenticity, and rewarding interactions) that offset one another and explain deep acting’s null relationship with work strain and well-being outcomes (Goodwin, Groth, & Frenkel, 2011; Grandey, 2003; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007). Strikingly, although this explanation has been repeatedly echoed in

the literature, this hypothesis has, to date, not yet been tested empirically. In their seminal review, Grandey and Melloy (2017) therefore argued that this “explanation is mostly conjecture or tested inadequately (. . .) and requires further study” (p. 8). Our study directly addresses this call by investigating the relationship between deep acting, emotional exhaustion, and all three suggested mechanisms simultaneously (i.e., psychological effort, sense of authenticity, rewarding interactions).

Second, a key finding from the emotional labor literature is that emotions and the use of emotional labor strategies are highly dynamic and fluctuate within individuals over time (Chi & Grandey, 2019; Diestel, Rivkin, & Schmidt, 2015; Huang et al., 2015; Hülshager, Lang, Schewe, & Zijlstra, 2015; Judge et al., 2009; Sanz-Vergel, Rodríguez-Muñoz, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2012; Schreurs, Guenter, Hülshager, & van Emmerik, 2014; Scott & Barnes, 2011; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Oerlemans, & Koszucka, 2018; Zhan et al., 2016). It has therefore been argued that to account for the dynamic nature of emotional labor, it is best studied at the within-person level, which is able to capture fluctuations within individuals and investigate the short-term effects of surface and deep acting on work strain and well-being (Beal & Trougakos, 2013; Hülshager et al., 2015). Therefore, our study is designed to investigate the short-term within-person effects of emotional labor on emotional exhaustion via the three mechanisms described earlier. The overall research model is depicted in Figure 1.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

As noted earlier, existing research has repeatedly identified three theoretical mechanisms that may explain the differential effects of surface and deep acting on emotional exhaustion: psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions. How each of the mechanisms explain the effect of surface and deep acting on emotional exhaustion is outlined in the following.

Psychological Effort

Psychological effort is an important mechanism proposed in the emotional labor literature to explain relationships of emotional

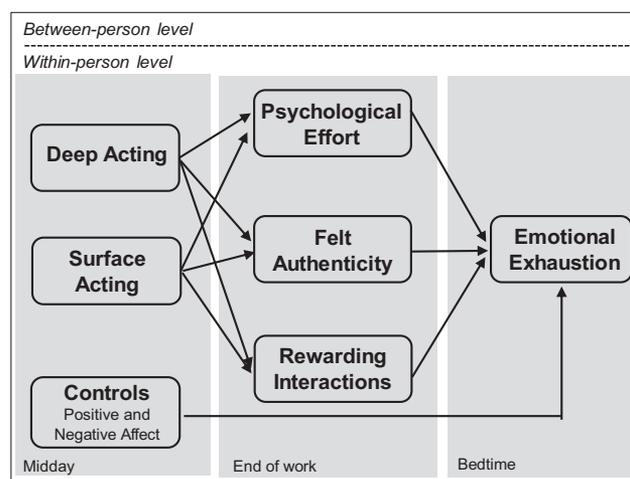


Figure 1. Proposed research model with surface acting and deep acting as predictors.

labor strategies with well-being and strain, including emotional exhaustion (Beal & Trougakos, 2013; Côté, 2005; Grandey, 2003; Huang et al., 2015; Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007). Emotional self-regulation draws from a finite pool of energetic and mental resources (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). Accordingly, engaging in surface and deep acting requires the expenditure of resources, which may lead to feelings of mental exhaustion and fatigue in the short run (Huang et al., 2015; Xanthopoulou et al., 2018), and to burnout in the long run (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). This idea has its roots in the work by Gross and colleagues (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1997), who found that suppression of both positive and negative emotions led to increased sympathetic activation of the cardiovascular system. Other laboratory studies found that regulating emotions by faking, suppression, or exaggeration impairs subsequent performance on diverse tasks, such as hand-grip or anagram tasks (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Muraven et al., 1998), suggesting that self-regulation is emotionally taxing and depletes resources needed for other tasks.

Not all regulatory efforts are equally resource intensive (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). A central tenet of the emotional labor literature is that surface acting consumes more resources and is therefore more effortful than deep acting (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). Surface acting comes in relatively late in the emotion-generating process and is primarily focused on modifying the behavioral aspect of the emotions without changing the emotion itself (Grandey, 2000; John & Gross, 2004). Like any self-regulatory process, this is effortful. Simply suppressing and faking emotions involves a constant conscious comparison between the current emotional state and the required emotional display (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Hochschild, 1983). Deep acting, in contrast, involves dealing with the emotion's antecedents (Grandey, 2000; Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007). It comes very early in the emotion-generating process so that not only the behavioral components but also the entire emotional sequence is altered. Deep acting requires changing the underlying emotion, which is also effortful. However, unlike in surface acting, in deep acting emotions are altered at the beginning so that emotions do not need to be constantly controlled throughout the entire interaction. Because suppressing experienced emotions is more effortful than preventing emotions from developing (Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007), deep acting is expected to consume less resources and involves less effort than surface acting (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Therefore, it can be expected that both surface and deep acting positively relate to emotional exhaustion via psychological effort. Notably however, theoretical arguments presented above suggest that surface acting involves more psychological effort than deep acting. We therefore hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: Surface acting positively relates to psychological effort.

Hypothesis 1b: Deep acting positively relates to psychological effort.

Hypothesis 1c: The positive relationship between surface acting and psychological effort is stronger than the one between deep acting and psychological effort.

Hypothesis 2a: There is a positive indirect relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion via psychological effort.

Hypothesis 2b: There is a positive indirect relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion via psychological effort.

Felt Authenticity

Felt authenticity refers to one's own perception of authenticity when engaging in emotional labor (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Erickson & Ritter, 2001; Simpson & Stroh, 2004). Authenticity is defined as the degree to which one behaves in accordance with what is considered to be one's true or genuine self, "who one IS as a person" (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000, p. 184). Perceiving oneself as authentic is an important predictor of strain and well-being (Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Hochschild, 1983; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Iardi, 1997; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). This assertion resonates with Rogers's (1961) pioneering theoretical work on the importance of authenticity to the self in which he states that the subjective experience of feeling out of touch with one's "true self" can arouse an acute sense of inauthenticity, and that departure from authenticity forms a threat to the person's well-being and healthy functioning.

Emotions are a reflection of an individual's personal identity, so what individuals express during social interactions is important to them (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005). When individuals regulate their emotions, they evaluate the extent to which their behavior is consistent with their inner values and more general self-views (Carver & Scheier, 1998; English & John, 2013). Hence, while performing emotional labor, individuals keep track of the potential dissonance between felt and displayed emotions. The experience of emotional dissonance informs individuals that their behavior is inconsistent with their self-concept, an experience that is psychologically taxing and strain enhancing (Festinger, 1957; Hochschild, 1983; Pugh, Groth, & Hennig-Thurau, 2011).

From the discordance–congruence perspective of emotional labor (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), the degree to which emotional displays are authentic is said to be the key difference between surface and deep acting (see also Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006; Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting is about showing an emotional façade; it does not involve authentic self-expression (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). When surface acting, emotional expressions and actual feelings are at odds, and because individuals are generally aware of the dissonance between felt and displayed emotions (John & Gross, 2004; Pugh et al., 2011), surface acting is likely to result in the subjective experience of dissonance and inauthenticity, which causes strain and has been associated with burnout (cf. Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Following this line of reasoning, surface acting should be positively associated with emotional exhaustion via reduced authenticity.

In contrast to surface acting, deep acting involves changing the underlying emotions so that the resulting emotions are aligned with the inner self (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). Deep acting involves the genuine display of required emotions, which in turn allows for the authentic expression of the self. Deep acting should therefore positively relate to

one's sense of authenticity (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002) and be negatively associated with emotional exhaustion via this pathway. We therefore hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3a: Surface acting negatively relates to felt authenticity.

Hypothesis 3b: Deep acting positively relates to felt authenticity.

Hypothesis 4a: There is a positive indirect relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion via felt authenticity.

Hypothesis 4b: There is a negative indirect relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion via felt authenticity.

Rewarding Interactions

From the perspective of the social interaction model of emotional labor (Côté, 2005), the quality of social interactions is key to understanding the effects of surface and deep acting on employee strain. Accordingly, interactions are rewarding to the extent that they promote the development of close relationships between the individual and his or her interaction partner; interactions are unrewarding to the extent that relationship building is hampered (Côté, 2005). Rewarding interactions are more likely when interaction partners perceive the emotional displays by the worker as authentic (English & John, 2013; Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005; Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007). Authenticity signals trust and honesty, which prompt interaction partners to engage in supportive behavior (Côté, 2005; English & John, 2013; Reis & Patrick, 1996). In turn, the social support received from the interaction partner elicits pleasant emotions in the worker and is instrumental in buffering the negative effects of work stressors (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Conversely, interaction partners tend to perceive acts of inauthenticity as calculated attempts to control them, or as signaling a lack of effort or interest in them (Côté, 2005; English & John, 2013; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Sheldon et al., 1997; Swann, De la Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Swann & Pelham, 2002). Inauthentic displays may lead to interpersonal conflict, which has been shown to be associated with several indicators of strain, including emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and depression (Liu et al., 2015; Spector & Jex, 1998).

When surface acting, emotional displays are not aligned with felt emotions, resulting in inauthentic emotional expressions. According to Côté's (2005) social interaction model, this evokes negative reactions in the interaction partner and these negative reactions, for instance anger, disappointment, or disrespect, function as stressors that induce strain and affect the employee's well-being. Accordingly, surface acting can be expected to lead to emotional exhaustion via reductions in rewarding interactions.

In contrast to surface acting, deep acting aligns required and felt emotions so that emotional displays are authentic, which in turn should lead partners to react positively to the interaction (Côté, 2005), resulting in rewarding interactions and thereby reducing employee strain. Accordingly, deep acting may be expected to be negatively related to emotional exhaustion via increases in rewarding interactions.

Although Côté's social interaction model has not yet been empirically tested as a whole, the proposition that surface and deep acting lead to different customer reactions has received empirical support. Grandey and colleagues (2005) found that employees who engaged in more authentic displays of positive emotions were perceived as more friendly by customers who as a result were more satisfied with the service (Grandey et al., 2005). Hennig-Thurau and colleagues (2006) found that in contrast to surface acting, deep acting led to increases in customer's positive affect levels and positively affected the customer-employee rapport. Using a between-person as well as within-person approach, Zhan et al. (2016) found that surface acting led to more negative treatment from customers, which resulted in more emotional exhaustion. In contrast, deep acting was associated with more positive treatment from customers, which resulted in lower levels of emotional exhaustion when adopting a between-person approach. Finally, deep acting has been shown to relate positively and surface acting negatively to customer-rated customer orientation, especially when customers identified employees' use of emotional labor strategies (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009).

Taken together, we therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5a: Surface acting negatively relates to rewarding interactions.

Hypothesis 5b: Deep acting positively relates to rewarding interactions.

Hypothesis 6a: There is a positive indirect relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion via rewarding interactions.

Hypothesis 6b: There is a negative indirect relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion via rewarding interactions.

Competing Mechanisms Underlying the Deep Acting-Exhaustion Relationship

So far, we have argued that three theoretical mechanisms—psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions—underlie the effects of emotional labor strategies. In regard to surface acting, these mechanisms all point in the same direction: Surface acting is hypothesized to be effortful, inauthentic and to result in unrewarding interactions, all of which are processes that are psychologically taxing and strain enhancing. However, a more complicated picture emerges for deep acting. Like surface acting, deep acting requires regulatory effort and is therefore strain enhancing. Yet, deep acting is also thought to promote a sense of authenticity and to yield rewarding interactions, both of which are processes that reduce strain. Accordingly, deep acting is theorized to be simultaneously strain enhancing (it involves effort) as well as strain reducing (it leads to feelings of authenticity and to rewarding interactions). Following this line of reasoning, the competing strain-enhancing and joint strain-reducing forces can be expected to attenuate each other. To the extent that the competing strain-enhancing and joint strain-reducing forces are equally strong, they may even level each other out. Over many years, this argumentation has been echoed in the literature (Goodwin et al., 2011; Grandey, 2003; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011; Martínez-Iñigo et al.,

2007), yet never been put to the test empirically (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). We therefore hypothesize the existence of simultaneous, competing mechanisms underlying the deep acting–exhaustion relationship that offset each other.

Hypothesis 7: The indirect positive relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion via psychological effort (Hypothesis 2b) and the indirect negative relationships between deep acting and emotional exhaustion via felt authenticity (Hypothesis 4b) and via rewarding interactions (Hypothesis 6b) attenuate each other.

This prediction would be confirmed by the following pattern of results: (a) a nonsignificant total effect of deep acting on emotional exhaustion (that can formally not be hypothesized as it involves a 0-Hypothesis); (b) three simultaneously tested specific indirect relationships of deep acting with emotional exhaustion that differ in sign (Hypothesis 2b: positive indirect effect via psychological effort; Hypothesis 4b: negative indirect effect via felt authenticity; Hypothesis 6b: negative indirect effect via rewarding interactions).

Method

Sample and Procedure

Participants were recruited from Academic Prolific, an online research platform where participants get payment for completing studies. Several prescreening categories were used to recruit 150 participants employed in a customer-facing job at the time of the study. To participate, people had to be fluent in English and have a minimum of 90% approval rate in previous Academic Prolific studies. Participants were informed about the intensive longitudinal nature of the study and the payment structure for their participation. Participants received £0.35 for participating in the sign-up survey. Starting on the next following Monday, the 150 participants of the sign-up survey were invited to complete three daily surveys for seven days. Based on the average time used for completion of each daily survey during a pilot test, participants could earn £0.35 for completion of a midday survey, £0.25 for the completion of an end-of-work survey, and £0.25 for a bedtime survey. All surveys were completed electronically via Qualtrics.

For the completion of all three surveys a day, bonus payments on top of the base compensation were offered (10%, 15%, 20%, 25%, and 30% for 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 complete days, respectively). Furthermore, a bonus payment of £1.00 was added if participants completed all three surveys a day for 5 days. Invitations to the three daily surveys were sent out at 13:00, 16:00, and 19:00 with instructions to complete the survey during work, shortly after work, or in the evening, respectively. To prevent back-filling, surveys were closed before the invitation to the next survey was sent out. In total, 150 participants returned 1,717 surveys: 598 midday surveys, 570 end-of-work surveys, and 549 bedtime surveys.

Participants (52% female) had an average age of 31 years ($SD = 10.2$ years), an average tenure in their profession of 5.4 years ($SD = 6.8$ years), and worked on average 33 hr per week ($SD = 11.7$ hr). To find out more about the type of service jobs our participants held, we asked them with which type of organizational outsiders they interacted as part of their job. The majority (51%) of

participants indicated that they worked with customers, defined as persons that buy a good or a service. A large part was working with clients (23%), defined as persons that receive help or advice from a professional person. Five percent of our sample was employed in hospitality and worked with guests. The remaining participants worked with students (10%), patients (3%), children (3%), or none of the groups indicated above (4%). The job titles of the participants indicated that most of them were working in sales (29%), followed by IT (13%) and hospitality and related fields (10%).

Measures

Demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, and tenure) were measured in the sign-up survey. The independent variables of surface acting and deep acting were assessed in the midday survey (sent out at 13:00); psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions were measured in the end-of-work survey (sent out at 16:00); and the outcome variable emotional exhaustion was measured in the end-of-day survey (sent out at 19:00). This setup allowed for a temporal separation of the assessment of predictor, mediator, and outcome variables, reducing the temporal sequence of predictor, mediator, and outcome variables (cf. Liao, Yam, Johnson, Liu, & Song, 2018). Following recommendations to limit concerns about common method bias caused by transient mood states or affect in experience-sampling studies, we assessed positive and negative affect in the midday survey as control variables (Gabriel et al., 2019).

Surface acting. Surface acting was measured in the midday survey by the three items of Brotheridge and Lee's (1998, 2003) Emotional Labor Survey. Responses were provided on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*I fully disagree*) to 5 (*I fully agree*). When answering questions, respondents were asked to think about interactions with customers that morning. An example item is "Today, I pretended to have emotions that I didn't really have." The mean of Cronbach's α s across the 7 days was .74.

Deep acting. Deep acting was measured in the midday survey by the three items of Brotheridge and Lee's (1998, 2003) Emotional Labor Survey. Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*I fully disagree*) to 5 (*I fully agree*). When answering questions, respondents were asked to think about interactions with customers that morning. An example item is "Today, I made an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others." The mean of Cronbach's α s across the 7 days was .77.

Psychological effort. Psychological effort was measured in the end-of-work survey by the three items of the Explicit Emotional Effort Scale developed by Quiñones-García, Rodríguez-Carvajal, Clarke, and Moreno-Jiménez (2013). Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Respondents were asked to think back when they engaged in the activity of meeting emotional display rules. An example item is "To what extent have you felt that the activity involved a great amount of effort?" The mean of Cronbach's α s across the 7 days was .91.

Felt authenticity. Felt authenticity was measured in the end-of-work survey by three items taken from Erickson and Ritter's (2001) Inauthenticity Scale. Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Respondents were asked to think back about their interactions with customers

“during today’s working day” when answering questions. An example item is “Today, I didn’t feel like I could be myself at work.” We reversed the items prior to the analyses such that high values represent high levels of felt authenticity. The mean of Cronbach’s α s across the 7 days was .87.

Rewarding interactions. Rewarding interactions were measured in the end-of-work survey by the four-item scale developed by Brotheridge and Lee (2002). Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Respondents were asked to think back about their interactions with customers “during today’s working day” when answering questions. The items were “Today, I put a lot more effort in my relationships with my clients than I got out of them,” “Today in my job, I ‘gave’ a lot but did not ‘get much’ in return,” “Today, I found my interactions with my clients unrewarding,” and “Today, I got very little thanks or recognition from my clients in return for my efforts.” We reversed the items prior to the analyses so that high values indicate high levels of rewarding interactions. The mean of Cronbach’s α s across the 7 days was .81.

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was measured in the bedtime survey with two items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). We followed Teuchmann, Totterdell, and Parker (1999) and adapted the items to fit the daily setting. Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale how “emotionally drained” and “emotionally numb” they felt that day after work. Answers were provided on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). The mean of Cronbach’s α s across the 7 days was .80.

Positive and negative affect during work. Positive and negative affect during work were measured in the midday survey with a measure developed by To, Fisher, Ashkanasy, and Rowe (2012). Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very slightly*) to 5 (*extremely*) how they felt this morning. Positive and negative affect were measured with four items, respectively (positive affect: excited, enthusiastic, interested, inspired; negative affect: anxious, upset, ashamed, angry). Cronbach’s α s across the 7 days were .92 for positive affect and .86 for negative affect.

To confirm the distinctiveness of our predictor, mediator, and outcome variables, we conducted a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis including surface acting, deep acting, psychological effort, felt authenticity, rewarding interactions, and emotional exhaustion items loading onto their respective factors at the within- and between-person level of analysis, respectively. All factors were allowed to correlate with each other. In addition, the residual variance of one deep acting item was fixed to 0 at the between-person level.¹ The model resulted in a good fit ($\chi^2 = 3,696.80, p < .001$; comparative fit index = .94; Tucker–Lewis index = .93; root mean square error of approximation = .03; standardized root mean square residual within = .04; standardized root mean square residual between = .08).

Analyses

Because of the hierarchical data structure, we used multilevel modeling to test our hypotheses. Specifically, we used a multilevel structural equation modeling framework in Mplus 8 (Mplus Version 8, Muthén & Muthén, 2017) and followed procedures to test for (1–1–1) lower level multilevel mediation recommended by

Preacher and colleague’s (Preacher, Zhang, & Zyphur, 2011; Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). As argued in the introduction, our focus was on the role of within-person rather than on the static between-person aspects of surface and deep acting. Analytical models were specified at the within-person and between-person level simultaneously corresponding to person-mean centering of predictor variables at the within-person level. Accordingly, results at the within-person level inform on the role of a person’s daily variations from his or her mean level of surface and deep acting for emotional exhaustion, explained by daily psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions. We followed Preacher and colleagues’ recommendations in testing indirect effects (Preacher et al., 2010), using the parametric bootstrap procedure that produces 95% confidence intervals (CIs) around indirect effects that account for the asymmetric nature of the sampling distribution of an indirect effect. As stated in Hypothesis 1c, we also predicted differences in the strength of relationship of surface acting and deep acting with psychological effort. Differences in relationships were tested by adding a model constraint command in Mplus8.

We started the analysis by examining the direct relationship of surface and deep acting with the three mediating variables: psychological effort, perceived authenticity, and rewarding interactions (see Table 2). Next, we tested an overall model using surface and deep acting as predictors of emotional exhaustion including all mediating paths (three for surface acting and three for deep acting) simultaneously (see Table 3). We ran all analyses with and without positive and negative affect during work as control variables.

Results

Main Results

To estimate the relative amount of between- and within-person variance, we estimated intraclass coefficients. An inspection of intraclass coefficients revealed that 56% and 53% of surface and deep acting were attributable to within-person variance, respectively. Furthermore, 36%, 36%, and 45% of psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions were attributable to within-person variance, respectively, and 44% of emotional exhaustion was attributable to within-person variance. Regarding the control variables, 42% of both positive and negative affect during work were attributable to within-person variance. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables are depicted in Table 1.

First, we investigated the relationships between surface and deep acting (assessed in the midday survey) with each of the mechanisms (assessed in the end-of-work survey). In doing so, we followed recommendations in the literature and controlled for positive and negative affect (assessed in the midday survey) to account for potential biases due to transient mood states (Gabriel et al., 2019). The results of the direct relationships between daily surface and deep acting with the mechanisms: psychological effort,

¹ Not fixing the variance of this deep acting item resulted in identical fit but yielded an error message identifying the residual variance of this item to be slightly negative (estimate = $-.001, p = .97$). In such instances of nonsignificant negative residual variances, Mplus support recommends fixing the variance to zero.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Correlations							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Surface acting	2.75	1.16		.13*	-.28***	-.27***	.24***	.17**	-.17***	.23***
2. Deep acting	3.06	0.89	.41***		-.02	-.02	-.02	-.03	.12**	.01
3. Felt authenticity	3.69	1.14	-.83***	-.34***		.44***	-.49***	-.30***	.28***	-.32***
4. Rewarding interactions	3.27	0.73	-.71***	-.45***	.70***		-.33***	-.11	.16**	-.19***
5. Psychological effort	2.65	0.96	.79***	.42***	-.83***	-.81***		.30***	-.25***	.24**
6. Emotional exhaustion	2.32	1.25	.71***	.27*	-.83***	-.70***	.78***		-.24***	.23***
7. Positive affect during work	2.60	1.12	-.24*	.31**	.13	.11	-.09	-.15		-.24***
8. Negative affect during work	1.58	0.64	.24†	-.01	-.48***	-.22*	.37***	.51***	.00	

Note. *N* = 146 individuals and 699 observations. Within-person correlations are depicted above the diagonal; between-level correlations for the Level 1 correlations were computed and aggregated to the person level.

† *p* < .10 (two tailed). * *p* < .05 (two tailed). ** *p* < .01 (two tailed). *** *p* < .001 (two tailed).

felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions are shown in Table 2. Surface acting was positively related to psychological effort (estimate = .13, 95% CI [.04, .23]), providing support for Hypothesis 1a. Contrary to expectations (Hypothesis 1b), deep acting was not significantly related to psychological effort (estimate = -.01, 95% CI [-.11, .09]). Examining the difference in the strength of relationships of surface and deep acting with psychological effort revealed that the surface acting–psychological effort relationship was not significantly stronger than the deep acting–psychological effort relationship at the 95% confidence level (difference = .15, 95% CI [-.01, .29]). Hypothesis 1c was therefore not supported.

Surface acting was found to negatively relate to felt authenticity (estimate = -.15, 95% CI [-.23, -.07]), supporting Hypothesis 3a. In contrast, deep acting was not significantly related to felt authenticity (estimate = -.02, 95% CI [-.12, .08]); Hypothesis 3b was not supported. Furthermore, surface acting was found to negatively relate to rewarding interactions (estimate = -.16, 95% CI [-.24, -.08]), supporting Hypothesis 5a, whereas deep acting was not significantly related to rewarding interactions (esti-

mate = -.01, 95% CI [-.09, .07]); Hypothesis 5b was not supported.

Results of the multilevel mediation model for emotional exhaustion are depicted in Table 3. Psychological effort (estimate = .04, 95% CI [.01, .08]) and felt authenticity (estimate = .04, 95% CI [.01, .09]) mediated the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion, supporting Hypotheses 2a and 4a. Hypothesis 6a, however, was not supported: Rewarding interactions did not mediate the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion (estimate = -.02, 95% CI [-.05, .01]). None of the mechanisms—that is, psychological effort (estimate = -.01, 95% CI [-.04, .02]), felt authenticity (estimate = .00, 95% CI [-.03, .02]), and rewarding interactions (estimate = .00, 95% CI [-.01, .01])—mediated the relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion. There was also no evidence for a total effect of deep acting and emotional exhaustion (estimate = -.04, 95% CI [-.15, .08]). Because none of these mechanisms indirectly linked deep acting to emotional exhaustion, Hypothesis 7, stating that the strain-enhancing and strain-reducing mechanisms would attenuate

Table 2
Multilevel Model Predicting Psychological Effort, Felt Authenticity, and Rewarding Interactions

Variable	Psychological effort			Felt authenticity			Rewarding interactions			Emotional exhaustion		
	Estimate	<i>SE</i>	CI ^a	Estimate	<i>SE</i>	CI ^a	Estimate	<i>SE</i>	CI ^a	Estimate	<i>SE</i>	CI ^a
Within-person level												
Surface acting	.13***	.05	[.04, .23]	-.15***	.04	[-.23, -.07]	-.16***	.04	[-.24, -.08]	.10*	.05	[.00, .20]
Deep acting	-.01	.05	[-.11, .09]	-.02	.05	[-.12, .08]	-.01	.04	[-.09, .07]	-.04	.06	[-.15, .07]
Control												
Positive affect	-.15***	.05	[-.24, -.06]	.17***	.05	[.08, .27]	.07	.05	[-.03, .17]	-.20**	.07	[-.33, -.07]
Negative affect	.20*	.09	[.02, .37]	-.29***	.08	[-.45, -.13]	-.14*	.06	[-.25, -.03]	.21*	.10	[.02, .39]
Residual variance	.31***	.03		.34***	.03		.30***	.03		.48***	.04	
<i>R</i> ²	.13**	.04		.18*	.05		.09**	.04		.09*	.04	
DIFF surface and deep acting	.15†	.08	[-.01, .29]	-.13*	.06	[-.25, -.01]	-.15**	.06	[-.26, -.04]	.14*	.07	[.00, .28]
Between-person level												
Intercept	2.62***	.05		3.73***	.05		3.28***	.05		2.29***	.06	
Residual variance	.21***	.05		.17***	.04		.18***	.04		.27***	.06	

Note. *N* = 144 individuals and 699 observations. CI = confidence interval; DIFF = difference; *SE* = standard error. Models are random intercept models. Paths were modeled at the within- and between-person level simultaneously. However, only within-person paths are displayed here for the sake of readability.

^a Lower and upper 2.5% confidence interval.

† *p* < .10. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

Table 3
Multilevel Mediation Model Predicting Emotional Exhaustion From Surface Acting and Deep Acting, Mediated by Psychological Effort, Perceived Authenticity, and Rewarding Interactions

Variable	Estimate	SE	CI ^a
Within-person level			
Paths a			
Surface acting → Psychological effort	.19***	.05	[.10, .28]
Surface acting → Felt authenticity	-.23***	.04	[-.31, -.15]
Surface acting → Rewarding interactions	-.19***	.04	[-.28, -.11]
Deep acting → Psychological effort	-.03	.06	[-.15, .08]
Deep acting → Felt authenticity	.01	.06	[-.11, .13]
Deep acting → Rewarding interactions	.01	.04	[-.08, .09]
Paths b			
Psychological effort → Emotional exhaustion	.20**	.08	[.05, .35]
Felt authenticity → Emotional exhaustion	-.19*	.08	[-.35, -.04]
Rewarding interactions → Emotional exhaustion	.10	.08	[-.06, .25]
Paths c			
Surface acting → Emotional exhaustion	.06	.05	[-.04, .16]
Deep acting → Emotional exhaustion	-.04	.06	[-.15, .08]
Control			
Positive affect → Emotional exhaustion	-.14*	.07	[-.27, -.01]
Negative affect → Emotional exhaustion	.13	.08	[-.03, .30]
Indirect effects			
Surface acting			
Indirect effect via psychological effort	.04*	.02	[.01, .08]
Indirect effect via felt authenticity	.04*	.02	[.01, .09]
Indirect effect via rewarding interactions	-.02	.02	[-.05, .01]
Deep acting			
Indirect effect via psychological effort	-.01	.01	[-.04, .02]
Indirect effect via felt authenticity	.00	.01	[-.03, .02]
Indirect effect via rewarding interactions	.00	.00	[-.01, .01]
Residual variances			
Residual variance emotional exhaustion	.46***	.04	
Residual variance psychological effort	.33***	.04	
Residual variance felt authenticity	.38***	.04	
Residual variance rewarding interactions	.31***	.03	
R ² emotional exhaustion	.16**	.05	
R ² psychological effort	.06*	.03	
R ² felt authenticity	.08**	.03	
R ² rewarding interactions	.07*	.03	
Between-person level			
Intercept emotional exhaustion	2.32***	.05	
Residual variance emotional exhaustion	.18***	.05	

Note. $N = 146$ individuals and 699 observations. The model is a 1-1-1 mediation model with random intercept and fixed slopes. Paths refer to Figure 1. In addition to the relationships displayed here, the model included intercorrelations between predictor and between mediator variables. Paths were modeled at the within- and between-person level simultaneously. However, only within-person paths are displayed here for the sake of readability.

^a Lower and upper 2.5% confidence interval.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .01$.

each other, was not supported. Thus, although the total effect of deep acting on emotional exhaustion was not significant (estimate = $-.04$; $p = .47$; cf. Table 2), this null finding cannot be explained by an attenuation effect of competing underlying mechanisms. The results for the multilevel mediation analysis are shown in Figure 2.

Supplementary Analyses

To test the robustness of our findings and explore alternative explanations, we conducted a series of supplementary analyses. First, considering the ongoing debate as to whether affect or mood should be considered a control variable or a substantively important variable that should not be controlled (Gabriel et al., 2019), we

reran all analyses without the inclusion of positive and negative affect as control variables. The pattern of results, specifically the direction and the significance of relationships, remained the same.²

Second, due to recent findings that the type of interactions may affect the association of emotional labor strategies with outcomes (Grandey, Houston III, & Avery, 2019; Wang & Groth, 2014), we tested whether the extent to which employees have ongoing service relationships as opposed to one-time service encounters affected the relationship of surface and deep acting with mediating mechanisms and with emotional exhaustion. Specifically, we tested the same models as depicted in Table 2, but specifying

² Results can be received from the authors upon request.

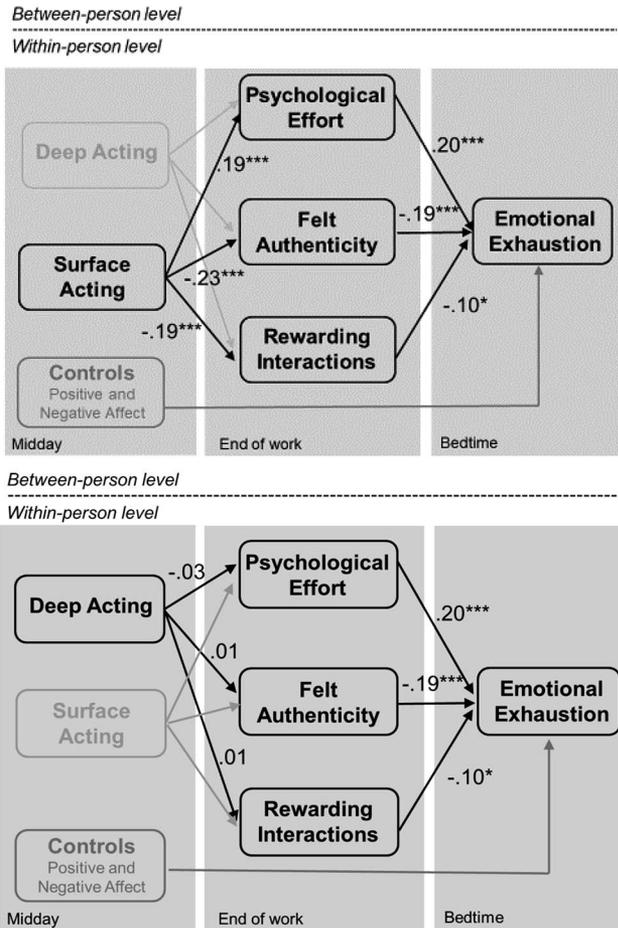


Figure 2. Results of multilevel mediation analyses. For the sake of readability, paths for surface acting are indicated in the upper panel, and paths for deep acting are indicated in the lower panel although both predictors were entered simultaneously in one analytical model. The indirect effect of surface acting via psychological effort was $\gamma = .04$, $SE = .02$, $p < .05$, via felt authenticity, $\gamma = .04$, $SE = .02$, $p < .05$, and via rewarding interactions, $\gamma = -.02$, $SE = .02$, ns . The indirect effect of deep acting via psychological effort was $\gamma = -.01$, $SE = .01$, ns , via felt authenticity, $\gamma = .00$, $SE = .01$, ns , and via psychological effort, $\gamma = .00$, $SE = .00$, ns . The effect of the control variable positive affect was $\gamma = -.14$, $SE = .07$, $p < .05$, and for negative affect, $\gamma = .13$, $SE = .08$, ns . ns = not significant.

cross-level interactions of surface acting and deep acting respectively with interaction frequency on emotional exhaustion. Interaction frequency was operationalized with a self-developed one-item measure asking participants how often they interacted with the same clients (answered on a 5-point scale from 1 [*never*] to 5 [*always*]). For none of the outcome variables (i.e., psychological effort, felt authenticity, rewarding relationships, and emotional exhaustion), these cross-level interactions were significant.²

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to shed light on the role of three central mechanisms that may drive and explain short-term, within-person relationships of surface and deep acting with emo-

tional exhaustion. Importantly, the three central mechanisms were considered jointly, thereby allowing to assess the unique contribution of each mechanism. This also allowed us to address a longstanding question in the emotional labor literature regarding the relationship of deep acting with work strain as indicated by the core burnout dimension of emotional exhaustion. Previously, researchers have hypothesized that the failure to find a significant relationship between deep acting and well-being outcomes may be explained by the fact that deep acting simultaneously has negative (it involves effort) as well as positive effects (it leads to feelings of authenticity and rewarding interactions) that counteract one another. The countering effects were suggested to explain deep acting's null relationship with work strain and well-being outcomes (Goodwin et al., 2011; Grandey, 2003; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011; Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007). With the present study, we answered calls to test this idea empirically (Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). Importantly, our findings challenge the idea that deep acting does not consistently relate to emotional exhaustion because it has both positive and negative effects on the key mechanisms advocated in the literature. Rather, results revealed that deep acting does not relate to any of the mechanisms studied here, that is, psychological effort, an individual's sense of authenticity, or the experience of rewarding interactions. These findings suggest that the null-relationships of deep acting with emotional exhaustion are explained by a lack of relationships between deep acting and all three mechanisms rather than by compensatory processes. The lack of support for an explanation that has been echoed numerous times in the literature highlights the need to pursue other explanations for the weak and inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between deep acting and outcomes related to well-being, like strain.

Alternative Explanations

The role of felt emotions. A possible explanation refers to the role of actually felt emotions in deep acting. In typical service jobs, deep acting involves changing the underlying emotion into a more positive one so that the display requirements can be met. Under conditions of positive display rules, employees therefore actually experience more positive emotions when using deep acting. Employees engaging in deep acting may therefore instantaneously be compensated for the effort spent to regulate their emotions by actually feeling more positive emotions. In support of this idea, most of previous research has shown that deep acting was associated with an increase in positive affect and a decrease in negative affect (Lennard, Scott, Johnson, 2019; Scott & Barnes, 2011; for an exception, see Judge et al., 2009). An inspection of within-person zero-order correlations of the present study (see Table 1) supports this argument: Deep acting was positively related to positive affect, which, in turn, was positively related to rewarding interactions and negatively to emotional exhaustion. The idea that such changes in affect better account for the weak or null relationship between deep acting and strain still awaits to be empirically tested. Notably however, an equivalent explanation has been put forth for the effects of surface acting on strain suggesting that the prolonged experience of negative emotions at least partly explains the strain-inducing effects of surface acting (Semmer, Messerli, & Tschann, 2016; see also Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). In a series of experience-sampling and cross-sectional studies, Semmer and col-

leagues (2016) were able to show that the effects of surface acting on well-being are substantially explained by negative emotions felt during social interactions. Similarly, Wagner, Barnes, and Scott (2014) showed that anxiety, a negative affective state, mediated effects of surface acting on emotional exhaustion. Notably, our study results suggest that negative affect is not the only mechanism that may explain the strain-inducing effects of surface acting, as surface acting predicted emotional exhaustion via psychological effort and felt authenticity even after controlling for negative affect.

Measurement issues. An alternative explanation for the lack of support for Hypothesis 7 may be that the traditional operationalization of deep acting as the “attempt or effort to change feelings to be congruent with emotional requirements” (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015, p. 326) fails to capture the true essence of deep acting. Although well-established and the most widely used operationalization of deep acting, this approach has recently been criticized, as it comes with several drawbacks, most notably the possibility that deep acting items assess the level of motivation of employees to adjust their emotions rather than their actual engagement or success in deep acting (Alabak, Hülshager, Zijlstra, & Verduyn, 2019; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Furthermore, an omnibus assessment of deep acting as attempts to align felt with required emotions fails to capture the actual cognitive strategies used by employees to achieve this goal. Some authors have therefore employed alternative measure of deep acting by directly assessing the extent to which employees engage in positive refocus and perspective taking when interacting with customers (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). In a recent article, Alabak and colleagues (2019) assessed perspective taking, positive reappraisal, and attentional deployment as three distinct emotion-regulation strategies involved in deep acting and showed that they differentially relate to the mechanisms we studied. Positive reappraisal and attentional deployment were positively related to mental fatigue (the result of psychological effort), but perspective taking was not. In contrast, perspective taking was positively related to rewarding interactions, whereas the other two regulation strategies were not. These findings suggest that for a thorough theoretical understanding of the role of deep acting in employee well-being, it might be advisable to move beyond the traditional assessment of deep acting as an omnibus construct to an assessment of the concrete underlying emotion regulation strategies. Such an approach would also be more in line with the current operationalization of surface acting that captures hiding and faking emotions, that is, the actual regulation strategies rather than employees’ intentions and efforts to regulate their expressions.

Comparing Mechanisms Underlying Surface Acting

In addition to scrutinizing processes involved in deep acting, our study set out to investigate the processes underlying the surface acting–exhaustion relationship. The investigation of all three mechanisms, psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions together, enabled us to shed light on the relative importance of each mechanism in the surface acting–emotional exhaustion relationship. This is important, as the mechanisms are likely to be dependent of each other (Holman et al., 2008). Our findings revealed that psychological effort and felt authenticity, but not rewarding interactions, drive the negative surface acting–

emotional exhaustion relationship. Our findings thus fully support the psychological effort account (Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Gross & John, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1997), as well as the self-authenticity account (English & John, 2013) of the surface acting–well-being relationship, but not the rewarding interactions account (Côté, 2005; Grandey et al., 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006).

Rewarding interactions was not found to be a mediator for the surface acting–emotional exhaustion relationship when considered alongside the other mechanisms. Therefore, rewarding interactions, or the lack thereof, does not explain the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion above and beyond psychological effort and felt authenticity. Notably however, the zero-order within-person correlation between surface acting and rewarding interactions was negative and significant, $r = -.27, p < .001$, providing some support for the rewarding interactions account. Consequently, when considered as a stand-alone predictor, our data support previous findings suggesting that inauthentic emotional displays impair relationships because they are interpreted as attempts to control the interaction partner (English & John, 2013; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Sheldon et al., 1997; Swann et al., 1994; Swann & Pelham, 2002). In conclusion, the nonsignificant indirect effect of surface acting on emotional exhaustion via rewarding interactions is largely attributable to the overlap between the three mechanisms, as evidenced by the moderate zero-order correlations of rewarding interactions with psychological effort, $r = -.33, p < .001$, and felt authenticity, $r = .44, p < .001$. In sum, these findings highlight the merits of studying the three mechanisms jointly, as this informs about the unique contribution of each mechanism in explaining surface acting–well-being relationships. Although surface acting is effortful, impairs employees’ sense of authenticity, and stands in the way of rewarding interactions with customers, the negative effects of surface acting on emotional exhaustion seem to be driven predominantly by psychological effort and by feelings of inauthenticity. Rewarding interactions have little explanatory power above and beyond the other two mechanisms.

Practical Implications

Our study yielded two key findings that have implications for practice: First, our study provided clear evidence that surface acting has the potential to increase employee emotional exhaustion. Second, deep acting was unrelated to emotional exhaustion and the mechanisms studied. This indicates that although deep acting might not necessarily increase well-being, it is healthier than surface acting for the regulation of emotions. In sum, one can conclude that deep acting seems to be less detrimental than surface acting. Practitioners and organizations with emotional labor-intensive jobs would thus be advised to reduce surface acting in emotional labor workers whenever possible. For example, an intervention study revealed that mindfulness-based interventions may be a viable strategy to diminish the use of surface acting in emotional labor-intensive jobs (Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As is the case for most studies, this study also comes with its own limitations. Despite our intensive longitudinal experience–

sampling design, we are not able to draw any causal conclusions about the relationships of emotional labor strategies with mediators and emotional exhaustion. Although we used a temporal separation between our predictor, mediator, and outcome variables, the study design is still one of repeated cross-sectional measures. We tried to avoid using causal language, but we still assumed the direction of effects to be that emotional labor strategies predict psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions, which in turn predict emotional exhaustion. This idea is grounded in theoretical and empirical advances in the emotional labor literature that support this causal ordering: For example, Hülshager, Lang, and Maier (2010) found surface acting to predict subsequent strain. However, it might still be that the direction of the effects found is actually reversed or reciprocal. For example, when feeling more exhausted employees may engage more in surface acting.

Deep acting was found to be unrelated to felt authenticity. This might show that surface and deep acting are separate points on a continuum differentiating the emotional displays according to their authenticity. Surface acting would be at the inauthentic side, the expression of genuine emotions at the more authentic one, and deep acting somewhere in between those two sides. Although employees make a genuine effort to change the emotions they feel when engaging in deep acting, these efforts may not always be successful and negative emotions may leak out. Indeed, Diefendorff and colleagues (2005) showed the existence of naturally felt emotions as a third emotion regulation strategy. Martínez-Iñigo and colleagues (2007) found that automatic regulation (i.e., the expression of naturally felt emotions) negatively relates to emotional exhaustion, whereas Hülshager and colleagues (2015) found automatic regulation to be positively related to the amount of tips received from customers. Although this is beyond the scope of our current study, future research could extend the present investigation to automatic regulation and the natural display of emotions.

Conclusion

The present study sheds light on the role of central intra- and interpersonal mechanisms in explaining the relationship of surface and deep acting with emotional exhaustion. By doing so, we addressed a longstanding, yet unresolved question regarding potential opponent processes that operate when employees engage in deep acting. Study findings largely confirmed previous theorizing on the role of intra- and interpersonal mechanisms in explaining the strain-inducing effects of surface acting. Importantly, however, contrary to previous theorizing in the literature, deep acting was shown to be unrelated to these intra- and interpersonal mechanisms, namely, psychological effort, felt authenticity, and rewarding interactions. Study findings therefore highlight the need to refine emotional labor theory regarding the processes involved in the deep acting–strain relationship.

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