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## Coping with emotional labor: an intervention study

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Coping with Emotional Labor: An Intervention Study

January 25, 2019

## Abstract

Emotional labor is generally seen as a response to organizational *display rules*, which seek to guide the employee's emotional expressions in such a way as to benefit the organization – generally by increasing customer satisfaction and fostering a positive regard for the organization itself. The current study investigates the degree to which a workshop intervention providing information about emotional labor and targeting effective coping strategies could have an effect on teachers' burnout. Using a sample of educators in primary and secondary schools, participants completed a pre-intervention survey, the training intervention, and a post-intervention survey six months after the training. Findings indicate that helpful coping strategies increased from the pre- to post-intervention survey and the relationships between emotional labor and burnout weakened from time 1 to time 2. The findings suggest that a brief, 60 minute, intervention has the potential to improve individual well-being. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Key words: emotional labor; teachers; stress; burnout; coping strategies

### Coping with Emotional Labor: An Intervention Study

Beginning with Hochschild's (1983) observation that a large portion of many employees' "work" has to do with the management and regulation of their emotions, a significant literature base on *emotional labor* has developed (e.g., Diefendorff & Croyle, 2008; Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). While an overarching model of emotional labor and how it fits within the organizational and individual context continues to evolve (Grandey & Melloy, 2017), there appears to be broad consensus regarding a basic model of emotional labor and outcomes (Diefendorff & Croyle, 2008; Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005; Judge, Woolfe, & Hurst, 2009; Totterdell & Holman, 2003).

In this basic model, emotional labor is generally seen as a response to organizational or occupational *display rules*, which are social system norms that seek to guide the employee's emotional expressions in such a way as to benefit the organization – generally by increasing customer satisfaction and fostering a positive regard for the organization itself (Diefendorff, Richard, & Croyle, 2006; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). When these display rules are in conflict with the employee's naturally felt emotions, one of two types of emotional labor is required to conform to these expectations. Employees may engage in *deep acting*, which is conceptualized as an antecedent-focused form of emotion regulation (Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Gross, 1998). This type of emotional labor consists of trying to manage one's internal feelings, often through attentional deployment (i.e., thinking of things that will elicit the appropriate emotion) or cognitive change (i.e., trying to see the situation differently so as to bring about the appropriate emotion; Gross, 1998). The other type is *surface acting*, conceptualized as response-focused emotion regulation. In surface acting, the employee works to

suppress the expression of the naturally felt negative emotion or to “fake” a positive expression so as to conform to the organization’s display rules (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998).

Previously studied outcomes of emotional labor have included burnout, job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover. Surface acting is generally found to be positively associated with burnout (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Judge et al., 2009; Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010; Totterdell & Holman, 2003) and turnover (Chau, Dahling, Levy, & Diefendorff, 2009), and negatively associated with job satisfaction (Grandey et al., 2005; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Judge et al., 2009) and job performance (Chi, Grandey, Diamond, & Krimmel, 2011; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Scott & Barnes, 2011). The relationship between deep acting and personal outcomes, on the other hand, has been less clear. While it was initially thought to result in similar outcomes as are associated with surface acting (Grandey, 2000), some later research has found deep acting associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and performance (Judge et al., 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013).

A question that remains is what can be done to better promote healthy emotion regulation strategies or to mitigate the negative effects of emotional labor among employees. Given the negative outcomes strongly associated with surface acting in many studies, it is somewhat surprising that so few intervention studies have been conducted. Those undertaken can be grouped into two categories: those designed to increase deep acting and those designed to increase variables that may mitigate the negative outcomes of emotional labor.

Because deep acting has been associated with more positive organizational and personal outcomes, one approach suggested by researchers (Chi et al., 2011; Judge et al., 2009) is to provide employees with training and opportunities to develop effective deep acting strategies. While researchers have found it possible to increase deep acting of both service workers and

managers through various interventions, none of the studies to date have investigated whether this had any impact on participants' burnout (Edelman & Knippenberg, 2016; Hülshager, Lang, Schewe, & Zijlstra, 2015).

Another approach to reducing the unhealthy outcomes associated with surface acting would be to target personal variables that have been shown to mitigate these outcomes and that may be amenable to treatment. The only intervention study to be found in the literature targeting such a variable was conducted by Hülshager and colleagues (2013), in which participants who received a mindfulness intervention demonstrated less emotional exhaustion and more job satisfaction than those who did not.

### **Coping Skills and Emotional Labor**

One important factor that has been shown to mitigate burnout is the presence of effective coping strategies (Chang, 2013; Chang & Chan, 2015). While there are a host of different strategies that individuals can use to cope with stress, some have more empirical support than others. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, coping strategies are often a response to stressful demands or situations. These stressors may accompany specific job demands or aspects of the job. When individuals are faced with these stressors, they typically respond either through problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping strategies are manifested by overt efforts to address, solve, or overcome the presenting challenge or stressor (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). This approach is represented by items such as "When I experience a problem, I take the initiative in resolving it" on the Proactive Coping Inventory (Greenglass, Schwarzer, Jakubiec, Fiksenbaum, & Taubert, 1999), and "I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in" on the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997).

Strategies aligned to problem-focused coping have been shown to be more effective than emotion-focused coping. For instance, Chang (2013) investigated teachers' adaptive coping strategies as a response to incidences of disruptive student behavior in the classroom and found that problem-focused coping effectively mediated the effects of this type of stressor on burnout. While coping strategies have been studied as responses to particular work stressors, of particular interest to our study is the degree to which effective coping strategies could lessen the negative outcomes associated with emotional labor as a job demand. Similarly, other studies have found effective coping to be negatively related to burnout (Chang, 2013; Chang & Chan, 2015), but none have done so in the context of emotional labor.

### **Current study**

In our study, we wanted to investigate the degree to which a brief workshop intervention providing information about emotional labor and targeting effective coping strategies could have an effect on teachers' burnout. While much of the research on emotional labor has been conducted with service workers, there is significant evidence that teachers experience a great deal of emotional labor (Cheung, Tang, & Tang, 2011; Philipp & Schüpbach, 2010; Tuxford & Bradley, 2015). Moreover, this is a population that experiences significant attrition and burnout (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

Our workshop consisted both of didactic training and group exercises. We first presented an overview of the topic of emotional labor and invited participants to engage in activities that made the connection between both surface and deep acting and their own work experiences. The second half of the workshop focused on coping skills. In table groups, participants were asked to sort the 28 item statements from the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997) into two groups: those which they thought were helpful or effective, and those which they thought were unhelpful. We

then presented to participants a quick summary of the research base for or against each of the coping scales included in the Brief COPE. Although we particularly emphasized problem-focused coping strategies, we intentionally used the language of “helpful” and “unhelpful” throughout the training, so as to broaden the helpful category to include other coping responses with empirical support (e.g., turning to religion; Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). We grouped the Active Coping, Planning, Using Instrumental Support, Positive Reframing, and Religion coping scales together as helpful. The Denial, Self-Distraction, Substance Use, Self-Blame, Behavioral Disengagement, and Venting scales were presented as unhelpful. The remaining scales (Acceptance, Using Emotional Support, and Humor) were presented as “it depends.” For these, we stressed that these responses might be helpful if they led to proactive, problem-focused coping; otherwise, they were unhelpful. Following this exercise, participants were invited to reflect on a situation in which they were routinely engaging in emotional labor and then work in small groups to select a helpful coping strategy that could be employed.

For our study, the following were hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1:* The use of helpful coping strategies will increase from pre- to post-intervention.

*Hypothesis 2:* The use of unhelpful coping strategies will decrease from pre- to post-intervention.

In this study, we hypothesized that the basic emotional labor relationships exist among teachers, as both theoretically and previous research has shown. Thus,

*Hypothesis 3:* Display rules are positively related to both (a) surface acting and (b) deep acting both pre- and post-intervention.

*Hypothesis 4:* Surface and deep acting are positively related to burnout both pre- and post-intervention.



Additionally, we hypothesized that the intervention, further described in the methods section, designed to promote the use of problem-focused coping mitigates or minimizes the relationships in the standard emotional labor model. This suggests that, when properly deployed, the negative outcomes associated with emotional labor may be reduced by a relatively simple intervention. Thus,

*Hypothesis 5:* The relationships between display rules, surface/deep acting, and burnout are weaker after the intervention compared to before.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Three public school districts in the Midwestern US were invited to integrate training on emotional labor and coping strategies as part of their monthly staff development. District administrators who agreed to participate in the training provided contact information for staff in their district. Participants were then invited to participate in a pre-intervention survey, the training intervention, and a post-intervention survey six months after the training. Data was cleaned to include only participants who participated in both the pre- and post-intervention surveys and the final count of participants was 97. The sample was majority female (82.60%) and consisted of a diverse age range, with a mean age of 40.93 ( $SD=12.10$ ). Participants had completed college, or had completed some graduate work (23.90%) or obtained a graduate degree (53.30%). Participants had been educators for an average of 14.86 years ( $SD=9.93$ ) and had been at their current organization for an average of 10.47 years ( $SD=9.20$ ).

### **Procedure**

All participants were invited to participate in a pre-intervention survey administered through Qualtrics survey software six months prior to the scheduled training workshop.

Participants then attended a 60-minute workshop on emotional labor and coping strategies as part of their monthly staff development. A table with the time and description for each activity in the intervention is provided in the Appendix. Each module of the training was timed and delivered by the same presenter to ensure that the training was the same for all participants across school districts.

The training intervention modules consisted of both lecture style presentation and interactive activities. The first half of the training focused on emotional labor. First, the definition and background of research on emotional labor was shared. Then, examples of emotional labor in education settings were shared. Next, participants working together in small groups were provided with poster paper and markers and were asked to discuss and visually represent a scenario in which they have faced emotional labor as teachers. Participants were then invited to share their examples of emotional labor with the larger group. Finally, the results of the display rules and emotional labor scales from the pre-training survey were shared with participants.

The second half of the training focused on coping skills. Participants worked in small groups to sort the coping response statements from the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997) into helpful and unhelpful piles. The presenters then shared which coping skills were considered helpful or unhelpful based on empirical research. In doing so, pre-training survey results related to coping skills were shared with participants. Finally, an activity focused on goal setting was implemented. Participants wrote down one stressor causing emotional labor on the outside of an envelope. They then passed the envelope around the table and each participant wrote down a coping strategy for managing that stressor on a strip of paper and put it into the envelope. Each

participant received their envelope back and they were able to read through the ideas and choose a coping strategy that they thought would be appropriate and manageable to address the stressor.

Six months following the training, participants were invited to take a post-intervention survey again using Qualtrics survey software. Thus, the pre- and post-intervention surveys were administered close to the same time in the academic year, one year apart, in an attempt to mitigate work-related confounds.

### **Survey Measures**

All scales discussed here were converted to latent variables prior to analysis. Specifically, the scales were each converted into composites of their respective items, after necessary recoding (e.g. reverse scored items). Each scales' items were summed and divided by the number of items, creating composites consistent with the scaling factor (e.g. 1 to 5 on an agree to disagree scale). This procedure is consistent with each respective scales' original source as cited here.

**Display rules** were measured using seven items adapted from Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand (2005). Four items assess positive display rules (e.g., "Part of my job is to make the stakeholders feel good"). Three items evaluated negative display rules (e.g., "This organization expects me to pretend that I am not upset or distressed"). Display rules were measured only at Time 1 with the assumption that display rules would be consistent across time points.

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale displayed acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

**Emotional labor** was measured using widely used scales (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998) with modifications recommended by Diefendorff et al. (2005). Participants were asked, "When doing your job, how often do you do the following behaviors?" Ratings were made on a 5-point Likert-

type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a great extent). Surface acting was measured using seven items (e.g., “I put on an act in order to deal with stakeholders in an appropriate way”). The surface acting scale demonstrated good internal consistency at Time 1 ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and Time 2 ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Deep acting was measured using four items (e.g., “I try to actually experience the emotions I must show to the stakeholders.”) The deep acting scale also demonstrated acceptable internal consistency at both Time 1 ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and Time 2 ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Burnout** was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Participants were asked to indicate how often they engage in each behavior statement. Ratings were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (every day). Burnout was measured using 21 items (e.g., “I feel emotionally drained from my work”). The burnout scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency at Time 1 ( $\alpha = .77$ ) and Time 2 ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Coping Skills** were assessed using the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997). Participants indicated, on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A lot) how often they use each coping skill statement. The Brief COPE consists of 28 items representing 14 conceptually distinct coping behaviors, with two items for each scale. For this study, the 10 items representing Active Coping, Planning, Positive Reframing, Using Instrumental Support, and Religion were coded as helpful, and the 12 items representing Self-Distraction, Denial, Emotional Venting, Substance Use, Behavioral Disengagement, and Self-Blame were coded as unhelpful. The coping responses presented as “it depends” in the workshops (Acceptance, Humor, and Using Emotional Support) were not included in either category. Helpful coping scales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency at Time 1 ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and Time 2 ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

Unhelpful coping scales also demonstrated acceptable internal consistency at Time 1 ( $\alpha = .77$ ) and Time 2 ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

**Affectivity** was assessed using a 20-item adapted version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants indicated, on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very slightly) to 5 (extremely), how often they feel various emotions (e.g., excited, proud, upset, and ashamed). Affectivity was measured only at Time 1 as affectivity is assumed to be a relatively stable trait that should be consistent across time points. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Positive Affectivity  $\alpha = .92$ ; Negative Affectivity  $\alpha = .80$ ). Both positive and negative affectivity were included as control variables in the following analyses.

## Results

Prior to proceeding with analyses and at the time of scale composite forming, each measurement scale and subsequent latent variable was verified using exploratory factor analysis using oblimin rotation, eigen value extraction at 1.0, and scree-plot verification. In all cases, the sample data showed the same factor structure as consistent with previous uses of the measures, with factor loadings adequate for further analysis. Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and alpha reliability coefficients for the focal variables at both time points.

### Hypothesis Tests

Our first hypothesis, that helpful coping skills would increase from Time 1 to Time 2, was supported (see Table 1). There was a significant difference in the scores for helpful coping skills at Time 1 ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) and Time 2 ( $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ );  $t(90) = -2.66$ ,  $p = .009$ . Our second hypothesis, that unhelpful coping skills would decrease from Time 1 to Time 2,

was not supported. There was not a significant difference in the scores for unhelpful coping skills at Time 1 ( $M = 1.62, SD = 0.36$ ) and Time 2 ( $M = 1.66, SD = 0.41$ );  $t(90) = -1.02, p = .310$ .

Positive and negative affect were used as control variables in all regression tests because they have an effect on the emotion regulation process and its outcomes (Grandey, 2000; Diefendorff, Erickson, Grandey, & Dahling, 2011). Our third hypothesis, that display rules are positively related to surface acting and deep acting both pre- and post-intervention, was tested using regression. All relationships for Hypothesis 3 are reported in Table 2. The relationship between display rules and surface acting was significant at Time 1,  $B = 0.39, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.16, 0.61]$ , indicating that display rules is positively related to surface acting. The relationship between display rules and deep acting was significant at Time 1,  $B = 0.34, p < .01, 95\% CI [0.11, 0.56]$ , indicating that display rules are positively related to deep acting. The relationship between display rules and surface acting was not significant at Time 2,  $B = 0.16, p > .05, 95\% CI [-0.08, 0.41]$ , indicating that display rules is no longer related to surface acting at Time 2. The relationship between display rules and deep acting was not significant at Time 2,  $B = 0.17, p > .05, 95\% CI [-0.08, 0.41]$ , indicating that display rules is also no longer related to deep acting at Time 2. These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 3.

Our fourth hypothesis, that surface acting and deep acting are positively related to burnout both pre- and post-intervention, was tested using regression. All relationships for Hypothesis 4 are reported in Table 3. The relationship between surface acting and burnout was significant at Time 1,  $B = 0.26, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.15, 0.37]$ , indicating that surface acting was positively related to of burnout. The relationship between deep acting and burnout was not significant at Time 1,  $B = -0.05, p > .05, 95\% CI [-0.17, 0.07]$ , indicating that deep acting is not related to burnout. The relationship between surface acting and burnout was significant at Time

2,  $B = 0.26, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.13, 0.40]$ , which indicates surface acting was positively related to burnout. The relationship between deep acting and burnout was significant at Time 2,  $B = -0.15, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.30, -0.01]$ , indicating that deep acting was negatively related to burnout.

Our fifth hypothesis, that the relationship between emotional labor (both surface acting and deep acting) and both display rules and burnout would be weaker after the intervention compared to before, was tested by comparing the regression coefficients between pre- and post-intervention by calculating a Fisher- $Z$  transformation. The relationship between display rules and surface acting was not significantly different pre- and post-intervention,  $Z = 0.18, p > .05$ . The relationship between display rules and deep acting was not significantly different pre- and post-intervention,  $Z = .68, p > .05$ . The relationship between surface acting and burnout was significantly different pre- and post-intervention,  $Z = 2.14, p < .05$ . The relationship between deep acting and burnout was different pre- and post-intervention at the  $p < .10$  level,  $Z = 1.61, p < .10$ . These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 5.

### Discussion

This study contributes to the literature on emotional labor in several ways. First, the results of this study replicate other research findings regarding the standard emotional labor model. While emotional labor has been found among teachers in Germany (Philipp & Schüpbach, 2010), China (Cheung, Tang & Tang, 2011), and Australia (Tuxford and Bradley, 2015), we are aware of no studies in which teachers from the US participated. Our findings show that American teachers, like teachers in other countries, engage in both surface and deep acting in response to display rules, and that surface acting is a significant predictor of burnout.

Secondly, our study adds to the extant research by presenting an intervention study that measured emotional labor and an outcome variable both pre- and post-intervention. While not all differences were significant, we found that most variables moved in the directions we had hoped following the intervention. Relative to pre-intervention levels, surface acting went down while deep acting went up, the utilization of helpful coping skills increased, resulting in a weaker relationship with burnout. As discussed above, intervention studies have been rare in the area of emotional labor, and none to date have included outcome measures. The results from this study lend support to the conclusion that a brief, targeted intervention was effective in reducing the strength of the relationship between emotional labor and burnout.

Finally, this study suggests that targeting employees' coping strategies can be an effective way to mitigate the effects of emotional labor. While the link between effective coping and burnout has been well established (e.g., Chang & Chan, 2015; Nizielski et al., 2013; Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002), this has usually been considered in the context of one or more specific work demands. We found that a short workshop with the goal of increasing teachers' use of helpful coping strategies in response to emotional labor resulted in a weaker association between emotional labor and burnout than was seen prior to the workshop. Although impossible to quantify, it should also be noted that a number of the participants contacted the researchers – during and after the workshop – to thank them for the information and for validating their experiences at work. Many reported that they never had a term for emotional labor, but that this was a very real part of their job and one that was often difficult to cope with. Their comments and feedback lend anecdotal support for the social validity of the intervention.

### **Research Implications**



The current study provides several key implications for research. First, in terms of emotional labor research, this study continues to show that emotional labor is not only active in customer service facing occupations (e.g., Rhoades Shanock, Allen, Dunn, Baran, Scott, & Rogelberg, 2013). Many occupations in a variety of sectors may have client-facing interactions or interactions internal to the organization that may require the regulation of emotions (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007; Rhoades Shanock et al., 2013). The current study showed that teachers experience both the expectations to engage in regulation (i.e. display rules) and the behavior associated with doing so (i.e. emotional labor). This supplements findings in other studies regarding the emotional labor of teachers (Cheung, Tang, & Tang, 2011; Philipp & Schüpbach, 2010; Tuxford & Bradley, 2015) and other education-related professionals (Weaver & Allen, 2017). It also continues the research called for by Rafaeli and Sutton (1989) as it further explores the causes and outcomes of emotional expression in the workplace.

The emotional labor expectations of educators certainly make sense given the extent to which they work with a variety of internal and external stakeholders. They work with direct clients (e.g. students), indirect clients (e.g. parents), peer educators (i.e. other teachers), and administrators (e.g. principals). This means that in addition to expectations placed upon them by the “ground rules” of the profession, teachers also face a great many transaction-defining cues (e.g., behavior of students or mannerisms of co-workers) which can all influence their perceptions of what emotional expressions are appropriate (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989; Van Maanan & Kunda, 1989). The hope is that the current study will spark further interest in investigating non-customer service situations as contexts for emotional labor as well as an increased interest in the experiences of educators.

A second research implication, frankly, is the surprising impact that a brief and powerful intervention had on school teachers' experience of emotional labor. Specifically, the seminar was limited to 60 minutes. About 30 minutes introduced teachers to the concepts of emotional labor and the remaining time was spent discussing how to cope with these demands. In sixty minutes, it appears as though some behavioral changes may have occurred. Anecdotally, many teachers approached the researchers after the seminar and thanked them for putting a name to the experiences they have had for years in their work roles. The implication here may be that legitimizing their feelings may be an additional variable that may explain some of the effect that was observed over time. Future research may take heart in attempting brief, but powerful interventions in this and other populations, particularly as it pertains to job demands like emotional labor.

A third implication for research is how this study illustrates the need to further our efforts in understanding the work that teachers do. We showed that they have an additional job demand, not typically accounted for in current models of teacher work demands (Tuxford & Bradley, 2015). Emotional labor clearly has an impact on their well-being and over time may explain feelings of exhaustion and desires to quit the occupation altogether. With the substantial rate of quitting among early tenure teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2014), understanding more about this and other, perhaps unaccounted for, demands placed upon teachers may hold additional keys to improving teachers' well-being and education of children, more indirectly.

### **Practical Implications**

Given the findings detailed above, there are several practical implications. For those who are interested in delivering an intervention like the one described above, we found it useful to deliver the content in the context of the real-life work experiences of the participants. In other

words, rather than simply lecturing about emotional labor and effective coping, we had participants work in small groups to actively make connections between these concepts and their experiences. For instance, having participants work together to visually represent their experiences with emotional labor on the “graffiti boards” (see Appendix) enabled each work group to have their experiences validated by the larger group and provided the researchers with an opportunity to check that participants had an accurate understanding of the concept. Additionally, giving participants some time, in a small group setting, to set concrete goals related to specific coping responses to emotional labor was a way to potentially build in some accountability. Participants were encouraged, not only to work on this task in small groups, but to continue to check in with one another in the months ahead to see if the new coping strategies were successful. Thus, in addition to the content provided in the workshop, it is possible that this exercise may have resulted in an improvement to the authenticity of the work climate (Grandey et al., 2012), as well as the quality of the coworker relationships (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). Finally, the workshop may have provided participants with a “time out” and “role release” from the display rules that ordinarily guided their behavior (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989), allowing participants to let down their guard and freely display and discuss their true feelings. These variables were not assessed in this study, but we can’t rule out the possibility that some of the changes seen pre- and post-intervention were due to these factors.

A practical implication of this study for teachers has to do with the idea that “knowledge is power.” In other words, one of the benefits of the intervention may simply have had to do with teachers being able to name emotional labor and realize that it is a recognized and studied construct. Anecdotally, many teachers expressed relief in hearing that their experiences are a valid phenomenon, and a recognized source of stress. Practically, in regards to coping, we found

that teachers were willing to change their behavior when presented with information contrasting less effective coping strategies with problem-focused coping. We found that many of the workshop participants were eager to hear the research for or against various coping behaviors, and wanted practical steps for dealing with the emotional stress they were facing.

Finally, for education administrators, a practical implication of this study is that the emotional labor of teachers should be recognized. Although more attention is being paid to the stresses teachers face (Ingersoll et al., 2014), the emotional aspects of the job should not be ignored. Our findings supplement those of other studies (e.g., Cheung, Tang & Tang, 2011; Tuxford & Bradley, 2015) showing that teachers who report high levels of surface acting are more likely to experience burnout. However, on an encouraging note, our study found that even a brief educational workshop may positively impact this outcome.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Although the current study was carefully designed, it was limited in three ways. First, the current study relied on a pre- and post-intervention survey to measure differences before and after the intervention. Due to the nature of the intervention, all participants were exposed to the training intervention (i.e., no control group). Researchers have found that while this type of design increases the external validity of the research, it is sensitive to internal validity issues (Dimitrov and Rumrill, 2003). This means that the observed differences in emotional labor, coping skills, and burnout may be the result of the intervention or they could be due to the characteristics of the teachers who were in the study. Since random assignment and control groups could not be used, a solid conclusion cannot be drawn. To mitigate this limitation, we controlled for affect, a common characteristic known for influencing levels of emotional labor and burnout.

The current study was also limited by common-method bias since the measures were collected online in the same manner for all measures (Conway and Lance, 2010; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003). The limitations resulting from common-method bias cannot be fully eliminated, but we did take steps to mitigate these issues. First, we created proximity and psychological separation by assessing the measures independent of one another. Second, identifying information was not collected which assured participants anonymity as recommended by Podsakoff and colleagues (2003). Third, we collected the data at two different time points, both pre- and post-intervention, creating temporal separation. Since we took these steps to mitigate common-method bias, and due to the strengths of the longitudinal design, we are confident that the effects of such bias are not strongly present in this study.

The third limitation of the study stems from the sample size. Although efforts were made to encourage participation at all stages of the project and at all time points, a total of only 97 participants completed all surveys and were therefore included in the analyses. The complexity of time-lagged intervention design makes this sample size remarkable, but introduces some analysis challenges. The ideal method for testing the proposed model and hypotheses would be using both confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the measurement model and structural equation modeling to test the paths and hypotheses. However, to do so would require such a large number of degrees of freedom (i.e. one degree of freedom per scale item), that the sample remaining to test the hypotheses would be too small to detect the effects currently reported in the study. Power analysis using G Power 3.1 software recommends a sample size of more than 300 would be needed given the number of potential items in the model. Thus, we decided to use less power-intensive analyses that are commonly used for smaller samples (e.g., Grandey et al., 2005).

Given these findings, one potential future direction is to change the research design of the study to be a true experiment. The study could be designed to randomly assign participants to treatment (i.e., participants receive the training intervention) and control (i.e., participants do not receive the training intervention) groups. This type of design could lead to a true causal conclusion regarding the training intervention and could determine whether the intervention does cause a decrease in burnout and emotional labor and an increase in helpful coping skills.

Additionally, this study left unanswered questions about what drives the surface acting of educators. While we know that surface acting is in response to display rules, questions remain about what specifically shapes educators' perceptions of appropriate emotional display (e.g., explicit training in teacher preparation programs or the organization itself, or implicit societal norms). Additionally, the specific aspects or encounters of the job that fuel teachers' negative emotions were not addressed in this study. It may be that there are fairly uniform experiences that teachers share which create stress in the job, or there may be idiosyncratic differences among teachers. In either case, knowledge of these experiences would allow organizations to teach coping skills to specifically target these stressors. Future research should explore these questions so that the most relevant and effective coping strategies are developed and promoted.

### **Conclusion**

Teachers engage in emotional labor in response to organizational display rules and this demand requires effective coping skills. A brief intervention targeting coping strategies was effective at increasing teachers' reported use of effective coping strategies and subsequently weakening the link between surface acting and burnout. Findings from this study suggest that one way to mitigate the negative effects of emotional labor may be to educate employees about the construct and to teach effective coping strategies.

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Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations*

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
Pre- Intervention	1. Display Rules	3.87	0.67	(.77)												
	2. Surface Acting	2.81	0.86	.38**	(.94)											
	3. Deep Acting	3.45	0.76	.28**	.22*	(.88)										
	4. Burnout	3.00	0.73	.27**	.57**	-.05	(.77)									
	5. Positive Affectivity	3.81	0.69	-.22*	-.20	.14	-.69**	(.92)								
	6. Negative Affectivity	1.94	0.43	.18	.51**	.17	.61**	-.28**	(.80)							
	7. Helpful Coping Skills	2.35	0.68	.08	.07	.36**	-.04	.18	.12	(.89)						
	8. Unhelpful Coping Skills	1.62	0.36	.26*	.46**	.24*	.56**	-.31**	.51**	.35**	(.77)					
Post- Intervention	9. Surface Acting	2.71	0.93	.25*	.60**	.14	.61**	-.44**	.46**	.05	.52**	(.95)				
	10. Deep Acting	3.54	0.78	.13	.29**	.52**	-.09	.14	.17	.22*	.16	.16	(.91)			
	11. Burnout	2.95	0.73	.07	.31**	-.18	.70**	-.61**	.49**	-.08	.48**	.61**	-.17	(.87)		
	12. Helpful Coping Skills	2.52	0.60	-.07	.15	.14	.11	.06	.26*	.61**	.26*	.11	.21*	.03	(.85)	
	13. Unhelpful Coping Skills	1.66	0.41	.09	.32**	-.01	.47**	-.34**	.52**	.13	.56**	.52**	.06	.61**	.39**	(.83)

*Notes.*  $N = 97$ . Internal consistency estimates for each scale shown on diagonal in parentheses, where applicable.

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

\*\*\*  $p < .000$  (2-tailed).

Table 2

*Effect of Display Rules on Surface Acting and Deep Acting Pre- and Post-Intervention*

	Model	Surface Acting					Model	Deep Acting				
		$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$B$	$SE_B$	$\beta$		$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$B$	$SE_B$	$\beta$
Pre- Intervention	Step 1	.26*	.26*				Step 1	.07*	.07*			
	Constant			1.193	.66		Constant			1.79	.65	
	PA			-0.08	.12	-.06	PA			0.23	.12	.21*
	NA			0.99	.19	.49*	NA			0.41	.19	.23*
	Step 2	.35*	.08*				Step 2	.15*	.08*			
	Constant			-0.40	.78		Constant			0.40	.78	
	PA			-0.01	.11	-.01	PA			0.29	.11	.26*
	NA			0.91	.18	.45*	NA			0.34	.18	.19
DR			0.39	.11	.30*	DR			0.34	.11	.30*	
Post- Intervention	Step 1	.32*	.32*				Step 1	.07*	.07*			
	Constant			2.94	.69		Constant			1.85	.68	.21
	PA			-0.46	.12	-.34*	PA			0.23	.12	.23*
	NA			0.78	.20	.36*	NA			0.41	.19	
	Step 2	.33	.31				Step 2	.09*	.02			
	Constant			2.26	.86		Constant			1.17	.85	
	PA			-0.43	.12	-.32*	PA			0.26	.12	.23*
	NA			0.75	.20	.35*	NA			0.38	.20	.21
DR			0.16	.13	.12	DR			0.17	.12	.14	

Note.  $N = 97$ . PA = Positive Affect, NA = Negative Affect, DR = Display Rules.

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

Table 3

*Effect of Surface Acting and Deep Acting on Burnout Pre- and Post-Intervention*

	Model	Burnout					Model	Burnout				
		$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$B$	$SE_B$	$\beta$		$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$B$	$SE_B$	$\beta$
Pre- Intervention	Step 1	.65*	.66*				Step 1	.65*	.66*			
	Constant			3.77	.38		Constant			3.77	.38	
	PA			-0.60	.07	-.56*	PA			-0.60	.07	-.56*
	NA			0.77	.11	.45*	NA			0.77	.11	.45*
	Step 2	.72*	.07*				Step 2	.65*	.00			
	Constant			3.47	.35		Constant			3.86	.40	
	PA			-0.57	.06	-.54*	PA			-0.58	.07	-.55*
	NA			0.51	.11	.30*	NA			0.79	.11	.46*
	SA			0.26	.06	.30*	DA			-0.05	.06	-.05
Post- Intervention	Step 1	.47*	.48*				Step 1	.47*	.48*			
	Constant			3.91	.48		Constant			3.91	.48	-.51*
	PA			-0.55	.09	-.51*	PA			-0.55	.09	.34*
	NA			0.58	.14	.34*	NA			0.58	.14	
	Step 2	.54*	.08*				Step 2	.50*	.49*			
	Constant			3.14	.49		Constant			4.19	.49	
	PA			-0.43	.09	-.40*	PA			-0.51	.09	-.48*
	NA			0.38	.14	.22*	NA			0.65	.14	.38*
	SA			0.26	.07	.33*	DA			-0.15	.07	-.16*

Note.  $N = 97$ . PA = Positive Affect, NA = Negative Affect, SA = Surface Acting, DA = Display Acting.

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

## Appendix

## Timed Intervention Outline with Activity Descriptions

- I. *Topic/Activity:* Who We Are & Why We're Here  
*Summary:* We point out our different backgrounds and experiences (knowledge of workplace psychology, management, etc.; years of experience in educational settings; etc.) All started at the university at the same time and realized a common interest.  
Why are we here? There has been a lot of research and a lot written about the work that teachers do. We're here because we suspect that one of the most challenging things about being a teacher is something that no one has written about or studied – something called “emotional labor!”  
*Time:* 5 minutes
  
- II. *Topic/Activity:* Emotional Labor: the Basics  
*Summary:* A quick overview of terms (*display rules, surface acting, deep acting*) and review of past research.  
*Time:* 5 minutes
  
- III. *Topic/Activity:* Emotional Labor in the Educational Setting / “Graffiti Boards”  
*Summary:* A demo “graffiti board” is presented and explained. Next, participants work in groups of 2-5 to create a scenario on chart paper of an example of what emotional labor might look like in the educational setting. They can use words, symbols, pictures etc., to demonstrate their scenario. Groups will share out.  
*Time:* 10 minutes
  
- IV. *Topic/Activity:* Survey Results – Display Rules and Emotional Labor  
*Summary:* Results from participants’ pre-intervention survey are shared and explained.  
*Time:* 5 minutes
  
- V. *Topic/Activity:* Effective Coping Skills / Group Coping Statements Activity  
*Summary:* In table groups of 2-5, participants are to take the list of individual coping behaviors from the survey and group into “Helpful” and “Unhelpful” piles. After 5 minutes, the research for or against the effectiveness of each coping behavior is presented, along with the results of participants’ pre-intervention survey.  
*Time:* 20 minutes
  
- VI. *Topic/Activity:* Individual Goal Setting / Envelope Activity  
*Summary:* Have each teacher write a stressor/emotional labor behavior they are engaging in on the outside of an envelope. Pass the envelopes around to teachers at the table and on strips of paper have them brainstorm ways to manage that stressor. After the teacher has an



opportunity to read the suggestions they will pick one that seems appropriate and manageable for them. Encourage groups to check in on one another to see how this coping strategy is working.

*Time:* 15 minutes

VII. *Topic/Activity:* Next Steps

*Summary:* Wrap up. Teachers are told that a follow-up survey will be sent out in approximately 6 months to see if any changes to their emotional labor and coping behaviors have occurred.

*Time:* 1 minute