

Influence of female managers' emotional display on frontline employees' job satisfaction: a cross-level investigation in an emerging economy

Female managers' emotional display

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Received 31 March 2020
Revised 29 July 2020
13 August 2020
Accepted 26 August 2020

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Abstract

Purpose – Emotions and emotional labor play a crucial role in professional interactions. Due to the increasing participation share of women managers in the workforce, especially in the customer-oriented service context, this study adopts a multilevel approach and mobilizes person–job fit theory to investigate whether the emotional labor of female managers influences the association between customer orientation and job satisfaction in frontline employees in a services setting.

Design/methodology/approach – The participants were 124 immediate female managers working in bank branches and their 896 customer-facing employees in China.

Findings – The results show that the positive relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction in frontline employees is strengthened by increases in female managers' deep acting, but it is weakened with the increase in their surface acting.

Research limitations/implications – The study findings provide support for scholars and financial service organizations as they seek to better understanding the dynamics behind the mobilization of women's emotions and their extent. In term of limitations, the data were taken from a single type of organization located in the northern cities of China, so it can be expected that the findings of this study will not generalize to all contexts.

Originality/value – This paper is the first to investigate female managers' emotional labor employing a cross-level analysis in financial services setting.

Keywords Emotional labor, Person–job fit theory, Customer orientation, Job satisfaction, Cross-level analysis

Paper type Research paper



The authors would like to thank the Editor, Prof. Hooman Estelami and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. This work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) under Grant No. 71672127 and China Postdoctoral Science Foundation under Grant No. 2020M671236. The opinions and arguments expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the NSFC and China Postdoctoral Science Foundation.

International Journal of Bank
Marketing
Vol. 38 No. 7, 2020
pp. 1491-1509
© Emerald Publishing Limited
0265-2323
DOI 10.1108/IJBM-03-2020-0152

1. Introduction

Actions that shape a sustainable organization may take various forms. In their contribution, [Smith *et al.* \(2019\)](#) and [Shrivastava *et al.* \(2013\)](#) urged business researchers to find new directions that organizations can take to become more sustainable. The challenges that face the meaningful participation of women in the workforce ([Makinde *et al.*, 2017](#)) make it crucial to pursue an investigation of female managers in business and strategy studies. Women are key actors in modern organizations ([Elmagrhi *et al.*, 2019](#); [Glass *et al.*, 2016](#)). They actively promote sustainability-oriented approaches in the workplace ([Lu and Herremans, 2019](#)) and have the potential to guide their organizations toward the achievement of sustainability-related challenges ([Shinbrot *et al.*, 2019](#)). Previous studies have found that the ways in which female leaders express their feelings in the workplace can influence their direct reports' assessment of the leader's role ([Adamson and Kelan, 2019](#)) and their reactions to the female leader ([Kapasi *et al.*, 2016](#)). However, it remains unknown whether female managers' emotional expression can influence the job attitudes of the entire group. This study bridges the gap, addressing the ways in which female managers' emotional expression influences the association between customer orientation (CO) and job satisfaction in frontline employees in a service setting, using a cross-level perspective. Frontline employees act as a bridge between its external stakeholders and organization's internal operations ([Sengupta *et al.*, 2015](#)).

Contemporary organizations promote a customer service approach that centers on meeting all customer desires or providing service with a smile, which has led to widespread interest in managing the emotional display of managers in service-related positions ([Homburg *et al.*, 2011](#)). Organizations, in general, have some specific display rules, which the employees are expected to follow and exhibit limited emotions during business communications. Skill in interpersonal dealings among frontline employees and customers is a fundamental part of customer satisfaction, allegiance, profit and growth ([Bezerra and Gomes, 2015](#)). The contemporary competitive market requires services to ensure that frontline employees show a CO to a high degree ([Paparoidamis *et al.*, 2019](#)).

Managerial dynamics can produce mutually top-down and bottom-up outcomes at higher and lower levels ([Yammarino and Dansereau, 2011](#)). Female managers in service organizations may accentuate diverse managerial values ([Hamidullah *et al.*, 2015](#)). Prior researchers have reported discrete administrative alterations between male and female managers, in which female managers are alleged to be fairer, more involved and more independent ([Kezar, 2014](#)). The cross-level analysis provides promising novel ground to have insight into employees' work-related outlooks. Although prior researches have been conducted on job satisfaction in relation to the workplace environment ([Bangwal and Tiwari, 2019](#)), very little is known of how female managers' emotional display styles affect the job satisfaction of frontline employees. The contribution of this study is in its assessment of the influence on frontline workers' job satisfaction through CO and the emotional labor of female managers. This approach employs an emotional mechanism to understand the effects female managers' emotional display has on frontline employees' job satisfaction from a cross-level perspective to enrich the knowledge of practices of emotional management in the service context and other commercial areas.

On the other hand, the interactive nature of jobs needs a wide range of responsibilities to achieve desired goals in organizations because such goals need efforts to understand subordinates, be considerate of their situations and internalize their feelings. Organizations, therefore, create emotion display regulations and encourage employees to withstand their emotional display ([Choi *et al.*, 2014](#)). For example, customer service employees spend hours of every working day performing eye contact and speech interactions with customers. These specified interactions require employees to articulate only administratively ordained affirmative gestures to customers in interactions and to ignore their own emotions, suppressing pessimistic expressions. The management of one's own emotions on the job can

have drastic effects on employee motivation, satisfaction and may lower service performance (Alsakrneh *et al.*, 2019). Nowadays, due to the rapid change in socioeconomics, knowledge-based work and innovative learning have become the key drivers and are prompting organizations to create a bottom-up working style (Yoo and Jung, 2019). Frontline employees are often managed by their managers through certain display rules. Grandey and Sayre (2019) reported that managers' deep acting transforms their opinion to certain situations by genuinely taking the perspective of how other party/individuals feels. Managers' surface acting is instigated when a usual negative emotion is modified by faking positive emotion. However, managers are also likely to display their genuine emotions to frontline workers (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005).

CO denotes the tendency to center one's actions on the customer's needs (Donavan *et al.*, 2004). This term denotes the employee approach to customer desires and needs (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). The CO has acquired considerable attention from the academic world because it is more important to success. In fact, organizational behavioral literature has shown that CO creates more job-related consequences at the frontline employees level that include employees job satisfaction, job performance and the organizational commitment, although plummeting the conflicting role, turnover intention and exhaustion (Korschun *et al.*, 2014). Employees with higher CO are more probable to love their work and organizations, perform well in their roles and exhibit positive behavior toward customers (Liao *et al.*, 2009). However, in spite of the long-standing recognition of the positive relationship between CO and job satisfaction (Donavan *et al.*, 2004), the psychological mechanism for this connection remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, the study analyzed that frontline employees with higher CO are more content with their work or job than frontline employees with less CO. This inscribed the basic question of "why high CO frontline employees are contented with their job while low CO employees do not." As a result, this study explores the psychological mechanisms that explain the connection between CO and its influence on frontline employees' job satisfaction and investigates how such connotation could be impacted in a cross-level analysis by female managers' emotional labor in a service setting. The framework for the study is shown in Figure 1.

This study contributes to the literature on CO, job satisfaction and emotional labor in two major ways. First, it provides pragmatic evidence for the association among frontline employees' CO and their job satisfaction in the service setting. Second, a framework of two levels was developed. In level 1, CO is investigated for its relationship to frontline employees' job satisfaction. In level 2, the relationship between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction is examined for moderation by female managers' emotional labor. To develop our hypotheses, we administered a multisource research design survey to collect data from frontline employees and their female managers in branches of a Chinese bank.

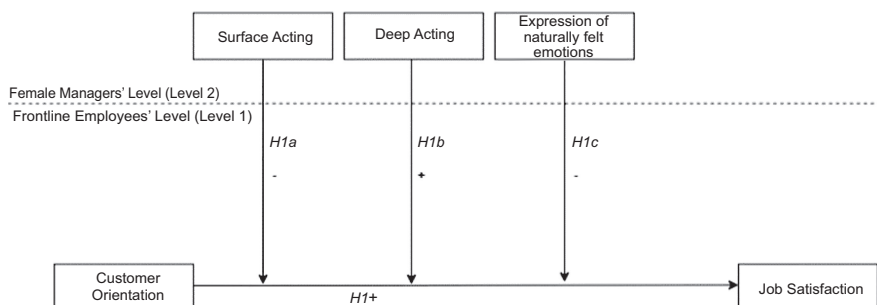


Figure 1.
Multilevel model of
frontline employee's
job satisfaction

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

2.1 Relationship between customer orientation and frontline employees' job satisfaction

CO is defined as a focus on meeting customers' expectations and providing tailored services (Bruno *et al.*, 2017). According to person–environment fit theory, the organizational workplace can be approached as an environment where compatibility and balance among an organization's employees and their overall work can be reached (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2017). We analyze a hypothesized link between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction using the person–job fit framework developed in person–environment fit theory. In other words, if employees' self-assessed features are in line with their organizational work environment, they tend to see their work in a more positive light (Kristof, 1996). Previous researchers have found that in relation to person–environment fit, different types of organizations exert divergent effects on employees' work-related outcomes, including job satisfaction (Donavan *et al.*, 2004). In general, person–job fit is divided into two aspects, namely demands–abilities fit and need–supplies fit (Marstand *et al.*, 2017). The need–supplies fit approach describes that people select particular job because they think that their targeted needs (e.g. household need, psychological desires, life objectives, family values and economic benefits) could be fulfilled by their job (e.g. the return in the form of pay, empowerment of employee, work satisfaction, employee relations and guidance of supervisor) (Chuang *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, in the demands–abilities fit mechanism, the person–job fit approach describes the similarity among particular employee abilities with respect to job and the job demands in an organization (Lu *et al.*, 2014). Success or failure in job performance may be determined by the matching between abilities, personalities and the job itself (Moen *et al.*, 2015).

Researchers explained that if there is a good match among the employee's attitude, behavior, personality and his or her job, then the good outcomes can be achieved (Follmer *et al.*, 2017; Tims *et al.*, 2016). The core statement for the conclusion is that if employees meet all or major job demands, then they will feel a strong professional matching of their self with their job; this similarity always results in a positive way for job satisfaction and commitment (Mehmood and Hussain, 2017; Menguc *et al.*, 2016; Youngs *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, the demands–abilities and need–supplies approaches suggest that if employees are getting what seems important to them out of their job than they feel satisfied as their all values and emotional considerations are fulfilled by the job, whereas jobs that are dissimilar with employees values and belief simply produce dissatisfaction (Lopez *et al.*, 2009; Simha; Agata, 2015).

In service contexts, service employees who have a higher CO have more job satisfaction with their jobs due to the feeling of accomplishment they are able to obtain from the tasks they perform. Kwan *et al.* (2015) have found that individuals with a high CO feel satisfaction when they please their customers by fulfilling their demands or give them even more than what was desired by exercising their service skills. We conclude that individuals with positive CO perceive their jobs to be more appealing and enjoyable than others who have less CO. Consequently, employees with high CO have higher levels of job satisfaction. We posit the following hypothesis:

H1. CO is positively related to frontline employees' job satisfaction.

2.2 Moderating role of female managers' emotional labor in the relationship between customer orientation and frontline employees' job satisfaction

In an organization, emotional labor includes controlling one's own expressions and emotions to express the organizational rules and regulations for emotional display. This is most prominent in customer-facing service positions, such as in banks, airlines, tourist businesses and others (Hochschild, 1983; Mostafa and ElSahn, 2016; Narteh, 2018; Zameer *et al.*, 2015).

Emotional display rules are simply the rules for the organization's standard repertoire of emotions and expressions that are appropriate for customers with respect to certain situations (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). The display rules in service organizations define the explicit or implicit standard for displaying proper emotions to customers. Thus, in customer interactions, service employees often present fake emotions, while hiding genuine ones, to satisfy customers and display emotions that match organizational guidance (Chi and Grandey, 2019). In particular, the emotional labor of services includes smiling at every customer, positively listening to their complaints and always showing kindness to all of them in any situation.

The display rules represent organizational tenets exhorting managers to exhibit appropriate emotional expressions (Scott *et al.*, 2020). The proper display of emotion following organizational rules in a series of conditions is a significant facet of the demeanor of effective managers (Grandey, 2000). Managers use a range of strategies to regulate their emotions during their work. Grandey (2003) argued that managers can use surface acting that relates to apparent facets of an emotion, regardless of their subjective feelings; this approach focuses on emotional responses. Grandey (2000) also suggested that managers can also use deep acting, which is defined as the desire to have the same particular sentiments with articulated emotions that reflect on the antecedents of emotions. According to Cossette and Hess (2012), managers may also express their naturally felt emotions. Emotional labor is work performed to evade negative and enable positive results (Diefendorff and Croyle, 2008). Thus, managers may disguise their real feelings by directly altering their emotions to express sentiments that are needed for interpersonal transactions with customers (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003).

Surface acting may trigger emotional conflict and emotional dissonance as individuals work to uphold a constructive impact due to the experience of a psychological incongruence between a real inner feeling and the expressed artificial emotion (Yoo, 2016). Surface acting can be an unpleasant experience for both employees and managers who must simultaneously cope with their own genuine emotions while they falsely sustain a false or surface emotional display (Lee *et al.*, 2014). The emotional conditions aggravated when workers involved in surface acting but enhanced when they engaged in deep acting. Moreover, the within-individual associations were stronger for females than for males (Scott and Barnes, 2011). Yang and Guy (2015) reported that surface acting and deep acting are positively associated with job satisfaction in Korean women. During their investigation of group affect, Barsade and Gibson (2007) find that all adverse outcomes associated with surface acting by managers can influence the effect of the group of their reports because their position as manager diffuses their unwanted feelings to their frontline employees through emotional contagion (Sy *et al.*, 2005), which decreases the positive association between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction. Therefore, we hypothesize:

- H1a.* The strength of the positive relationship between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction decreases with increased female manager's surface acting.

Managers who use deep acting strive to completely understand their customers' needs, thoughts and desires work to feel what their customers feel and put themselves in their customers' shoes (Chen *et al.*, 2019). Humphrey *et al.* (2015) reported that emotional expression, consistency, helpfulness and friendliness are positively linked to deep acting, as these are associated with higher CO, and employees with this factor more often exhibit deep acting than surface acting. For example, for the retail business, McGuigan *et al.* (2015) produced the finding, echoed by Yoo and Jung (2019) for the banking sector, that employees with a high CO are more concerned with meeting customers' expectations and demands and always strive to foster good customer relations through interpersonal relationships, warmth, kindness and consideration. The emotional labor paradigm of managers is accompanied with

both positive and negative facets, in relation to which kind of emotions they decide to employ, and they produce deep acting to enable positive emotions and increase their job satisfaction (Choi *et al.*, 2019). Managers who exercise deep acting are more content with their careers (Wen *et al.*, 2019). Following the similar rationality of the group-leader effect (Barsade and Gibson, 2012; Li *et al.*, 2019; Mehmood and Li, 2018), managers' deep acting can be expected to increase the positive association between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction. We therefore hypothesize:

- H1b.* The positive relationship between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction is strengthened by an increase of the female manager's deep acting.

Managers may also spontaneously feel and articulate the emotions that their organization prescribes and express them naturally. The expression of naturally felt emotions differs from deep and surface acting as a way to display the emotions that are desired by the organization (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005). Martínez-iñigo *et al.* (2007) suggested that this emotional response approach can be spontaneous, automatic or genuine. Such naturally felt emotions might not be in resemblance to display rules. Expressing them could place the individual in clashes with administrative structures, such as those against voicing negative emotions. The control theory of emotional labor indicates that managers might ignore the emotional display rules under three conditions (Diefendorff and Grosserand, 2003). Firstly, it may require excessive effort for managers to express anticipated emotions in conflict with a strongly felt emotion. Secondly, managers may simply not choose to adhere to display rules. Thirdly, managers might consider skeptical of the display rules in one or another case. One effect of expressing naturally felt emotions is that it can flout the expectations that frontline employees and the organization have of the managers, which may then confuse the frontline employees about the role of the manager and may cause job dissatisfaction and job stress. Hence, we propose that the expression of naturally felt emotions in managers would damage the positive relationship between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction.

- H1c.* The strength of the positive relationship between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction decreases as female managers' expression of naturally felt emotions increases.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants and procedures

The participants were customer-facing frontline employees and their immediate managers in a commercial bank in northern cities of China and used a purposive sampling technique. To collect data, the study contacted 124 bank branches. After the consent of the bank's top management was obtained, 124 immediate female managers participated in the study. In total, 1,200 frontline bank employees participated in the survey via the bank's intranet. Frontline employees perform the vital function of a bridge between an organization's internal operations and its external customers (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015). Of the 1,200 questionnaires that were distributed, 950 were returned. After 54 incomplete responses were removed, the data from 896 responses were analyzed, for a final response rate of 74.6%. In the final 896 survey participants, 896 were frontline employees. The age of 41.7% of participants was between 18 and 25 years, 25% were aged between 26 and 30 years, 29.4% were aged between 31 and 35 years and the rest were more than 36 years old. In all, 47.7% of participants had received a university education.

3.2 Measures

The questionnaires included a scale for each construct of interest (CO, deep acting, surface acting, the expression of naturally felt emotions and job satisfaction), along with the

demographic variables. All survey items were primarily derived and adapted from previous literature with good validity and reliability. We presented all the survey items in Chinese. We followed [Brislin \(1980\)](#) back-translation methods. Chinese experts in the field of organizational science converted the questionnaire from English into Chinese. Another bilingual expert then translated it back into English. To guarantee that the items could be generalized to the study context, we consulted personnel in the surveyed bank and asked two independent bilingual doctoral scholars to check the English and Chinese translations ([Schaffer and Riordan, 2003](#)). The participants rated these items taken from all instruments on a five-point Likert scale (anchored at 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The theoretical constructs and the related items were analyzed for the content validity during the pilot study, and the related items were initially purified by the corrected item-total correlation. This survey was administered to 20 respondents and there were no significant word modifications made that suggest sufficient readability and familiarity of the items' content. Secondly, using EFA analysis we checked unidimensionality with varimax rotation along with extraction by principal components in SPSS 22. We also calculated the intraclass correlation (ICC) in the large-scale bank survey, which was indicative of an acceptable interrater agreement as all results were above 0.5. Measurement properties and the items are displayed in [Table 2](#).

3.3 Data analysis

Managers' leadership does not occur in a vacuum, and a manager usually has multiple reports or multiple reporting groups. Being nested within groups and between groups needs to be examined with multilevel modeling ([Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992](#)).

Therefore, our hypotheses will be analyzed using multilevel modeling techniques. Multiple rating sources were used to avoid common-methods variance in this study. Level 1 variables, such as frontline employee's job satisfaction and CO, were rated by employees. Female managers' emotional labor, which occupied level 2 of the analysis, was rated by team managers themselves. In addition, in this study, measurement context effect was examined by using Harman's single-factor test. The largest factor only accounted for 17.81%, indicating that common method bias was unlikely to be a problem in our survey ([Liang et al., 2007](#); [Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)) when adding all the measurement items into EFA with an unrotated factor solution in SPSS. However, the study took satisfactory measures to curtail the odds of common method bias.

In this study, we conducted cross-level analysis using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), following the processes used by ([Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992](#)), and three models were examined. First, to determine the necessity of a multilevel analysis, we calculated ICC (1) based on a null model to determine the ratio of between-group variance to within-group variance for frontline employees' job satisfaction (the dependent variable). Second, we analyzed model 1 using level 1 variables, where the independent variable (CO) was entered into the model, while at the level 1 analysis, demographics were also controlled. Third, model 2 was examined, where the female manager's emotional labor (three dimensions) as level 2 variables was entered and was used to moderate level 1 variable (CO).

4. Results

The univariate and multivariate assumptions were tested before analyzing the data. All variables in this study were examined for accuracy of data entry, missing values, outliers, normality, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Skewness and kurtosis values of the scales were examined, and the values lie between -1.24 and + 0.411. Hence, these results validate that the data set is normally distributed. The linearity and multicollinearity analysis confirmed that the data set is acceptable for the regression analysis. [Table 1](#) indicates

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics
and correlation^a

Variables	Mean	SD	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Job satisfaction	2.432	1.221	0.805	0.925	(0.92)				
(2) Customer orientation	3.420	0.897	0.517	0.810	0.123**	(0.80)			
(3) Surface acting (Manager)	3.570	0.901	0.645	0.879	-0.108**	0.127**	(0.87)		
(4) Deep acting (Manager)	3.368	0.775	0.660	0.886	0.133*	0.313**	0.303**	(0.88)	
(5) Expression of naturally felt Emotions (Manager)	3.712	0.621	0.519	0.824	-0.115*	-0.106*	0.126**	-0.149*	(0.73)
Note(s): ^a Frontline employees $n = 896$, female managers $N = 124$; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted Cronbach's alphas are displayed along diagonal ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ Two-tailed tests									

satisfactory results of the internal reliabilities of the predictor and dependent variables, means and standard deviations measured.

4.1 HLM results for the antecedents of frontline employees' job satisfaction

4.1.1 Correlation matrix and descriptive statistics. Table 1 shows that the descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables indicated that frontline employees' job satisfaction was positively related to CO ($r = 0.123^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). The result also indicated that frontline employees' job satisfaction is positively correlated to manager's deep acting ($r = 0.133^{*}$, $p < 0.05$), whereas it is negatively correlated with manager's surface acting ($r = -0.108^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and managers' expression of naturally felt emotions ($r = -0.115^{*}$, $p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the participants can differentiate these variables from each other. These correlations are compatible with our hypotheses and provide initial support for further analysis. As suggested by Hair *et al.* (2010), the sample adequacy indicator (KMO: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin) value was 0.829, which is well above the acceptable range (KMO's minimum acceptable value is 0.5) and confirmed that the sample size was adequate.

4.1.2 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA was utilized to assess the measurement model using AMOS 24. The hypothesized five-factor model has a good fit with all the fit indices at the acceptable level: ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 345.322/125 = 2.763$, GFI = 0.959, CFI = 0.972, TLI = 0.965, RMR = 0.040; RMSEA = 0.044) (Spagnoli and Weng, 2017). To check the discriminant validity of the hypothesized five-factor measurement model, we compared it to the four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 1576.937$, $p < 0.01$), three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(7) = 1970.504$, $p < 0.01$), two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(9) = 2826.817$, $p < 0.01$) and one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(10) = 4903.597$, $p < 0.01$). These results (Table 3) led us to conclude that the five-factor model showed a better fit with the data. Furthermore, we examined the average variance extracted (cutoff criteria AVE: greater than 0.50) and composite reliability (cutoff criteria CR: greater than 0.80), which supported convergent validity (Table 2).

4.1.3 Null model. We investigated the null model by using HLM. We assessed ICC (1) by ($\tau_{00}/\tau_{00+\sigma^2}$) and found its value as 0.62, which accounted for 62% of the variance in frontline employees' job satisfaction between groups.

4.1.4 Level 1 analysis (model 1). We concluded that variance (R^2) was explained by the level 1 predictor variables in the outcome variable using ($\sigma_{\text{null}}^2 - \sigma_{\text{random}}^2 / \sigma_{\text{null}}^2$). The results of the

Source	CR	AVE	Coding	
Susskind <i>et al.</i> (2003) $\alpha = 0.80$	0.810	0.517	CO1	When performing my job, the customer is most important to me
			CO2	It is best to ensure that our customers receive the best possible service available
			CO3	As an employee responsible for providing service, customers are very important to me
			CO4	I believe that providing timely, efficient service to customers is a major function of my job
Diefendorff <i>et al.</i> (2005) $\alpha = 0.87$	0.879	0.645	CO5	If possible, I meet all requests made by my customers
			SA1	I put on an act in order to deal with subordinates in an appropriate way
			SA2	I fake a good mood when interacting with subordinates
			SA3	I put on a "show" or "performance" when interacting with subordinates
			SA4	I show feelings to subordinates that are different from what I feel inside
			SA5	I just pretend to have the emotions I need to display my job
			SA6	I put on a "mask" in order to display the emotions I need for the job
Diefendorff <i>et al.</i> (2005) $\alpha = 0.88$	0.886	0.660	SA7	I fake the emotions I show when dealing with subordinates
			DA1	I try to actually experience the emotions that I must show to subordinates
			DA2	I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display toward others
			DA3	I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to subordinates
			DA4	I work at developing the feelings inside of me that I need to show to subordinates
Diefendorff <i>et al.</i> (2005) $\alpha = 0.73$	0.824	0.519	EXP1	The emotions I express to subordinates are genuine
			EXP2	The emotions I show to subordinates come naturally
			EXP3	The emotions I show to subordinates match what I spontaneously feel
Cammann <i>et al.</i> (1979) $\alpha = 0.92$	0.925	0.805	JS1	At present, "I am satisfied with my job."
			JS2	Right now, I like my job
			JS3	At this moment, I like working here

Note(s): All factor loadings are significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 2.
Measurement properties and the items

level 1 analysis showed that the CO explained 10.2% of the within-group variance, as shown in Table 3. CO ($\beta = 0.157$, $p < 0.001$) showed a significantly positive relationship with frontline employee's job satisfaction, so hypothesis 1 was supported.

4.1.5 Level 2 analysis (model 2). The HLM analysis also allowed hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c to be tested, and level 2 variables were input. The results (Table 4) at level 1 showed that the positive association between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.157$, $p < 0.001$) was significantly moderated by female managers' surface acting ($\gamma = -0.186$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the positive level 1 association between CO and frontline

Table 3.
Results of
confirmatory factor
analysis for the
measures of the
variables studied

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta\text{df})$	GFI	CFI	TLI	RMR	RMSEA
Model 5. Five-factor ^a	345.322	125	2.763		0.959	0.972	0.965	0.040	0.044
Model 4. Four-factor ^b	1922.259	129	14.901	1576.937 (4)	0.748	0.771	0.728	0.111	0.125
Model 3. Three-factor ^c	2315.826	132	17.544	1970.504 (7)	0.725	0.721	0.676	0.119	0.136
Model 2. Two-factor ^d	3172.139	134	23.673	2826.817 (9)	0.670	0.611	0.556	0.160	0.159
Model 1. One-factor ^e	5248.919	135	38.881	4903.597 (10)	0.580	0.346	0.258	0.243	0.206

Note(s): *** $p < 0.001$. $N = 896$, GFI = goodness of fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis coefficient; RMR = root-mean-square residual; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation
^aCustomer orientation, surface acting, deep acting, expression of naturally felt emotions, and frontline employees’ job satisfaction as five independent factors ^bCustomer orientation, surface acting + deep acting, expression of naturally felt emotions, and frontline employees’ job satisfaction are merged into four factors ^cCustomer orientation, surface acting + deep acting + expression of naturally felt emotions, and frontline employees’ job satisfaction are merged into three factors ^dCustomer orientation + surface acting, and deep acting + expression of naturally felt emotions + frontline employees’ job satisfaction are merged into two factors ^eCustomer orientation + surface acting + deep acting + expression of naturally felt emotions + frontline employees’ job satisfaction combined as one factor

Table 4.
Hierarchical linear
modeling results of
frontline employees’
job satisfaction^a

Variables	Null model			Frontline employees’ level predictor (Level 1)			Adding female managers’ level (Level 2)		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
<i>Level 1</i>									
Intercept	2.439***	0.173	14.070***	2.445***	0.172	14.217***	2.442***	0.189	12.888***
Customer orientation				0.157***	0.043	3.605***	0.202***	0.038	5.206***
<i>Level 2</i>									
Surface acting							Y	SE	t
Deep acting							−0.186***	0.039	−4.758***
Expression of naturally felt emotions							0.177***	0.052	3.375***
Within-group residual variance	0.574***			0.515***			−0.014	0.041	−0.357
R^2 within-group ^b				0.102***					
R^2 between-group ^c							0.459***		
Model deviance	2165.4695			2091.0540			2097.1380		

Note(s): ^aFrontline employees $n = 896$, female managers $N = 124$. Entries are estimations of fixed effect (β ’s) with robust standard errors
^bProportion of within-group variance explained by (level 1) frontline employees’ level predictors
^cProportion of between-group variance explained by (level 2) female managers’ level (after level 1 variables are controlled for)
*** $p < 0.01$, Two-tailed tests

employees’ job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.157$) was attenuated by 0.186 units for an increase of 1 unit in the female managers’ surface acting, which supported [hypothesis 1a](#). Furthermore, using [Stone and Hollenbeck’s \(1989\)](#) method to probe this result, the slopes were calculated using 1 standard deviation above or below the mean of the moderating variable. The interaction effects are shown in [Figure 2](#).

Similarly, the results showed that at level 1, the positive associations between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.157, p < 0.001$) were significantly moderated by female managers' deep acting ($r = 0.177, p < 0.001$), indicating that the positive level 1 association between CO and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.157$) was strengthened by 0.177 units for an increase of 1 unit in the female managers' deep acting, which supported [hypothesis 1b](#). Furthermore, using [Stone and Hollenbeck's \(1989\)](#) method to prove this result, the slopes were calculated using 1 standard deviation above or below the mean of the moderating variable, and the interaction effect is shown in [Figure 3](#). It was found that the positive association between CO and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.157, p < 0.001$) was not significantly moderated by female managers' expression of naturally felt emotions ($r = -0.014, p > 0.05$), so [hypothesis 1c](#) was not supported.

5. Discussion

This cross-level study found that the female manager's emotional labor had an impact on the association between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction. The association is enhanced and reduced in the context of different emotional management strategies employed by female managers. We also found that when female managers used the surface acting strategy, the association was decreased, but deep acting increased the association. The results are in alignment with prior researches ([Alsakarneh et al., 2019](#)), who affirmed that surface acting has adverse effects on employees' performance and satisfaction.

The results indicated that the way female managers manage their psychological manifestation, a high-level phenomenon, can influence the behaviors and job attitudes of a whole group. Furthermore, this study improves our understanding of CO's effects, particularly in its relationship to frontline employees' job satisfaction. For emotional labor, beyond investigating surface and deep acting, we also assessed naturally felt emotions as an additional aspect of emotional labor that enriches the understanding of the effects of

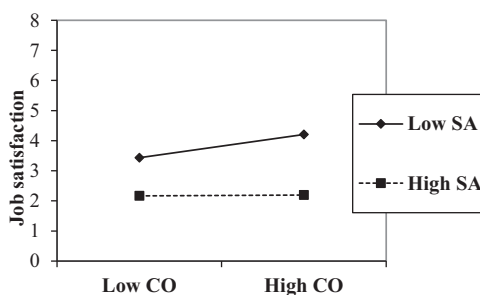


Figure 2.
Interaction graph of SA
and CO on frontline
employee's job
satisfaction

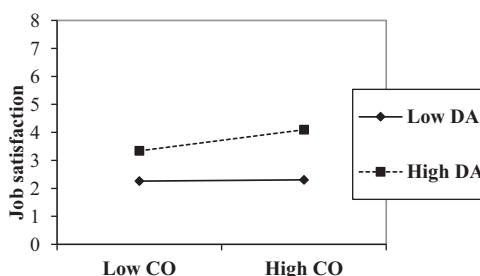


Figure 3.
Interaction graph of
DA and CO on frontline
employee's job
satisfaction

emotional labor in service contexts. Empirically, the findings of the cross-level study provided evidence that female managers' emotional labor is important for the association between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction, which was positively related to CO.

This study produced theoretically based findings on the association between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction in relation to female managers' emotional labor strategies in a financial service context. The main reason for high levels of job satisfaction in employees of banks and other financial sector organizations in relation to higher CO is the result of the deep acting strategy, while employees with a low CO possess lower levels of job satisfaction due to use of the surface acting strategy. The use of deep acting leads to higher levels of job satisfaction and potential outcomes through successful service commitment, and job dissatisfaction is found in employees in relation to a surface acting strategy (Scott *et al.*, 2019). The study findings are also supported by prior research (Chen *et al.*, 2012), in which surface acting is negatively linked with job satisfaction.

Using the need-supplies fit theory approach, employees with higher CO in a financial service context are likely to feature a high level of job satisfaction and feel effectual need contentment, expressing a deep acting strategy. On the other hand, employees with a low level of CO tend to have job dissatisfaction and express surface acting as they perform their job requirements, which could lead to negative emotional outcomes and lower their enthusiasm to perform their job duties. The person-job fit theory is usually employed by service practitioners to determine their level of compatibility or the emotional labor strategies they use for CO. It is advantageous for management to hire managers who understand the emotional labor strategies in their work surroundings in financial service contexts. Employees who have a higher level of CO are more likely to be satisfied with their job because they practice deep acting strategy to keep customers pleased, so management should closely consider employee placement where challenges may arise that require a high level of customer service and emotional demand.

The aforementioned results lead to the assumption that in financial service jobs, CO and emotional labor strategies are pivotal factors for frontline employees and female managers. Although in the financial service context frontline employees and female managers have different work aspects such as the intensity of service interaction and it causes unusual job attitudes and behavior, frontline employees and managers use their emotional strategies in the identical or akin way in the similar surroundings of customer servicing. Although job attitudes and behaviors may be distinct for frontline employees and female managers in financial services, this disparity leads to a different intensity and frequency of service interaction, which in turn regulates their emotions in the same or similar manner in the same customer service setting. Prior research (Liu, 2017) has also affirmed that females envision themselves more than their male counterparts as emotionally enriched, which can serve as an advantage. In addition, frontline employees and female managers abiding the emotional display rules defined by the management both operate under the similar service provisions.

First, the empirical results showed that mounting the frontline employees' job satisfaction is significantly pretentious by the strategies of emotional labor, particularly financial services employee practices surface acting or otherwise deep acting. The CO level ascertains the mode of emotional labor strategies, so the theoretical model and empirical findings of the study suggest that employees of financial services have to pay consideration to person-job fit. The person-job fit theory is mainly employed by financial services practitioners to determine their level of compatibility or emotional labor strategies used for CO. In this manner, it is advantageous for management to hire female managers who have the ability to properly understand the strategies of emotional labor in the work surroundings in financial services. CO is positively associated with the strategy of deep acting, which could help financial services employees enact emotional labor better than surface acting. This is in alignment with Chen *et al.* (2017), who suggested that female leaders' emotional labor had a stronger, positive

effect on employee trust and task performance than their male counterparts. In a recent study conducted in Chinese service sector, it was found that male employees are more willing to use surface acting strategy to meet emotional demand in the face-to-face service process (Liu, 2017).

The employees with a higher level of CO are probably satisfied with their job by practicing their financial services traits to keep customers pleased by deep acting strategy, so management should think about their employees' situation where handling of problems, high level of customer service and emotional demands are required. The frontline employees get pleasure from their jobs when they are utilizing maximum time in helping customers with a high level of CO. On the other hand, managers also think about their frontline employees' situation with low CO, where interactions with customers are highly scripted and concern less emotional display (Baranik *et al.*, 2017; Söderlund, 2016).

Our study found that emotional labor dimensions were linked directly to CO. CO is a vital resource for the emotional labor demand in organizations in financial services, who might focus on creating an intervention development that encourages employees. Furthermore, we encourage financial service organizations to provide training programs to help employees to develop their deep acting skills and avert the negative outcomes of surface acting. In addition, seminars or workshops should be arranged to enhance awareness of deployment and cognitive reappraisal in financial services (Uy *et al.*, 2017; Yam *et al.*, 2016) on how financial services frontline employees can build up customer relationships. Finally, our findings provide support for scholars and organizations as they seek to better understand the dynamics behind the mobilization of women's emotions and their extent. Our work has brought new important parameters to bear on the understanding of emotional labor, which may present researchers and practitioners new directions on future work on women's meaningful participation in the workforce.

5.1 Implications

This study provided significant academic contributions, including an extension of the link between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction by investigating the moderating effects of the dimensions of emotional labor. First, the theoretical implications of this empirical study include an explanation of the role of the female manager's emotional labor strategies among the links between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction. In the process of everyday customer interaction, employees active within the service contexts must mobilize their emotions while on the job. This is a critical component that appears on a daily basis in service employees' performance of customer service interactions. This study provided a broadened theoretical approach to this and supports further empirical research into emotions by presenting an inclusive model of the link between CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction in relation to female managers in a financial services context.

Moreover, Tsai and Chen (2017) claimed that for theory development, it is essential to understand the psychological processes that determine the relationships between the predictor variable and dependent variables. Therefore, this empirical research has well developed a broad and ample theoretical model through analyzing emotional labor dimensions and its effects on the link among CO and frontline employees' job satisfaction, which illustrate the mechanism of different emotional labor dimensions through which CO affects frontline employees' job satisfaction and also explaining the reason why frontline employees satisfied with higher CO with their jobs compared to frontline employees with low CO are less contented with their jobs.

These findings provide significant implications for female managers' emotional management and leadership style and frontline employees' job satisfaction. The study results will help alleviate the adverse effects of emotional labor and contribute to a conducive

work environment for managers and employees. The study will help the policymakers to formulate specific HR practices such as training employees in deep acting, appropriate staffing strategies, capacity building, personality development and emotion management for better person–job fit.

6. Directions for future research and limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, the data were taken from a single type of organization located in the northern cities of China, so it can be expected that the findings of this study will not generalize to all contexts. Emotional norms vary across cultures (Scott and Barnes, 2011), and hence, future research should consider other cultures and other industries.

Moreover, our research design provided statistical inference among the variables in relation to causal associations. Future studies should examine the causality among these constructs and include male managers investigating the possible effects and differences in various national and organizational settings. In addition, the findings from our study relate to a specific theoretical orientation, so further research should take the analysis with a different set of tools and with different assumptions. However, this fact does not negate the importance of this study and its contribution to the literature.

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