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Ellen Heuven ^a; Arnold Bakker ^a

^a Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

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Emotional dissonance and burnout among cabin attendants

Ellen Heuven and Arnold B. Bakker

*Department of Social and Organizational Psychology,
Utrecht University, The Netherlands*

This study used a sample of 220 cabin attendants to test the hypothesis that emotional dissonance is an essential predictor of human service burnout. We hypothesized that, in addition to the “classical” variables in Karasek’s (1979, 1998) demands–control model, emotional dissonance would make an independent contribution to explaining variance in burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). The findings of a series of SEM-analyses supported this hypothesis. Moreover, emotional dissonance was a more important predictor of burnout among cabin attendants than quantitative job demands and job control. In addition, consistent with Leiter’s (1993) model, emotional exhaustion was found to play an important mediating role between work characteristics and depersonalization. No support was found for the predicted interaction between job demands and job control and between these two variables and emotional dissonance. Finally, results of exploratory qualitative analyses point to the importance of understanding emotion work as a dynamic process that is actively regulated by the human service worker on the basis of interaction, reciprocity, and learning.

I acted as if the whole world was my best friend, because that is the concept that one is slowly being fitted into. In fact, one is learned to love everybody. You love your colleagues, the purser, the pilots and especially the passengers. You love the whole world and actually you don’t make any differentiation in that. In reality, however, you completely run down on energy.

(Anonymous cabin attendant)

How can showing good humour, friendliness, and cheerfulness lead to energy depletion and a callous, cynical attitude towards clients? Traditional job stress models, like the demands–control (D–C) model (Karasek, 1979, 1998; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), seem not to be able to adequately respond to this question. We

Requests for reprints should be addressed to E. Heuven, Utrecht University, Dept of Social and Organizational Psychology, Heidelberglaan 1, PO Box 80.140, 3508 TC, Utrecht, The Netherlands. Email: E.Heuven@fss.uu.nl

will argue that there is something specific about the intensive interpersonal interactions in human services professions that may cause burnout, which can be summarized under the heading of *emotion work*. Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, and Isic (1999) have drawn attention to the fact that most studies on work-related stressors are of a cognitive and social nature, while emotion work is a central part of working in service and helping professions. Emotion work can be described as the management, or modification, of emotions as part of the work role (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild and others have proposed that emotion work can be stressful and may result in burnout.

We do not believe that burnout is limited to human service professions (see, for example, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2002; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). However, we do argue that these professions are characterized by specific demands, that are not found in other professions, and that can lead to burnout complaints. The central aim of the present research is to gain insight into these specific job stressors in human service professions, and understand to how they are related to burnout.

In this study, we examined the relationship between emotion work and burnout among cabin attendants of a major Dutch airline. The D–C model was used as a theoretical framework. We will start by describing and operationalizing emotional labour and burnout in human services professions. Then, we will propose to include emotional dissonance in the D–C model in addition to more classical variables such as workload and job control. Finally, we will discuss the results of testing this emotional dissonance model among a sample of cabin attendants of a major Dutch airline, and illustrate the central concepts of emotion work with qualitative information.

BURNOUT

Although several empirical studies have shown that burnout is not restricted to the human services professions (e.g., Bakker et al., 2002; De Jonge & Schaufeli, 1998; Demerouti et al., 2001; Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996; Warr, 1990), Maslach's (1982) original definition clearly limits the syndrome to this specific group of workers. Maslach (1982) defined burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among people who do 'people work' of some kind" (p. 1). In the present study, we restrict ourselves to the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of burnout. These two dimensions are generally considered as the "core of burnout", whereas personal accomplishment reflects a personality characteristic like self efficacy rather than a genuine burnout component (e.g., Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Demerouti et al., 2001; Shirom, 1989). Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of energy depletion and of being overextended by the demands of one's work. Depersonalization is characterized by negative,

cynical attitudes about the recipients of one's service or care (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

Leiter and Maslach (1988) have proposed a process model of burnout in which the various aspects of burnout are strongly interrelated. First, emotional exhaustion arises in response to a demanding working environment. A way of coping with this exhaustion is to decrease the investments in the relationship with recipients by emotionally distancing oneself from them. Several empirical studies have provided evidence for this process model of burnout (e.g., Bakker, Schaufeli, Sixma, Bosveld, & Van Dierendonck, 2000; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Therefore we will use this model in our present study.

Although it has been suggested by Hochschild (1983) that the prevalence of burnout complaints among cabin attendants could be high, so far, no empirical evidence supports this suggestion. However, cabin attendants show common characteristics with other human services professions, in which burnout forms an important professional risk. Typical about burnout in the human services is that it is to an important extent the consequence of job-related interpersonal stress (Maslach, 1982; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). From the outset, contacts with recipients were considered to be a main cause of burnout complaints among employees in human services. Buunk and Schaufeli (1993) mention the lack of reciprocity in the contact between the professional caregiver and the recipient as a main cause for the emergence of burnout complaints among this group of employees. Another common characteristic for workers in human services is that interacting with people requires emotion work. Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998, p. 124) argue that "the notion of emotional labour is potentially important for our understanding of burnout since it captures an essential aspect of the professional-recipient relationship".

EMOTIONAL DISSONANCE AMONG CABIN ATTENDANTS

In the study of organizational behaviour, emotion work has for long time been a neglected area. This is quite remarkable since emotion work is an important aspect of the jobs of many employees. Hochschild (1989) estimates that roughly one third of American workers have jobs that include emotion work. Since the late 1980s, emotion work has received increasing attention in organizational stress research (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli, 1989; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Zapf, 2002; Zapf et al., 1999) underlining its importance as a potential source for job stress.

Hochschild (1983) was the first scholar who introduced the concept of emotion work in her qualitative study of cabin attendants. Emotion work can be defined as the process of regulating feelings and expressions as part of the work role (Grandey, 2000). More specifically, Morris and Feldman (1996, p. 987)

define emotion work as “the effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions”. In all organizations in which human interaction is part of the job, rules apply as to when and which emotions should be expressed. Thus, cabin attendants are expected to display friendliness, funeral directors sadness, police officers rigour, and nurses compassion. These rules for which expression is appropriate in a certain working context are referred to as feeling rules or display rules. The expression of an appropriate emotional display can be achieved through deep acting, surface acting, and the expression of genuine emotion. In most cases, the expression of emotion is a spontaneous process that does not cost any effort (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Zapf et al., 1999). Surface acting involves changing the observable expression while the inner feelings remain unchanged (i.e., phoney smiles). Deep acting refers to the effort of actually changing these inner feelings in order to comply with the display rules (i.e., actively trying to like a customer). In this case, not only the emotional expression but also the inner feelings are regulated.

Both the positive and the negative consequences of emotion work have been discussed. Hochschild (1983) was the first who described the possible negative consequences of emotion work for employee well-being. She states that the persistent, structural discrepancy between which emotions need to be displayed and what is really felt can produce alienation from one’s own authentic emotions. Emotions have a signal function that can be compared to for example pain signals. If these signals are systematically neglected due to the performance of emotion work, employees can suffer from energy depletion and burnout complaints. The structural discrepancy between displayed and felt emotions as part of the work role has been named *emotional dissonance*. This aspect of emotion work is considered to be the key predictor of emotional exhaustion, and has been most consequently related with psychological strain (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; Morris & Feldman, 1997; Zapf, 2002; Zapf et al., 1999). Therefore, in our present study, we restrict ourselves to the emotional dissonance dimension of emotion work.

THE DEMAND–CONTROL MODEL

The demand–control (D–C) model (Karasek, 1979, 1998; Karasek & Theorell, 1990) is one of the most prominent theories in explaining stress and motivation in relation to aspects in the working environment. The D–C model predicts that high quantitative job demands (i.e., high workload, time pressure) and little control (i.e., poor autonomy) will result in psychological and physical strain. Combined with high control however, high job demands will result in learning, motivation, and personal growth. The model thus gives a theoretical framework for both stress and motivation in relation to job demands and job control. In the present study, we will focus on the strain hypothesis proposed by the D–C model, which

proposes that the combination of high quantitative job demands and low job control results in a synergistic harmful stress effect, which is greater than the sum of the separate effects.

Hypothesis 1 Cabin attendants with low levels of job control experience more burnout when confronted with high quantitative job demands than cabin attendants with high levels of job control.

However, during the past decade, little empirical evidence has been found for this intuitively attractive interaction effect (De Jonge & Kompier, 1997; Jones & Fletcher, 1996; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). The conceptualization and operationalization of job control is one of the reasons that have been put forward to explain this lack of evidence (Wall, Jackson, Mullarkey, & Parker, 1996). Methodological limitations and lack of attention for personality variables such as coping style are other possible explanations that have been mentioned (De Rijk, Le Blanc, Schaufeli, & De Jonge, 1998).

Another suggestion is that the D–C model focuses too much on cognitive aspects of the working environment, thereby ignoring the multifaceted nature of working in human services professions (De Jonge & Kompier, 1997; De Jonge, Mulder, & Nijhuis, 1999; Jones & Fletcher, 1996; Le Blanc, Bakker, Peeters, Van Heesch, & Schaufeli, 2001). Emotional job demands are central to human services professions, and should therefore be incorporated in the model in order to explain feelings of burnout among this group of workers. Thus, we want to include emotional dissonance as a specific job demand that is particularly relevant for workers in the human services, and especially for cabin attendants.

Hypothesis 2 Emotional dissonance explains a significant amount of variance in predicting emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among cabin attendants, on top of quantitative job demands and job control.

The perspective of emotion work has only recently explicitly been applied to psychological strain (Abraham, 1998; Adelman, 1995; Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; Grandey, 1998; Morris & Feldman, 1997; Zapf, 2002; Zapf et al., 1999). Moreover, until now, emotion work has been mostly studied as an isolated phenomenon in relation to psychological strain (Abraham, 1998; Adelman, 1995; Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; Grandey, 1998; Morris & Feldman, 1997; Zapf et al., 1999), thereby ignoring its relationship with other job demands. A recent study by Zapf, Seifert, Schmutte, Mertini, and Holz (2001) has demonstrated the importance of understanding emotion work variables in combination with other stressors. Analyses of interaction effects in this study showed that, for service professionals, the combination of high emotional dissonance and other stressful working conditions resulted in exaggerated levels of emotional exhaustion and

depersonalization. Using the D–C model as a theoretical framework, we therefore propose the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 The combined effect of high emotional dissonance, high quantitative job demands, and low job control among cabin attendants will result in elevated levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization that are higher than the sum of the separate effects.

Finally, following Leiter (1993), we predict that emotional exhaustion, in turn, evokes indifferent and cynical ways of dealing with recipients. To cope with feelings of being emotionally overextended and drained by interactions with other people, cabin attendants will attempt to protect themselves by gaining emotional distance from passengers as a way of coping with their exhaustion (cf. Leiter, 1993; Leiter & Maslach, 1988).

Hypothesis 4 Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between job demands, job control, and emotional dissonance on the one hand, and depersonalization on the other.

The combination of our four hypotheses is captured in Figure 1.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited from a large airline company in The Netherlands. A random sample of 700 Dutch cabin attendants was asked to fill out self-report questionnaires, distributed via the company's mailboxes. A total of 220 cabin attendants returned the questionnaire (response = 31%). For all personal characteristics, i.e., gender, age, hierarchical position, working experience, and type of contract, this group of respondents proved to be highly similar to the total population of cabin attendants. Table 1 shows the results of a nonresponse analysis in which we compare the present sample with the total population for the main personal characteristics. The sample included 189 (85%) female and 31 (15%) male cabin attendants. Their mean age was 31 years ($SD = 5.9$). Most participants had considerable working experience: 0–2 years (27%), 3–9 years (46%), 10–19 years (20%), 20 years or more (6%). Twenty-four percent of the sample had a position as supervisor (i.e., assistant pursers and pursers).

Additionally, semistructured in-depth interviews were held with five cabin attendants showing no burnout complaints, and five respondents with burnout at the time of the interviews. Also, interviews were held with two occupational doctors and one company psychologist whose patients existed of cabin attendants, and four airline staff members. The respondents without burnout complaints were randomly selected among the cabin staff. Those with complaints

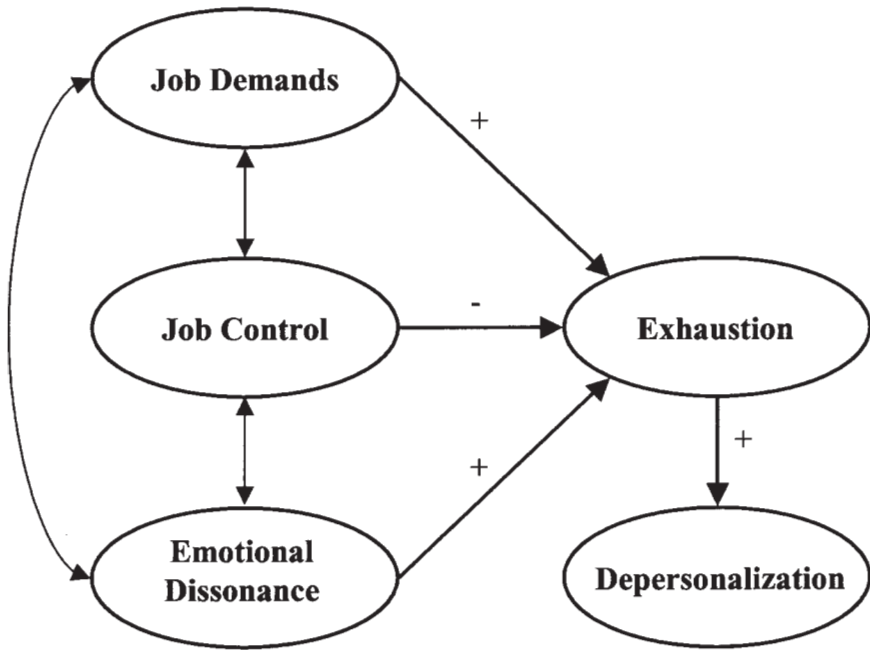


Figure 1. Hypothetical emotional dissonance model.

were selected with support of the occupational health service. The interviewees were questioned about the main topics in the quantitative model: job demands, job control, emotional dissonance, and burnout.

Measures

Demand-control variables. Quantitative *job demands* were assessed with three items based on a Dutch version of Karasek's (1985) job content instrument (De Jonge et al., 1997), tapping one main aspect of demands, that is, time pressure (e.g., "Do you have to work very fast?"). As suggested by Wall et al. (1996), for *job control*, we used a three-item scale explicitly assessing opportunity for control (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, in press). An exemplary item is: "Can you personally decide upon how your work is done?" All these items were scored on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 "never" to 5 "always".

Emotional dissonance. Emotional dissonance was measured following Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, and Mertini's (1998) conceptualization and operationalization of this construct. Respondents were asked "How often do you actually do each of the following acts during a flight?" Four items were used to assess the

TABLE 1
 Comparison of sample population ($N = 220$) with total population
 ($N = 7132$) of cabin attendants

	<i>Total population</i>		<i>Sample population</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender				
Men	1032	14.5	31	15.0
Women	6100	85.5	189	85.0
Age				
< 25	481	6.7	19	8.6
25–34	3990	55.9	150	68.2
35–44	2045	28.7	42	19.1
45–54	607	8.5	8	3.6
> 55	9	0.1	1	0.5
Years of tenure				
< 3	2082	29.2	59	26.8
3–9	1736	24.3	43	19.5
10–19	1736	24.3	43	19.5
> 20	349	4.9	13	5.9
Type of contract				
Full time	4341	60.9	154	70.0
Part time	2791	39.1	66	30.0
Hierarchical position				
Cabin attendant	4928	69.1	141	64.1
(Assistant) purser	2204	30.9	79	35.9

amount of emotional dissonance. Exemplary items are: “having to show certain feelings to passengers that do not correspond with the way you feel at that moment” and “having to show positive feelings to passengers, while in fact you feel indifferent” (1 = “never”, 5 = “always”).

Burnout. Burnout was measured using the Dutch version (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1996). Two subscales were used: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Emotional exhaustion was measured with eight items, including “I feel emotionally drained from my work.” Depersonalization included five items, for example “I feel I treat some of my passengers as if they were impersonal objects.” Small adjustments were made to the original MBI to make the questions appropriate for cabin attendants; the term “patients” was replaced by “passengers”. All items were scored on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 0 “never” to 6 “every day”.

Strategy of analyses. The emotional dissonance model was tested with structural equation modelling analyses (SEM) using the AMOS computer program (Arbuckle, 1997). Maximum likelihood estimation methods were used and the covariance matrix of the items was the input for the analysis. The goodness-of-fit of the model was evaluated using absolute and relative indices. The absolute goodness-of-fit indices calculated were the χ^2 goodness-of-fit statistic and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Nonsignificant χ^2 -values indicate that the hypothesized model fits the data, and RMSEA-values smaller than or equal to .08 are indicative of an acceptable fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

However, the χ^2 goodness-of-fit statistic is sensitive to sample size, so that the probability of rejecting the hypothesized model increases with increasing sample size. To overcome this problem, the computation of relative goodness-of-fit indices is strongly recommended (Bentler, 1990; Bollen, 1989). As proposed by Marsh and Hau (1996), we used the Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), the Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). For these relative fit-indices, as a rule of thumb, values of .90 or higher are considered as indicating a good fit (Hoyle, 1995).

Each of the components in our model was included in the structural equation model as a latent variable, using the items as indicators (see Measures section). Interaction terms will only be included in the model if preliminary regression analyses indicate that they explain a unique part of the variance in the outcome variables (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization), after controlling for the main effects of job demands, job control, and emotional dissonance. Before the two- and three-way interaction terms were computed, job demands, job control, and emotional dissonance were standardized, i.e., centred around their mean scores (cf. Aiken & West, 1991).

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients for all variables, as well as the correlation matrix. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above the level of .75 for all the multi-item scales, except for depersonalization, which reached an alpha of .67. A relatively low reliability for depersonalization is often found in burnout research (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Taken together, these findings indicate that all scales had an acceptable level of internal consistency.

RESULTS

In terms of intercorrelations between the two burnout scales, emotional exhaustion was significantly related to depersonalization. Furthermore, all predictor variables correlated significantly with the two burnout variables. Table 2 shows that we also found moderate relationships between the independent variables. The predictor variables correlated significantly with both the mediating variable (emotional exhaustion), and the criterion variable

TABLE 2
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the variables
included in this study ($N = 220$)

	Possible range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emotional exhaustion	0–48	13.80	8.07	(.88)				
2. Depersonalization	0–30	8.71	4.71	.67 ^a	(.67)			
3. Job demands	1–5	2.77	.82	.45 ^a	.35 ^a	(.80)		
4. Job control	1–5	2.77	.81	-.22 ^a	-.30 ^a	.03	(.76)	
5. Emotional dissonance	1–5	2.83	.82	.58 ^a	.57 ^a	.30 ^a	-.21 ^b	(.87)

^a $p < .001$; ^b $p < .01$; ^c $p < .05$.

(depersonalization). This implies that an important condition for mediation was met in this study (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Model testing

Our central hypothesis is that emotional dissonance explains a significant amount of the variance in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among cabin attendants on top of quantitative job demands and job control (hypothesis 2). In addition, we hypothesized that job control would have a moderating effect on the relationship between job demands and exhaustion (hypothesis 1), and that the combined effect of high emotional dissonance, high quantitative job demands, and low job control would result in elevated levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among cabin attendants (three-way interaction; hypothesis 3).

Before testing these hypotheses simultaneously using structural equation modelling (SEM), we performed two separate hierarchical regression analyses, with job demands, job control, emotional dissonance, and the interaction terms as predictor variables, and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization as the criteria. More specifically, demands, control, and emotional dissonance were entered in the first step of the regression equation, the Job demands \times Job control interaction term was entered in the second step, and the three-way interaction term was entered in the third step. Results indicated that the two-way interaction term (exhaustion: $\beta = -.07$, $t = -1.24$, n.s.; depersonalization: $\beta = .06$, $t = 1.15$, n.s.) and the three-way interaction term (exhaustion: $\beta = .03$, $t < 1$, n.s.; depersonalization: $\beta = -.01$, $t < 1$, n.s.) did not explain a unique amount of the variance in symptoms of burnout. Thus, hypotheses 1 and 3 were rejected, and the interaction terms were excluded from further analyses.

The first SEM model that was tested included the relationships postulated in hypothesis 2 and the covariations between the three predictor variables, job demands, job control, and emotional dissonance. As can be seen in the first row

of Table 3, our emotional dissonance model fitted reasonably well to the data. The RMSEA is .07, and the NNFI, CFI, and IFI are equal to or higher than the criterion value of .90. Note, however, that the GFI is quite low. The modification indices suggested that the fit could be improved by adding direct relationships between job control and depersonalization, and between emotional dissonance and depersonalization. Since both relationships have been reported in the literature (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Zapf et al., 1999), we decided to build an alternative model by including these two paths, and by deleting the nonsignificant covariation between job demands and control. The second row of Table 3 shows that this model resulted in a fit to the data that was somewhat better than the fit of the proposed model. Indeed, the chi-square difference test proved that the alternative model was significantly better than the proposed model, $\Delta \Pi^2(1) = 16.96$, $p < .001$. The fact that the GFI of .87 is still below the criterion level of .90 is most probably caused by the limited sample size. All other fit indices are acceptable.

All manifest variables in the model loaded significantly on the intended factors, and all relationships were in the expected direction. As can be seen in Figure 2, emotional dissonance explains a significant and unique amount of the variance in emotional exhaustion scores on top of job demands and job control (cf. hypothesis 2). The three variables together explained 49% of the variance in exhaustion. In addition, even after adding the direct paths between job control and emotional dissonance on the one hand, and depersonalization on the other hand, emotional exhaustion still showed a strong relationship with depersonalization (parameter = .59; total explained variance = 65%), confirming hypothesis 4. Thus, consistent with Leiter's (1993) model, emotional exhaustion plays an important mediating role between work characteristics and depersonalization.

TABLE 3
Results of SEM analyses: Standardized maximum likelihood estimates of the emotional dissonance model ($N = 220$)

<i>Model</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>NNFI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>IFI</i>
Proposed model	391.71	202	0.86	0.07	0.90	0.92	0.92
Alternative model	374.75	201	0.87	0.06	0.91	0.92	0.92
Null model	2489.79	231	0.29	0.21	—	—	—

χ^2 = chi-square; *df* = degrees of freedom; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; NNFI = non-normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index. The alternative model includes the paths between job control and emotional dissonance on the one hand, and depersonalization on the other hand. In addition, the nonsignificant covariation between job demands and control has been deleted.

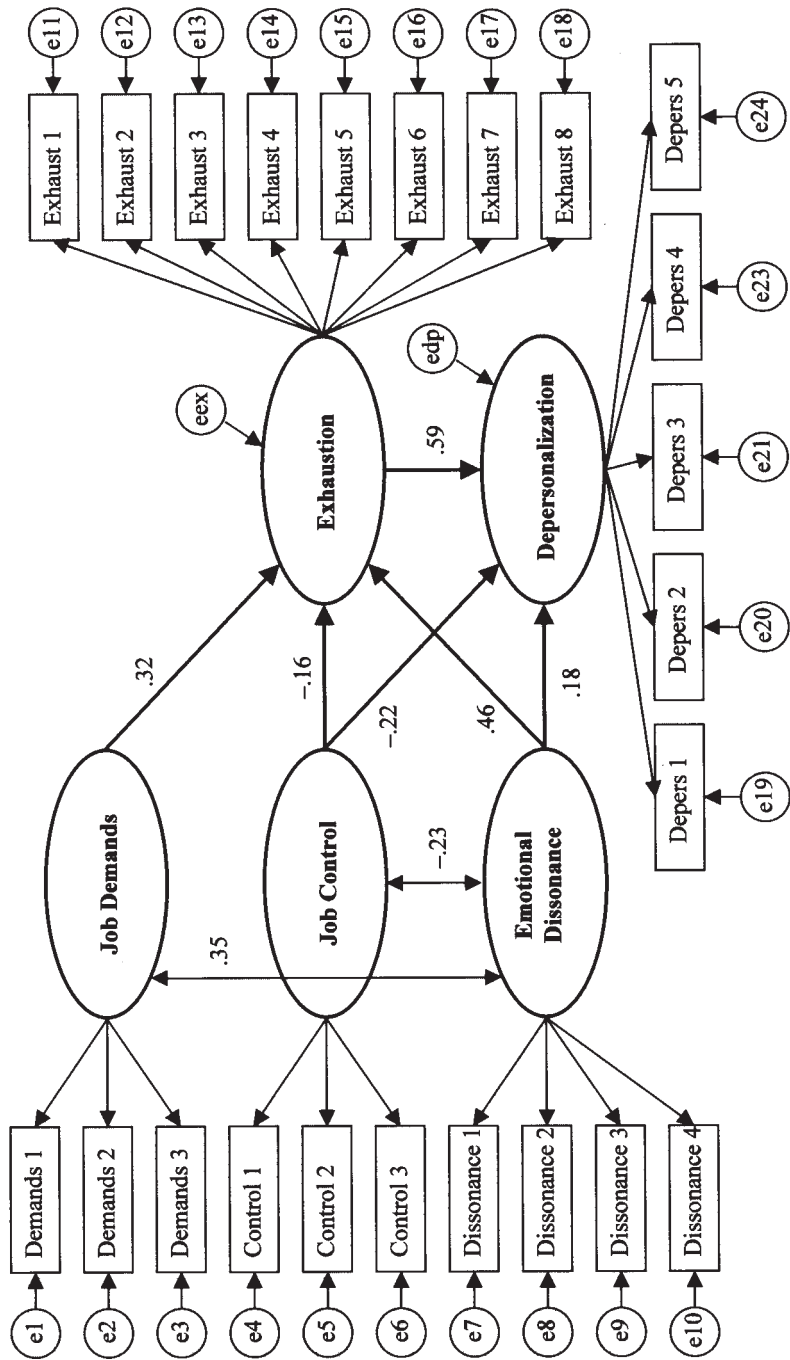


Figure 2. Emotional dissonance model, standardized solution.

Qualitative analysis

A discussion of the qualitative data from interviews with five healthy and five burned-out cabin attendants in the present study can make a contribution to the debate regarding some of the contradictory aspects of emotion work. Brotheridge and Lee (1998) and Grandey (2000) argue that contradictions about the definition and operationalization of emotion work may create difficulties for future research. Despite the limited number of interviewees, the qualitative material allows us to colour our quantitative results, and to generate some ideas for future exploration of the relatively new terrain of emotion work.

The results of our exploratory qualitative study generally support our quantitative findings. In line with hypothesis 2, we found that the amount of emotional dissonance that respondents had experienced in the past was predictive of current burnout complaints. While emotional dissonance seems to be an unavoidable, intrinsic part of human service professions, we noticed that the group without burnout complaints experienced what one could call “healthy emotional dissonance”. A certain amount of dissonance between felt and expressed emotions seems not to have any harmful effects for employees’ health. One of the respondents describes this “healthy” kind of emotional dissonance as follows: “Most of the time I just behave the way I feel. That has to do with the fact that I genuinely like my job and that is what I radiate on board. But fatigue and unkind passengers sometimes force me into playing a role, which I sometimes experience as being emotionally stressful.” For the group of burned-out cabin attendants, emotional dissonance had exceeded certain limits, beyond which one could describe this phenomenon as being unhealthy and severely damaging for employees’ health. Two respondents report on how this “unhealthy” form of emotional dissonance closely relates to the self-alienation described by Hochschild (1983): “In one’s work, one is very much managed on being cheerful, being sociable, being kind and smiling. At a certain moment, this has dissociated itself to such an extent, that I had the feeling of not controlling my own character any longer ... It is something very difficult to put into words, but I had the feeling that I had lost my own feeling.”

Our qualitative findings also shed light on the covariations between the three predictors (emotional dissonance, job demands, and job control) and on their relationships with burnout. We found that the “healthy” cabin attendants clearly experienced more control over the organizational setting and their emotional expression than did their burned-out colleagues. This becomes apparent in the differences in perception of control over display rules between these two groups. The group with burnout complaints perceived feeling rules as being static, clearly defined, and imposed upon them by the organization. They unanimously felt that these rules consisted of responding to an image of the perfect cabin attendant: “I had the feeling that, in the short time a passenger sees me, he needs to get a positive image of our airline, and that I therefore had to be a laughing object,

always cheerful and positive.” Another respondent with burnout complaints comments: “There was just one single way of dealing with passengers: smiling and treat every single passenger as a VIP.” The group without burnout complaints showed a different perception of individual control over display rules: “You just do your job. You don’t give it much thought what the airline expects of you. I think that we are left much freedom of action.” Another respondent comments: “I am very care giving, friendly and kind and I can express much of that in my job. Nobody forces me to be friendly.” This group explored the limits of organizational display rules in defining them as part of the interaction with each passenger: “Whether or not I am being friendly also depends on the passenger. In the beginning of my career I had the feeling that passengers were holy entities to whom one is not allowed to say anything in a negative sense. Now I have become very conscious that I also need to protect my own interests. How much I will give in terms of personal emotions and energy very much depends on the passenger. I always keep to a basic standard of friendliness, and I gradually add to that depending on how kind the passenger is.” Thus, for the group of burned-out individuals, display rules were found to be an organizational given that workers had to comply to, while the group of healthy workers defined display rules defined on the basis of reciprocity in the interaction with passengers.

Reciprocity theory (Buunk & Schaufeli, 1993, 1998) offers a fruitful framework for understanding why certain individuals develop burnout complaints in reaction to the emotional requirements of their jobs, and others do not. The theory points to the importance of the balance between investments and outcomes for the development of burnout. In our limited qualitative study we found that cabin attendants who experienced no burnout complaints had learned to develop strategies to secure sufficient reciprocity in their contact with passengers. They actively reshaped display rules in order to protect their own interests and well-being. “How many and which emotions will I give to my passengers and how much can I expect in return?” was a question that respondents frequently asked themselves. It points to consciously regulating the emotional exchange and reciprocity between the service agent and passenger. One of the cabin attendants commented on this aspect of reciprocity as follows: “I keep to a certain airline standard, but the contact with passengers has become more superficial and less intensive compared to the beginning of my career, because I have realised that I received very little in return. Thus, I have started to give less, but I still see very satisfied passengers, so that remains the same as in the beginning when I gave much more. Apparently, extra attention is considered as a standard. In the end, I get the same in return.” Regulating emotions as part of the work role is apparently something one can learn.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to examine: (1) whether empirical support could be found for the strain hypothesis of Karasek's (1979) D–C model in a homogeneous sample of cabin attendants; (2) whether the incorporation of emotional dissonance in the D–C model would significantly improve the prediction of burnout; (3) whether the combined effect of high quantitative job demands, low job control, and high emotional dissonance would result in elevated levels of burnout; and (4) whether emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between job demands, job control, and emotional dissonance on the one hand, and depersonalization on the other.

First, quantitative job demands and job control had significant main effects on both burnout components, i.e., emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (cf. De Jonge & Kompier, 1997), but not the predicted interaction effect. Thus, hypothesis 1, following Karasek's (1979) strain hypothesis, was rejected on the basis of our empirical findings. These results are consistent with several other empirical studies testing the D–C model, which have shown similar results (Jones & Fletcher, 1996; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). The incorporation of a context-specific stressor, namely emotional dissonance, in a three-way interaction with job demands and job control, did not qualify our empirical findings. Hypothesis 3 was therefore rejected as well, and interaction terms were excluded from further analyses. Note that these latter findings do not match with those found by Zapf et al. (2001), who found interaction effects between emotion work variables and other stressors. Differences in sample size, conceptualization of central concepts, and the homogeneity of the population in the present study could account for this discrepancy in empirical findings.

Second, results of the present study emphasize the importance of including emotion work variables in studies on job stress in human services, as emotional dissonance explains a significant and unique amount of variance in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization on top of job demands and job control. Thus, hypothesis 2 was clearly supported by the results of a series of SEM analyses. A structural mismatch between emotions that need to be displayed and inner feelings makes an important contribution to explaining why cabin attendants get emotionally exhausted and detach from their jobs. Thus, the findings of the present study underscore the relevance of including emotional dissonance in future studies on job stress in the human services.

Third, consistent with Leiter's (1993) process model of burnout, we found that emotional exhaustion as determined by high job demands, low job control, and high emotional dissonance, in turn, evokes depersonalization, thereby confirming hypothesis 4. These findings are in line with previous longitudinal studies in which emotional exhaustion was found to evoke a callous and cynical attitude towards recipients (e.g., Bakker et al., 2000). By treating others as

objects rather than as people, cabin attendants presumably attempt to gain emotional distance from their passengers as a way of coping with their exhaustion (Leiter, 1993; Leiter & Maslach, 1988).

Finally, our qualitative exploratory analysis gives us indications for a better understanding of emotion work, as well as suggestions for future research. The qualitative results illustrate that employees of a homogenous group of workers show a great diversity of reactions in relation to emotion work. Self alienation coexists with genuine self expression, and standardized smiles with a great variety of emotional expressions. We therefore argue that these contradictions that can be found in literature should be integrated in the concept of emotion work, rather than trying to solve them. Integrating personality variables, emotional intelligence, and coping mechanisms in future studies on the relationship between emotion work and burnout would be a way to achieve this. Our exploratory qualitative analysis suggests that these aspects are crucial in understanding how emotion work can result in burnout. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data, as was done in the present study, seems to be the most fruitful way of exploring the relatively new terrain of emotion work.

Our interview examples also clearly show that the nature, variety, and frequency of emotional display is not only defined by organizational demands, but is actively regulated by the human service agent on the basis of interaction and reciprocity with recipients. Service workers consciously shape display rules and explore their limits, in order to protect themselves and cope in a healthy way with a great variety of human interactions. In our limited sample of interviewees we noticed that especially healthy cabin attendants had learned to develop such coping strategies in dealing with the emotional demands of their job. The perception of display rules of this group clearly differed from the group of cabin attendants with burnout complaints. Consistent with Hochschild's (1983) idea of emotions as standardized, modelled products, the unhealthy group described display rules as static organizational standards of perfectly smiling objects. In contrast, for the healthy group these rules were clearly defined on the basis of reciprocity with recipients. This is in line with Wouters' (1989) ideas that the emotion work of cabin attendants consists of a need to attune their behaviour to the emotional style of the individual passenger. Future studies could focus on which strategies healthy workers develop to cope with emotion work, in order to integrate this information in future training of human service workers. Furthermore, we argue that emotion work should best be understood as the joint outcome of the social interaction between agent and recipient on the one hand and organizational rules for observable expression on the other.

Limitations

Because of the cross-sectional design of the current study, the postulated relationships between emotional dissonance and burnout dimensions cannot be interpreted causally. The direction of the causal relationship can only be

determined theoretically. In our study, stressors such as emotional dissonance lead to burnout complaints, while the direction of this relationship could also be reversed. Indeed, several authors (e.g., Adelman, 1995; Zapf et al., 1999) have suggested that emotional dissonance can be considered both as an external organization demand as well as a stress reaction that is strongly interrelated with emotional exhaustion. In our sample, cabin attendants who were exhausted and cynical needed to suppress a lot of negative emotions to comply with the positive feeling rules that were required of cabin attendants, and thus experienced more emotional dissonance. To further validate the hypothesized causal relationships between emotional dissonance and burnout, longitudinal studies and quasi-experimental research designs are needed.

Another limitation of the present research is the low response rate. Only one third of the questionnaires were returned. Although our sample matched on the most important personal variables like age, gender, hierarchical position, and job tenure with the total population of cabin attendants, it is conceivable that cabin attendants with burnout complaints, or having experienced these complaints in the past, were more inclined to fill out our questionnaire. However, a comparison of our sample to a norm group of Dutch human service professionals (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000) showed that the scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization do not deviate significantly. Despite these results suggesting that the sample did not include an overrepresentation of burned-out cabin attendants, it seems important to replicate the current findings in future research.

A final limitation of the current research is that our study concerns a national sample. Basically, this calls into question the generalizability of the present findings to countries outside The Netherlands. Moreover, it is very likely that the feeling rules strongly vary between the different countries. The American style of “always smile at the customer” is for example not recognized by Dutch cabin attendants. A comparison between various countries regarding emotion work and its effects on burnout in future research would be a valuable contribution to our knowledge in this domain.

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