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### Spirituality, religion, and emotional labor in the workplace

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## Spirituality, religion, and emotional labor in the workplace

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Emotional labor is the regulation of emotional displays as part of a work role. To date, minimal research has considered how spirituality and religion impact the performance and consequences of emotional labor, which is an important omission given a growing awareness that religion and spirituality are important components of people's lives that continue to inform their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors while at work. Accordingly, we review the literature on emotional labor and develop a series of research questions that focus on issues such as the interplay between organizational and religious expectations for emotional displays toward others, as well as the ability of religious support and beliefs to buffer the negative effects of emotional labor on individual employees. Our hope is that these ideas spark interdisciplinary research on emotional labor that draws on a wider body of perspectives in management.

**Keywords:** emotions; emotion regulation; display rules; social support; helping professions; forgiveness; faith

Many jobs and organizations require people to manage their emotions in particular ways when interacting with customers or the public. For example, customer service representatives are generally expected to display enthusiasm and warmth while hiding any trace of emotions like boredom, irritation, or disgust. In contrast, people working in collections or law enforcement positions sometimes need to appear angry or disapproving while covering up any feelings of compassion or happiness that they might be feeling. This process of regulating emotional displays as part of a work role is referred to as emotional labor (Hochschild 1983; Grandey 2000), which is a common part of a great many jobs (Glomb *et al.* 2004). Over 25 years of research on emotional labor has documented that it is a stressful and effortful process that is shaped by many characteristics of the workplace situation and individual differences between employees (e.g. Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Morris and Feldman 1996; Diefendorff and Richard 2003; Bono and Vey 2005).

Despite the considerable increase in interest in emotional labor, very little research has considered how phenomena observed in the management,

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spirituality, and religion (MSR) literature may facilitate or hinder the process of effectively performing emotional labor (see Syed 2008 for an exception). Consequently, we see considerable value in drawing connections between the MSR and emotional labor literatures to highlight the previously unconsidered ways in which emotional labor might be influenced by a person's experiences with religion and spirituality. Additionally, we make a point to draw on beliefs and practices from both Western (Judeo-Christian) and Eastern religious perspectives in the sections that follow, and we highlight the similarities and differences in these practices where they are relevant to understanding emotional labor.

We begin by first giving a brief overview of emotional labor research for readers unfamiliar with this area of inquiry. We then consider the ways in which MSR constructs directly and indirectly influence the performance of emotional labor by focusing on major constructs and processes studied by emotional labor researchers. Additionally, we consider the emotional labor of religious- and faith-based workers in particular and highlight some unique emotional labor demands faced by these groups in different religious contexts (e.g. the practice of confession conducted by priests within the Catholic faith).

### **Emotional labor: an overview**

Emotional labor was first brought to the attention of organizational scholars by Hochschild (1983), who studied the process of emotional labor among flight attendants working for Delta Airlines. Interest in the topic grew as researchers increasingly became aware of the importance of emotions in the workplace (Brief and Weiss 2002). Moreover, understanding emotional labor has become increasingly important as the service sector has grown to encompass a larger proportion of the economic growth of most developed countries in the West (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Morris and Feldman 1996).

One fruitful body of research on this topic has focused on identifying the many situational and individual antecedents of emotional labor. For example, individual differences such as trait affect, self-monitoring, and emotional intelligence are known to predict emotional labor (e.g. Bono and Vey 2005; Diefendorff *et al.* 2005; Joseph and Newman 2010). These characteristics affect emotional labor because they are associated with the emotions that people feel and their ability to maintain a desired public appearance.

Situational cues also elicit emotional labor, most notably perceived display rules (e.g. Schaubroeck and Jones 2000). Display rules are standards that dictate what emotions should be shown to and hidden from others at work. These rules are typically implicit and learned through experience and socialization into an occupation and/or a specific organization. For example, Wharton and Erikson (1993) classified occupations based on the types of display rules that they tend to involve. Occupations with integrative display rules tend to require the expression of positive emotions and suppression of negative emotions (e.g. waiters, tour guides), whereas occupations with differentiating display rules

tend to require the suppression of positive emotions and expression of negative emotions (e.g. bouncer, collections agent). In contrast, masking occupations involve the suppression of both strong positive and negative emotions to maintain an appearance of impartiality, calmness, and rationality (e.g. doctors, judges).

With respect to the performance of emotional labor, most research adopts a dramaturgical perspective (Grandey 2000) to characterize two strategies that employees can use. The first strategy is surface acting, which involves faking the necessary emotional display without changing one's internal feelings. This type of emotional labor is sometimes referred to as acting in bad faith (Grandey 2000) because it involves simply putting on an inauthentic act. In contrast, the second strategy, deep acting, involves eliciting the necessary emotional display by working to change one's internal feelings. This type of emotional labor is referred to as acting in good faith because the generated display is authentic and genuine. Surface and deep acting also differ with respect to when they can be performed. Specifically, deep acting is an antecedent-focused form of emotion regulation, which means that it must be performed prior to entering the context in which emotional displays must be managed. In contrast, surface acting is a response-focused form of emotion regulation that can be quickly performed after being faced with an unexpected emotional display demand (Gross 2002). In addition to these two key strategies, some limited research has studied the expression of naturally felt emotions, which occurs when employees feel and display emotions consistent with display rules without any need for regulation (Diefendorff *et al.* 2005; Dahling and Perez 2010).

Although both surface and deep acting can be effective means of regulating emotions (Côté 2005), there are different outcomes associated with these two strategies when they are used habitually. Surface acting is generally associated with more negative outcomes because it generates a sense of emotional dissonance (a disconnect between what one feels and expresses) and requires constant effort to maintain the façade of the appropriate emotional display. For example, research indicates that surface acting is positively associated with burnout (e.g. Brotheridge and Grandey 2002; Diefendorff *et al.* 2011; Kim 2008) and lower ratings of affective delivery (e.g. Brotheridge and Lee 2002; Grandey 2003). Deep acting is generally unrelated to negative outcomes, and is associated with positive outcomes in some research, including higher ratings of emotional well-being (Johnson and Spector 2007). Over time, the more distal consequences of emotional labor can include supervisor and customer performance ratings (Grandey 2003), turnover intentions and turnover behavior (Chau *et al.* 2009), and conflict between work and family when stress from work is brought home (Montgomery *et al.* 2006).

We next turn to an integration of MSR constructs with the emotional labor process described in this section. Most of our propositions concern the effects of religion and spirituality, so some consideration of how we define these constructs is a critical starting point. As several authors in the MSR literature have noted, there is no clear consensus on the distinction between spirituality

and religion (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003; Mitroff 2003; Fornaciari and Lund Dean 2009). Consistent with previous research (e.g. Day 2005), our approach is to define spirituality as a sense of connectedness to a larger purpose that is associated with a sacred, higher power. In contrast, religion involves membership in a particular community of faith with its own structure, rules, and belief systems. As Day (2005) pointed out, these constructs are fully independent; people can be both spiritual and religious, neither spiritual nor religious, or just one and not the other (e.g. being strongly affiliated with a religious community without experiencing any sense of spirituality through its practice). In the sections that follow, when we refer to *spirituality*, we are concerned with the effects that are likely to occur as a consequence of feeling this sense of connectedness and trust in a higher power. When we refer to *religion*, we are concerned with the effects that are likely to occur as a consequence of subscribing to the tenets of particular religious faiths.

### **Effects of religion and spirituality on emotional labor**

We see several points of integration between the MSR and emotional labor literatures that could form the basis for future research. In the sections that follow, we explore several of these ideas. Specifically, we consider how religious and spiritual individuals are likely to face high emotional labor demands due to their entry into interpersonal and helping professions, how the experience of religion and spirituality shapes the emotions that employees regulate through emotional labor, and how adherence to religious display rules may facilitate or contradict adherence to organizational/occupational display rules for emotional labor. In the aftermath of emotional labor, we also consider how religion and spirituality can serve as a source of socioemotional resources that buffer employees against the stress of emotional labor, and we explore how the practice of forgiveness can help employees deal with difficult, uncivil customers or members of the public. We conclude by discussing some emerging research needs on the emotional labor of religious and spiritual workers and by highlighting recent research on a related construct, spiritual labor, that is a fruitful direction for interdisciplinary work.

### ***Religion, spirituality, and choice of helping professions***

One of the most important reasons for MSR scholars to study emotional labor is that religion and spirituality pull people towards occupations in which emotional labor demands are unusually high. In particular, people who adhere to a religious or spiritual life should feel a draw toward a helping profession because the sacred texts of both Eastern and Western religions stress the importance of charity, helping others, and assisting one another as a fundamental tenet of their belief systems.

For example, in the case of Judaism, Cain asks God if he is his brother's keeper after murdering Abel, which has been taken to mean in the Jewish

tradition that we are responsible for the lives of each other (Genesis 4:9 Hebrew–English Tanakh Student Edition). Similarly, one of the most prominent Jewish religious figures, Moses, abandoned his life of comfort in the palace to help his brethren (Exodus). In the Christian tradition, Jesus advises to his disciples that whatever they do to the least of their peers will be the equivalent of doing those actions to Jesus himself (Matthew 25:40 The New American Bible). For Islam, the Quran advises adherents to “practice regular charity” (Qur’an 58:13 A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem), explains that they “are protectors one of another” (8:73) and are guided to do “righteous good deeds” (20 Ta-Ha 75). Hinduism tells of King Rantideva, who fasted for 48 days during a time of great hunger in his kingdom, to suffer along with his people. On his 49th day, when he was ready to begin eating again, two beggars came to him and he gave food to them both. This story emphasizes the fact that it is better to work at alleviating the suffering of others than to ensure our own personal salvation (Balasubrahmanian 1969). Buddhism emphasizes the ending of desire as a way to cease pain and that this can happen through selflessness and authentic service to other beings (Olcott 1908). Sikhism teaches that he who attains great wealth, but does no charity, has nothing (Sri Guru Granth Sahib 712 : 1 English Translation).

Consistent with these sacred texts, research indicates that religions predispose their adherents toward helping professions. For example, Wagenfeld-Heintz (2009) found that religious values and beliefs positively influenced individuals’ choice of a career in social work. Additionally, her study discovered that these employees expressed that they found that the values of their professions intertwined with the values of their religion or spirituality. Religion is also a central force in shaping individuals’ inclination toward public service. This influence is thought to stem from early childhood experiences with religion that shape individuals’ values and continued involvement with the religion throughout the course of their lives (Mather 2008).

Similarly, helping professionals also appear to be more inclined toward spirituality and religiosity. Public servants are more likely to agree with the existence of a God who is involved in their lives (Houston and Cartwright 2007). These public servants express that they experience God’s love directly or through those that they help. They also more commonly expressed that they believed that their life was part of a larger spiritual force. Compared to those not employed as public servants, these people reported greater spirituality and an obligation to help others.

The emotional labor literature clearly indicates that people who are engaged in helping professions are likely to face high requirements for emotion regulation. For example, professions such as protective services, health care, or counseling, which all involve emotionally intensive interactions with others, present extensive emotional labor demands (Glomb *et al.* 2004). These occupations involve emotionally-charged helping tasks such as investigating unusual or illegal activity, assisting and preparing patients for treatments, and helping clients identify their problems and develop plans to improve their lives.

Strazdins and Broom (2007) explain the high emotional labor requirements of these occupations through the process of emotional contagion, in which feelings that must be managed are passed back and forth via social interaction. Contagion can come as a cost or a reward, depending on the emotion that the worker is encountering. When showing connection, warmth, inclusion, and kindness toward others, workers often cited lower depressive symptoms. On the other hand, while hearing the worries and troubles of others or defending those in conflict, workers identified more depressive symptoms. Both instances are fueled with intense emotions. Smith *et al.* (2009) examined the potential negative and positive outcomes of emotions to the safety and reduction of risk to staff and clients within the context of the UK's National Health Service. Nursing students described the fright of interacting with patients as well as the compassion that must be displayed in order to establish a trust. They also stressed that their patients required complex levels of help that they had to be able to assess. Thus, it is clear that these helping professions are emotionally demanding.

Taken in sum, the MSR literature suggests that highly religious and spiritual people are predisposed to enter professions that involve interpersonal helping. In turn, the emotional labor literature shows that these helping professions are associated with high emotional labor requirements. Consequently, we propose that religion and spirituality should be indirectly associated with emotional labor requirements as a consequence of the choice of helping professions, but no research to date has bridged these literatures.

*Research Question 1:* Do highly religious and spiritual people face high emotional labor requirements because their beliefs and values encourage them to enter helping professions with considerable interpersonal demands?

### ***Religion, spirituality, and experienced emotion***

Emotions are central to the experience of religion and spirituality, and adherents can experience them both privately and within a community setting, such as a church or prayer service (Watts 1996). Research suggests that religions can shape the specific emotions that people feel. Indeed, religions across the world prescribe certain emotions to their adherents (e.g. feeling love for others in Christianity or subdued feelings of pleasantness in Buddhism), and if an individual identifies strongly with their religion, they will be disposed toward feeling these particular emotions (Kim-Prieto and Diener 2009). Additionally, the prayer component of religion can also empower adherents to reflect on the experiences of the day and redirect their emotions toward those advocated by the religion (Watts 1996).

In particular, there is a large body of evidence to suggest that those who are affiliated with a religious group experience greater levels of positive emotions, such as happiness and satisfaction, in comparison to nonaffiliated individuals (Frankel and Hewitt 1994). One explanation for this finding is that, for many, religious groups provide support, meaning, and an optimistic orientation toward life (Myers 2000). For example, Catholics and Protestants

have both explained that an important element of their spiritual lives is the congregational support that they receive from their community and they relate this to their joy and contentment with their life (Cohen 2002). This support extends itself toward the socioemotional realm as adherents are more likely to report feeling esteemed and cared about by their community. This support also yields a more encouraging network of friends than what is reported by the nonreligious (Ellison and George 1994). In sum, members of these Christian congregations tend to experience love more intensely and frequently than nonreligious people (Kim-Prieto and Diener 2009).

Empowered with more frequent occurrences of heightened positive emotions, religious and spiritual workers should be able to perform emotional labor with less effort. The positive emotions that adherents are more likely to display have been shown to be related to enhance workers' personal accomplishments (Zapf and Holz 2006). Additionally, those with positive emotions are more readily able to empathize and display sincere concern for others. Nelson (2009) found that drawing from positive emotions in an unknown situation with strangers can help individuals attain compassion for their new acquaintances. This can also lead to higher levels of empathy toward others whose norms are different. The improved compassion that is understood as a product of positive affect can also help to assemble long-term social tools for the religious and spiritual. This finding suggests that these individuals can receive the benefit of improved social and individual functioning from their beliefs (Nelson 2009).

The emotional labor literature also shows that experienced positive emotion plays an important role in the process of emotional labor, particularly in relation to the choice of emotional labor strategy. High positive affect is positively related to the utilization of deep acting and display of naturally felt emotions, and negatively related to the utilization of surface acting, for individuals engaged in emotional work (Bono and Vey 2005; Dahling and Perez 2010). These workers have a greater tendency to use deep acting and to express genuine emotion in their work situations, and these strategies are related to fewer negative outcomes relative to surface acting (Bono and Vey 2005; Johnson and Spector 2007). Religious and spiritual workers will also have a broader array of positive, genuine emotions such as compassion, empathy, love, and understanding which should alleviate the stress of the emotional labor process.

To summarize, highly religious and spiritual people tend to experience more positive, integrative emotions, like happiness and compassion. These emotions afford them advantages in interpersonal situations, direct them toward more functional emotional labor strategies (i.e. deep acting and expressing naturally felt emotions), and result in fewer situations in which they must regulate their displays in an effortful fashion. Accordingly, we suggest that religion and spirituality will have indirect effects on emotional labor via experienced emotions.

*Research Question 2:* How do the emotions that highly religious and spiritual people experience impact their need to perform emotional labor and choice of emotional labor strategies?



### ***Religion, spirituality, and emotional display rules***

To this point, we have focused primarily on emotional labor happening within the context of occupations with integrative display rule expectations, those jobs that require employees to express positive emotional displays and suppress negative emotional displays (Wharton and Erickson 1993). We now turn to a consideration of what may happen when religious and spiritual individuals work in jobs that are characterized by conflicting display rules, namely differentiating rules (i.e. suppress positive and express negative emotional displays) or masking rules (i.e. suppress both positive and negative emotional displays).

As noted previously, most religions advocate for the display of positive emotions to others, and religion and spirituality are associated with the experience of feeling positive emotions. Thus, religions have “display rules” of their own, which fit well with the display rules of integrative occupations; religious individuals who engage in integrative occupations can perform emotional labor that is consistent with both organizational expectations and their own religious values/beliefs. Consistent with this idea, research shows that employees who report high positive affect can easily follow integrative organizational display rules (Rafaeli and Sutton 1989; King and Emmons 1990). Globally, this finding speaks to the idea of emotional harmony, which occurs when the emotions that a worker is called to display at work are in agreement with the values and emotions that the worker privately holds (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987).

Conversely, those occupations with differentiating or masking display rules contradict the integrative display rules of religions, and employees working in these occupations may experience less emotional harmony and more emotional dissonance when deciding which rule to follow. For example, consider the case of bill collection agents. Sutton (1991) found that bill collectors were expected to display irritation to debtors in the interest of generating a sense of urgency for the debtors to pay their delinquent bills. This occupation is characterized by differentiating display rules; the employees were selected, encouraged, and rewarded for closely following this display rule of irritation. However, Sutton also found that some bill collectors experienced conflicting feelings of sympathy toward debtors, particularly when the debtors behaved in a polite and friendly way toward the collectors. This dissonance proved challenging for many employees to manage. Although the bill collectors’ feelings of sympathy were not rooted in their religious beliefs in Sutton’s study, this example demonstrates how employees may find themselves faced with organizational display rules that contradict their own authentic feelings and standards for how others should be treated.

We suggest that the dissonance between religious display rules and differentiating or masking display rules at work may be particularly troublesome for a devout individual. Syed (2008) explained that highly religious people who are expressing emotions that conflict with their religious values will find this to be an uncomfortable state that can lead to feelings of guilt or shame. This dissonance may contribute to a dysfunctional spiral in which guilt and shame

mount as a consequence of detaching from one's religious beliefs, making effective emotional labor harder and harder to perform. Religion may not offer a refuge for these employees; for example, research on Protestant adherents showed that they expressed disapproval toward people who expressed an emotion that did not relate to how they truly felt (Cohen and Rozin 2001).

In aggregate, we suggest that the display rules prescribed by religious faiths may facilitate or complicate adherence to organizational and occupational display rules. Religious people working in integrative occupations should engage in high levels of emotional labor that is consistent with organizational expectations because their religious beliefs and organizational display rules are consistent and harmonious. In contrast, religious people working in differentiating or masking occupations may engage in less emotional labor consistent with these rules, and may even ignore organizational display rules in the interest of following the teachings of their religions.

*Research Question 3:* Do the emotional display rules of religions interact with the emotional display rules of organizations/occupations to influence emotional labor?

### ***Religion and spirituality as socioemotional buffers of emotional labor***

One of the more important theoretical perspectives in the emotional labor literature is conservation of resources theory (COR theory). COR theory states that people act to conserve their socioemotional resources and will minimize threats to resource loss whenever possible, but as resources diminish, self-regulation becomes increasingly difficult (Hobfoll 1989). Some threats to personal socioemotional resources in the emotional labor process include responding to role demands (e.g. organizational display rules), expressing the energy needed to complete work tasks, and putting in the effort required to perform both surface acting and deep acting (Lee and Ashforth 1996).

COR theory is applied in the emotional labor literature mainly to explain why emotional labor is so frequently associated with stress and burnout, psychological experiences that occur when socioemotional resources are being depleted at a rate faster than they can be replenished. These associations between emotional labor and stress are well-established in past research. For example, as compared to those in less emotionally demanding roles, people who are expected to engage in emotional labor on a regular basis report greater degrees of burnout (Brotheridge and Grandey 2002; Holman *et al.* 2008). Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) also found that the employees who experience the most burnout are those in the most emotionally demanding roles with respect to the frequency and intensity of their interpersonal interactions. Cropanzano *et al.* (2004) extended these findings to explore the mechanisms by which emotional labor can harm well-being. By creating worker alienation, burnout, stress, and low performance, they argued that emotional labor is detrimental to an employee's psychological well-being at work (Cropanzano *et al.* 2004).

Lee and Ashforth (1996) suggested that burnout occurs when people do not have adequate emotional resources to meet the work demands and/or strains of interpersonal stressors. They conducted a meta-analysis that uncovered strong associations between demand stressors and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, depersonalization, a defensive strategy of withdrawal rather than engagement, was strongly associated with role stress and stressful events. As a consequence, organizations experience negative outcomes such as turnover intentions and decreased organizational commitment when employees experience burnout without the means to replenish their lost socioemotional resources (Chau *et al.* 2009).

One major means of replenishing personal socioemotional resources is through social support. For example, social support is negatively associated with burnout, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion (Baruch-Feldman *et al.* 2002; Brotheridge and Lee 2002; Brown *et al.* 2003). Social support is also positively associated with satisfaction and productivity (Baruch-Feldman *et al.* 2002), and with personal accomplishment (Eriksson *et al.* 2009). In examining specifically how emotional labor can lead to burnout, Brotheridge and Lee (2002) discovered that rewarding social relationships partially mediated this relationship. Additionally, their findings support the assertion that rewarding relationships can reduce one's sense of emotional strain because of the psychological resources that are restored by these relationships (Brotheridge and Lee 2002).

A strong sense of faith is a second way that people may be able to replenish their socioemotional resources. For example, Harrowfield and Gardner (2010) found that high levels of faith maturity mediated the relationship between challenge appraisals and positive religious coping. Respondents with higher levels of faith maturity were more likely to appraise stressors as challenges and had more stress-related growth at work. Additionally, a positive attitude toward prayer among clergy was associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and higher levels of personal accomplishment (Turton and Francis 2007). Results from another study also indicated that intrinsic religious faith (defined as a belief and reliance on a higher power), among participants was correlated with lower anxiety and depression scores, and higher ego strength scores (Laurencelle *et al.* 2002).

Both social support and faith have shown to have beneficial outcomes with respect to employees' well-being and important organizational criteria. Consistent with this body of research, we suggest that religion and spirituality may buffer the effects of emotional labor on stress through two mechanisms. First, religious groups can provide a valuable source of social support that allows employees to revitalize their socioemotional resources. Holman *et al.* (2008) suggested promoting any form of social support as an effective intervention strategy that can reduce the negative consequences of emotional labor, and some research suggests that religious support in particular can help offset burnout as a consequence of work stressors (e.g. Eriksson *et al.* 2009). Second, faith in a religion or spiritual belief system can offer personal comfort that also replenishes personal resources. Day (2005) offered some valuable insight that

supports this idea: “Religious individuals often assert that religion provides them with one of their most effective coping mechanisms, both for extreme situations and daily stressors . . . These relationships between religiosity and enhancing coping may mean that . . . they may be able to deal better with daily stressors and long term ambiguities” (p. 116).

In summary, we suggest that religious and spiritual people will experience fewer detrimental outcomes from emotional labor. Consistent with COR theory, we expect that involvement in religious groups that provide social support and maintaining faith in a religious or spiritual belief system will help to replenish socioemotional resources lost in the performance of emotional labor. Religious and spiritual employees should consequently be able to endure despite these demands and experience less stress, burnout, and other negative consequences.

*Research Question 4:* How do the supports associated with religion and spirituality, namely faith in a higher power and the social support of religious groups, buffer the detrimental effects of emotional labor on service employees?

### ***Forgiveness, incivility, and emotional labor***

Although it is relatively under-studied, forgiveness has received some recent research attention in the MSR literature (e.g. Worthington *et al.* 2010). Forgiveness deserves special attention with respect to emotional labor due to research that has focused on the difficulties associated with emotional labor directed toward difficult or uncivil customers.

Most research on incivility in emotional labor settings uses organizational justice theory as an explanatory framework, particularly in terms of interactional injustice (e.g. Rupp and Spencer 2006). Customer incivility that is unfair from the employee’s perspective results in negative outcomes such as decreased productivity, lowered job satisfaction, heightened emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Sliter *et al.* 2010). These outcomes occur because employees who feel as though they have been unfairly treated by their customers react negatively to such treatment and must expend more effort to manage their emotions and adhere to display rules (Rupp and Spencer 2006). This effort depletes employees’ socioemotional resources and makes it harder to provide convincing emotional labor. For example, Sliter *et al.* (2010) found that emotional labor fully mediated the relationship between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion while partially mediating the relationship between customer incivility and customer service performance.

Sliter *et al.* (2010) went on to suggest that personality attributes might buffer the negative effects of incivility. For example, self-esteem, agreeableness, and negative affect have been offered as potential personality traits that could moderate the stressor–strain relationship. We suggest that propensity to forgive could also be considered one such individual difference that could potentially impact the relationship between customer incivility and experienced outcomes. Forgiveness occurs when people are faced with stressful psychological, physical, or moral transgressions by others, yet they decide to

behave and feel positively toward the transgressor rather than seeking some form of retribution or compensation (Worthington 2006). Most religions, as evidenced by sacred texts, prescribe forgiveness as essential to its following. For example, Hinduism proclaims forgiveness as the “supreme peace” (Mahabharata, Udyoga Parva Section XXXIII). Further, the Qur’an describes Muslims as those who “avoid gross sins and vice, and when angered they forgive” (Qur’an 42:37) and says that, “Although the just requital for an injustice is an equivalent retribution, those who pardon and maintain righteousness are rewarded by God” (Qur’an 42:40). Lastly, in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he advises “Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours” (Matthew 6:14–15). In one empirical study, researchers found that Protestants and Catholics showed higher levels of forgiveness of others, feeling forgiven by God, and seeking forgiveness when compared to non-religious groups (Toussaint and Williams 2008).

Because all major religions endorse the value of forgiveness (Rye *et al.* 2000), it is intuitive to expect that if religion prescribes forgiving, it can motivate religious workers to make relatively quick decisions to forgive (Worthington *et al.* 2010), which should help them deal with uncivil transgressions. Additionally, some research shows that *inability* to forgive *strengthens* the relationships between transgressions and negative organizational outcomes consistent with our reasoning. Previous researchers have identified three classes of unforgiving responses to workplace transgressions, which include vengeful responses, avoidant responses (e.g. staying home from work, turnover) and active grudge-holding (Mullet *et al.* 2005), all of which likely threaten an employee’s ability to provide convincing emotional labor. An inability to forgive may also cause an employee to ruminate over the offense, which generates additional detrimental outcomes (Berry *et al.* 2005).

To summarize, we expect that religious and spiritual employees are more likely to see value in forgiving others. This propensity to forgive should serve as an important moderator of the relationships between customer incivility and negative personal outcomes that have been established in the emotional labor literature.

*Research Question 5:* Does a propensity to forgive others buffer the relationship between customer incivility and detrimental outcomes associated with emotional labor?

### ***Emotional labor and spiritual labor among religious workers***

Moving beyond the process of emotional labor, we note that studies of emotional labor very rarely examine religious work and religious workers (e.g. priests, rabbis, or nuns) despite the heavy emotional labor demands associated with these roles. This represents a final important direction for future research as many religious faiths introduce special emotional labor demands for those who are called to serve. For example, confession of sins to a religious leader occurs within many religious faiths, including Catholicism and Mormonism. Although there are

oftentimes mechanical barriers between the religious leader and the confessor (e.g. a booth), religious leaders hearing confession must hold it in confidence and suppress any number of emotional reactions that they may feel to maintain trust with the confessor. These in-role requirements result in considerable emotional labor demands for religious workers, yet the emotional labor literature offers few insights into the experiences of emotional labor among religious workers and organizations (see Kreiner *et al.* 2006 for some examples of emotion management in the context of developing and maintaining identity among Episcopal priests).

Religious leaders have unique emotional labor demands that distinguish them from most other professions. That is not to say, however, that their work demands are completely different from other careers. For example, connections can be drawn between the emotional labor demands of religious leaders and religious workers in secular organizations. In both instances these religious workers have chosen to adhere to a set of values and principles determined by their religious affiliation. As such, there is an obligation for these workers to display emotions that are consistent with their internalized beliefs (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987; Cohen and Rozin 2001).

Religious workers may also face a related regulatory demand called spiritual labor. McGuire (2010) recently described this construct, which involves the commodification and regulation of spirituality in organizational settings. The notion of spiritual labor is modeled on emotional labor and presents a number of intriguing research directions for both MSR and emotional labor scholars. McGuire studied spiritual labor among the faculty of parochial boarding schools and found that the faculty actively regulated their spiritual expressions consistent with organizational norms, and that some faculty experienced a sense of dissonance as a consequence. Additionally, Considine (2007) identified two potential dilemmas, internal and interactional, that care providers face when dealing with spiritual needs. These include trying to seek ways to incorporate spirituality into care and balancing their own spiritual needs with those of their patients. Although research on spiritual labor is in its infancy, we suggest that understanding the mechanisms involved in emotional labor could help to advance the study of spiritual labor as well.

*Research Question 6:* How do religious workers manage their emotional and spiritual labor demands? As a special type of population, what unique demands do they face that secular employees do not?

## Discussion and conclusion

Emotional labor is widespread in organizational life and critical to the success of many service-based organizations. Despite the expansion of research on emotional labor that has occurred in the past 25 years, very little research has considered how religion and spirituality impact this process. This is an important omission given a growing awareness that religion and spirituality are important components of people's lives that continue to inform their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors while at work (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003).

Our intent in this article was to highlight some novel directions for MSR researchers to “plug into” existing questions, models, and theories of emotional labor in the broader management literature. To this end, we considered how religion and spirituality shape entry into helping occupations that are saturated with emotional labor requirements, how positive emotional experiences associated with religion and spirituality influence emotional labor, and how religious expectations for emotional displays may facilitate or inhibit adherence to organizational display rules. Further, we pointed out several places in which MSR constructs may serve as critical moderators that buffer employees from the negative consequences of emotional labor. We suggested that faith and involvement in religious or spiritual communities may help employees replenish socio-emotional resources lost in the course of effortful emotion regulation, and we pointed out how propensity to forgive others may play a particularly important role in enduring emotional labor in the face of incivility from customers. Lastly, we described how religious workers may experience demands to regulate their emotions and spirituality in ways that have not been fully examined in either the MSR or emotional labor literature. Our hope is that these ideas spark interdisciplinary research on emotional labor that draws on a wider body of perspectives in management.

In conclusion, it is clear to us that the study of emotional labor offers many exciting new directions for MSR scholars to explore. Likewise, there are new ideas and under-studied populations of workers in the MSR literature that present novel questions and challenges for emotional labor research. Given the centrality of emotion, religion, and spirituality to everyday life at work and at home, it is crucial for future research to pursue these inquiries and better integrate these literatures.

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