A Study on the Concept, Dimensions and Consequences of Emotional Labor

Yeong-Gyeong Choi*, Kyoung-Seok Kim** & So-Jung Kim***

*Business Administration, Kyungpook National University, Daegu, KOREA. E-Mail: regulusmw{at}hanmail{dot}net
**Business Administration, Kyungpook National University, Daegu, KOREA. E-Mail: kskim{at}knu{dot}ac{dot}kr
***Business Administration, Kyungpook National University, Daegu, KOREA. E-Mail: fione{at}hanmail{dot}net

Abstract—This study, literature review research, intends to deal with the problem of conceptual ambiguity among research on emotional labor, and to look into the evolutionary trends and changing aspects of defining the concept of emotional labor. For this, it gropes for methods for reducing conceptual ambiguity. Further, it arranges the concept of emotional labor; and examines and reviews comparatively the currents of the existing studies and looks for the characteristics and correlations of their classification criteria. That is, this study intends to arrange systematically and examine theories on emotional labor suggested hitherto, and suggest a future direction of research on emotional labor on the basis thereof. In addition, it attempts to look for positive aspects of the results of emotional labor.

Keywords—Emotion Labor; Dimensions of Emotional Labor.

Abbreviations—Emotional Labor Scale (ELS).

I. INTRODUCTION

A framework for research on emotion in organizations has been created since emotion was recognized as one element of labor from the 1970s. As the service industry has developed, emotional laborers, who are asked by organizations to hide their emotions and display emotions customers want, have increased rapidly. According as it has been found that emotional labor has negative effects on emotional laborers’ attitudes towards jobs and organizations and on their job performance as well as on their psychological and physical health, a lot of studies on emotional laborers have been under way. Many of the studies emphasized negative aspects of the results of emotional labor.

While active research has been carried out by researchers, mixed findings and many problems have been suggested. This is because the existing studies failed to clarify the concept and dimensions of emotional labor. Most research on emotional labor used Hochschild, Morris & Feldman’s concept, and had no clear definition of emotional labor. In addition, different researchers used the different numbers and names of the dimensions of emotional labor.

Hence, this study, literature review research, intends to deal with the problem of conceptual ambiguity among research on emotional labor, and to look into the evolutionary trends and changing aspects of defining the concept of emotional labor. For this, it gropes for methods for reducing conceptual ambiguity. Further, it arranges the concept of emotional labor; and examines and reviews comparatively the currents of the existing studies and looks for the characteristics and correlations of their classification criteria.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. What is ‘Emotional Labor’?

Emotion work is the starting point for the understanding of emotional labor. Hochschild (2003) used the term emotion work to refer to any attempt to modify the experience or expression of a consciously felt emotion. When the individual performs emotion work as a required part of his/her actual job performance it is called emotional labor. Callahan & McCollum (2002) interprets that emotional work is appropriate for situations in which individuals are personally choosing to manage their emotions for their own non-compensated benefits. The term emotional labor is appropriate only when emotion work is exchanged for something such as wage or some other type of valued compensation. Wharton & Erickson (1993) remarks that not only such actions are performed for wage; they are also under the control of others. Thus, emotional labor is under the control of organizations. Various scholars have conceptualized emotional labor in various ways. In the next
section, these conceptualizations of emotional labor have been reviewed.

2.2. Conceptualization of Emotional Labor
The term emotional labor was first introduced by the American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild. Her research was in the airline industry, and focused particularly on the emotional work of flight attendants.

Since the concept of emotional labor introduced by Hochschild (1983), efforts to refine the concept of emotional labor have been made by many researchers [Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Morris & Feldman, 1996]. In this section, in order to widen understanding of concept of emotional labor, this study examines some major researches that treated conceptualization of emotional labor in priority, and intends to refine the concept of emotional labor based on this.

Emotional labor was a term firstly coined by Hochschild (1979, 1983). She termed regulation of one's emotions to comply with occupational or organizational norms as “emotional labor”. She defined emotional labor as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value” [Hochschild, 1983]. According to Hochschild, jobs with emotional labor have three criteria; 1) they require face-to-face or voice-to voice contact with the public 2) they require the worker to produce an emotional state in the client or customer 3) they allow the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees [Hochschild, 1983].

Hochschild's perspective on emotional labor was an outgrowth of the dramaturgical perspective made popular by Ervin Goffman (1959). The dramaturgical perspective on behavior in organizations focuses on customer interactions as providing the performance stage for employees' impression management skills. Employees' efforts to manage their emotions appropriately for their respective organizational roles are seen as performances on the organizational stage. This emotion management is seen as a central part of the employee's job performance and meanings toward meeting organizational goals.

Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) contributions to the area of emotional labor have propelled the study of emotions forward, since they include the role of social identity and integrate it into the study of emotions and their expression at work. They defined emotional labor as “the act of displaying the appropriate emotion” [Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993]. Their definition differs from Hochschild's (1983), since it emphasizes the actual behavior rather than the presumed emotions underlying the behavior.

Morris & Feldman (1996, 1997) have also contributed to the growing literature on emotional labor in organizations by refining the conceptualization of emotional labor. They defined emotional labor as “the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transaction” [Morris & Feldman, 1996].

Grandey (2000) provides another conceptualization of emotional labor in an attempt to clear up the apparent contradictions resulting from attempts in the literature to refine the construct of emotional labor. Grandey (2000) defined emotional labor as “the process of regulating both feelings and expressions for organizational goals”.

The previous paragraphs have given an overview of the various theories an definitions currently available in the literature around the concept of emotional labor. As it can be observed, the debate about the nature of emotional labor is still ongoing, and no one specific theory gives a full picture.

It was found that typical researches have not clearly agreed on the conceptual definition of emotional labor, and there have arisen conceptual differences due to a matter of perspective. The point that preceding researches commonly claim is that individuals can regulate their emotional expressions at work. Emotional labor involves active strategies to modify, create, and alter the expression of emotions in the context of paid employment. Thus, emotional labor is the process of regulating the expression of emotions for achievement of organizational goals and the employee is paid for this labor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hochschild (1983, 1989)</td>
<td>the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display</td>
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<td>Ashforth &amp; Humphrey (1993)</td>
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<td>Grandey (2000)</td>
<td>the process of regulating both feelings and expressions for organizational goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Krual &amp; Geddes (2000a)</td>
<td>what employees perform when they are required to feel or at least project the appearance of certain emotions in order to produce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diefendorff &amp; Richard(2003)</td>
<td>the management of emotions as part of the work role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Johnson (2007)</td>
<td>the expression of organizationally desired emotions by service agents during service encounters</td>
</tr>
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2.3. Dimensions of Emotional Labor
Hochschild (1979, 1983) categorized those performing emotional labor based on the 'acting' they were performing. Hochschild describes two types of emotional acting: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting involves employee’s simulating emotions that are not actually felt, by changing their outward appearances (i.e, facial expression, gestures, or voice tone) when exhibiting required emotions. Deep acting occurs when employee's feelings do not fit the situation; then they use their training or past experience to work up appropriate emotions.

Hochschild discussed surface acting and deep acting as key features of emotional labor, however, several researchers suggested that emotional labor is a multidimensional
construct and may involve strategies other than surface acting and deep acting.

Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) argued that employees must do surface acting or deep acting in order to express the expected emotions. However, they took the definition of emotional labor a step further by including a third category of emotional labor called expression of genuine emotion. They stated that conceptualizing emotional labor as surface acting and deep acting alone dismisses the possibility of employees spontaneously and genuinely experiencing and displaying appropriate emotions.

Morris & Feldman (1996) conceptualize emotional labor in terms of four distinct dimensions: 1) the frequency of appropriate display 2) attentiveness to required display rules 3) variety of emotions required to be displayed 4) the emotional dissonance generated as a result of having to express organizationally desired emotions that are not genuinely felt. Later, in their empirical research on antecedents and consequences of emotional labor, emotional labor was identified into three dimensions: 1) frequency 2) duration 3) emotional dissonance. 


Examining preceding researches dealing with emotional labor dimensions, since Hochschild first suggested surface acting and deep acting, emotional labor dimensions have not been clearly determined until today. Although plenty of researches on emotional labor dimensions are presently being conducted, no agreement has been brought about yet. Many of researches have dealt with emotional labor dimensions by using surface acting and deep acting that only focus on emotional expressions, and the results are also limited. Thus, this research, to approach emotional labor multi-dimensionally, composed emotional labor dimensions with surface acting, deep acting, frequency, strength, and diversity. 

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A key contribution of Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) theory of emotional labor is their emphasis on the observable expressions of emotions rather than the internal management of emotions. They focused on the outcomes process instead of actual processes themselves. They argued that surface acting and deep acting by themselves focus on the effort of trying to express the desired emotions, and ignore the outcomes such as how genuine or sincere the emotion appears to customers and affects on customers [Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993].

Researchers have used different approaches to understand the dimensionality of emotional labor. Some treat emotional labor as a one-dimensional construct solely concerned with the intensity and frequency of emotional displays [Hochschild, 1983; Wharton & Erickson, 1993; Abraham, 1998], and others see emotional labor as a multi-dimensional construct [Morris & Feldman, 1997; Grandey, 1999; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000; Kruml & Geddes, 2000a].

Among those researchers who assert that emotional labor is a multi-dimensional construct, there are different opinions about the numbers of dimensions of emotional labor. Different dimensions capture different facets of emotional labor.

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In an effort to integrate previous perspectives, Brotheridge & Grandey (2002) restructured emotional labor into two categories. One focuses on the characteristic of the job and the other emphasizes employees' emotion management process. The former is called “job-focused emotional labor” which includes the frequency, duration, variety, and intensity of emotional labor and display rules.
The latter is called “employee-focused emotional labor” which includes surface acting and deep acting.

2.4. Consequences of Emotional Labor

Starting with Hochschild (1979, 1983), negative and positive consequences of emotional labor for individuals and organizations have been suggested in the literature. Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) described emotional labor as a double-edged sword. The following section discusses the negative and positive consequences of performing emotional labor.

2.4.1. Negative Consequences

In terms of the consequences of emotional labor, prior research mainly focuses on the potentially psychologically damaging effects on the employees who perform emotional labor. The most-often-cited consequences are emotional dissonance and job dissatisfaction.

Emotional dissonance Researchers express that, surface acting is likely to lead to emotional dissonance [Hochschild, 2003], and emotional exhaustion [Grandey, 2003]. Surface acting is linked to burnout and lower service performance [Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002]. Heuven & Bakker (2003) emphasized the importance of emotion work variables on emotional dissonance. They found that emotional dissonance explains a significant amount of variance in predicting depersonalization and emotional exhaustion among cabin attendants.

Job dissatisfaction Parkinson (1991) argued that when employees’ genuine feelings are masked, it leads to increase in job dissatisfaction. Abraham (1998) argued that increase in emotional dissonance increases job dissatisfaction. Cote & Morgan (2002) found that the suppression of unpleasant emotions increases job dissatisfaction and the intention to quit.

Burnout Employees in many kinds of jobs may be fisk of job burnout. Maslach (1976) defined burnout as an overall phenomenon that organizational members who frequently make interpersonal relations experience and a sequential intensive course. Burnout consists of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Brotheridge & Grandey (2002) note, workers in these jobs were presumed to be susceptible to burnout as a result of the amount of interaction their jobs entailed. They found that surface acting increases employees’ feelings of depersonalization, while reducing their sense of personal accomplishment at work.

Some of the negative consequences of emotional labor have received empirical support. Morris & Feldman (1997) found that greater emotional dissonance, which is a form of estrangement of self and work role, is significantly associated with increased emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction.

2.4.2. Positive Consequences

Although substantial literature on emotional labor implies negative consequences, some researchers have suggested positive consequences for both organizations and individuals. Organizations Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) proposed that expression of positive emotions is related to increased task effectiveness. Pugh (2001) remarked that the display of positive emotions by the employee is positively related to the customers’ positive affect and this leads to positive evaluations of service quality. And increase sales and repeated business Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987].

Individuals The positive aspects of emotional labor include financial rewards (i.e. salaries or tips), mental and physical well-being [Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987], increased satisfaction, security, and self-esteem [Strickland, 1992; Tolich, 1993; Wharton & Erickson, 1993]; increased self-efficacy and psychological well-being [Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993]; decreased stress [Conrad & Witte, 1994]. Emotional labor is not always considered as negative, some employees are rewarded by the fruits of such labor and consequently are drawn to jobs that require emotional challenges [Shuler & Sypher, 2000].

The reward or benefit aspect of performing emotional labor receives some empirical support. Wharton & Erickson (1993) found that workers employed in jobs requiring substantial amounts of emotional labor experience higher job satisfaction and lower emotional exhaustion than other workers. Adelman (1989) found a similar result. She found that, contrary to Hochschild’s estrangement assumption, performing emotional labor does not adversely impact employees’ psychological well-being, but enhances their job satisfaction.

Most of studies have yielded inconsistent results. It seems that the confusion with regarding to consequences of emotional labor stems from the fact that different definitions of the construct have been utilized with different antecedents by previous researchers.

Another reason for the contradictory conclusions about emotional labor’s consequences is that researchers have failed to take into account the importance of individual factors. Researchers have posited that individual characteristics may play a primary role in explaining variation in the consequences [Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Wharton & Erickson, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1997; Jones, 1998]. Therefore, taking individual characteristics into account as the antecedents of emotional labor can help understand how individuals perform emotional labor and its associated consequences.

III. Summary

The existing study on emotional labor is not far off the subject treated in early study. Also, as researchers are explaining various conceptualizations and processes about emotional labor with quite different theoretical viewpoints, there are problems such as drawing mixed research results. As these researchers are testing diverse precedence factors and result variables on how they define and measure emotion management with opposing sides against one another, it is difficult to measure research results. Though this is a common phenomenon undergone in the process of theoretical
development, for the development of a research on emotional labor, a research to approach emotional labor more synthetically is necessary here and now. Perceiving these problems, this study integrated and refined the conception and variables of emotional labor based on preceding researches. As each research has developed by suggesting new ideas and directions to complement shortcomings of preceding researches, this study intends to focus on integrating and refining the concepts of preceding researches in this context. This paper presents a review of the literature regarding the emotional labor. This paper explains the concept of emotional labor, dimensions of emotional labor and consequences of emotional labor. The goal of the study is to integrate the conceptualization of emotional labor and its components through the examination of the previous studies, presenting researchers subsequent academic discussions. Some subtle differences were found in the concept of emotional labor and its components as suggested in previous study, differing in the perspectives from the point of view from any direction and not being completely contradictory to each other. Moreover, the differences might be recognized as a conceptual refinement and the expansion of the range of each study based on previous investigations. This paper contributes to the existing literature by assimilating different works done in this domain and providing a comprehensive understanding of emotional labor. That is, this study arranges systematically and examines theories on emotional labor suggested hitherto, and suggests a future direction of research on emotional labor on the basis theory. The result obtained through this study will contribute to developing the theory of emotional labor.

REFERENCES