Retaining the Authentic Self in the Workplace: Authenticity and Work Engagement in the Mass-Service Industries

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Abstract: Striving to uphold consistency in service, an authentic approach to customers is usually considered detrimental. Focussing on customer-service workers within the mass-service industry, such as fast-food and supermarket workers, this research explores the relationship between employee authenticity and work engagement. One hundred and forty employees from a range of customer service roles were surveyed regarding their sense of authenticity at work, surface and deep acting, self-efficacy, personal accomplishment, and experience of work engagement. Overall results suggest that authenticity and personal accomplishment are independently and positively related to work engagement, and recommend that workers strive to maintain a sense of authenticity with customers, and be encouraged to feel a sense of accomplishment in their work. Further recommendations, for training and job design to promote authenticity and build a sense of accomplishment in customer service workers are discussed, as is the potential, protective application of surface acting.

Keywords: Authenticity, emotional labor, personal accomplishment, mass-service, standardisation, meaningfulness

BACKGROUND

In the current climate of mass-production and global competition, rival organisations often compete to sell the same or very similar products. With increasing awareness of the immense power in good customer service to raise the reputation of one brand above its rivals, managerial intervention to regulate the interaction between service employees and their customers has also increased (Fineman, 2000; Leidner, 1993). Currently, although strict regulation ensures that service interactions are almost always short and polite, evident in the familiarity of the question 'Hi, how are you?', they are also often highly predictable and superficial. This phenomena is most apparent in the mass-service industries. Modelled on mass-production, mass-service industries are designed to manage high-

frequency customer-contact and, by requiring minimal training, also high-employee turnover. Although this model of extensive standardisation service is efficient, as mass-service workers usually have little liberty to customise their service (Maister & Lovelock, 1982), the service experience can become repetitive, robotic, and impersonal.

Owing to the superficiality created by close regulation at the supervisory and managerial levels over the service encounter (Fineman, 2000; Leidner, 1993), the mass-service model may be detrimental to the commercial competitive advantage that it is designed to protect. Research findings indicate that customers can detect when service workers are acting, and that they respond positively when they perceive authenticity (Bujisic, Wu, Mattila, & Bilgihan, 2014). Therefore, capacity for the service encounter to build relationships with customers that are positive and enduring may be substantially reduced by a superficial approach to service (e.g., fake smiles and platitudes such as 'have a nice day'). For workers, sustained acting of a service-persona has been related to feelings of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, which are key factors in burnout (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002).

As large multinational organisations, to which the mass-service model is especially popular, break into new markets, and lean organisations outsource their service functions to developing nations, mass-service is now a substantial sector of employment worldwide. Despite this, service research has focussed on customer-outcomes in mass-service, and attention to the enhancement of the well-being of workers is lacking. Considering the combination of the repetitive and restrictive working conditions with demand to maintain the service-persona, we were concerned for the possibility of emotional strain on this emerging sector of emotional labour workers. In the present research, an indicator of the working experience in mass-service workers (petrol station attendants, fast-food workers, supermarket checkout operators, and general retail workers), we examined work engagement, and the relationship between engagement and the extent to which they felt that they retained or put aside their authentic self in order to perform their service role.

Authenticity, Deep Acting and Surface Acting

Authenticity in the workplace is an intricate concept. In a general sense, authenticity can be defined as "expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (Harter, 2005, p. 382). While related to wellbeing generally, authenticity at work remains an elusive and under-researched phenomena. Within the workplace context, in addition to explicit rules, normative pressures for professional conduct shape behaviour. Authenticity at work becomes particularly complex in service roles in which their customers evaluate service quality against socially-defined expectations. Therefore, in addition to efficient service, these workers are expected to present themselves to be positive, helpful, friendly, and energetic (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996.)

While research on authenticity in the workplace has rarely been considered in scientific research, the effects of acting at work has for a long time been a focus of the emotional labour literature (see Brotheridge & Lee 2002; Grandey, 2003). Best illustrated as 'painting on a smile', surface acting is an acting technique employed by service workers to maintain the service persona. While surface acting, workers do not experience the emotions that they display to customers, and this technique is associated with strain, burnout, and service that appears artificial and lacking in warmth (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Another technique, deep acting, refers to going beyond the outward display; when using deep acting, workers do cognitive work to experience the emotional responses that they are expected to portray. For example, to maintain a helpful and positive persona in the face of a frustrating customer, a service representative utilising deep acting may imagine the customer as a hard-working and otherwise good person who is tired after a long day of work. Such stories elicit the positive emotions and consequential emotional displays expected from the service role. Building on a body of research discussed below, which indicates that the strain of inauthenticity is a contributing

factor for burnout, we were interested to investigate authenticity as a means to improve the experience of mass-service work. For this reason, in addition to exploring the relationship between acting techniques and work engagement, we were interested in the extent to which each technique permitted workers to retain a sense of authenticity.

Although research that has considered the role of authenticity at work is scarce, findings that demonstrate a positive relationship between surface acting and burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002) suggest that sustained acting is harmful, and suggests positive potential in an authentic approach to service. The same body of research that indicates a positive relationship between surface acting and burnout, also consistenly demonstrates the absence of a significant correlation between deep acting and burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2002, 2003; Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Grandey, 2003; Totterdell & Holman, 2003; Yagil, 2012). In service work, burnout is largely considered to arise from the strain of emotional dissonance (Bujisic, Wu, Mattila, & Bilgihan, 2014; Grandey, 2003; Totterdell & Holman, 2003), which is the conflict between the inner emotional experience and the outward display (Hochschild, 1983). Although this concept is related to inauthenticity, interested in the positive side of the spectrum, our focus was authenticity and enhancing the experience of service work. As previous studies have largely neglected to measure authenticity, it is unknown if deep acting permits workers to retain greater authenticity, or if authenticity is beneficial to a positive working experience. In a rare study on emotional labour in which authenticity was recorded, Brotheridge and Lee (2002) found evidence of a weak but positive relationship between deep acting and authenticity, and of a negative relationship between surface acting and authenticity. Additionally, research findings indicate that emotional displays produced through deep acting appear more authentic to customers and observers than do those produced through surface acting (Grandey, 2003; Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005; Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009; Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006). These findings suggest that surface actors experience greater inauthenticity than do deep actors and for this reason, their gestures appear less authentic. Conversely, these findings may reflect that surface acting is simply a less effective technique that produces less-convincing displays. Additionally, as originally argued by Hochschild (1983), although surface acting may generate strain, emotional dissonance may also be an indication that surface acting permits workers to retain their connection to their authentic self in a way that deep acting does not.

In conjunction with the direct associations between deep acting, surface acting, and authenticity observed in Brotheridge and Lee's (2002) study, drawing from the body of related findings discussed previously, we hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 1: Authenticity would be positively related to deep acting

Hypothesis 2: Authenticity would be negatively related to surface acting

Work engagement. Work engagement is typically defined according to Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002)'s operational definition, as a positive state composed of vigour, dedication, and absorption in work activities. Preceding this concept, Kahn (1990) conceived of personal engagement as a continuum of discretionary effort in which a worker engages and withdraws their physical, emotional, and cognitive resources from work tasks, and in which maintaining a connection to the authentic self was integral.

Kahn (1990) proposed that individuals would be motivated to engage themselves when they perceived their role as an expression of their authentic self. For example, Kahn hypothesised that when a worker identified their personal values with the task, they would be motivated to commit

their cognitive resources, and may experience absorption in the task, their physical energy, and experience vigour, their emotional resources, and experience dedication. Important for the service context, in place of putting aside either the service role (constantly friendly, positive, helpful) to be completely authentic, or the personality to achieve the service role, Kahn's concept of engaging the self in the role suggested expressing the personality (witty, friendly, considerate) through the service persona (polite, efficient), as a mechanism to work engagement.

Although research investigating authenticity as a correlate to work engagement is lacking, a body of findings on related concepts is encouraging support for Kahn's theory. Of particular interest is evidence of significant associations between work engagement and job autonomy and a climate of authenticity (Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005; Grandey, Foo, Groth, & Goodwin, 2012; Johnson & Spector, 2007; Taipale, Selander, Anttila, & Nätti, 2011; van den Bosch & Taris, 2014a; van den Bosch & Taris, 2014b; Yagil, 2012). Considering Kahn's (1990) original concept of engagement, in the present study, we extended on this literature to investigate authenticity as a positive correlate to work engagement; ultimately suggesting that:

Hypothesis 3: Authenticity would be positively related to work engagement

Although a body of research provides evidence of a positive relationship between surface acting and burnout, this same body demonstratesthe absence of a significant relationship between deep acting and burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2002, 2003; Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Grandey, 2003; Totterdell & Holman, 2003; Yagil, 2012). Although we did not consider burnout to be an equivalent oppositional construct to work engagement, owing to this evidence, we were interested to explore the potential for deep acting to improve the experience of service work. We expected that deep acting would be related to higher work engagement, and owing to its relationship with burnout, that surface acting would be negatively related to work engagement. Therefore we hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 4: Deep acting would be positively related to work engagement

Hypothesis 5: Surface acting would be negatively related to work engagement
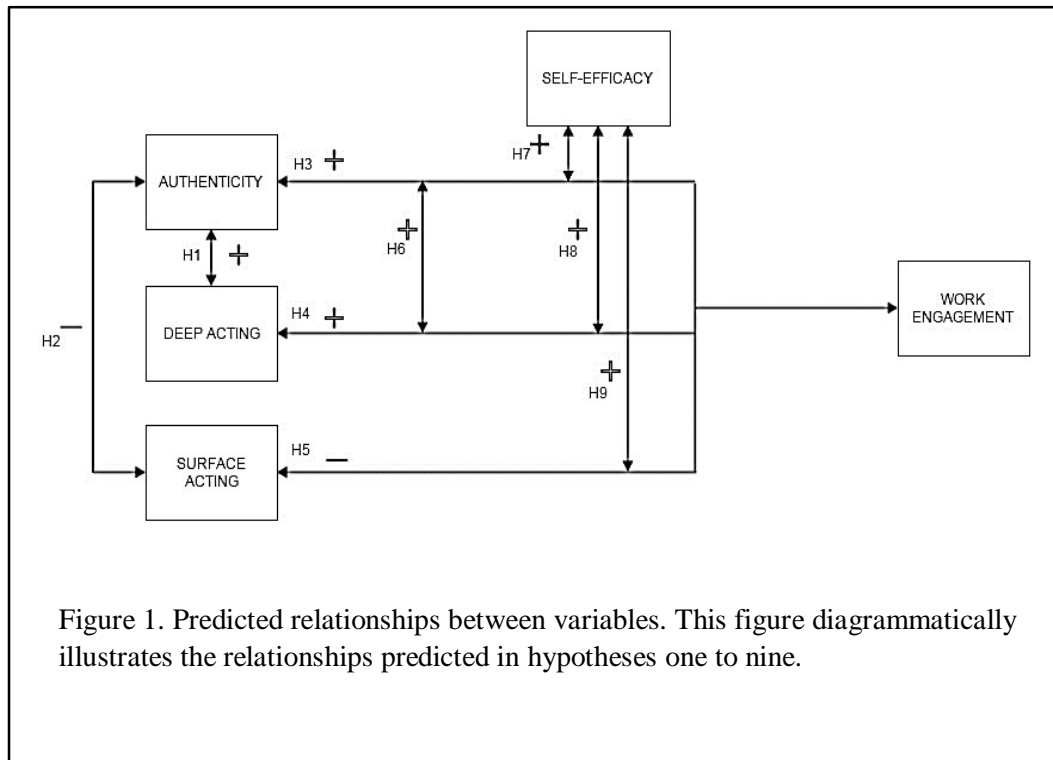
The interactive context and self-efficacy

For the reason that customer service workers can affect the emotional-states of their customers, mass-service industries often have rules for emotional displays (Leidner, 1993), for example, to greet each customer with a smile. Building on this, the Social Interaction Model (SIM, Côté, 2005) considers the way in which workers may be affected by the reactions of their customers. Founded on the idea people are inclined to trust those who appear authentic, in this model Côté (2005) suggests that workers who appear authentic will experience more rewarding interactions with their customers, and repeated positive interactions will increase the self-efficacy of these workers. Drawing from the SIM (Côté, 2005) and referring to Kahn's (1990) concept of the concept of expressing personality through the service role, we expected that customers would react most positively to workers who appear authentic with their customers while also achieving the socially defined expectations for the service role. Founded in Côté's model (2005), the following hypotheses (see Figure 1 for a diagrammatical representation) investigated the moderating properties of both authenticity and self-efficacy on relationships with work engagement.

Deep acting is a technique used by service workers in order to perform the service persona as expected by customers. Considering Kahn's (1990) concept of personal engagement, we anticipated

that a combination of authenticity with deep acting would indicate the expression of authentic personality into the work-role and would be related to high work engagement. Therefore we suggested that:

Hypothesis 6: Authenticity would moderate the relationship between deep acting and work engagement, such that when deep acting and authenticity are both high, the relationship between deep acting and work engagement will be stronger.

Figure 1. Predicted relationships between variables. This figure diagrammatically illustrates the relationships predicted in hypotheses one to nine.

Considering the SIM (Côté, 2005), we expect that high self-efficacy will indicate a balance of retaining the authentic self with achieving the expectations of the service role. Combining this theory with Kahn's (1990) concept of personal engagement, we expected that workers with this balance, indicated by high self-efficacy, would also experience greater work engagement.

Hypothesis 7: We predicted that self-efficacy would moderate the relationship between authenticity and work engagement, such that when authenticity and self-efficacy are both high, the relationship between authenticity and work engagement would be stronger.

For the reason that deep acting is a technique used to reduce conflict between personal values and expectations for the service-role, we considered that deep acting and high self-efficacy would indicate a balance of achieving role expectations and authenticity, which by enhancing the working experience both directly, and as the result of rewarding customer interaction, would promote work engagement.

Hypothesis 8: We expected that self-efficacy would moderate the relationship between deep acting and work engagement, such that when deep acting and self-efficacy are both high, the relationship between deep acting and work-engagement would be stronger.

Although consistent evidence through the burnout literature of a strong relationship with burnout indicated that surface acting would be negatively related work engagement, and to self-efficacy ($r =$

-.18, $p < .01$, Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Gross & John, 2003; Totterdell & Holman, 2003), evidence from a recent study by Sloan (2014) indicates that this relationship may be moderated by the extent to which the portrayal appears convincing to customers. Consistent with the Social Interaction Model (Côté, 2005), Sloan (2014) found that the relationship between surface acting and feelings of self-estrangement was significantly reduced when self-efficacy and perceived influence over others were high. As such, we predicted that:

Hypothesis 9: Self-efficacy would moderate the relationship between surface acting and work engagement such that when self-efficacy is high, the relationship between surface acting and work engagement would be reduced.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

One hundred and forty mass-service workers between the ages of 17 and 65 ($M = 24.30$, $SD = 9.21$) responded to a self-report survey. The sample was limited to those who worked in petrol stations (6%), fast food outlets (13%), supermarkets (24%), and in general retail (58%). Experience in the customer service-role ranged from one month to 12 years (M (months) = 66.54, $SD = 77.56$).

Measures

The survey was composed of 38 items and utilised one five-point and three seven-point Likert-type scales.

Authenticity at work. In order to consider authenticity within the workplace context we used the Individual Authenticity Measure at Work (IAM Work, van den Bosch and Taris, 2014a). The short version of the Individual Authenticity Measure at Work (IAM Work, van den Bosch & Taris, 2014a) consists of 12 items measuring three latent constructs: 'self-alienation' (feeling detached from the core self), 'accepting external influence' (agreeing with others without resistance), and 'authentic living' (making choices in alignment with underlying personal values). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each statement reflected their most typical interactions on a seven-point rating scale (1: "does not describe me at all" – 7: "describes me very well"). Example items are "At work, I always stand by what I believe in" (authentic living), "I am strongly influenced in the workplace by the opinions of others" (accepting external influence), "At work, I feel out of touch with the 'real me'" (self-alienation). In the case of item 8, "At work, I feel alienated", as the word 'alienated' is uncommon, to ensure a consistent interpretation we added '(isolation)' in brackets next to this item.

Measures reached the required minimum for Kaiser's criterion (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007): authenticity components: authentic living ($\alpha = .78$), accepting external influence ($\alpha = .65$), self-alienation ($\alpha = .90$). To preserve the original hypotheses following the separation of authenticity into separate components, accepting external influence, and self-alienation, were reverse-coded. Therefore, a high score on accepting external influence or self-alienation indicates high authenticity, and a low degree of accepting external influence or self-alienation.

Surface acting and deep acting. Brotheridge and Lee's (2003) Emotional Labour Scale (ELS) consists of six items on a five-point frequency scale (1: "never" to 5: "always") that reflect the extent to which respondents use techniques related to surface acting and deep acting while interacting with customers. Three items measured expressing emotion that is not felt (surface acting), and three, making an effort to feel the emotion that expectations for the service role dictate the service worker

should portray (deep acting). Example items are "Hide my true feelings about a situation" (surface acting), "Make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others" (deep acting). Cronbach alphas (surface acting, $\alpha = .86$; deep acting, $\alpha = .82$) met requirements for internal consistency (Nunnally, 1994).

Work engagement. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) was used to enable comparison with the growing body of literature in the wok engagement space. Evidence supports the reliability of this scale across cultures (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). The short version measures work engagement as a second-order construct composed of vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour refers to an employee who is energised in their work, dedication describes obtaining a sense of meaning from work, and absorption illustrates immersion in, and experiencing difficulty detaching from work-tasks. Each primary construct is measured with three items on a seven-point frequency scale that ranges from 1: "never" to 7: "always". Example items are, "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" (vigour), "I am proud of the work that I do" (dedication), "I feel happy when I am working intensely" (absorption). Cronbach's alpha, $\alpha = .94$, indicates strong internal reliability.

Self-efficacy. To aid generalisability of findings towards burnout literature we used the personal accomplishment scale within the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Scale (MBI-GS, Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996). Items are on a seven-point frequency scale that ranges from 1: "never" to 7: "always". Following the results of Principal Components Analysis, we measured self-efficacy as the following two components of three items each: 'self-efficacy' ($\alpha = .86$), and 'personal accomplishment' ($\alpha = .83$). Example items are "In my opinion, I am good at my job" (a general sense of self-efficacy at work), and "I feel exhilarated when I accomplish something at work" (personal accomplishment).

Demographic variables. To gather a demographic description of the sample and to control for potential confounding variables, the survey also collected data on respondents' gender, age, ethnicity, sector of employment (fast food, petrol station, supermarket, or general retail), and the duration of their experience in the customer-service role over their lifetime.

Analysis

The results of Pearson's product-moment correlation informed hypotheses one to five, and multiple regression, hypotheses six to nine. In addition, as positive correlations indicated that some groups within the demographic variables had significantly different relationships with authenticity and work engagement, in order to identify which groups, we used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post-hoc pair-wise comparisons, and independent-sample t-tests.

RESULTS

Investigating the extent to which deep and surface acting preserve the connection to the authentic self, hypotheses one and two predicted that deep acting would be positively (H1), and surface acting negatively (H2) correlated to authenticity. Suggesting that deep acting may not feel particularly authentic or inauthentic, the relationship between deep acting and authentic living, though significant, is weak ($r = .22$, $p = .01$), as is the relationship with self-alienation, which also only becomes significant at the .10 level ($r = .17$, $p = .051$). There is no evidence of a significant relationship between deep acting and accepting external influence ($p = .44$), hypothesis one is therefore partially supported. Regarding hypothesis two, the relationship with surface acting is stronger and consistent across the authenticity construct (authentic living, $r = -.48$, $p < .001$;

Table 1

Correlations between authenticity, acting, self-efficacy, work engagement, and demographic variables

	AuthLiv	AccExInf	Self-Al	DA	SA	SEff	PAccom	WE	Gender	Age	Ethnic	OrgTyp
AuthLiv												
AccExInf	.27**											
Self-Al	.62***	.27***										
DA	.22**	-.07	.17*									
SA	-.48***	-.19**	-.60***	-.06								
SEff	.42***	.10	.28***	-.02	-.27***							
PAccom	.36***	.03	.37***	.25**	-.49***	.47***						
WE	.43***	.16*	.62***	.23**	-.59***	.45***	.76***					
Gender	-.04	-.08	.08	.01	-.03	.08	.09	.16*				
Age	.07	.26**	.16*	-.14*	-.09	.13	.24**	.25**	-.07			
Ethnic	.17**	.08	.17**	.08	-.03	.05	.15	.16*	.07	-.01		
OrgTyp	.09	.13	.08	.02	-.16	-.06	.02	.17**	.07	.11	.03	
RoleExp	.04	.30***	.12	-.24**	-.19**	.26**	.24**	.22**	-.08	.74**	-.10	.07

Note. AuthLiv = Authentic Living; AccExInf = Accepting External Influence; Self-Al = Self-Alienation; DA = Deep Acting; SA = Surface Acting; SEff = Self-Efficacy; PAccom = Personal Accomplishment; WE = Work Engagement; Ethnic = Ethnicity; OrgTyp = Type of Organisation; RoleExp = Experience in the Role. 'Accepting External Influence' and 'Self-Alienation' are reverse-coded for ease of comparing across the authenticity concept. $N = 140$. * p < .10, **p < .05, *** p < .001

accepting external influence, $r = -.19$, $p = .03$; self-alienation, $r = -.60$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis two is fully supported.

H3 – H5 demonstrate strong and significant associations between authenticity components, authentic living and self-alienation, with work engagement (authentic living, $r = .43$, $p < .001$; self-alienation, $r = .62$, $p < .001$), however, the relationship to accepting external influence was much weaker and only became significant at the .10 level of significance, $r = .16$, $p = .06$. Hypothesis three is partially supported. Results reveal a weak but significant relationship between deep acting and work engagement, $r = .23$, $p = .01$ (H4), and a strong and significant relationship between surface acting and work engagement, $r = -.59$, $p < .001$ (H5). Hypotheses four and five are fully supported.

Considering moderated relationships to work engagement, we analysed four models of multiple regression. As each demographic variable obtained significance with the dependent variable, the first step of each regression model held the demographic variables constant; this step accounted for 14% of variability in work engagement.

Authenticity as a moderator between deep acting and work engagement. Deep acting retained a significant beta weight, however, its impact was substantially reduced with the addition of self-alienation (step two: $b = 0.42$, $p = .02$; step three: $b = 0.25$, $p = .02$), see Table A1, Appendix A. As authentic living ($p = .24$) and accepting external influence ($p = .35$) did not obtain significance, hypothesis six was only partially supported. This model accounted for 47% of variance in work engagement.

Self-efficacy as a moderator between authenticity and work engagement. As self-alienation and personal accomplishment retained significant beta weights, it is evident that there is interaction between authenticity and self-efficacy, and as this model accounts for 73% variance in work engagement, their influence is substantial. However, only self-alienation ($b = .21$, $p < .05$) and personal accomplishment ($b = 0.60$, $p < .001$) showed significant influence in the final stage of this model (Table A2, Appendix A). Hypothesis seven is only partially supported.

Self-efficacy as a moderator between deep acting and work engagement. As the influence of deep acting became non-significant with the addition of self-efficacy and personal accomplishment, hypothesis eight was not supported. In the final regression equation, self-efficacy, personal accomplishment, and type of organisation retained significance to account for 63% of variance in work engagement (Table A3, Appendix A).

Self-efficacy as a moderator between surface acting and work engagement. Illustrating a reduced relationship between surface acting and work engagement, the beta-weight of surface acting decreased from $b = -0.74$ to $b = -0.37$ when self-efficacy and personal accomplishment were added to the regression equation (Table A4, Appendix A); hypothesis nine is fully supported. This model accounted for 68% of variability in work engagement.

Additional Analysis

In cases in which a significant correlation involved a categorical variable, we used further analysis to identify significant differences between the means of different groups.

Type of organisation. ANOVA with post-hoc pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni correction revealed that supermarket workers ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.97$) reported significantly less work engagement than workers in general retail ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.22$), F(3, 136) = 4.56, $p = .004$.

Overall, results suggest a positive relationship between authenticity and work engagement. Small and weak correlations between deep acting and authenticity variables, and deep acting and work engagement, indicate that while deep acting is not being inauthentic, it can neither be considered to be an authentic approach to service, and that while it may relate to work engagement, the extent to which it could have a positive influence is expected to be substantially limited. However, with strong negative relationships to authenticity and to work engagement, deep acting may have more positive outcomes than surface acting. Although the hypothesis that authenticity is related to work engagement was only partially supported, given that the two significant components demonstrated strong correlations (authentic living, $r = .43$, $p < .001$; self-alienation, $r = .62$, $p < .001$), there is evidence of a strong relationship between retaining a sense of authenticity the workplace and work engagement.

Regression models reinforce the relationship between authenticity and work engagement. Somewhat unexpected, given the breadth of previous research focussing on the relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement, results reveal personal accomplishment and not self-efficacy as key to moderating relationships with work engagement. Of particular interest, the results of analysis for H9 indicates that personal accomplishment may be able to substantially reduce the detrimental impact of surface acting (variability accounted for by surface acting reduced from $b = -0.74$ to $b = -0.37$), as well as contribute positively to work engagement (personal accomplishment, $b = 0.50$).

Retaining the Authentic Self

DISCUSSION

The present investigation moves beyond emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, and contributes to a growing body of research focussed on building a positive working experience for service workers. The results demonstrate that an authentic approach to customer-interaction and a sense of personal accomplishment are important to work engagement in customer service workers in the mass-service industries. Results suggest that while authenticity is beneficial to work engagement, deep acting is not related, and surface acting is indeed detrimental. Overall, these findings support the promotion of authenticity in the workplace, as well the importance of developmental opportunities for workers to obtain a sense of accomplishment within their roles. As authenticity and personal accomplishment were independently and positively related to work engagement, we recommend that HR professionals in these fields strive to cultivate a balanced approach between relating to customers in a manner that feels authentic, and presenting a service persona that meets expectations for quality service (i.e. helpful and polite). Furthermore, surface acting presented a unique finding. A reduced negative relationship between surface acting and work engagement when employees feel a sense of accomplishment, suggests that surface acting may be a useful skill to protect employees from the negative effects of unpleasant customer interaction. .

Strengths, Limitations, and Avenues for Future Research

Although this research presents new information applicable to a large part of the employment sector, potential limitations include variation in working conditions between service–workers who participated, and the cross sectional nature of the study design.

Future research could investigate the strong and unprecedented relationship between a sense of personal accomplishment and work engagement. Considering this finding from the framework of the Social Interaction Model (Cote, 2005), in a role in which the principle task is interaction with customers, this is evidence to suggest that this interaction is rewarding for these workers. The negative relationship between surface acting and authenticity that has not been considered in prior research, suggests that surface acting may protect employees from the effects of unpleasant

interaction. For example, momentarily disconnected from the authentic self and engaged in acting the service role, the effects of abusive customers may be less intensely experienced. For this reason, we recommend that future research consider the impact that customers have on customer-service workers, and investigate the utility of surface acting and that service employees be trained in surface acting to protect themselves in abusive customer interactions. .

Implications for HRM

Positive relationships between authenticity and work engagement indicates that employees may benefit from tailoring their service according to their personality, and the relationships that they build with individual customers. These findings support the recommendation that HR professionals shift their focus from trying to standardise the behaviour of customer service workers to a concept of ideal service, and in its place, work to train workers to express their personality in their service role in a way that is beneficial to customer relationships. These findings support moving away from design for optimum efficiency, to a design to promote a sense of personal accomplishment. A strong relationship between work engagement and personal accomplishment supports arguments that job-design in mass-service jobs incorporate greater autonomy and task diversity. Increasing job-scope could be expected to provide opportunities for workers to see the centrality of their role in generating customer satisfaction, however, it should be noted that this would be incur higher investment in training and risk of error. Owing to the strong relationship between work engagement and a sense of personal accomplishment shown in the present study, we urge that organisations within the mass-service industries recognise what may be inherent limitations in the mass-service model, and consider how organisational aims could be achieved by other approaches to service.

The results of the present research support recommendations from previous studies to (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002) discourage surface acting. However, evidence of a substantially stronger relationship between work engagement and authenticity than was evident with deep acting, indicates that customer service workers who express their personality with customers have a more positive working experience than those who use deep acting. Therefore, results of this study support recommendations for service workers to be trained to integrate their personality into their service role. Training to express their individual personality through the role could involve customer service workers identifying aspects of their personality that will contribute to the service role (i.e. helpful, talkative).

Finally, the results of the present research indicate that the case for surface acting may be more complex than previously thought. According to our findings and those of Sloan (2014), which indicate that the negative effects of surface acting can be substantially reduced if workers can act convincingly and draw a sense of accomplishment from the interaction. We recommend that HR professionals in the customer service context train workers in surface acting as a skill and as a tool to be used in situations of unpleasant interaction, in which authenticity may leave these workers vulnerable.

Conclusion

Overall, this research highlights the possible and beneficial implications for mass-service workers who maintain their sense of authenticity within the service-role. Results demonstrate that deep acting is a more authentic approach to emotional labour than surface acting, however, an inconsistent relationship across the authenticity construct suggests that, although this technique may reduce internal conflict with behaviour, neither of these techniques permit workers to retain a connection to their authentic self in the mass-service environment. Personal accomplishment emerged as

immensely important to the experience of service work, and in this interactive context, this indicates the potential effect of customer-feedback on service workers. In summary, these findings support the 'humanisation' of the service role for an enhanced working experience, which owing to their face-to-face interaction with customers, we expect to extend to an improved customer-experience, and ultimately to positive organisational outcomes.

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Appendix A: Results of models of multiple regression analysis

Table A1

Model one: Regression of deep acting and authenticity onto work engagement

	b	R	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1: Demographics				
Gender	0.52**			
		.37	.14	.14***
Step 2: Deep Acting				
Gender	0.53**			
Deep Acting	0.42***			
		.46	.21	.07***
Step 3: Authenticity				
Gender	0.40**			
Deep Acting	0.25**			
Self-Alienation	0.36***			
		.69	.47	.26***

Note. N = 140. Step 1, demographic variables = gender, age, ethnicity, type of organisation, experience in the role. Step 3, authenticity variables = authentic living, accepting external influence, self-alienation. Only variables with beta-weights significant at the .05 level are displayed. **$p <$ .05, *** $p <$ .001

Table A2

Model two: Regression of authenticity and self-efficacy onto work engagement

	b	R	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1: Demographics				
Gender	0.52**			
		.37	.14	.14***
Step 2: Authenticity				
Self-Alienation	0.37***	.67	.45	.31***
Step 3: Self-Efficacy				
Type of Organisation	0.16**			
Self-Alienation	0.27***			
Personal Accomplishment	0.54***			
		.86	.73	.28***

Note. N = 140. Step 1, demographic variables = gender, age, ethnicity, type of organisation, experience in the role. Step 2, authenticity variables = authentic living, accepting external influence, self-alienation. Step 3, self-efficacy variables = self-efficacy, personal accomplishment. Only variables with beta-weights significant at the .05 level are displayed. **$p <$ .05, *** $p <$ .001

Table A3

Model three: Regression of deep acting and self-efficacy onto work engagement

	b	R	R^2	$\varDelta R^2$
Step 1: Demographics				
Gender	0.52**			
		.37	.14	.14***
Step 2: Deep Acting				
Gender	0.53**			
Deep Acting	0.42***			
		.46	.21	.07***
Step 3: Self-Efficacy				
Type of Organisation	0.19**			
Self-Efficacy	0.21**			
Personal Accomplishment	0.60***			
		.79	.63	.42***

Note. N = 140. Step 1, demographic variables = gender, age, ethnicity, type of organisation, experience in the role. Step 3, self-efficacy variables = self-efficacy, personal accomplishment. Only variables with beta-weights significant at the .05 level are displayed. ** *p* < .05, *** *p* < .001

Table A4

Model four: Regression of surface acting and self-efficacy onto work engagement

	b	R	R^2	$\varDelta R^2$
Step 1: Demographics				
Gender	0.52**			
		.37	.14	.14***
Step 2: Surface Acting				
Gender	0.47**			
Age	0.03**			
Ethnicity	0.08**			
Surface Acting	- 0.74***			
		.66	.43	.30***
Step 3: Self-Efficacy				
Type of Organisation	0.14**			
Surface Acting	- 0.37***			
Self-Efficacy	0.18**			
Personal Accomplishment	0.50***			
		.83	.68	.25***

*Note. N = 140. Step 1, demographic variables = gender, age, ethnicity, type of organisation, experience in the role. Step 3, self-efficacy variables = self-efficacy, personal accomplishment. Only variables with beta-weights significant at the .05 level are displayed. ** p < .05, *** p < .001*

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