Hidden in Plain Sight: Contrasting Emotional Labor and Burnout in Civilian and Sworn Law Enforcement Employees

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Chapter 13 (4500 words) in
Emotional Labour in Criminal Justice and Criminology
Editors: Jake Phillips, Jaime Waters, Chalen Westaby and Andrew Fowler

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1. INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, police agencies in the United States were called upon to increase their numbers of civilians. The ensuing civilianization of US law enforcement has been pronounced, though little academic energy has been devoted to understanding how those employees shape, and are shaped by, the police agencies that employ them. In the modern era, civilians represent up to 46% of law enforcement employees (Reaves, 2011). Concerningly, despite extensive research on the emotional burnout of sworn officers, only one study has compared the civilian employee experience (McCarty & Skogan, 2013).

This chapter reports the results of a dual test on the subscales of burnout – emotional exhaustion and depersonalization – for civilian and sworn employees in a large US correctional agency. The lone previous study to compare burnout in civilian and sworn law enforcement employees (McCarty & Skogan, 2013) found the levels and predictors of burnout were invariant across the two groups. The chapter takes that finding as a departure point, extending both its scope and findings by including burnout via depersonalization, with important differences noted across employee type. The chapter concludes with suggestions for law enforcement managers tasked with supervising both civilian and sworn employees, with a focus on understanding the differing burnout paths for each.

2. Literature Review

Burnout is a psychological construct first labeled by Bradley (1969), but specific measurement of the phenomenon and construction of a gold-standard scale was led by Christina Maslach and colleagues (Maslach & Jackson, 1982; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, Schaufeli, & Schwab, 1986). Early burnout research centered on public service workers, including police officers (Burke & Deszca, 1986), and is defined as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that frequently occurs among individuals who do 'people-work' of some kind" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 99). Burnout does not occur in a vacuum, and researchers have established the role of emotional labor in driving burnout, particularly in people-service professions (Guy, Newman, & Mastracci, 2014; Jeung, Kim, & Chang, 2018). The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) identified three subcomponents of burnout: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Meta-analysis of burnout research finds that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are the consistent heart of burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Burnout is "one of the most frequently-studied phenomena" in organizational research (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010, p. 487), and ample research links burnout to adverse organizational, professional, emotional, and physical health outcomes (Jeung et al., 2018). Police-focused studies confirm that law enforcement employees experience some of the highest levels of burnout (Adams & Mastracci, 2018; Burke & Deszca, 1986; Kop, Euwema, & Schaufeli, 1999; Kwak, McNeeley, & Kim, 2018; Schaible & Six, 2016). However, these studies all focus on sworn officers in law enforcement. Despite

comprising upwards of half of total employees in law enforcement (Reaves, 2011), only one study examines civilian workers specifically.

McCarty and Skogan (2013) tackle the question of what precipitates burnout in sworn and civilian employees. The authors find the two groups experience the phenomenon identically, as "the burnout process is a universal one, driven by virtually the same factors among both civilian and sworn officers" (McCarty & Skogan, 2013, p. 66). However, the authors operationalize 'burnout' as emotional exhaustion only. This presents an incomplete picture of how burnout may be experienced differently in two different job roles; one male-dominated, and the other female-dominated, given the meta-analytic finding (Purvanova & Muros, 2010) that women tend to experience higher rates of emotional exhaustion, while men report higher levels of depersonalization.

Depersonalization is the "cynicism" initially identified and defined by Jackson and Maslach (1981, p. 99). Depersonalization is a phenomenon wherein the individual becomes more callous, leading them to see colleagues and clients as problems, numbers, and otherwise less than fully human. Moreover, depersonalization and emotional exhaustion can have different outcomes, particularly in law enforcement. For example, Ellrich (2016) reports that in her study of German officers (n=1742), higher levels of depersonalization were linked to higher rates of being victimized while working. Relatedly, Kop and colleagues (1999) link depersonalization to higher rates of Dutch police using force. Taken together with the close links between emotional labor, burnout, and workplace violence (Jeung et al., 2018), depersonalization plays an important, and perhaps gender-differentiated, role in overall burnout. In this chapter, we test emotional exhaustion and depersonalization across both civilian and sworn employees to investigate crucial theoretical and empirical differences in the components of burnout.

We situate emotional labor correlates as the primary independent variables of interest. Emotional labor is the effort to comply with display rules, which are often unwritten codes of conduct instructing employees on how to comport their physical and emotional responses. First brought to scholarly attention in 1983's *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 2012), emotional labor was theorized to cause emotional harm to the practitioner and alienate the worker (Mastracci & Adams, 2018b) from her own emotions (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Scholars have expanded the scope of emotional labor research to include public service workers (Guy et al., 2014), and now recognize that there are both benefits and harms to the practice of emotional labor.

Suppression display rules are used to control often negatively-construed emotional responses, such as anger, disgust, pity, and inappropriate humor. On the other hand, pretending display rules instruct the employee on how to express an unfelt emotion, such as smiling when unhappy, or projecting calm when upset. Surface acting is the employee's attempt to comply with display rules through management of their emotive state, facial expression, and demeanor. All three correlates – suppression display rules, pretending display rules, and the resulting surface acting – are linked to burnout. This path forms part of the well-established framework for emotional labor research (see Grandey & Melloy, 2017, fig. 1, p. 409).

In addition, we consider the role of perceived organizational support (POS), a perception by employees that the employer values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). The POS literature is robust, and its measurement scale is well-validated by meta-analyses (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009). In the law enforcement context, a marked distrust exists between

front-line personnel and management (Crank, 2014), and studies have verified the negative relationship between POS and burnout (Adams & Mastracci, 2018; Jawahar, Stone, & Kisamore, 2007). We posit three linked hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis One:* Civilian and sworn employees experience invariant levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.
>
> *Hypothesis Two*: Pretending display rules, suppression display rules, and surface acting are positively related, and POS is negatively related, to depersonalization and emotional exhaustion in sworn employees.
>
> *Hypothesis Three:* Pretending display rules, suppression display rules, and surface acting are positively related, and POS is negatively related, to depersonalization and emotional exhaustion in civilian employees.

3. Methods

3.1. Procedure

As part of a more extensive study of law enforcement employee wellness, the participating agency was contacted in late Spring 2018. Following administrative approval, we worked with an agency representative to develop supplemental questions specific to the agency's interests. The survey was distributed simultaneously to all employees of the agency. After removing non-valid emails, a total of 2178 anonymous URL links were emailed to employees in July 2018 and remained open for thirty days. A total of 945 valid responses were received, resulting in a 43.48% response rate. Of that, 934 employees (703 sworn, 231 civilian) were retained in the final sample. Due to item non-response, regression outputs report a slightly lower sample size.

3.2. Respondents

The agency is a sizeable correctional organization in the Western United States. It is a large, modern agency, and employees work across a range of environments to supervise and care for many thousands of inmates, parolees, and probationers. Sworn employees include correctional officers who work behind prison walls, and parole agents with full law enforcement authority whose work is mostly indistinguishable from investigators in more traditional policing agencies. Civilian employees tasked with providing medical, dental, and psychiatric services work alongside locksmiths, furniture construction managers, and drug rehabilitation specialists. To the degree that a correctional facility is a city, civilian employees work alongside sworn officers to manage the city and its residents. Though their work activities and stressors may appear separate, civilian and sworn employees generally inhabit the same environment.

Because we investigate differences between civilian and sworn employees, it is useful to understand how the two groups differ along demographic lines. Descriptive statistics are found in Table 1. The starkest difference is sex, with women comprising 77.4% of the civilian group, while fully 85.1% of sworn employees are men. The civilian and sworn 'sides of the house' are sex-linked, with far more women on the civilian side and far more men with sworn status.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Civilian Employees					Sworn Employees				
Variable	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Emotional Exhaustion	175	3.84	1.47	1	7	566	4.49	1.43	1	7
Depersonalization	172	4.34	1.55	1	7	563	5.30	1.21	1	7
Pretend Display Rules	195	5.28	0.92	1	7	614	5.57	0.84	2	7
Surface Acting	175	4.21	1.36	1	7	570	4.57	1.33	1	7
Suppress Display Rules	184	4.92	1.22	1	7	593	5.30	1.12	1	7
Perceived Organizational Support	170	3.93	1.67	1	7	561	3.50	1.53	1	7
Sleep 7+ Hours/Night	166	0.40	0.49	0	1	559	0.30	0.46	0	1
College Graduate	165	0.56	0.50	0	1	557	0.52	0.50	0	1
Female	159	0.77	0.42	0	1	538	0.15	0.36	0	1
White	231	0.62	0.48	0	1	703	0.72	0.45	0	1
Years in Profession	200	13.93	9.89	0	39	667	13.68	8.60	0	40

Note: Bolded variables indicate a group-level mean difference, 95% confidence level

3.3. Measures

Emotional labor research has established the "robust sequence from surface acting to burnout" (Allen, Diefendorff, & Ma, 2014, p. 21), and the inclusion of surface acting in burnout studies is particularly salient for US-based samples. This robust sequence may be subject to measurement variance when used across cultural boundaries (Mastracci & Adams, 2018a; Yang et al., 2018), but is generally accepted within Western and Individualistic cultures (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011).

Seven-point Likert-type scales are used to construct latent independent variables of pretending ($\alpha = .6623$) and suppression ($\alpha = .8864$) display rules, surface acting ($\alpha = .7870$), and POS ($\alpha = .9576$). With one exception, Cronbach alpha scores for all constructs are well above the accepted cutoff of .70 (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1967). In the case of pretending display rules, it is only slightly below .70. Given the vulnerability of constructs with only three or four items (Santos, 1999) and that the construct is relied upon throughout emotional labor research, it is retained for modeling.

Control Variables: In addition to the independent variables defined above, we model several demographic controls, including years of service and respondent race/ethnicity, sex, and education level. Mastracci, Guy, and Newman (2014) find that both new and tenured public employees engage in emotional labor, and suggest that as employees gain consistent experience engaging in emotional labor, they increase capacity. However, other research finds that length of service predicts higher levels of burnout and lower levels of POS (Adams & Mastracci, 2018). Meta-analysis of age and years-of-experience studies (Brewer & Shapard, 2004) found no conclusive effects across all professions, though differences in occupations are likely confounders of overall effects. Given the majority of police-specific burnout literature appears to view years-of-service as an essential predictor of burnout, it is included as a control variable, operationalized as a continuous measure of a respondent's total years in law enforcement.

Sleep deprivation and fatigue are recent concerns in burnout research. Police and other first responders are long known to suffer from sleep disorders at greater rates than other professions. Sleep deprivation is related to increased burnout and work error, poorer physical health, and decreased job satisfaction in police-specific studies (Basinska & Wiciak, 2012; Rajaratnam et al., 2011). We operationalize sleep with a dichotomous variable where '1' represents respondents' self-reports that they normally get at least seven hours of sleep during their typical sleep cycle.

Sex differences in emotional labor are inconsistent across studies, though the literature is clear that both sexes engage in emotional labor. Particularly salient for this study is the meta-analysis by Purvanova and Muros (2010) which finds that women tend to experience more emotional exhaustion, while men tend to experience higher levels of depersonalization. This is relevant to our study of differences between a male-dominated group (sworn officers) and a group comprised mostly of women (civilian employees).

Table 2. Burnout in Corrections Agency by Employee Group

	(Sworn) Emotional Exhaustion	(Civilian) Emotional Exhaustion	(Sworn) Depersonalization	(Civilian) Depersonalization
Control Variables				
Years in Service	0.004 (0.00624)	-0.076 (0.0104)	**0.132***** (0.00517)	0.066 (0.0115)
White	0.048 (0.201)	0.000 (0.306)	0.053 (0.166)	0.054 (0.339)
Female	0.039 (0.151)	0.042 (0.246)	-0.056 (0.125)	0.067 (0.272)
College Education (Any)	-0.008 (0.108)	0.080 (0.211)	**0.081*** (0.0896)	0.053 (0.234)
Sleep7plus	**-0.106**** (0.119)	0.052 (0.207)	-0.060 (0.0985)	0.128 (0.230)
Independent Variables				
Pretend Display Rules	**0.124*** (0.0824)	-0.042 (0.150)	**0.126**** (0.0684)	0.048 (0.167)

Surface Acting	**0.190***** (0.0506)	**0.333***** (0.0943)	**0.155***** (0.0419)	**0.314***** (0.105)
Suppression Display Rules	**0.121*** (0.0716)	0.189 (0.123)	**0.223***** (0.0594)	0.078 (0.136)
Perceived Organizational Support	**-0.254***** (0.0379)	**-0.302***** (0.0685)	**-0.199***** (0.0315)	**-0.309***** (0.0760)
Observations	507	142	507	142
Adjusted R^2	0.280	0.365	0.305	0.313

Standardized beta coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses; Significant results in bold, at levels * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

4. Results

Table 2 (above) reports the regression results with standardized coefficients, which allow for a comparison of the relative strength of association between each independent variable and the two burnout components. Results from regression analysis allow us to reject Hypotheses One and Three, while accepting Hypothesis Two. Overall, and building on the findings of McCarty and Skogan (2013), we find sworn and civilian employees experience differing levels of burnout and for different reasons. Important similarities and differences between the groups of civilians and sworn officers emerge. Even among correlates that are significant for both groups, differences in magnitude offer insights into how the two groups experience burnout differently.

T-tests of both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization reject Hypothesis One, which predicts sworn and civilian employees experience the same levels of both measures. This test replicates and extends McCarty and Skogan's (2013) original finding for the emotional exhaustion subscale. We find significant differences in emotional exhaustion for sworn ($\bar{x}$ = 4.49, σ = 1.43) and civilian ($\bar{x}$ = 3.84, σ = 1.47) employees; t (739) = -5.17, p= 0.000. We further find a significant difference in the depersonalization score for sworn ($\bar{x}$ = 5.30, σ = 1.21) and civilian ($\bar{x}$ = 4.34, σ = 1.55) employees; t (733) = -8.51, p= 0.000. Results partially contradict gendered expectations of burnout (Purvanova and Muros, 2010), with sworn employees reporting higher levels of both depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

Independent Variables. Important magnitude differences emerge for emotional labor-related independent variables. The role of surface acting on burnout is consistent across groups and outcomes, with statistically-significant effects in the civilian group noted for both emotional exhaustion (β= 0.333, p = .000) and depersonalization (β= 0.314, p = .001). Surface acting has a similar significant positive relationship to burnout within the officer group for both emotional exhaustion (β= 0.190, p = .000) and depersonalization (β= 0.155, p = .001). While surface acting has a significant effect on both subcategories of burnout in both groups, the standardized effect in the civilian group is nearly twice as large.

The role of POS in protecting against emotional exhaustion and depersonalization is well supported in previous research (Adams & Mastracci, 2018; Jawahar et al., 2007). In the models tested here, we find a significant negative relationship between POS and both emotional

exhaustion and depersonalization. For sworn employees, POS has a significant negative relationship with emotional exhaustion (β= -0.254, p = .000) and depersonalization (β= -0.198, p = .000). The civilian employee group shows a similar significant, negative relationship for emotional exhaustion (β= -0.301, p = .000) and depersonalization (β= -0.308, p = .000). The effect size is more consistent across employee groups compared to surface acting.

While invariant effects were found for surface acting and POS, the models show differing effects on burnout subscales for other independent variables of interest. The effect of display rules varies by employee group but is consistent by outcome. For officers, pretending display rules show a significant, positive relationship to both emotional exhaustion (β= 0.124, p = .011) and depersonalization (β= 0.126, p = .008), but is not significant in either of the civilian models. Suppress display rules also show a significant, positive relationship for officers in both the emotional exhaustion (β= 0.121, p = .033) and depersonalization (β= 0.223, p = .000) models, but is not significant in either civilian model.

Control Variables. We find mixed support for the role of sleep deprivation in burnout. Sworn employees who report sleeping at least seven hours in a sleep cycle experience significantly less emotional exhaustion (β= -0.106, p = .006). However, for officer depersonalization no significant effect was detected, nor was any significant effect found for civilian employees on either burnout component. Sleep correlates were included to control for effects established in a previous study of burnout in law enforcement officers (Rajaratnam et al., 2011), and our results confirm a differential effect between civilian and sworn employees, as well as between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The intersection of sleep and work outcomes is a promising site of inquiry, and further research is warranted to explore the effect of sleep deprivation more purposively.

An interesting result for education level also arises. Officers with post-high school education levels report a significantly higher level of depersonalization. Demographic characteristics of race and sex do not have a significant effect on either emotional exhaustion or depersonalization for either group.

7 Discussion & Implications

This study investigated the impact of emotional labor and POS correlates on both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, with a focus on testing for invariant effects across civilian and sworn employee groups. Our results show the two groups experience burnout at different levels, and for different reasons. We both extend and conflict findings from the only other research study to center civilian and sworn employees in the burnout literature.

Surface acting is a significant and consistent contributor to both subcomponents of burnout for both sworn and civilian employees. However, the effect size is not invariant as it has nearly double the standardized coefficient for the civilian group. All other factors held constant, surface acting is the single largest contributor to overall burnout for civilian employees.

Generally, a greater proportion of burnout in civilian employees can be explained with relatively fewer predictors compared to sworn personnel. In both the emotional exhaustion (adjusted R^2 = 0.365) and depersonalization (adjusted R^2 = 0.313) models, civilian burnout is significantly explained by only surface acting and POS. The officer models are more complex, yet less explanatory overall, with emotional exhaustion (adjusted R^2 = 0.280) and

depersonalization (adjusted $R^2 = 0.305$) consistently predicted by surface acting, POS, and both pretend and suppression display rules. Interesting control variable significance is noted, with the emotional exhaustion model for officers significantly predicted by sleep health while depersonalization is significantly related to both education level and years in service.

8 Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

This study differs in important ways from the sole previous research to look directly at burnout among both civilian and sworn personnel (McCarty & Skogan, 2013). While similar outcome variables are investigated in both, our research is focused on the emotional labor antecedents of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization within a single large agency, whereas McCarty and Skogan are primarily interested in organizational level explanations for only emotional exhaustion, across twelve different agencies. In this way, the two studies complement one another in pursuit of better understanding burnout in law enforcement.

While the research presented here advances the empirical base, there are important limitations to consider and future research directions to pursue. Crucially, this study locates its sample and findings in the US context. While extending our results to other Western/Individualistic cultures is likely appropriate (Mastracci, 2017; Minkov & Hofstede, 2011), there is reason to doubt the appropriateness of cross-cultural extension of the full model (Allen et al., 2014), particularly in Collectivist cultures. Though some studies have found the model is robust to cultural contexts (Mastracci & Adams, 2018a), caution is warranted, as even in similar cultural contexts such as the US and the UK, meta-analysis suggests differences exist in the gendered aspects of burnout (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). There are active research programs in the area of cross-cultural measurement of emotional labor which presupposes differences in how emotional labor manifests between cultural groups, and caution must be used before assuming measurement and outcome invariance.

The consistently-strong role of POS in decreasing burnout has been noted in previous work (Adams & Mastracci, 2018) and confirmed here. Previous research has established perceived organizational support as a mediating correlate for a host of job stressors and predictors, and intriguing differences in the US versus UK contexts has been noted (Jawahar et al., 2007). Given the lack of research focused on civilians in law enforcement, this is a viable research direction for scholars interested in extending and replicating the findings here. Law enforcement managers would do well to emphasize and POS to support both their civilian and sworn employees. Managers should support the important role of sleep hygiene in relieving overall burnout levels in sworn personnel. Civilian employees appear particularly susceptible to the negative outcomes associated with surface acting, so managers should seek to recognize that emotional labor is how much of the job is done, and compensating that effort.

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