

ABSTRACT

An Experimental Investigation of Emotional Labor Display Rules and Performance in a Human Resources Sexual Harassment Interview Simulation

by

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Human Resource (HR) professionals are expected to engage in emotional labor (EL), or, management and control of their own emotions and emotional expression, during sexual harassment (SH) investigations. This EL expectation, or *display rule* (DR), is dynamic and complex requiring suppression of emotions and expressions of neutral empathy and is thus termed a *dynamic neutral-empathic DR*. Prior research shows that DRs in other occupations function as job demands that can deplete employees' personal resources and negatively affect performance. The current study investigates the impact of the dynamic neutral-empathic DR by testing a process model that was developed via an integration of Job Demands-Resources and Conservation of Resources theories. The model tests predictions that emotion regulation and negative affect mediate relationships between the dynamic neutral-empathic DR and performance in the SH investigation context. The SH context comprised a simulated, SH investigation interview, which is part of professional training program developed by attorneys and psychologists and implemented in organizations. In the simulation, college students played the role of HR managers who interviewed an SH claimant as well as the alleged harasser. I used an experimental design to test the effects of this unique DR by randomly assigning participants

to one of three conditions including a control condition with no DR, and two DR conditions. In the first DR condition, participants were instructed to adhere to the dynamic neutral-empathic DR. In the second DR condition, I manipulated *DR adherence expectation*, where more stringent requirements to adhere to the same, neutral-empathic DR were implemented. As such, I was able to test the impact of these two different DR conditions. Performance was measured during the simulated SH interviews via objective performance variables, and after via self-assessed performance and a memory task. Results providing evidence of resource depletion associated with the DR conditions were mixed. Negative affect mediated the relationship between DR condition and performance for participants in the DR conditions where greater levels of negative affect were negatively associated with performance. Emotional labor also mediated this relationship, but was unexpectedly associated with enhanced performance. Results are followed by a discussion and suggestions for future research.