Alleviating the Burden of Emotional Labor: The Role of Social Sharing

A. Silke McCance
Procter & Gamble

Christopher D. Nye
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Lu Wang
University of New South Wales

Kisha S. Jones
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Chi-yue Chiu
Nanyang Technological University

Difficult customer interactions cause service employees to experience negative emotions and to engage in emotional labor. The present laboratory study examined whether social sharing (i.e., talking about an emotionally arousing work event with one's coworkers) can attenuate the residual anger lingering after a taxing service episode. Participants assumed the role of customer service representatives for a fictitious technical support hotline and encountered either neutral or difficult service interactions. After fielding three easy or three difficult calls, participants were given the opportunity to engage in social sharing by talking about (a) the facts that just transpired, (b) the feelings aroused by the encounters, or (c) the positive aspects of the experience, or they were asked to complete a filler task. Results from quantitative data revealed

1

that participants who engaged in difficult (vs. neutral) customer interactions reported more surface acting and felt more anger. Engaging in social sharing was beneficial: All three types of social sharing were effective in reducing the anger aroused by handling demanding customers. Findings from qualitative analyses suggested that different mechanisms might have contributed to the effectiveness of the three types of social sharing. Future research directions and implications for practice are discussed.

Customer service plays a crucial role in customer satisfaction and repeat business (e.g., Dietz, Pugh, & Wiley, 2004; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005; Schneider, 1987; Schneider, Holcombe, & White, 1997). To ensure high levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, service workers are often required to follow organizationally imposed display rules for emotional conduct toward customers (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; Diefendorff & Richard, 2003; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). To adhere to these display rules, employees sometimes engage in *emotional labor,* which is defined as the effort exerted to modify one's emotional display in such a way that it matches organizational requirements (Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996). Interactions with difficult customers who behave in an unfair and verbally hostile manner heighten emotional labor demands for service employees (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004; Rupp & Spencer, 2006; Spencer & Rupp, 2009). Past research has revealed many negative correlates of emotional labor (e.g., detrimental health consequences, diminished well-being, and emotional negativity) but has not examined how to alleviate them. To address this oversight, we examine how *social sharing* (Rimé, 1987; Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991) can help employees deal with elevated levels of anger resulting from taxing service interactions.

The Costs of Emotional Labor

The need for emotional labor arises when organizations require their service providers to interact with customers in an organizationally prescribed manner that clashes with the emotions employees actually feel (Diefendorff & Richard, 2003; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Such effortful emotional regulation may include suppressing negative emotions (e.g., anger, frustration), as well as expressing organizationally prescribed emotions (e.g., cheerfulness; Diefendorff & Richard, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). Researchers have distinguished between two strategies for emotional labor: surface acting and deep acting (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). While surface acting involves merely modifying one's outwardly displayed emotions (e.g., facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, etc.), deep acting involves altering one's actual emotional state (e.g., putting oneself in the customers' shoes and trying to empathize with them; Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000). From the perspective of emotion regulation theory, surface acting represents a form of response-focused emotion regulation (e.g., suppression) and deep acting a form of antecedent-focused emotion regulation (e.g., reappraisal; Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998).

Organizations have good reason for requiring their employees to perform emotional labor (Giardini & Frese, 2008). However, an array of undesirable outcomes has been attributed to the construct, particularly surface acting (Grandey, 2003). Research consistently shows that engaging in emotional labor is related to poor health (e.g., stress, emotional exhaustion, and depression; Abraham, 1998; Bono & Vey, 2005; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000), decreased job satisfaction (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Tolich, 1993; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989), lower levels of performance (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Richards & Gross, 1999; Totterdell & Holman, 2003), withdrawal behaviors (e.g., absenteeism; Bailey, 1996; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Grandey et al., 2004), intentions to quit, and turnover (Chau, 2007; Côté & Morgan, 2002).

Customers, who are "ever-present physically, emotionally and discursively" (Cutcher, 2004: 5) in the work life of service employees, play a pivotal role in bringing about these outcomes. In particular, handling difficult customers can elicit anger, which is linked to many negative outcomes such as violence and hostility (Fox & Spector, 1999) and antisocial behaviors (e.g., theft; Chen & Spector, 1992). Hostile customers who violate interpersonal norms may initiate abusive and angry conversations (Glomb, 2002; Grandey et al., 2004; Spielberger, 1999), and interactions with unfair customers evoke more anger than interactions with fair customers (Rupp, McCance, Spencer, & Sonntag, 2008; Rupp & Spencer, 2006; Spencer & Rupp, 2009). Based on the work of Cropanzano, Weiss, Suckow, and Grandey (2000), Rupp et al. (2008) posited that receiving unjust treatment from the customer can elicit both anger and the attempt to perform emotional labor via surface acting. However, because surface acting does not modify the underlying emotional experience, the negative emotion aroused by interactions with difficult customers is likely to still boil under the surface after the service episode is over. Consistent with this idea, Judge, Woolf, and Hurst (2009) found in an experience sampling study that the degree to which employees engage in surface acting is linked to more negative affect as well as to emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction. Given the important role customers play in service interactions, we follow Grandey, Tam, and Brauburger's (2002) call to focus on customers as a source of anger for service employees.

Buffering the Well-Being Costs of Emotional Labor

Customer incivility (Grandey et al., 2002), verbal abuse (Grandey et al., 2004), and hostility (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007) can deplete service employees' cognitive and emotional resources and render emotional regulation effortful. Nonetheless, expression of anger toward the customer is not a viable option for the employee because of the inherent employee–customer power differential (Fitness, 2000) and the existence of display rules (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; Diefendorff & Richard, 2003; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Thus, for the employee, both expression and suppression of anger can have disruptive consequences. This makes anger regulation in the customer service context particularly interesting and important.

We focus on the discrete emotion of anger because of its importance in the workplace (for a review, see Gibson & Callister, 2010). In particular, there is little research on what can be

done to help employees manage the anger that can result from difficult service encounters. Therefore, we conducted an experiment that simulated a customer service setting and had participants engage in interactions with neutral or difficult customers. The goal of this research was to identify an intervention that can reduce the amount of anger that lingers in the wake of handling hostile and unfair customers. We propose that social sharing—the process of talking about an emotionally relevant experience (such as a taxing service episode) with others (Rimé, 2007; Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998; Rimé et al., 1991)—can lessen the emotional strain of demanding service episodes. Thus, the present study goes beyond mere documentation of the unfavorable emotional correlates of emotional labor and examines whether social sharing can help alleviate such emotional negativity. Moreover, we hope to identify which type of social sharing yields the greatest psychological benefit.

The Psychological Benefits of Social Sharing

Social sharing is an interpersonal process set into motion by the experience of an event of subjective emotional significance (Rimé et al., 1998; Rimé et al., 1991). The person who experienced the event communicates it to someone else, either verbally or in written form. As a widely studied phenomenon in the social psychological literature, social sharing has been observed in individuals of both sexes, all ages, and across cultures (Meisiek & Yao, 2005; Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001; Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001). Nevertheless, only a single theoretical chapter is known to have discussed the possible role of social sharing in the work setting (Meisiek & Yao, 2005). In this chapter, Meisiek and Yao put forth several propositions regarding the antecedents and outcomes of the use of humor in social sharing at work, and they consider it a way to cope with emotional events in difficult workplaces. The present study applies social sharing to the service context, where employees have to deal with emotionally charged work episodes on a regular basis.

Social sharing has several psychological functions. First, it provides a socially acceptable outlet for voicing one's emotional upheaval and promotes health and well-being. According to the theory of inhibition (Pennebaker, 1985, 1989), physiological efforts are required to inhibit thoughts, emotions, or actions, and as a result, chronic inhibition of emotions can produce stress-related physical and psychological problems (Rimé et al., 1998). Moreover, research reveals that physical and subjective well-being is negatively associated with emotional secrecy (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998) and positively associated with sharing of feelings (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). People often report feeling relieved after sharing an emotional episode (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Overall, the more subjectively intense and disruptive the emotional experience, the more often people engage in social sharing (Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000; Rimé et al., 1998). In short, engaging in social sharing can help ameliorate the detrimental impact of an emotional and stressful event.

Second, social sharing can also help service workers faced with hostile customer interactions make sense of their negative experiences and view them more objectively (Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992). The mere process of articulating thoughts and feelings allows an individual to gain a different perspective on troublesome episodes, gives hardship meaning, and replenishes one's self-worth and other resources (Hemenover, 2003; Pennebaker, 1990; Silver, Boon, & Stones, 1983). *Sensemaking* refers to individuals and groups reflecting on

and interpreting situations characterized by uncertainty and arousal in order to derive meaning (Erera, 1992; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). Conflict situations often induce sensemaking attempts (Bergmann & Volkema, 1994; Volkema & Bergmann, 1989; Volkema, Farquhar, & Bergmann, 1996). A conflict stirs up feelings of cognitive dissonance, which can be reduced by reframing the situation (Festinger, 1957). Discussions with coworkers (which have also been termed "third-party sensemaking"; Volkema et al., 1996) offer opportunities to create structure and derive meaning in a complex, ambiguous, stressful situation and thus present a way to reframe it and lessen the associated emotional arousal. Consistent with this idea, studies reveal that social support and sharing emotions predict fewer negative emotions and lower levels of stress (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Pennebaker, 1985; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Thus, we contend that through sensemaking, social sharing can help reduce service providers' anger.

Of particular relevance to our hypothesis is the fact that sensemaking often occurs through communication and social interaction (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994; Jeong & Brower, 2008; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Taylor and Van Every (2000: 58) state that "communication [is] an ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and of the events that affect them." Coworkers make for ideal listeners because they know about the work processes involved in a given job and are implicitly interested in what happens in their organization (Meisiek, 2002). In communicating with a coworker, the individual reconstructs the situation by conveying information about related facts and emotions. This leads to an interactive process that allows for cognitive structuring and helps clarify the situation.

Making sense of one's negative experiences may also make one feel good about the self (Brown, 2000; Coopey, Keegan, & Emler, 1997; Volkema et al., 1996). According to Weick (1995: 23), sensemaking "occurs in the service of maintaining a consistent positive self-conception." For example, the experience of having a conflict with the seemingly more powerful customers can threaten and destabilize individuals (Wilhelm, Herd, & Steiner, 1993). Third-party sensemaking through talking to a coworker can serve to legitimize and reinforce the service representative's sense of identity and self-worth (Volkema et al., 1996).

In light of the theories and evidence reviewed above, we hypothesize that social sharing can help service employees cope with customer-related emotional upheaval. We posit that individuals who are given (vs. those who are not given) the opportunity to talk about a negative affective event in a customer service context (i.e., the discrete emotions aroused by a taxing service interaction) will feel less angry following a string of interactions with difficult customers. In the present study, we focus on verbal social sharing within an interactional context, when two or more individuals come together to talk about an emotionally relevant episode. We adopt this operationalization of social sharing because it reflects a realistic context in which social sharing occurs in the workplace: Service employees can verbally share (i.e., talk about) an emotionally arousing service episode with their coworkers, following an emotionally charged interaction with difficult customers.

> *Hypothesis 1:* Individuals who engage in social sharing after a number of difficult service interactions will subsequently report *lower* levels of anger (controlling for pre-sharing anger) than individuals who do not engage in social sharing.

Exploring the Effectiveness of Different Types of Social Sharing

Hypothesis 1 assumes that social sharing can help alleviate the emotional burden of demanding customer interactions. However, some types of social sharing might be more effective than others. To identify the type of social sharing that can most effectively protect individuals from the psychological burden of emotional labor, we examine three different forms of sharing: sharing of (1) feelings, (2) facts, and (3) positive experiences (i.e., reflecting on one's strengths in handling difficult customers and on what one can be proud of). Some psychological benefits are common to all forms of social sharing. For example, social sharing can provide a socially supportive environment for broadcasting one's emotional upheaval. According to the emotional broadcaster theory (Harber & Cohen, 2005), emotional broadcasting affords opportunities for relationship improvement and social integration (Rimé et al., 1998). Specifically, self-disclosure increases mutual liking between the discloser and the listener (Collins & Miller, 1994), and social support from coworkers can buffer stress (Dollard, Dormann, Boyd, Winefield, & Winefield, 2003; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999), burnout (Halbesleben, 2006), and physical strain (Schwarzer & Leppin, 1989). Thus, merely sharing facts is enough to attenuate the emotional impact of emotional labor.

Although all forms of social sharing may facilitate sensemaking, the psychological benefits of this process should be most pronounced when employees are encouraged to view their experiences from a *positive perspective*. Research findings from cognitive psychology corroborate this prediction. According to the verbal overshadowing effect (Chiu, Krauss, & Lau, 1998; Paivio, 1986; Schooler & Engstler-Schooler, 1990; Schooler, Ohlsson, & Brooks, 1993; Wilson & Schooler, 1991; for reviews, see Schooler, Fiore, & Brandimonte, 1997; Schooler, Ryan, & Reder, 1996), describing an ambiguous experience that is difficult to verbalize (e.g., an emotional experience) in a positive manner creates a positively framed memory of the event, which in turn colors how the experience will be remembered later. Accordingly, making factual descriptions of an emotionally taxing episode should not change the perceived negativity of the experience. In contrast, after fielding difficult customers, sharing one's negative experience from a positive perspective allows employees to frame the negative events in a positive way (e.g., focusing on lessons learned or on the positive aspects of one's performance during the emotional episode). Once the group reaches consensus on the meaning of the experiences, employees should develop positive perceptions of them.

In contrast, simply broadcasting one's feelings might focus employees on their negative feelings and may create a negative memory representation of the interactions with difficult customers. Service workers describing their feelings during an interaction with a hostile customer may use negative emotion descriptors to characterize their subjective experience. For example, they may describe how "irritated" the customer was, or how "angry" the customer has made them. Subsequently, employees may remember the event in a negative light because that was how they described it. Consistent with this idea, research has shown that individuals who ruminate on their problems and their negative feelings about them without taking any action tend to experience increased anger after rumination (Bushman, 2002; Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998). Nevertheless, sharing feelings allows the venting of

negative emotions, which—according to the theory of inhibition—should have a positive effect on health (Panagopoulou, Maes, Rimé, & Montgomery, 2006; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). In a diary-writing study, Pennebaker and Beall (1986) found that compared to control and facts sharing participants, feelings sharing participants reported fewer specific health problems (e.g., high blood pressure, colds or flu, migraine headaches, heart problems). In short, sharing of feelings may mitigate the negative emotional consequences of taxing service interactions through emotion venting but runs the risk of increasing anger if such sharing leads to negative framing of experiences. In contrast, sharing positive experiences should yield emotional benefits through the process of sensemaking. Thus, based on the preceding review of the literature, we hypothesize that sharing of positive experiences will be more effective in reducing emotional negativity than sharing of facts or feelings.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who engage in sharing of positive experiences (vs. sharing of feelings and sharing of facts) after a number of difficult service interactions will subsequently experience *lower* levels of anger.

Method

Overview

To determine how social sharing mitigates emotional labor outcomes, we conducted a 2 (call difficulty) × 4 (social sharing) between-subjects laboratory experiment in which participants acted as customer service representatives. Participants were told that the experiment concerned the effectiveness of using Skype, an Internet-based phone software, in customer service. Next, they answered three phone calls from three different customers (confederates). These customer interactions differed in the level of difficulty depending on the experimental condition (see below). After answering the calls, participants shared their experiences in a small group of two to six people. The types of sharing varied across experimental condition (see below). After the sharing session, participants completed the key dependent measures and were fully debriefed. There were 29 to 34 participants in each of the eight experimental conditions.

Sample

The sample consisted of 250 undergraduate students from a large Midwestern university, with an approximately equal number of men ($n = 114$) and women ($n = 134$). Two participants did not report their gender. The ethnic breakdown was as follows: 56.2% Caucasian, 31.0% Asian, 6.2% African American, 4.5% Hispanic, and 2.1% other. Eight participants did not report their ethnicity. The mean age was 18.95 years ($SD = 2.05$), and 40.5% of the participants had previously worked in a customer service position. Participants received course credit for their participation.

Cover Story, Experimental Manipulations, and Procedures

To ensure realism, we developed an elaborate cover story. At the beginning of the experiment, the experimenter told the participants that the researchers were collaborating with another group of investigators who were interested in the psychology of interactions between customers and customer service representatives while using an Internet-based phone software called Skype. Participants were asked to assume the role of customer service representatives and were led to believe that they would receive calls from students participating in the other experiment. The participants further learned that the callers were required to complete a timed spreadsheet task within 50 minutes, and the top performers in the callers' experiment would have the chance of winning $100 in a lottery. This cover story was introduced to ensure that the participants would not be surprised by some of the callers' high levels of emotional involvement in their task. Participants were also informed that the callers believed they were, in fact, calling University Tech Support and were asked to treat the callers as if they were actual customers. Finally, participants were given "display rules" for their emotions (e.g., "Please be nice to the 'customer' and treat them with respect") and informed that their conversations with the customers would be monitored via audio-recordings.

After this brief introduction, participants were led to individual rooms where they each received three calls from three different confederates. The callers requested help in creating a graph using data in a spreadsheet. To assist individuals with little experience with this software, each participant was given a list of potential problems as well as step-by-step instructions for solving them. Participants were told that this list was generated based on a pilot study of the experiment. The confederates used only the problems on this list when making their calls.

Prior to each experimental session, participants were randomly assigned to the neutral or the difficult call condition. For calls in the neutral call condition, all callers (confederates) were friendly and followed the participants' step-by-step instructions for how to solve their problems. In contrast, all callers (confederates) in the difficult call condition acted rushed, irritated, and annoyed. They were reluctant to provide information to the participant, acted as if they were unable to follow the participant's instructions, cut the participant off, made sarcastic comments, and would sometimes simply hang up on the participant. Special care was taken during the debriefing to explain to the participants in the difficult call condition that their performance was in no way related to the treatment they received from the callers, that they were randomly assigned to this experimental condition, and that the callers were trained to behave in this manner.

To standardize the experimental procedures, we had each confederate go through extensive training before acting as a caller in this study. First, one of the authors conducted call simulations with all confederates to ensure they were able to believably act out the role they were given. Second, confederates received a script with detailed instructions on the tone, length of the calls, and appropriate verbiage. The script also contained sample conversations for all spreadsheet problems that the confederates practiced in pairs. The authors periodically reviewed the confederates' performance and provided additional training to make sure that the confederates delivered standardized and realistic performances throughout the study.

Following the calls, all participants filled out the first set of measures that assessed their levels of anger and deep and surface acting (see below). These measures were used as baseline measures to gauge the effect of social sharing. After completing the baseline measures, participants were randomly assigned to one of four social sharing conditions: three group discussion conditions or the control condition in which no discussion took place. In the three discussion conditions, participants either shared facts about the calls they received (facts sharing condition), their feelings about the calls (feelings sharing condition), or their positive experiences regarding the calls (positive experiences sharing condition). Participants in the facts sharing condition were asked to describe the problems their customers called them with, how well Skype (the Internet software used in the experiment) worked, and whether the customers' problems were solved. Participants in the feelings sharing condition shared their feelings about the calls, their feelings about giving instructions through Skype, and their feelings about the outcomes of the calls. Participants in the positive experiences sharing condition shared their views on the positive aspects of Skype as a tool in customer service interactions and reflected on their strengths in performing a demanding task and on what they were most proud of in handling the calls. In the no discussion condition, participants were asked to search for articles on the Internet pertaining to voice-based communication software.

Participants in the three social sharing conditions gathered in a larger room where they were joined by the other participants and a confederate pretending to participate in the experiment. The groups varied in size from two to six people, depending on how many participants signed up for and showed up for the experimental session. The mean group size was 3.45 persons. Average group size did not vary across experimental conditions (*F*s for the main effects of call difficulty and social sharing and their interaction in a two-way analysis of variance were less than 2.20, *ns*).

All members in a discussion group were assigned to the same call condition; that is, all members had received either neutral or difficult calls. At this point, the experimenter told the participants that to assure their confidentiality, he or she would leave the room during the discussion. The experimenter then asked if any of the participants would volunteer to moderate the discussion. The "participant" who was actually a confederate volunteered and was selected to be the discussion leader. This confederate read out the discussion questions and made sure the participants would stick to the questions and not digress during the discussion. This procedure ensured that participants in the different experimental conditions would share only the information or experiences that they were supposed to share in their respective experimental condition. The confederate was instructed to read one discussion question and then go around the table to make sure all participants responded to every question. This procedure ensured that each participant engaged in sharing and that the discussion would remain fairly structured, without much talking back and forth. Nonetheless, cross-talking occurred occasionally. Sometimes, participants made references to other participants' previous utterances, solicited contributions and clarifications from other participants, and responded to other participants' solicitations of contributions (see below). The confederate allowed such cross-talking as long as the discussion remained focused on the discussion topic. The confederate always answered the questions last in order not to bias the participants' responses. Participants in the no discussion condition remained in their individual rooms and engaged in an Internet search.

After the discussion, the experimenter returned and asked the participants to complete another survey before returning to their individual rooms to answer more calls. We told participants that they would answer more calls after the survey to create a more realistic work context—in real life, customer service providers would expect further customer interactions after social sharing. The second survey assessed participants' current level of anger following the social sharing manipulation (see below). After they had completed this measure, the experimenter announced that there were no further calls. Participants were probed for suspicion and fully debriefed before the conclusion of the experiment.

Measures

Emotional labor. After the calls, we measured emotional labor using Grandey's (2003) eight-item measure. The items tap into both surface acting (e.g., "I put on an act in order to deal with the customers in an appropriate way," "I just pretended to have the emotions I needed to display for my job") and deep acting (e.g., "I made an effort to feel the emotions that I needed to display toward others," "I worked hard to feel the emotions that I needed to show to others"). Responses were measured on a 5-point frequency scale with endpoints ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). Coefficient α for this measure was .90 for surface acting and .73 for deep acting.

Anger. We assessed the amount of anger the participants felt immediately after they answered the calls and also after the discussion. We used the 10-item anger subscale from the Discrete Emotions Inventory (Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999). After the calls, participants were instructed to indicate how they felt during the calls; after the discussion, participants indicated how they felt at that particular moment. Participants were instructed to respond to the degree to which they felt each discrete emotion (e.g., "pissed," "irritated," and "angry"). Responses were measured on a 5-point scale with response options ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (5). Coefficient α for this scale was .97 for the Time 1 measure and .95 for the Time 2 measure.

Other measures. In addition, we obtained the following information from the participants: age, gender, other demographic information, and work experience in customer service (*yes* or *no*). Although we did not measure participants' emotional states prior to answering the calls, participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight Call Difficulty × Social Sharing conditions. Thus, participants' emotional states before receiving the calls should not have systematic effects on our results.

Transcription and Analysis of Group Discussions

To shed some light on what transpired in the social sharing conditions, we transcribed the discussions and had two of the authors independently code all discussion content. First, we counted the number of speaking turns in each group discussion (intercoder reliability was

perfect). Next, we conducted a qualitative analysis of the discussion content to examine the hypothesized mechanisms behind the emotional benefits of social sharing, which included sharing of emotions and collective construction of the callers' and the participants' own behaviors during the calls (i.e., sensemaking). Thus, our analysis focused on (a) expressed emotions of the participants, (b) participants' perceptions of their emotion regulation efforts, (c) perceived emotions of the callers, (d) perceived attitudes of the callers, and (e) evidence of coordination in meaning construction during the discussion. For each speaking turn, coders identified whether the following types of content were present: (a) reference to one's own negative emotions during the interactions with the callers (e.g., "I felt pretty frustrated," "I just got mad"); (b) reference to one's own positive emotions during the interactions with the callers (e.g., "I felt pretty good," "I was proud of myself"); (c) reference to negative emotions of the callers (e.g., "They were really angry," "Seemed like the customers were pretty frustrated"); (d) reference to positive emotions of the callers (e.g., "They were happy"); (e) reference to callers' negative attitudes (e.g., "I think they were really rude," "They were kind of mean"); (f) reference to deliberate attempts to regulate one's own emotions during the calls (e.g., "I didn't show that I was annoyed or upset with the callers," "The customer didn't know that I lost my cool. . . . I saw myself getting impatient, getting frustrated, but I thought I didn't let the customer know that"); and (g) reference to other participants' previous utterances (e.g., "I actually had the same problems"). For each discussion and each coded variable, we counted the number of speaking turns in which the coded variable appeared, and divided the count by the total number of speaking turns. The resulting proportions represented the frequency of appearance of certain types of content in a group discussion controlling for the length (number of speaking turns) of the discussion. Intercoder reliabilities in terms of the correlation between the proportions computed from the two coders' coding were high (rs > .95). Disagreements were settled through discussion between the coders.

Results

Effects of Difficult Calls on Emotional Labor and Emotions

To check whether random assignment to the four social sharing conditions was successful, we performed an ANOVA on each measure (anger, surface acting, deep acting) taken after the calls and before the discussion, with social sharing as the independent variable. The effect of social sharing was not significant on any of the dependent measures, Fs < 1.52, *ns,* indicating that participants in the various sharing conditions experienced similar levels of anger and engaged in similar levels of emotional labor before participating in social sharing.

Analysis of the post-call results by call difficulty indicated that call difficulty affected participants' emotional states and levels of emotional labor. We conducted a call difficulty (difficult or neutral) ANOVA on reported anger, surface acting, and deep acting before the discussion. As shown in Table 1, the main effect of call manipulation was significant for anger and surface acting: As expected, participants in the difficult call condition reported higher levels of anger and surface acting than did those in the neutral call condition.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and *F* Statistics for Post-Call
Emotional Labor and Anger by Call Condition

	Mean (*SD*)		
	Neutral Call Condition	Difficult Call Condition	*F* Statistic[a]
Anger	1.19 (0.25)	2.95 (1.14)	261.15***
Surface acting	2.80 (1.06)	3.44 (0.86)	29.64***
Deep acting	3.31 (0.92)	3.24 (0.90)	0.47

a. $df_1 = 1$; $df_2 = 218$.
***$p < .001$.

Table 2
Correlations and Coefficient Alphas for Post-Call Measures[2]

	Surface Acting	Deep Acting	Anger
Surface acting	.90		
Deep acting	.11	.73	
Anger	.34**	.04	.97

Note: Reliability coefficients (αs) are indicated in the main diagonal.
**$p < .01$.

Table 2 shows the correlations among the post-call measures. Participants who reported higher levels of anger also reported higher levels of surface acting ($r = .34$, $p < .01$). Deep acting had no significant correlations with either surface acting or anger. In summary, the results are consistent with the prediction that participants receiving difficult (vs. neutral) calls engaged in more surface acting and felt angrier.

Effects of Social Sharing on Post-Sharing Anger

Next, we examined the effects of social sharing on anger induced by the difficult calls. To test Hypothesis 1, we fitted a multiple regression model to reported anger after the social sharing session (or the Internet search task for participants in the no discussion condition), with call difficulty (fixed factor), social sharing (fixed factor), and their interaction as predictors. We also controlled for reported anger immediately after answering the calls. Social sharing was coded into three dummy variables, with the no discussion condition treated as the reference group (coded as 0) and the remaining conditions coded as 1 in the pertinent dummy variable. For call difficulty, the neutral call condition was coded as 0 and the difficult call condition was coded as 1. We predicted a significant Call Condition × Sharing Condition interaction, which would indicate that social sharing significantly lowered anger levels compared to the post-call baseline, particularly among participants who were randomly assigned to handle difficult calls.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Post-Sharing Anger Controlling
for Post-Call Anger by Social Sharing Condition

	Neutral Call Condition	Difficult Call Condition
No discussion		
M	1.12	1.98
SD	0.40	1.07
n	32	33
Positive experiences sharing		
M	1.04	1.45
SD	0.10	0.48
n	34	32
Feelings sharing		
M	1.05	1.61
SD	0.13	0.75
n	31	29
Facts sharing		
M	1.08	1.41
SD	0.29	0.64
n	30	29

Participants who reported more anger after answering difficult calls also reported more anger after the social sharing session: for post-call anger $B = 0.239$, $SE = 0.042$, $t(240) = 5.72$, $p < .001$. The main effect of social sharing was also significant, $F(3, 240) = 4.60$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .054$. However, we interpreted this main effect in the context of the significant Call Difficulty $\times$ Social Sharing Condition interaction, $F(3, 240) = 3.52$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .042$.

To understand the nature of the interaction, we examined the simple main effect of social sharing in the neutral call condition and the difficult call condition. Again, we controlled for the effect of post-call anger in the simple main effect analysis. In the neutral call condition, the effect of social sharing was not significant, $F(3, 122) = 0.95$, *ns*. As shown in Table 3, participants in the four social sharing conditions reported similar levels of post-sharing anger relative to post-call anger. As predicted, in the difficult call condition, the simple main effect of social sharing on post-sharing anger relative to post-call anger was significant, $F(3, 117) = 4.27$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .099$.

Next, we performed planned contrast analyses to further understand the effect of social sharing in the difficult call condition. Specifically, we fitted a set of Helmert contrasts to the data. The first contrast in the set compared the no discussion condition with the three social sharing conditions. If this contrast was significant, it would support Hypothesis 1: Social sharing could significantly mitigate the emotional impact of answering difficult calls. The second contrast compared the positive experiences sharing condition with the remaining two sharing conditions. This contrast tested Hypothesis 2, which concerns whether sharing positive experiences had an additional advantage over sharing facts and sharing feelings. Finally, the last contrast compared sharing facts with sharing feelings. This contrast tested whether sharing feelings had an advantage over sharing facts.

As predicted, the first contrast was significant, $t = 3.37$, $p < .001$, supporting Hypothesis 1. As shown in Table 3, participants in the three social sharing conditions reported lower levels of anger after the sharing session (relative to the post-call baseline) than did participants in the no discussion condition. However, both the second contrast ($t = –0.46$, ns) and the third contrast ($t = 1.14$, ns) were not significant, indicating that the three types of social sharing were equally effective in mitigating the emotional impacts of answering difficult calls. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

As an alternative way to test Hypothesis 1, we compared post-call anger to post-discussion anger and found a significant reduction in anger after the discussion ($M = 2.06$ for post-call pre-sharing anger and $M = 1.36$ for post-sharing anger), $t(219) = 9.65$, $p < .001$. Anger reduction (mean reduction = 0.07) was small in the neutral call condition, $t(110) = 2.57$, $p = .01$, and sizable in the difficult call condition (mean reduction = 1.33), $t(108) = 11.63$, $p < .001$. The small amount of anger reduction in the neutral call condition was due to the low level of anger the participants experienced after fielding neutral calls ($M = 1.19$), leaving little room for further reduction of anger after social sharing. In the difficult call condition, participants in the no discussion condition reported lower levels of anger after performing the filler task (mean reduction = 0.92), $t(32) = 4.96$, $p < .001$. This suggests that participants' anger tended to dissipate even after performing a cognitive filler task, probably because performing such a task diverted participants' attention away from their negative emotions. Nonetheless, reduction in anger was significantly more pronounced in the three social sharing conditions (mean reduction ranged from 1.32 to 1.61), $ts > 5.12$, $ps < .001$. The Call Difficulty × Social Sharing (sharing vs. no sharing) ANOVA performed on reduced anger revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 126) = 5.26$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$, lending further support to Hypothesis 1.

Effects of Manipulations on Social Sharing Content

Although the results showed that the three forms of social sharing were equally effective for managing anger evoked by hostile customers (thus not supporting Hypothesis 2, which posited that positive experiences sharing would be most effective), analysis of the discussion transcripts suggested that the three forms of social sharing might have been effective for different reasons: Sharing of positive experiences might have attenuated anger through construction of shared meanings of the positivity of the experiences (the positive experience of staying calm while handling difficult calls), whereas sharing of feelings might have attenuated anger through emotion venting, and sharing of facts might have helped divert participants' attention away from the emotion-evoking aspects of their experiences.

Effects of call difficulty. To capture the effects of call difficulty and social sharing on the content of social sharing, we performed a Call Difficulty × Sharing Condition ANOVA on each coded variable, with discussion group as the unit of analysis. Post hoc analyses were carried out to probe the nature of the significant effects. As expected, handling difficult (vs. neutral) calls affected participants' emotions. There was a significant main effect of call difficulty on the tendency to mention one's own positive emotions in the discussion, $F(1, 56) = 5.90$, $p = .02$,

$\eta_p^2 = .095$: Participants in the difficult call condition ($M = .03$) mentioned positive emotions less frequently than did those in the neutral call condition ($M = .09$).

In addition, after receiving difficult (vs. neutral) calls, participants were more likely to mention negative emotions and attitudes in the callers. There was a significant main effect of call difficulty on the likelihood of mentioning the callers' negative emotions in the discussion, $F(1, 56) = 18.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .245$: Participants in the difficult call condition ($M = .10$) mentioned callers' negative emotions more often than did those in the neutral call condition ($M = .01$). There was also a marginally significant main effect of call difficulty for reference to callers' positive emotions, $F(1, 56) = 3.35$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .056$: Participants in the difficult call condition never mentioned callers' positive emotions ($M = 0$, compared to $M = .01$ in the neutral call condition). Furthermore, after answering difficult (vs. neutral) calls, participants were more likely to mention callers' negative attitude, $F(1, 56) = 9.58$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .146$: Participants in the difficult call condition ($M = .07$) were more likely to mention the callers' negative attitude (e.g., "I think they are really rude") were those in the neutral call condition ($M = .01$).

Finally, there was a significant main effect of call difficulty on the tendency to mention self-regulation attempts, $F(1, 56) = 6.54$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .105$: Participants in the difficult call condition ($M = .08$) mentioned self-regulation attempts (e.g., "I didn't show that I was annoyed or upset with the callers") more frequently than did those in the neutral call condition ($M = .02$). No other effects were significant in the analyses described above.

In short, handling difficult calls diminished participants' positive emotions and drew their attention to the callers' negative emotions and attitudes. As a result, participants were less inclined to mention their positive emotions and more inclined to mention the callers' negativity, independent of the social sharing condition. That is, even when participants who had received difficult calls were directed to share their positive experiences or neutral facts in the discussion, they were still inclined to mention the callers' negativity. Meanwhile, receiving difficult calls also increased the motivation to reflect on self-regulation attempts during the group discussion. These results showed that the call difficulty manipulation had a strong impact on the perceived negativity of the callers.

Effects of social sharing. Our results suggested that different forms of social sharing might have lowered post-sharing anger for different reasons. To elaborate, there was a significant Social Sharing × Call Difficulty interaction on the tendency to mention positive emotions during discussion, $F(2, 56) = 3.47$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .110$. Post hoc analyses showed that directing participants to share their positive experiences increased the likelihood of sharing one's own positive emotions, irrespective of whether the participants had fielded difficult or neutral calls. In the positive experiences sharing condition, independent of call difficulty, the frequency of mentioning positive emotions of the self was relatively high ($M = .08$ in the neutral call condition, and $M = .06$ in the difficult call condition), $F(1, 17) = 0.13$, *ns,* for the simple main effect of call difficulty in the positive experiences sharing condition. In contrast, independent of call difficulty, the frequency of mentioning positive emotions of the self was low in the facts sharing condition ($M = .01$ in the neutral call condition, and $M = 0$ in the difficult call condition), $F(1, 17) = 1.79$, *ns,* for the simple main effect of call difficulty in the facts sharing condition. The emotion discourses in the feelings sharing condition were in line with participants' actual emotional experiences: Participants in this social sharing

condition mentioned fewer positive emotions of the self in the difficult (vs. neutral call) condition ($M = .02$ vs. .18), $F(1, 17) = 10.75$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .387$, for the simple main effect of call difficulty in the feelings sharing condition.

Results on the tendency to share negative emotions further supported the notion that participants in the feelings sharing condition tended to share the actual emotions they experienced during the calls. When directed to share their feelings, these participants were more likely than those in the remaining conditions to share their negative emotions. There was a significant main effect of social sharing on referencing one's own negative emotions in the discussion, $F(2, 56) = 5.54$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .165$, and no other effects on this dependent variable were significant. Participants in the feelings sharing condition were more likely to mention their negative emotions ($M = .09$) than were participants in the facts sharing condition ($M = .02$), $p = .002$. There was also a nonsignificant trend for participants in the feelings sharing condition to mention their negative emotions more frequently than did those in the positive experiences sharing condition ($M = .05$), $p = .06$.

There was a significant main effect of social sharing on cross-referencing others' previous utterances, $F(2, 56) = 6.54$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .189$. Post hoc analyses revealed a significantly greater tendency to reference other participants' previous utterances in the positive experiences sharing condition ($M = .30$) and feelings sharing condition ($M = .26$) than in the facts sharing condition ($M = .14$), ps $< .05$. No other effects were significant in this analysis. This result indicates that participants in the positive experiences and feelings sharing conditions were more motivated to collaborate with their colleagues to reach consensus on the meaning of their experience.

Directing participants to share their positive experiences also increased the motivation to reflect on their self-regulation attempts. There was a significant main effect of social sharing on mentioning self-regulation attempts during the discussion, $F(2, 56) = 17.87$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .390$. In fact, participants almost never mentioned any self-regulation attempts in the facts sharing condition ($M = 0$) and the feelings sharing condition ($M = .004$). Participants in the positive experiences sharing condition were significantly more likely to mention such attempts ($M = .14$), ps $< .001$. Finally, there was a significant interaction of call difficulty and social sharing, $F(2, 56) = 6.22$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .182$. The simple main effect of social sharing was more pronounced in the difficult call condition, $F(2, 30) = 14.98$, $p < .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .500$, than in the neutral call condition, $F(2, 26) = 4.71$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .266$.

Discussion

Social Sharing as a Viable Mechanism to Unburden Service Employees

The present study examined social sharing as a possible practice that service organizations can use to help frontline employees manage the anger lingering after demanding service encounters. Our results show that social sharing is a viable mechanism for unburdening service employees who have to exert emotional labor. Taxing service encounters lead to higher levels of anger and surface acting than do relatively easy customer interactions. Although individuals in the control condition, who did not engage in social sharing, also reported

reduced anger at the end of the study, sharing the experience in a small group alleviated the anger experienced immediately after the difficult encounters even more. This result speaks to the added benefit of social sharing in mitigating the emotional impact of difficult customer interactions.

Although we did not find sharing of positive experiences to be more effective than sharing of feelings or facts, results from the qualitative analyses provided a more nuanced understanding of the social psychological processes that contribute to the effectiveness of the three types of social sharing. Specially, when directed to talk about their positive experiences while fielding the difficult calls, participants went through active sensemaking, trying to construct positive meanings of their experiences with the difficult customers. During the discussion, participants often referenced each other's utterances, which is a behavioral signature of collaborative communication directed toward establishing shared understanding of common experiences. In addition, participants in this condition were more inclined to reflect on their successful self-regulation attempts. Such reflections might have instilled a sense of pride about persevering in the face of a demanding situation, which might confer a sense of self-efficacy and allow participants to feel good about the self. Indeed, in the positive experiences sharing condition, participants often mentioned positive emotions of the self after fielding difficult calls. Two representative responses in this condition were:

> Yeah, me too. It was kind of hard handling the calls unless I could actually solve the problem and help in some way. Yeah so I was proud of that.

> I tried keeping my cool for the most part, and I think I did a good job. But, um, at points where if they would say something to me, I would answer back, being nice, but I would still answer them back. For the most part, I thought I was alright.

This finding underscores the importance of constructive sensemaking for finding new meaning in negative experiences as a way to mitigate their negative emotional impact (Rimé et al., 1992). It also resonates with Weick's (1995: 23) observation that sensemaking "occurs in the service of maintaining a consistent positive self-conception."

Directing participants to share their feelings produced a different effect: Instead of reflecting on their self-regulation attempts, participants tended to mention more negative and fewer positive emotions of the self. A typical remark in a feeling sharing session sounded as follows:

> I got really anxious, I was halfway through with her, the woman was like this is ridiculous, I've been on the phone trying to figure this out, she got really frustrated with it. The very first caller, I was only able to get the ID number. And the second call, that said I've been really trying to get a hold of you guys, there were problems with it. So I felt pretty anxious as well even though I was going through all the steps.

> I was so frustrated. I don't think I was successful in any of them. I was successful like in one of them but the third person asked me two questions and the second question I wasn't able to answer them like clearly so like most of the customers they just hung up on me and I was never able to ask the customer satisfaction rating.

Although the reason for this difference is unclear, it is possible that such sharing allowed participants to vent their anger. This explanation and our results are consistent with Pennebaker and Beall's (1986) finding that sharing negative experiences can improve individuals' emotional well-being and produce significant positive health effects. Nonetheless, unlike Pennebaker and Beall, we did not find that sharing feelings was more effective at reducing anger than was sharing facts. Several factors can account for this discrepancy. First, Pennebaker and Beall conducted a diary study on traumatic life events, whereas our study is an experimental simulation of customer service in a laboratory. Because the emotions aroused during a taxing service encounter are much less severe than those that are aroused due to traumatic life events, the psychological process underlying the effect of social sharing on emotional recovery from life traumas may not generalize to that on emotional labor.

Second, it is possible that the social sharing of emotions does not decrease the emotional impact of the episode but, rather, reactivates the feelings that were experienced (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998; Rimé et al., 1998; Rimé et al., 1991). Therefore, sharing one's feelings, despite its long-term benefits on emotional adjustment, could increase arousal and negative emotions immediately after sharing the experience for the first time (Mendolia & Kleck, 1993; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Furthermore, research has shown that emotions are contagious: Emotions shared within a group can influence the moods of the other group members (Barsade, 2002). In the context of the present experiment, social sharing may facilitate emotional contagion; individuals who express their customer-induced irritation and frustration in front of others may spread their anger to other group members. This interpretation is consistent with the qualitative result that participants in the feelings sharing condition also engaged in collaborative communication—they referenced each other's utterances to establish shared meanings. These immediate negative consequences may attenuate the long-term positive effect of social sharing. This may explain why the effects of sharing feelings are not more pronounced than the effects of sharing facts.

Limitations and Future Directions

As a laboratory experiment, the current study has limited external validity and generalizability (Sears, 1986). On the other hand, the controlled environment created in this study allowed us to investigate the effects of social sharing in a customer service context with greater precision. We went to great lengths and took every measure at our disposal to ensure psychological realism, from the elaborate cover story we devised to the thorough training of our confederates. Another limitation of this research is that only college students were sampled. However, a sizable proportion of our sample (40.5%) had customer service experience. That said, future research should examine social sharing in the workplace with actual employees.

Moreover, given the cross-sectional nature of the present study and the reliance on self-report data and discussion transcripts as our dependent measures, these results are vulnerable to common method bias. Longitudinal data using multiple methods are needed to assess the long-term benefits of social sharing. Such data can also address questions about the divergent effects of the types of social sharing on employees' long-term emotional well-being.

Future research should also examine whether social sharing can shield service employees in highly stressful work environments from emotional exhaustion and burnout.

One interesting finding of the present study is that different forms of social sharing may reduce employees' anger for different reasons. Our content analysis of the group discussions showed that participants in the various social sharing conditions displayed very different patterns of social interaction and revealed several possible mechanisms for the buffering effects that depended on the type of social sharing individuals engaged in. Future research needs to systematically confirm the mediating role of these mechanisms.

Other directions for future research may deepen our understanding of the anger reduction function of social sharing. As the name implies, social sharing consists of a social and a sharing component. The social component refers to the experience of interpersonal mutuality in social interactions, and the sharing component refers to the exchange of emotionally relevant information or experiences. On the one hand, it is possible that the beneficial effects of social sharing in the present study come from the experience of interpersonal mutuality during the discussion. However, the fact that similar beneficial effects were obtained in the facts sharing condition, where mutuality in communication was limited, suggests that the experience of interpersonal mutuality is not necessary for the benefits of social sharing to occur. To determine which aspect of social sharing is the source of our results, additional studies are needed to examine the effects of mere expression of feelings without feedback from others (removing the social aspect) as well as the effects of communicating to others about different, unrelated (positive vs. negative) experiences (removing the sharing aspect).

In addition, our results might have been driven by the awareness that other individuals in the discussion group had similar experiences. To examine this possibility, future studies should investigate the effectiveness of social sharing when group members have different experiences (e.g., some group members encounter difficult customers, whereas others experience relatively smooth customer interactions). Of particular interest is a situation in which an employee finds out in the discussion that he or she is the only one who has encountered difficult customers. Will such knowledge increase his or her sense of unfairness and diminish the benefits of social sharing, or will it enhance such benefits because the other group members can provide emotional support?

Another important question for future research concerns the effectiveness of social sharing with friends versus strangers. In our study, participants typically did not know the other members of the discussion group. In the actual workplace, employees are likely to share their experiences with their acquaintances or friends in the organization. Future research should also explore whether opening up to one's coworkers can improve interpersonal relationships and social integration at work (Pennebaker et al., 2001; Rimé et al., 1998).

Finally, the medium of communication might play a crucial role in determining what information is communicated, how it is communicated, and with what consequences. In the current study, we operationalized social sharing as verbal face-to-face communication to approximate a typical sharing context in the workplace (e.g., the break room). However, service representatives can easily engage in written forms of social sharing, for example through blogs or online communities such as "Customers suck" (LiveJournal.com, 2010). Future research should examine the effectiveness of these and other written forms of social sharing.

Practical Implications

The implications of our results for organizational practice are clear: Create opportunities for service employees to engage in social sharing "behind the scenes" (i.e., away from the customers). The measures that should be implemented can be as straightforward as allowing for some break time and formally supporting social sharing about demanding service encounters instead of frowning upon it. In short, the organization should foster an atmosphere conducive to social sharing, which, according to our results, can help employees manage taxing work experiences.

In addition, the results obtained from analyzing the social sharing transcripts suggest that it would be beneficial if organizations trained their service providers in how to engage in social sharing on the job. It is noteworthy that when they engaged in positive experiences sharing, participants mentioned positive emotions, regardless of whether they had encountered neutral or difficult customers, and they also tended to mention fewer negative emotions than did participants who were instructed to talk about their feelings. Therefore, sharing training should teach employees to talk about difficult service episodes in a constructive way, focusing on the positive aspects that can be gleaned from such interactions. Geddes and Callister (2007) suggested that the expression of negative emotions can have positive consequences if it occurs in a socially acceptable manner. Talking about taxing service encounters can potentially counteract the negative repercussions that have been associated with customer service jobs: stress, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, turnover intentions, and turnover (Chau, 2007). In short, supporting and facilitating social sharing on the job can benefit both individual employees and the organization.

Conclusion

In summary, we conducted the first experimental study to examine how the benefits of social sharing unfold after taxing customer service episodes. By focusing on how the negative consequences of emotional labor, particularly surface acting, can be attenuated, the present study adds a missing piece to the emotional labor literature. Our results showed that social sharing is a process that can counteract the emotional hazards of working in customer service. Although we have taken an important first step in understanding the potential benefits of social sharing, much work remains to be done. We encourage other researchers to more thoroughly explore how social sharing functions in the customer service realm.

References

Abraham, R. 1998. Emotional dissonance in organizations: Antecedents, consequences, and moderators. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs,* 124: 229-246.

Ashforth, B. E., & Humphrey, R. H. 1993. Emotional labor in service roles: The influence of identity. *Academy of Management Review,* 18: 88-115.

Bailey, J. J. 1996. *Service agents, emotional labor, and costs to overall customer service.* Poster presented at the 11th annual conference for the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, San Diego, CA.

Barsade, S. G. 2002. The ripple effect: Emotional contagion and its influence on group behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 47: 644-675.

Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Muraven, M., & Tice, D. M. 1998. Ego depletion: Is the active self a limited resource? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 74: 1252-1265.

Bergmann, T. J., & Volkema, R. J. 1994. Issues, behavioral responses and consequences in interpersonal conflicts. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 15: 467-471.

Bono, J. E., & Vey, M. A. 2005. Towards understanding emotional management at work: A quantitative review of emotional labor research. In C. E. J. Härtel, W. J. Zerbe, & N. M. Ashkanasy (Eds.), *Emotions in organizational behavior:* 213-233. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Brotheridge, C. M., & Grandey, A. A. 2002. Emotional labor and burnout: Comparing two perspectives of "people work." *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 60: 17-39.

Brown, A. D. 2000. Making sense of inquiry sensemaking. *Journal of Management Studies,* 37: 45-75.

Bushman, B. J. 2002. Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination, distraction, anger and aggressive responding. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 28: 724-731.

Chau, S. L. 2007. Examining the emotional labor process: A moderated model of emotional labor and its effects on job performance and turnover. *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 68: 63-71.

Chen, P. Y., & Spector, P. E. 1992. Relationships of work stressors with aggression, withdrawal, theft and substance use: An exploratory study. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* 65: 177-184.

Chiu, C., Krauss, R. M., & Lau, I. Y. M. 1998. Some cognitive consequences of communication. In S. R. Fussell & R. J. Kreuz (Eds.), *Social and cognitive psychological approaches to interpersonal communication:* 259-278. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Collins, N. L., & Miller, L. C. 1994. Self-disclosure and liking: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin,* 116: 457-475.

Coopey, J., Keegan, O., & Emler, N. 1997. Managers' innovations as "sensemaking." *British Journal of Management,* 8: 301-315.

Cordes, C. L., & Dougherty, T. W. 1993. A review and integration of research on job burnout. *Academy of Management Review,* 18: 621-656.

Côté, S., & Morgan, L. M. 2002. A longitudinal analysis of the association between emotion regulation, job satisfaction, and intentions to quit. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 23: 947-962.

Cropanzano, R., Howes, J. C., Grandey, A. A., & Toth, P. 1997. The relationship of organizational politics and support to work behaviors, attitudes, and stress. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 18: 159-180.

Cropanzano, R., Weiss, H. M., Suckow, K. J., & Grandey, A. A. 2000. Doing justice to workplace emotion. In N. Ashkanasy, C. Härtel, & W. Zerbe (Eds.), *Emotions in the workplace: Research, theory, and practice:* 49-62. Westport, CT: Quorum.

Cutcher, L. 2004. *Banking on the customer: Customer relations, employment relations, and worker identity in the Australian retail banking industry*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Sydney, Australia.

Diefendorff, J. M., & Gosserand, R. 2003. Understanding the emotional labor process: A control theory perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 24: 945-959.

Diefendorff, J. M., & Richard, E. 2003. Antecedents and consequences of emotional display rule perceptions. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 88: 284-294.

Dietz, J., Pugh, S. D., & Wiley, J. W. 2004. Service climate effects on customer attitudes: An examination of boundary conditions. *Academy of Management Journal,* 47: 81-92.

Dollard, M. F., Dormann, C., Boyd, C. M., Winefield, H. R., & Winefield, A. H. 2003. Unique aspects of stress in human service work. *Australian Psychologist,* 38: 84-91.

Erera, I. P. 1992. Social support under conditions of organizational ambiguity. *Human Relations,* 45: 247-264.

Festinger, L. 1957. *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Finkenauer, C., & Rimé, B. 1998. Keeping emotional memories secret: Health and subjective well-being when emotions are not shared. *Journal of Health Psychology,* 3: 47-58.

Fitness, J. 2000. Anger in the workplace: An emotion script approach to anger episodes between workers and their superiors, co-workers, and subordinates. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 21: 147-162.

Fox, S., & Spector, P. E. 1999. A model of work frustration-aggression. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 20: 915-932.

Geddes, D., & Callister, R. R. 2007. Crossing the line(s): A dual threshold model of anger in organizations. *Academy of Management Review,* 32: 721-746.

Giardini, A., & Frese, M. 2008. Linking service employees' emotional competence to customer satisfaction: A multilevel approach. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 29: 155-170.

Gibson, D. E., & Callister, R. R. 2010. Anger in organizations: Review and integration. *Journal of Management,* 36: 66-93.

Gioia, D. A., & Chittipeddi, K. 1991. Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal,* 12: 433-448.

Gioia, D. A., Thomas, J. B., Clark, S. M., & Chittipeddi, K. 1994. Symbolism and strategic change in academia: The dynamics of sensemaking and influence. *Organizational Science,* 5: 363-383.

Glomb, T. 2002. Workplace anger and aggression: Informing conceptual models with data from specific encounters. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology,* 7: 20-36.

Goldberg, L. S., & Grandey, A. A. 2007. Display rules versus display autonomy: Emotion regulation, emotional exhaustion, and task performance in a call center simulation. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology,* 12: 301-318.

Grandey, A. A. 2000. Emotion regulation in the workplace: A new way to conceptualize emotional labor. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology,* 5: 95-110.

Grandey, A. A. 2003. When the "show must go on": Surface acting and deep acting as determinants of emotional exhaustion and peer-rated service delivery. *Academy of Management Journal,* 46: 86-96.

Grandey, A. A., Dickter, D. N., & Sin, H.-P. 2004. The customer is not always right: Customer aggression and emotion regulation of service employees. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 25: 397-418.

Grandey, A. A., Tam, A. P., & Brauburger, A. L. 2002. Affective States and traits in the workplace: Diary and survey data from young workers. *Motivation and Emotion,* 26: 31-55.

Gross, J. J. 1998. Antecedent- and response-focused emotion regulation: Divergent consequences for experience, expression, and physiology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 74: 224-237.

Halbesleben, J. R. B. 2006. Sources of social support and burnout: A meta-analytic test of the conservation of resources model. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 91: 1134-1145.

Harber, K. D., & Cohen, D. J. 2005. The emotional broadcaster theory of social sharing. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology,* 24: 382-400.

Hemenover, S. H. 2003. The good, the bad, and the healthy: Impacts of emotional disclosure of trauma on resilient self-concept and psychological distress. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 29: 1236-1244.

Hochschild, A. R. 1983. *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jeong, H.-S., & Brower, R. S. 2008. Extending the present understanding of organizational sensemaking: Three stages and three contexts. *Administration and Society,* 40: 223-252.

Judge, T. A., Woolf, E. F., & Hurst, C. 2009. Is emotional labor more difficult for some than for others? A multi-level, experience-sampling study. *Personnel Psychology,* 62: 57-88.

LiveJournal, Inc. (2009). *Customers suck.* Retrieved December 9, 2009, from http://community.livejournal.com/customers_suck

Luminet, O., Bouts, P., Delie, F., Manstead, A. S. R., & Rimé, B. 2000. Social sharing of emotion following a negatively valenced situation. *Cognition and Emotion,* 14: 661-688.

Meisiek, S. 2002. *Social sharing of emotion in strategic adaptation: Evidence from a small business venture.* Unpublished manuscript, Stockholm School of Economics, Stockholm.

Meisiek, S., & Yao, X. 2005. Nonsense makes sense: Humor in social sharing of emotion at the workplace. In C. E. J. Haertel, W. J. Zerbe, & N. M. Ashkanasy (Eds.), *Emotions in organizational behavior:* 143-165. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Mendolia, M., & Kleck, R. E. 1993. Effects of talking about a stressful event on arousal: Does what we talk about make a difference? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 64: 283-292.

Morris, J. A., & Feldman, D. C. 1996. The dimensions, antecedents and consequences of emotional labor. *Academy of Management Review,* 21: 986-1010.

Paivio, A. 1986. *Mental representations: A dual coding approach.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Panagopoulou, E., Maes, S., Rimé, B., & Montgomery, A. 2006. Social sharing of emotion in anticipation of cardiac surgery: Effects on preoperative distress. *Journal of Health Psychology,* 11: 809-820.

Pennebaker, J. W. 1985. Traumatic experience and psychosomatic disease: Exploring the roles of behavioral inhibition, obsession and confiding. *Canadian Psychology,* 26: 82-95.

Pennebaker, J. W. 1989. Confession, inhibition, and disease. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 22): 211-244. New York: Academic Press.

Pennebaker, J. W. 1990. *Opening up: The healing powers of confiding in others*. New York: William Morrow.

Pennebaker, J. W., & Beall, S. K. 1986. Confronting a traumatic event: Toward an understanding of inhibition and disease. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology,* 95: 274-281.

Pennebaker, J. W., Zech, E., & Rimé, B. 2001. Disclosing and sharing emotion: Psychological, social, and health consequences. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, & H. Schut (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: Consequences, coping, and care:* 517-544. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Rafaeli, A., & Sutton, R. I. 1987. Expression of emotion as part of the work role. *Academy of Management Review,* 12: 23-37.

Richards, J. M., & Gross, J. J. 1999. Composure at any cost? The cognitive consequences of emotion suppression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 25: 1033-1044.

Rimé, B. 1987. *Le partage social des émotions* [Social sharing of emotions]. Paper presented at the Symposium on Social Psychology and the Emotions, Maison des Sciences de l'Hommes, Paris, France.

Rimé, B. 2007. The social sharing of emotion as an interface between individual and collective processes in the construction of emotional climates. *Journal of Social Issues,* 63: 307-322.

Rimé, B., Finkenauer, C., Luminet, O., Zech, E., & Philippot, P. 1998. Social sharing of emotion: New evidence and new questions. *European Review of Social Psychology,* 9: 145-189.

Rimé, B., Mesquita, B., Philippot, P., & Boca, S. 1991. Beyond the emotional event: Six studies on the social sharing of emotion. *Cognition and Emotion,* 5: 435-465.

Rimé, B., Philippot, P., Boca, S., & Mesquita, B. 1992. Long-lasting cognitive and social consequences of emotion: Social sharing and rumination. In W. Stroebe & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *European review of social psychology* (Vol. 3): 225-258. Chichester, UK: John Wiley.

Rupp, D. E., McCance, A. S., Spencer, S., & Sonntag, K. 2008. Customer (in)justice and emotional labor: The role of perspective taking, anger, and emotional regulation. *Journal of Management,* 34: 903-924.

Rupp, D. E., & Spencer, S. 2006. When customers lash out: The effects of customer interactional injustice on emotional labor and the mediating role of discrete emotions. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 91: 971-978.

Rusting, C. L., & Nolen-Hoeksema, S. 1998. Regulating responses to anger: Effects of rumination and distraction on angry mood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 74: 790-803.

Salanova, M., Agut, S., & Peiro, J. M. 2005. Linking organizational resources and work engagement to employee performance and customer loyalty: The mediation of service climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 90: 1217-1227.

Schaubroeck, J., & Jones, J. R. 2000. Antecedents of workplace emotional labor dimensions and moderators of their effects on physical symptoms. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 21: 163-183.

Schneider, B. 1987. The people make the place. *Personnel Psychology,* 40: 437-453.

Schneider, B., Holcombe, K. M., & White, S. S. 1997. Lessons learned about service quality: What it is, how to manage it, and how to become a service quality organization. *Consulting Psychology Journal,* 49: 35-50.

Schooler, J. W., & Engstler-Schooler, T. Y. 1990. Verbal overshadowing of visual memories: Some things are better left unsaid. *Cognitive Psychology,* 22: 36-71.

Schooler, J. W., Fiore, S. M., & Brandimonte, M. A. 1997. At a loss from words: Verbal overshadowing of perceptual memories. In D. Medin (Ed.), *Handbook of learning and motivation:* 293-334. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Schooler, J. W., Ohlsson, S., & Brooks, K. 1993. Thoughts beyond words: When language overshadows insight. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General,* 122: 166-183.

Schooler, J. W., Ryan, R. S., & Reder, L. M. 1996. The costs and benefits of verbally rehearsing memory for faces. In D. Herrmann, M. K. Johnson, C. McEvoy, C. Hertzog, & P. Hertel (Eds.), *Basic and applied memory: New findings:* 51-65. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Schwarzer, R., & Leppin, A. 1989. Social support and health: A meta-analysis. *Psychology and Health,* 3: 1-15.

Sears, D. O. 1986. College sophomores in the laboratory: Influences of a narrow data base on social psychology's view of human nature. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 51: 515-530.

Silver, R. L., Boon, C., & Stones, M. H. 1983. Searching for meaning in misfortune: Making sense of incest. *Journal of Social Issues,* 39: 81-102.

Singh-Manoux, A., & Finkenauer, C. 2001. Cultural variations in social sharing of emotions: An intercultural perspective. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology,* 32: 647-661.

Spencer, S., & Rupp, D. E. 2009. Angry, guilty, and conflicted: Injustice toward coworkers heightens emotional labor through cognitive and emotional mechanisms. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 94: 429-444.

Spielberger, C. D. 1999. *Staxi-2: State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2.* Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. 2000. *The emergent organization: Communication as its site and surface.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tolich, M. B. 1993. Alienating and liberating emotions at work. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 22: 361-381.

Totterdell, P., & Holman, D. 2003. Emotion regulation in customer service roles: Testing a model of emotional labor. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology,* 8: 55-73.

Van Maanen, J., & Kunda, G. 1989. Real feelings: Emotional expression and organizational culture. *Research in Organizational Behavior,* 11: 43-103.

Viswesvaran, C., Sanchez, J. I., & Fisher, J. 1999. The role of social support in the process of work stress: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 54: 314-334.

Volkema, R. J., & Bergmann, T. J. 1989. Interpersonal conflict at work: An analysis of behavioral responses. *Human Relations,* 42: 757-770.

Volkema, R. J., Farquhar, K., & Bergmann, T. J. 1996. Third-party sensemaking in interpersonal conflicts at work: A theoretical framework. *Human Relations,* 49: 1437-1454.

Weick, K. E. 1995. *Sensemaking in organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. 2005. Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science,* 16: 409-421.

Weiss, H. M., Suckow, K., & Cropanzano, R. 1999. Effects of justice conditions on discrete emotions. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 84: 786-794.

Wilhelm, C. C., Herd, A. M., & Steiner, D. D. 1993. Attributional conflict between managers and subordinates: An investigation of leader-member exchange effects. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 14: 531-544.

Wilson, T. D., & Schooler, J. W. 1991. Thinking too much: Introspection can reduce the quality of preferences and decisions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 60: 181-192.