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THE EFFECTS OF CUSTOMER PERSONALITY TRAITS ON THE DISPLAY OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS

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We extended past research on the display of positive emotions within customer service settings by focusing on customer traits. Adopting an emotional contagion perspective, we found that customer traits relate to the display of positive emotions by the service provider. This display of positive emotions was also found to relate to customer satisfaction. Implications for emotion management and service personnel training are discussed.

The present study presents evidence that customers shape their own service experiences through their traits and through the display of positive emotions by service providers. The field of emotion management has concentrated on service providers' display of positive emotions to customers (e.g., Pugh, 2001; Rafaeli, 1989). Rafaeli and her colleagues proposed and tested several situational demands that affected the display of positive emotions (Rafaeli, 1989; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989, 1990). Personal characteristics of the service providers, such as personality traits, were also proposed to affect the display of positive emotions (Rafaeli, 1989). The focus of the present study is on service providers and how organizations can create environments that induce pleasant service encounters.

In this study, we propose that customer characteristics, in particular, customer personality traits, play a role in the service experience, since customers can affect service delivery process and outcomes (Lovelock & Young, 1979; Normann, 1991). Research in marketing has explored the impact of customer behaviors on service delivery (e.g., Bettencourt, 1997) and the impact of customer affective responses toward service providers (Jayanti, 1996). However, the relationship of customer traits with the behaviors of service providers is not well understood. A service interaction is dyadic and reciprocal. As is depicted in Weick's (1996) "double interact," what an individual first says is followed by the response of another, which is then followed by the response of the first person. We therefore theorized that both the service provider and the customer affect each service interaction. Research on "emotional contagion" has also shown that exposure to images of a person displaying positive or negative emotions can result in a corresponding change in the emotional state of the observer (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Wild, Erb, & Bartels, 2001). Therefore, the focus on the present study is on customer traits and the role they play in service encounters.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Emotional labor is the act of expressing socially desired emotions during service transactions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). The focus is on employee behavior expressed through tone of voice, facial expression, and spoken words, such as words of thanks (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Different forms of expressed emotions are required for different occupations (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991). In most service encounters, employees are expected to display positive emotions toward customers, regardless of actual emotions felt. Using McDonalds as an example, Gutek (2000) described the encounter between the customer and service provider as one in which the types of emotions that service employees display to customers, such as greeting and smiling, are usually prescribed during training and reinforced by supervisors. Rafaeli and Sutton (1989) asserted that, despite organizationally sanctioned behavioral norms, societal and occupational norms and service provider characteristics also affect employee-expressed emotions.

We assert that brief encounters, such as interactions in service encounters, can affect outcomes

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meaningful to service organizations such as fast-food restaurants. Research in social and clinical psychology has shown that "thin slices of behavior," encounters as short as 30 seconds, can accurately predict important outcomes (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992, 1993). In particular, Ambady and Rosenthal (1993) presented silent videos, ranging in duration from 6 to 30 seconds, of college teachers' nonverbal behaviors to groups of participants and found that evaluations of these nonverbal behaviors were strongly related to outcome variables, such as evaluations of teacher performance made at the end of the semester. In a similar vein, although the interactions in service encounters are scripted and short, customers, through their expressive behavior, lead service providers to attribute characteristics to them.

The present study extended previous work by examining the relationship of customer traits with the display of positive emotions of service employees and the relationship between displays of positive emotions and customer evaluation of service encounters. Specifically, the study explored the relationship for both customer traits that promote the display of positive emotions and those that inhibit these displays. Past research on employee traits has mostly focused on traits that promote the displays of positive emotions, probably because the focus was on service employees' need to control the display of negative emotions, despite how they truly feel. There is clearly some asymmetry between the types of emotions that customers can display toward service employees and the types of emotions that service employees can display toward customers. The service employee who is reluctant to express positive emotion may be able to choose to be neutral. However, displaying negative emotions is usually not an option for service employees.

Customer Agreeableness and Customer Satisfaction

Although there are several positive personality traits that could be investigated in a service context, we chose agreeableness, since the focus of agreeableness is maintaining harmonious relations. *Agreeableness* refers to an individual's propensity to defer to others. The secondary traits underlying agreeableness are kindness, warmth, sympathy, and sensitivity (Saucier, 2002). Whether it is the service provider or the customer who displays agreeableness in a service context, a display of this trait will promote the harmonious relationship that is of primary importance in this context. Customers high in agreeableness strive to maintain good social relations and are by nature courteous, good-natured, cheerful, and tolerant (Costa & McCrae, 1985). In a service interaction, highly agreeable customers will elicit positive emotion displays by service providers. In addition, individuals high in agreeableness regulate their own emotions, especially during "negative-emotion situations" (Tobin, Graziano, Vanman, & Tassinary, 2000). Therefore, even if a service provider is not pleasant or a customer does not feel positive at the moment of interaction, a customer high in agreeableness will exert effort to control his or her emotions to maintain good social relations.

According to research on emotional contagion, good cheer expressed by a service provider high in agreeableness in turn increases the likelihood that a customer will report a positive service encounter (Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001). The highly agreeable customer, upon the display of positive emotions by a service provider, will be satisfied with the service experience and evaluate the service provider in a favorable light (Brown & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001). Supporting our assertion on the interaction between service provider and customer is Weick's (1996) work on double interacts. From this perspective, an agreeable customer is likely to elicit a pleasant response from a service provider that is related to the customer's higher satisfaction with the service provider.

Hypothesis 1. Customer agreeableness is positively related to customer satisfaction, and this relationship is mediated by service provider display of positive emotions.

Customer Negative Affectivity and Customer Satisfaction

Negative affectivity is a general dimension of subjective distress that includes a variety of aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, and disgust (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Among negative emotion traits, we chose negative affectivity over neuroticism as negative affectivity is characterized by a general tendency to view the world and oneself negatively (Brief, Butcher, & Roberson, 1995). This negative cognitive orientation can lead to unpleasant encounters in which service providers display less positive emotions, by which we mean neutral and mildly negative emotions. Although neuroticism is a negative emotional trait, it is a "superfactor" and includes other characteristics, such as anxiety and shyness (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991), that may not lead to the display of less positive emotions by service providers.

Individuals with high levels of negative affectivity are likely to be angry, tense (Diener & Emmon,

1985), contentious, and complaining (Watson & Clark, 1984). A customer with high negative affectivity is more likely than are other individuals to antagonize a service provider, and it is less pleasant for the service provider to interact with this customer. The service provider is likely to experience emotional dissonance between how he or she feels and organizationally sanctioned emotional expressions. Therefore, more effort is required to express these sanctioned expressions (Morris & Feldman, 1996). The result is lower levels of good cheer displayed by the service provider.

The lower levels of good cheer displayed by service providers are in turn related to customers' adverse evaluations of their service encounters. Individuals with low negative affectivity tend to be more composed (Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky, 1993) and more resilient to life's daily irritations and frustrations (Watson & Clark, 1984). These customers are less likely to irritate service providers than are those with high negative affectivity. Thus, service providers need to put forth less effort to express positive emotions. Here, we propose that the processes of double interact and emotional contagion work to elicit positive emotions from service providers, which mediate the customer trait–customer satisfaction relationship.

Hypothesis 2. Customer negative affectivity is negatively related to customer satisfaction, and this relationship is mediated by service provider display of positive emotions.

METHODS

Sample and Research Instruments

Service providers (cashiers) of two major fast-food chains in Singapore that sold mainly hamburgers were observed in January and early February 2002. To control differences in location, we chose sites located close together, either in the same shopping mall or across the road from each other. To obtain a wider range of customers from the Singapore population, we selected six outlets (three from each chain) in each of four areas (central Singapore and its northern, eastern, and western suburbs) for a total of 24 outlets (3 outlets $\times$ 2 chains $\times$ 4 regions). A pilot study was conducted prior to the actual data collection.

In total, 520 transactions involving 175 service providers were observed. We also collected data from the customers of the outlets via a survey, attempting to match the customers to the 520 observations. We were able to match 432 surveys, thus obtaining a customer response rate of 83 percent. The research assistants who observed and coded the service interactions also noted gender and ethnic group for all 520 customers observed; membership in one of the three major ethnic groups in Singapore (Chinese, Malay, and Indian) could be visually ascribed. In addition, the research assistants estimated the age of each customer. A series of *t*-tests indicated no significant differences in gender, ethnic group, and age between customers who responded to the survey and those who did not.

We used both unobtrusive observations and short surveys in the present study. We obtained data on the service providers' displays of positive emotions in the service interactions through unobtrusive observations to reduce the possibility of deliberate display of more positive emotions by service providers under direct observation. Self-report surveys were administered to assess customers' personality traits and their satisfaction with the service providers with whom they interacted.

Procedures

Pilot study. We conducted a pilot study to establish the reliability of the observational measure for the actual study, following Rafaeli and Sutton (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). Two research assistants who were unaware of the study's objectives were trained to code the observations at one outlet of each of the two fast-food chains. The training was aimed at familiarizing the research assistants with the process and the "peculiarities of the recording task" (Krippendorff, 1980: 72) and at minimizing error variance caused by observer heterogeneity. The two outlets used in this pilot study were not included in the actual study.

To calculate interrater reliability and thus establish consistency, we used Perreault and Leigh's (1989) measure of reliability, a modification of Cohen's kappa, a widely used coefficient of interjudge reliability. Calculation is based on an explicit model of the level of agreement that might be expected given a true (population) level of reliability. This index can result in reliability values between 0.0 and 1.0; for this sample, the values were between .82 and .90, an acceptable level of reliability.

Data collection. Both research assistants visited each outlet at the same time and coded the same interactions independently. Interactions between service providers and customers were observed first, and customers were subsequently asked to complete a short survey. The techniques used to observe the subjects were modeled closely on those formulated by Rafaeli and Sutton (Rafaeli, 1989; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). The research assistants observed three to six service providers at each outlet to reduce the dependency of observations on one

service provider. The variables that the assistants coded included customer demand, store busyness, service provider display of positive emotions, and customer demographic characteristics. The number of transactions coded was spread evenly throughout the day (into three shifts, morning, afternoon, and evening) as a means to control for fluctuations of service provider emotions during the day. The research assistants waited until customers had finished their meals before approaching them outside the outlets to complete the survey. The customers were offered an incentive of two Singapore dollars (approximately US $1.20) to either keep or donate to charitable organizations. Of the 432 customers who completed the survey, 311 (72%) donated the money to charity. The survey measured a customer's satisfaction with the service provider with whom he or she had interacted and the customer traits of agreeableness and negative affectivity. Customers were given a cover letter, printed on the official stationery of the university that supported the study, stating the purpose of the study and assuring confidentiality. The letter also gave contact information for all the authors of the present study. All the items in the survey were measured on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5, "strongly agree."

Variables

Mediating variable. *Display of positive emotions* (α = .90), defined as the extent to which service providers displayed warmth and friendliness to customers, was measured with six items. The first four items measured the mechanics of displayed positive emotions: greeting, eye contact, smiling, and thanking (Rafaeli, 1989; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). The other two items, attentiveness and pleasantness, were also developed by Rafaeli and Sutton (1990), and took into account the many nuances of emotions that could not be captured by the mechanics of displayed emotions.

Two of the first four items, greeting and thanking, referred to verbal behavior, and smiling and eye contact were nonverbal behaviors. For these items, any portrayal of each behavior was coded 1, whereas the absence of the behavior was coded 0. *Greeting* was defined as opening statements such as "Hello," "Good morning," "Good afternoon," "Good evening," or a similar operative initiated by the service provider. *Eye contact* was defined as the service provider's turning of face and looking directly at the customer while interacting with him or her. A direct gaze by the service provider was considered a genuine effort to establish eye contact. *Smiling* was defined as a noticeable upturn of the lips (Pugh, 2001; Tidd & Lockard, 1978; Tsai, 2001). Finally, *thanking* was defined as the service provider's offer of a polite separation comment to indicate the end of the transaction. A simple "Thank you," or a similar expression as well as "Have a nice day" was acceptable.

Attentiveness was defined as the degree to which the service provider provided what the customer asked for; it tapped a task-related aspect of displayed emotions. *Pleasantness*, on the other hand, was defined as the degree to which the service provider's actions toward the customer promoted a friendly interaction or demonstrated a positive attitude (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990). These two variables were measured on a six-point scale ranging from 1, "not pleasant or attentive," to 6, "very pleasant or attentive."

We standardized each of the six items before combining them to form a single index for the display of positive emotions.

Dependent variable. *Customer satisfaction with service provider* (α = .82) was measured with two items adapted from Winsted (1997): "I feel the cashier did a good job in attending to my needs" and "I am satisfied with the level of friendliness of the cashier."

Independent variables. As was the dependent variable, the independent variables, customer agreeableness and customer negative affectivity, were assessed after each service transaction. While it would have been possible to collect these data before the service interactions, doing so could have cued customers that they would be observed. Since considerable evidence has indicated that personality is relatively stable (e.g., Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Costa & McCrae, 1986), collecting personality data after transactions was deemed a better option. *Customer agreeableness* (α = .82) was evaluated using the shorter, ten-item version of the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, 1999). Ten items developed by Levin and Stokes (1989) were used to measure *customer negative affectivity* (α = .83).

Control variables. Following Rafaeli and Sutton (1990), we measured two potentially relevant control variables: store busyness and customer demand. *Store busyness* was the total number of people in the store divided by the longest line. *Customer demand* was measured with two items, size of purchase and task-related demands. For size of purchase, a small purchase (less than 6 Singapore dollars, approximately U.S. $3.50) was coded as 1; a medium purchase (6–15 Singapore dollars, approximately U.S. $3.50–8.80) was coded as 2; and a large purchase (more than 15 Singapore dol-

lars, approximately U.S. $8.80) was coded as 3. Task-related demands was coded as 1 if a customer changed his or her order or made additional requests and as 0 otherwise.

As the study was conducted in two major fast-food chains, we conducted a series of *t*-tests to check for differences in displayed emotion levels between service providers in the two chains. No significant differences were found. In addition, no significant differences were found in customers' satisfaction with the service providers across the two chains. Also, no significant differences in displayed emotion levels were found between shifts and between days of the week. Hence, we did not control for these variables in our subsequent analyses.

To alleviate concerns about observing multiple customers interacting with one service provider, we conducted additional analyses in which only one customer was used for each service provider. We selected that customer using a random number generator. For this sample of 175 service encounters with 175 service providers, the reliability estimates and correlations were similar to those for the overall dataset. Confirmatory factor and structural model analyses were also conducted on this reduced sample, and the results were similar to those reported for the overall sample. Thus, we are confident that, despite our observing multiple customers for each service provider, the results are robust.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and zero-order correlation coefficients for the study variables. As predicted, customer agreeableness ($r = .47$, $p < .01$) and customer negative affectivity ($r = -.56$, $p < .01$) were significantly related to the display of positive emotions. The display of positive emotions was related to customer satisfaction with a service provider ($r = .46$, $p < .01$). Although store busyness was negatively related to the display of positive emotions ($r = -.11$, $p < .05$), customer demand (size of purchase and task-related demand) was not. We therefore only controlled for store busyness in all subsequent analyses.

All analyses were conducted using structural equation modeling via AMOS (version 4.0). Construct distinctiveness was established using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA); Table 2 presents these results. Chi-square difference tests indicated that the hypothesized four-factor model (customer agreeableness, customer negative affectivity, display of positive emotions, customer satisfaction with service provider) provided a better fit for the data than (1) the one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 609.99$, $df = 6$, $p < .01$) and (2) the three-factor model that combined the personality traits ($\Delta\chi^2 = 286.37$, $df = 3$, $p < .01$). These results suggested that the constructs used in the present study were distinct.

We followed Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) nested-model approach in testing our hypotheses. We tested four competing models, one fully mediated and three partially mediated. The hypothesized fully mediated model was used as the basis for the nested-model comparison, whereby we relaxed successive paths and examined the changes in the fit indexes. The significance level of the change in chi-square between the fully mediated model and the relaxed model reflects the effects of the added paths, providing a test of the model's fit. A nonsignificant change in chi-square suggests that the added paths are not significant and hence provides support for the hypothesized model. Table 3 presents the results of the tests of our hypothesized model.

We found that the partially mediated model with direct paths leading from the personality variables to the outcome variables (model 4) compared favorably with the fully mediated model 1 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 49.03$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$). However, model 2 also compared

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities[a]

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Store busyness	1.89	1.10							
2. Size of purchase	1.50	0.61	.11*						
3. Task-related demand	0.01	0.08	−.01	−.07					
4. Customer agreeableness	3.61	0.47	−.02	.05	.06	(.82)			
5. Customer negative affectivity	2.61	0.55	.08	.06	−.09*	−.52**	(.83)		
6. Customer satisfaction	3.61	0.72	−.14**	.01	.08	.46**	−.43**	(.82)	
7. Display of positive emotions	0.01	0.82	−.11*	.04	.01	.47**	−.56**	.46**	(.90)

[a] $n = 432$. Reliabilities are shown in parentheses.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

TABLE 2
Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses of Study Variables[a]

Models	χ^2	*df*	CFI	NFI	PNFI	RMSEA
Null model	14,500.74	105				.56
One-factor model	822.91	76	.95	.94	.68	.15
Three-factor model[b]	499.29	73	.97	.97	.67	.12
Hypothesized four-factor model	212.92	70	.99	.99	.66	.07

[a] The variables were customer agreeableness, customer negative affectivity, service provider display of positive emotions, and customer satisfaction with service provider.
[b] Personality variables are combined.

TABLE 3
Results of Nested Difference Tests[a]

Models	χ^2	*df*	CFI	NFI	PNFI	RMSEA	Comparison	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
Null model	15,132.18	120				.54			
Model 1: Hypothesized full mediating model	419.52	83	.98	.97	.67	.10			
Model 2: Partial mediating model—Agreeableness	372.72	82	.98	.98	.67	.09	Model 2 vs. 1:	46.80**	1
Model 3: Partial mediating model—Negative affectivity	394.29	82	.98	.97	.67	.09	Model 3 vs. 1:	25.23**	1
Model 4: Partial mediating model—All independent variables	370.49	81	.98	.98	.66	.09	Model 4 vs. 1:	49.03**	2
							Model 4 vs. 2:	2.23	1

[a] $n = 432$.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

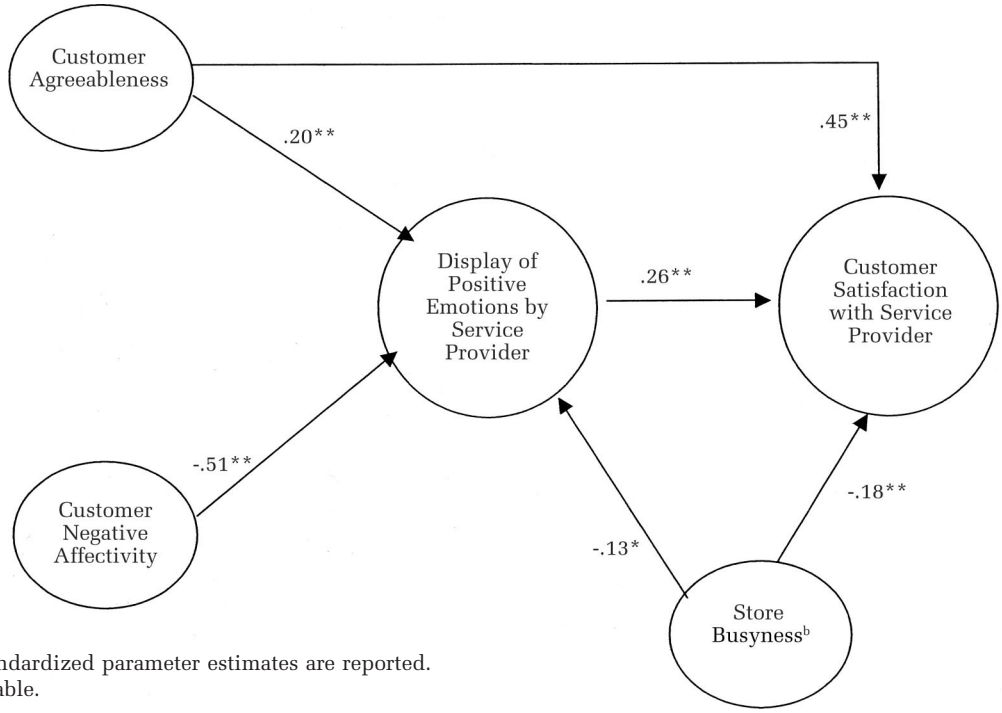
favorably with the fully mediated model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 46.80$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). As models 2 and 4 were nested models, we used the chi-square difference test and found no significant difference between the two models ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.23$, $df = 1$, n.s.). Hence, we selected the more parsimonious model of the two, model 2, as the best-fitting model. The parameter estimates for the paths are presented in Figure 1. As shown in that figure, customer agreeableness was both directly (standardized parameter estimate = .45, $p < .01$) and indirectly (standardized parameter estimate = .20, $p < .05$, via the display of positive emotions) related to customer satisfaction with a service provider, indicating partial mediation. The display of positive emotions was related to customer satisfaction at .26 ($p < .01$).

In contrast, the display of positive emotions fully mediated the relationship between customer negative affectivity and customer satisfaction. The standardized parameter estimate between negative affectivity and the display of positive emotions had a coefficient of −.51 ($p < .01$). Hence, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported, and Hypothesis 2 was fully supported. These results support the assertion that customers' traits are related to the display of emotions by service providers, which is also related to the customers' satisfaction with the service providers.

DISCUSSION

The present study shows that customer traits are related to the displayed emotions of service providers and to customer satisfaction with service providers. That is, customers, through their own personality traits, affected their own service expe-

FIGURE 1
Results of Structural Equation Modeling[a]



[a] $n = 432$; standardized parameter estimates are reported.
[b] Control variable.
$^{**}p < .01$

riences. These findings highlight the reciprocal nature of service interactions and the importance of taking both customers and service providers into account when delivering high-quality service is a goal. Although our data on customer traits were collected with surveys, the data on service provider displays of positive emotions were collected through unobtrusive observation, a much neglected but valuable research tool and method.

Specifically, we found that the trait of agreeableness in customers was positively associated with an increase in the display of positive emotions by service providers. In contrast, the behaviors of customers who scored high on the negative affectivity trait were associated with fewer displays of positive emotions by service providers.

The reciprocal nature of a service transaction has frequently been overlooked in the organization literature. A reason for this reciprocality is the contagion process whereby a service provider who encounters a nasty customer will start to feel less friendly and subsequently will display fewer positive emotions. This reciprocal display of emotions by the service provider reinforces the negative emotions of the customer. This process is similar to the double interact process described by Weick (1996). Although the transaction in a fast-food context is short, previous work on short exposure to the nonverbal behaviors of others has shown that an individual is influenced by stimuli lasting as little as .5 to 6 seconds (Wild et al., 2001).

Although the display of positive emotions mediated the relationship between customer agreeableness and customer satisfaction here, customer agreeableness was also directly related to customer satisfaction. One reason for this relationship may be that highly agreeable customers can tolerate lower levels of service quality. The situation, however, is different for customer negative affectivity; the relationship between negative affectivity and customer satisfaction here was fully mediated by the service provider display of positive emotions. Such results suggest that the contagion process might occur more for characteristics that relate to negative traits than for those relating to positive traits.

Implications

Although service employees are expected to behave consistently with all customers (Gutek, 2000), we found variations in emotional display. This inconsistency can be problematic for managers who want to maintain high service quality levels within their organizations. In general, service providers are trained to be consistently "nice" to all customers. Our results suggest, however, that service providers' emotional displays vary and seem to also

suggest that service providers were unaware of their responses to customers' traits. Our results thus suggest the need for additional training, training that extends beyond being simply nice. For example, service providers could be taught different scripts to be used with customers exhibiting happy, neutral, and unhappy behaviors; these scripts would represent different ways of being nice to different types of customers. The service providers would thus become cognizant of the need to focus on and to match their behaviors to different types of customers.

Another implication for raising and maintaining service levels is to teach service providers emotion management skills. Our results suggest that service providers' understanding of the influence of customer traits on their own emotions is important in this regard. Emotion management training could encompass identifying customer emotions, understanding the relationship of customer emotions with service provider emotions, and then learning how to manage the emotions of both parties to create a pleasant service interaction. By developing such emotion management skills, service providers could better manage customers who do not display good cheer toward them. One caveat to this implication is that fast-food organizations may not want to invest the kind of time and effort suggested in training their front-line employees in emotion management skills, given the low level of education and high turnover among such employees. However, to the extent that the results can be generalized to other service contexts, such as fine restaurants, this implication may be valid.

Another possibility is to select service employees who can handle a wide range of customers. As mentioned earlier, emotional contagion is a reciprocal process. While customers can influence service provider emotions, service providers can also influence the emotions of customers. The results of the present study show a relationship between high customer agreeableness and low customer negative affectivity on the one hand and the display of positive emotions by service employees on the other. Likewise, managers can hire service employees high in agreeableness and low in negative affectivity.

An important implication of our study concerns what individuals, as customers, can do to receive good customer service. Customers who want to receive good service should be cognizant that, to some extent, they can influence positive service outcomes. Although the conventional view of good customer service focuses on how service employees can enhance the service experience, our results indicate that customers may influence the service they receive.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study was conducted in a setting in which transactions between service providers and customers were relatively brief. Therefore, the findings may not generalize to other service contexts. However, these findings can be reasonably extended to settings such as supermarkets and convenience stores, where the service encounters that occur resemble those in fast-food outlets, and the duration of transactions is comparable.

Although common method variance may be an issue for some of our perceptual variables, our use of varying data collection methods (surveys and unobtrusive observations) should increase confidence in the findings. In addition, while our having collected the personality data after the service interactions took place may be another limitation, it is offset by the fact that our observations of the service interactions were unobtrusive.

Operant conditioning, rather than emotional contagion, may account for the present results. From an operant conditioning perspective, positive behavior on the part of service employees is reinforced by an agreeable person and extinguished by a person with high negative affectivity. While this process is likely to happen, the reinforcement cycle occurs over a relatively long period of time and with many different customers. The unobtrusive observations of the present study focused on brief, episodic dyadic exchanges in which a service provider had to react immediately to a customer. Emotional contagion therefore appears to us to be the more likely mechanism here, since it requires only brief exposures, as short as .5 seconds, to operate (Wild et al., 2001). To further investigate the emotional contagion mechanism, a laboratory study could be set up to measure physiological changes caused by emotional exchanges between different personality types in a simulated service encounter. If emotional contagion is indeed the mechanism at work, we would expect to see significant physiological changes as a response to these emotional exchanges.

In the present study, we did not collect information on who initiated the observed service encounters. Theoretically, the first party to act in an encounter is likely to set the stage for the double interact. Thus, a customer with high agreeableness and low negative affectivity may not react as positively as he or she would otherwise if a service provider first conveys a surly attitude. Alternatively, if such a customer initiates the interaction by being positive and agreeable, then the tone of the service encounter should be positive. Capturing

such information in future studies would have implications for the training of service providers.

Pugh (2001) found that the personality traits of employees were related to their displays of emotion. In the present study, we instead examined *customers'* personality traits and their relationship with employees' display of positive emotions. Future research could study the influence of both employee and customer personality traits together to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of a service encounter.

Future studies could also replicate the present study for different types of service relationships. In service relationships in which the duration of the interaction between the service provider and the customer is longer, and in relationships in which the service provider receives a commission, the service provider may put in more effort to manage emotions. Consequently, the relationship between customer traits and the level of good cheer displayed by the service provider may be weaker. Alternatively, a longer transaction may make it harder for a service provider to contain his or her true emotions, so an increase in the length of the transaction studied may thus strengthen the relationship shown between customer traits and the good cheer displayed by the service provider.

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