

1-2017

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Jane Shumski Thomas
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Jessie Olien
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Joseph A. Allen
University of Nebraska at Omaha, josephallen@unomaha.edu

Steven G. Rogelberg
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

John Kello
Davidson University

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Thomas, Jane Shumski; Olien, Jessie; Allen, Joseph A.; Rogelberg, Steven G.; and Kello, John, "Faking it for the higher-ups: Status and surface acting in workplace meetings" (2017). *Psychology Faculty Publications*. 183.
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Faking it for the higher-ups: Status and surface acting in workplace meetings

Jane Shumski Thomas and Jessie Olien
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Joseph A. Allen
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Steven G. Rogelberg
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

John Kello
Davidson University

Abstract

Recent evidence suggests that surface acting occurs in workplace meetings. Even in light of these findings, it remains unknown why employees would choose to surface act in meetings with their colleagues and supervisors, and how this form of emotion regulation affects employees in the short-term. A sample of working adults were asked to report their levels of surface acting during multiple workplace meetings. Results indicate that employees engage in surface acting during meetings, and that their surface acting is positively related to the presence of higher-status attendees in these meetings. Additionally, surface acting during meetings is negatively related to perceptions of both meeting psychological safety and meeting effectiveness. We also highlight the important role of one's job level as a moderating condition when examining the relationship between surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness. Our results suggest that individuals who are higher-up in an organization's hierarchy may perceive meetings as less effective when they surface act when compared to individuals who are in lower levels of the organization.

Keywords: meetings; surface acting; hierarchical status

Faking it for the higher-ups: Status and surface acting in workplace meetings

Meetings are commonplace in contemporary organizations (Cohen, Rogelberg, Allen, & Luong, 2011), with employees attending over 15 million meetings each day in the United States alone (Newlund, 2012). It is the unfortunate but unsurprising reality that people often have negative opinions about workplace meetings, complaining about these meetings being painful drains and productivity killers (Farrell, 2014; Griffel, 2015). Many employees may have personally experienced situations where they chose to “grin and bear it” to make it through a workplace meeting and get back to their work (Shanock et al., 2013).

It is likely that many people can also recall attending a meeting where employees consciously chose *not* to express what they were truly feeling. Employees might, for example, choose to conceal their fears and frustrations regarding organizational changes that are discussed in workplace meetings, in favor of putting on a smile to avoid upsetting or offending others, particularly their “higher-ups”, such as supervisors and other organizational leaders (Bryant & Cox, 2006). Although this example may illustrate an all-too-familiar workplace scenario, and empirical evidence suggests that employees do indeed “fake” their emotions in workplace meetings (Shanock et al., 2013), our theoretical and empirical understanding of *why* employees engage in this behavior in meetings remains limited.

Additionally, recent research suggests that surface acting during workplace meetings, which is defined as the masking of negative emotions and the faking of positive emotions (Grandey, 2003), has negative consequences for the employees who engage in this behavior (Shanock et al., 2013). The sole investigation of surface acting in meetings, however, focused on employees’ “average” or “typical” levels of surface acting across all of their workplace meetings, and only examined the long-term consequences of this behavior. Theoretically, however,

emotion regulation such as surface acting is an experiential process that occurs at the event-level of analysis (Beal, Trougakos, Weiss, & Green, 2006) or the within-event level of analysis (Gabriel & Diefendorff, 2015). This is because emotions are relatively short-lived and occur within a specific episode (Frijda, 1993). “Average” examinations of surface acting and related outcomes are limited because they likely capture participants’ *beliefs* about their affective experiences, and fail to capture truly episodic information about emotion regulation that is performed in specific situations and the consequences of this behavior (Robinson & Clore, 2002). To this end, understanding some of the immediate outcomes of surface acting in meetings, at the event-level, is especially important due to the prevalence and importance of meetings in many employees’ work days.

To address these issues, we develop and test a conceptual model that captures possible event-specific antecedents and outcomes of surface acting in workplace meetings as well as a possible boundary condition of the outcomes of this behavior. Extending current research on surface acting, we argue that differences in hierarchical status (i.e., job level) among meeting attendees influence employees’ decisions to surface act. Specifically, we build on emotional labor theory (Hochschild, 1983) by drawing on the expectation states theory of status and socioemotional behavior (Lawler & Thye, 1999; Ridgeway & Johnson, 1990) and prior meetings theory on status displays and negotiations (Owens & Sutton, 2001). The integration of these theoretical perspectives informs our central prediction that the presence of higher status meeting attendees is positively related to surface acting in meetings for those with lower status.

We also build on what is currently known about the consequences of surface acting in workplace meetings by further clarifying the impact of surface acting on perceptions of both meeting psychological safety and meeting effectiveness, in the short-term, at the event-level of

analysis. More specifically, we extend recent work by Grant (2013), which suggests that employees likely feel safer after surface acting, by empirically examining perceptions of meeting psychological safety as a direct outcome of within-meeting surface acting. Finally, we investigate a possible moderating effect of hierarchical status on the relationships between surface acting and perceptions of both meeting psychological safety and meeting effectiveness.

Theoretical Foundations

Status Theories in Organizational Research

Over the past two decades, management scholarship has witnessed a dramatic increase in the use of status dynamics to explain phenomena occurring both within and between organizations (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014). Status can most simply be defined as a “subjective judgment of social rank based on a hierarchy of values” (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014, p. 290). A number of organizational scholars have drawn from both expectation states theory and status characteristics theory to explain how status judgments form and the effects of status differences on small-group interactions and employee outcomes (e.g., Bendersky & Shah, 2013; Joshi & Knight, 2015). At its core, expectation states theory is focused on explaining how expectations, or the shared beliefs people have about group members (i.e., expectation states), affect group interaction and the emergence and maintenance of group status hierarchies (Wagner & Berger, 1993). According to this theory, expectations form quickly using observable cues, or status characteristics, that differentiate group members from one another. Certain status characteristics are “ascribed”, with individuals having little to no control over such characteristics (e.g., race and gender). These types of characteristics carry with them global expectations that are highly generalizable across a wide range of both tasks and settings (Wagner & Berger, 1997). Alternatively, people can also work to acquire, or achieve, status characteristics, such as job title,

education, and occupation. These specific characteristics denote expectations that are more well-defined and limited to a specific range of tasks or settings (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006).

Job level, which is the focus of the current study, is conceptualized as an achieved status characteristic. While a person's job level within an organization is specific to a relatively small range of tasks and contexts, it is associated with a hierarchical system that is organized around formal titles which are, in turn, also associated with varying levels of power and prestige. Job level is an important status characteristic within organizational settings, as it is not only associated with performance expectations, but also expectations related to access to resources, deference from subordinates, and other workplace privileges (Johnson, 1993; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Hierarchical Status and Workplace Meetings

Workplace meetings serve as an important context for studying hierarchical status differences. They are one of the most commonly occurring organizational events in which employees from different organizational levels are brought together, with the express purpose of facilitating interaction, communication, information sharing, and decision making (Rogelberg, Shanock, & Scott, 2012). Together these characteristics make meetings an important site for interaction between employees from different levels of the organization, and a salient arena for status to be displayed (Owens & Sutton, 2001). Moreover, when a status characteristic is meaningful with regard to a given task or context, it becomes further "activated", increasing its saliency and exerting a stronger influence on group interaction (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006). Because meetings bring employees together for work-related decision making, problem solving, sensemaking, and communication (Rogelberg et al., 2012), this context likely makes job level,

which is achieved on the basis of experience, skill, and expertise, a particularly salient status characteristic.

Surface Acting

Surface acting is a type of emotion regulation in which an individual simulates desired emotions without feeling them (Hochschild, 1983). This form of emotion regulation, a specific type of emotional labor, is most often seen as “putting on an act” or “faking it” (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). For example, employees engage in surface acting when they smile and pretend to be happy, when they are actually angry and frustrated. Surface acting captures two specific response-focused strategies (Gross, 1998a, 1998b), namely, adjusting the intensity of the displayed emotion and faking the desired emotion (Grandey, 2000). These strategies have been linked to negative outcomes in the workplace such as emotional exhaustion, withdrawal, burnout, and job dissatisfaction (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009; Scott & Barnes, 2011).

Surface acting can occur when interacting with organizational outsiders such as customers/clients and also with organizational insiders such as coworkers and supervisors (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007; Shanock et al., 2013). There is a growing body of research that suggests that emotional labor with organizational insiders may be quite prevalent. For example, employees may choose to regulate their emotions with organizational insiders during group-based work (Kim, Bhawe, & Glomb, 2013), in times of organizational change (Bryant & Cox, 2006), and during workplace meetings (Shanock et al., 2013).

Of particular relevance to the study of hierarchical status differences, leadership scholars have proposed and demonstrated that emotional labor is not uncommon in interactions between employees of higher and lower job levels (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Burch, Humphrey, &

Batchelor, 2013; Carlson, Ferguson, Hunter, & Whitten, 2012; Fisk & Friesen, 2012; Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009; Humphrey, 2008, 2012). More specifically, the effectiveness of leaders' emotional labor with their subordinates often depends on the influence that their emotion regulation has on their followers (Burch et al., 2013), while the frequency of leader surface acting has been linked to decreased levels of subordinate job satisfaction (Fisk & Friesen, 2012). Subordinates can also engage in upward emotional labor when interacting with their leaders and other "higher-ups" (Bryant & Cox, 2006; Carlson et al., 2012), which can result in outcomes such as subordinate burnout (Carlson et al., 2012).

Workplace meetings are a particularly complex setting for surface acting because they involve a group of people, in contrast to the one-on-one interactions that are common with organizational outsiders, and because the responses and cues of meeting attendees must be constantly monitored (Burch et al., 2013). To date, however, the antecedents of surface acting in meetings and the effects of this behavior, at the event-level, remain unknown. In the following section, we integrate the expectation states approach with existing work on surface acting with organizational insiders to propose a series of relationships between hierarchical status differences, surface acting, and meeting-specific perceptions in the context of workplace meetings.

Hypothesis Development

Expectation States and Surface Acting

The expectation states theory of status and socioemotional behavior, a subtheory in the expectation states approach, suggests that positioning at the top of a status hierarchy (i.e., high status) affords individuals freedom to display their emotions in group settings. In contrast, those who are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy (i.e., low status individuals) are likely to

conceal their emotions from the group (Lawler & Thye, 1999; Ridgeway & Johnson, 1990). This is because individuals with status characteristics such as high job level, are targets of higher performance expectations (Johnson, 1993; Lawler & Thye, 1999) and typically have more formal power and more control over resources than employees with lower status. As a result, lower status individuals are more likely to pay attention to the emotions of higher status individuals and to carefully regulate their own emotions to avoid upsetting those with access to greater resources (Lawler & Thye, 1999; Liu et al., 2015). Additionally, relative power and status differences in groups can serve as an "activating condition" for a self-reinforcing cycle of subgroup dynamics, feelings of threat and fear, and emotion regulation processes (Hinds, Neeley, & Cramton, 2013).

More specifically, and directly related to emotional labor, lower status individuals are more likely to conceal (Lawler & Thye, 1999; Ridgeway & Johnson, 1990), suppress (Gross & John, 2003), and control their emotions when in the presence of higher status individuals (Diefendorff & Greguras, 2009; Diefendorff, Morehart, & Gabriel, 2010). These behaviors are response-focused emotion regulation strategies that comprise surface acting. Additionally, when individuals perceive that they lack decision making power, as is often the case with lower status individuals, they are likely to engage in emotional labor (Bryant & Cox, 2006). Thus, we propose that employees might "fake" positive emotions and suppress negative emotions in meetings to pay deference to and to avoid upsetting higher status employees (Gross & John, 2003; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). We, therefore, hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: The presence of individuals with a higher job level is positively related to surface acting during workplace meetings for those with a lower job level.

Event-Level Outcomes of Surface Acting in Workplace Meetings

Perceptions of meeting psychological safety. Within-meeting behaviors can influence attendees' perceptions of psychological safety (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). Psychological safety is defined as the perception that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999). In psychologically safe situations, individuals understand what behaviors are acceptable (e.g., asking a question, proposing a new idea, etc.), whereas unsafe situations are marked by ambiguity and unpredictability in the consequences of such actions. In the extant literature, psychological safety has been conceptualized as a group-level climate (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014), an individual-level perception with the perceiver as the referent (Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004), and as an individual-level perception with the climate as the referent (Kark & Carmeli, 2009; Schulte, Cohen, & Klein, 2012). In this study, we adopt the latter perspective and focus on attendees' perceptions of meeting psychological safety.

Drawing from theory in emotional labor, when employees engage in surface acting, they mask felt emotions and display emotions that they do not feel (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). Thus, there is an incongruence between felt emotions and displayed emotions which is termed emotional dissonance (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional dissonance is a negative affective state that results from the tension between one's internal feelings and their external display (Hochschild, 1983). As suggested by Weiss (2002), negative affective states can contribute to negative evaluative judgments in the workplace. Thus, we expect that surface acting in meetings is negatively related to perceptions of meeting psychological safety.

Additionally, the quality of interpersonal interactions within a group is particularly important in establishing psychological safety (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson, Kramer, & Cook, 2004). The ability to display true emotions and to be oneself are

characteristic of high-quality interpersonal relationships whereas inauthenticity is more commonly found in low-quality relationships or interactions with strangers (Clark & Brissette, 2000; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996).

Emotional suppression can also diminish rapport and inhibit the formation of relationships (Butler et al., 2003). Thus, surface acting and its associated inauthenticity and suppression may result in low-quality relational connections among meeting attendees, making the meeting seem less psychologically safe to attendees.

Perceived meeting effectiveness. We also suggest that surface acting is negatively related to perceptions of a specific meeting's effectiveness, in addition to perceptions of meeting psychological safety. Perceived meeting effectiveness refers to attendees' evaluations of the quality of the meeting experience (Cohen et al., 2011). Shanock and colleagues illustrated that average levels of surface acting in workplace meetings are negatively related to overall perceptions of meeting effectiveness (2013). We anticipate a similar pattern at the event-level, in the short term, due to the emotional dissonance that accompanies surface acting and the effect of negative affective states on evaluative judgments (Weiss, 2002).

Based on the above discussion, we offer the following hypotheses:

H2: Surface acting in meetings is negatively related to a) perceptions of meeting psychological safety and b) perceptions of meeting effectiveness for those who surface act.

The Moderating Effect of Job Level

High-status employees are more likely to perceive and experience autonomy and engage in more variable and non-routine behaviors than lower-status individuals (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). This is because high status in groups affords

individuals resources and freedom, whereas low status in groups is marked by low resources, constraints, and inhibited behavior (Keltner et al., 2003). In organizations, hierarchical status often accompanies positions with increased responsibility along with more complex and novel job demands. Thus, it is likely difficult for high-status employees to consistently use the same surface-acting tactics during all of their workplace interactions. When employees engage in surface acting variably in their workplace interactions (i.e. non-routinely), the negative effects of surface acting are more severe (Scott, Barnes, & Wagner, 2012). In line with this reasoning, surface acting among high-status employees has been linked to self-control resource depletion (Yam, Fehr, Keng-Highberger, Klotz, & Reynolds, 2016), which provides initial support for the notion that high-status employees tend to be uniquely negatively affected by the experience of surface acting. Therefore, we suggest that job level moderates the negative relationships between surface acting and meeting-specific perceptions as follows:

H3: Job level moderates the negative relationships between surface acting during workplace meetings and a) perceptions of meeting psychological safety and b) perceptions of meeting effectiveness such that the negative relationship is stronger for those who surface act with a higher job level as compared to those who surface act with a lower job level.

Methods

Sample and Procedure

We recruited participants from a single construction materials company in the southeast United States. We contacted 211 employees who worked in an office environment where workplace meetings were common. First, we asked employees to complete a survey at Time 1 which measured their demographic information as well as their job level and trait positive and

negative affectivity. Of the 211 employees contacted, 113 completed the survey at Time 1.

Participants generated a unique identifier on the background survey that was then entered on the subsequent diary surveys to allow for data combination.

One week later, those 113 employees were asked to complete a total of five diary surveys, one after each of the next five meetings that they attended. Employees were instructed to complete each diary survey as shortly after the workplace meeting as possible. Each diary survey measured the presence of higher status individuals in the meeting, the employee's level of surface acting, the number of people who attended the meeting, perceptions of meeting psychological safety, perceived meeting effectiveness, and the purpose/type of each meeting. All meetings-specific variables, including the outcome variables, were measured immediately following participants' attendance in a workplace meeting. We chose to measure all of the variables in our theoretical model at the same time, as soon as possible after the conclusion of the meeting, in an effort to limit problems such as retrospective bias and/or a failure to recall specific event-level perceptions (Robinson & Clore, 2002).

Those who completed at least five diary surveys were provided with a \$25 gift card. Not all employees completed the requested five diary surveys, however. Of the 113 employees who completed the survey at Time 1, 80 employees completed at least two subsequent diary surveys, which was the minimum number of diary surveys for inclusion in the final sample.

We asked participants to indicate the nature of each workplace meeting and excluded surveys from customer/client meetings. This was done in order to examine the specific effect of relative hierarchical status in meetings with organizational insiders, in addition to removing any confounds that could be introduced in meetings that included customers/clients as well as organizational insiders. A total of sixteen (16) participants completed diary surveys in regard to

customer/client meetings. Two of these participants reported on two customer/client meetings each. Thus, eighteen (18) diary surveys were excluded from further analysis. After the removal of these surveys, all 16 participants who reported on customer/client meetings remained in the sample with at least two other diary reports of non-customer/client meetings.

Therefore, our final sample contained 80 employees and 337 diary surveys (mean number of diary surveys per employee = 4.21 surveys). These 80 participants was 79% male with a mean age of 46 years old and were 91% Caucasian. In order to maintain the sample size, we evaluated the frequency of missing data. Because less than 2% of the data were missing, we replaced missing data with the mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). One participant (with 5 diary surveys) did not indicate their gender. Due to the dichotomous coding of this variable and the absence of a meaningful mean value, this participant was removed from analyses involving gender (i.e. the sample consisted of 79 employees and 332 diary surveys when gender was included).

Measures

Job level and relative hierarchical status disadvantage. We assessed participants' job level and relative hierarchical status disadvantage within each meeting using a semi-objective process that was designed for this study. First, participants were asked to rate their own job level using a one item measure used in previous research on workplace meetings (Rogelberg, Allen, Shanock, Scott, & Shuffler, 2010). The question stated, "Assume there are 5 levels within your organization, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. At the site where you work, what level is your job?" A similar approach, in which job level has been used to represent hierarchical status, has been used in prior research by Aquino and Douglas (2003).

In order to capture each respondent's relative hierarchical status disadvantage within each meeting, we then asked participants to think of each of the attendees in the meeting when

completing each meeting-specific diary survey. Participants were asked to report each attendee's job level using the same question and response options for the self-assessment of job level. For the third step, we created a count variable that represents the participant's relative hierarchical status disadvantage in each meeting by counting the number of people in the meeting, including the meeting leader, who were at a *higher* job level compared to the participant's job level. Scores of relative hierarchical status disadvantage, therefore, represent the number of people in the meeting, relative to the respondent, who were at a higher job level. For example, a value of 5 indicates that there were five meeting attendees who were at a higher job level than the respondent. A value of 0 indicates that there were zero meeting attendees at a higher job level than the respondent.

Surface acting. We assessed surface acting in each meeting with items modified from the scale developed by Grandey (2003) (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to think of their most recent meeting (i.e., an event-specific referent) and indicate how often they engaged in various strategies. Surface acting was assessed using five items ($\alpha = .91$), including "Fake a good mood when interacting with others in the meeting." Items were rated using a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a great extent).

Perceptions of meeting psychological safety. Perceptions of meeting psychological safety were measured with a modified version of the scale developed by Edmondson (1999). Six items were re-worded to reflect the meeting context and were rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (very inaccurate) to 7 (very accurate) ($\alpha = .74$). A sample item from this scale is "The people in my last meeting were able to bring up problems and tough issues".

Perceived meeting effectiveness. We measured perceived meeting effectiveness in reference to participants' most recent workplace meeting with the seven-item scale ($\alpha = .92$)

developed by Cohen and colleagues (2011). Participants were asked to think of the meeting that they just attended and to indicate to what extent they agreed with a set of adjectives. Sample items included “efficient”, “productive use of time”, and “effective”. Reverse-coded items included “wasteful” and “inefficient“. The items were rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Meeting type. Respondents were asked one question regarding meeting type, “What type of meeting was your last meeting?” Options included a) departmental/staff meetings, b) meeting with supervisor, c) meetings with colleagues, d) task force meetings, e) team meetings, f) planning meeting, g) project meetings, and h) customer/client meeting. Meeting type was used to screen out reports from participants who attended customer/client meetings.

Level-1 control variables. The majority of participants reported that their meetings took place on separate days. Specifically, of the 337 reported meetings from the 80 participants, 89% of these meetings occurred on separate days (299 meetings), whereas 11% of the reported meetings occurred on the same day as another reported meeting (38 meetings). The presence/absence of a meeting prior in the day was coded as a dichotomous Level-1 variable for data analyses. Meeting size was assessed by asking the participant to report the total number of meeting attendees, including the meeting leader, in their most recent meeting. We accounted for size to rule out alternative explanations because we operationalized relative hierarchical status via counts of attendees who were at a higher job level within the organization relative to the respondent.

Level-2 control variables. We controlled for trait positive and negative affectivity (PA and NA) because individuals who are high in negative affectivity tend to engage in higher levels of surface acting (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). We assessed trait affectivity on Survey 1

using the PANAS scales developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). The 20-item measure was rated on a five-point Likert-style scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). Participants were instructed to think of the way they feel in general/on the average.” Sample items included “interested” and “nervous”. The alpha coefficients for trait positive and negative affectivity were both .92. In order to isolate the effects of hierarchical status as an achieved status characteristic, we also controlled for gender, race, and age, which are demographic characteristics that are commonly considered ascribed status characteristics.

Results

We used Mplus 6.0 to conduct multilevel regression analysis because the data were multilevel in nature (i.e., multiple diary surveys per employee). The first step in our multilevel analysis was to examine whether there was meaningful variance in the Level-1 variables due to the Level-2 factor (person). In order to test this, we conducted a null model analysis for each Level-1 variable and calculated the ICC(1) values, which indicated that there was significant between-person variation in each of our Level-1 variables with the exception of meeting size and prior meeting in the same day. The ICC(1) value for meeting size was .05 and .03 for prior meeting in the same day. These values indicate that only 3-5% of the variance in these variables are due to Level-2 (i.e., person) factors. Therefore, these variables were omitted in the multilevel analyses. The ICC(1) values are reported in Table 1 and the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all study variables can be found in Table 2.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here

Consistent with other repeated measures emotion regulation research (Scott & Barnes, 2011; Scott, Barnes, & Wagner, 2012), all Level-1 predictors were centered at participants' means (i.e., group-mean centered) and Level-2 variables were centered at grand means. Table 3

presents the results of the multilevel analysis predicting surface acting. We tested the relationship between relative hierarchical status disadvantage and surface acting, while controlling for trait NA, trait PA, age, gender, and race. Relative hierarchical status was positively related to surface acting above and beyond the control variables ($b_{10} = .05, p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 1. In line with previous research, trait negative affectivity was also a significant predictor of surface acting ($b_{01} = .41, p < .05$).

In order to test Hypothesis 2a and 2b, two separate multilevel regressions were conducted with perceptions of meeting psychological safety and perceived meeting effectiveness as the dependent variables. The results of these multilevel analyses are presented in Table 4. Surface acting was a significant negative predictor of perceptions of meeting psychological safety ($b_{10} = -.33, p < .01$) and perceived meeting effectiveness ($b_{10} = -.29, p < .01$) above and beyond the controls, which supports Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Also of note were the significant positive relationships between trait PA and both perceived meeting effectiveness ($b_{02} = .30, p < .01$) and perceptions of meeting psychological safety ($b_{02} = .21, p < .05$). Gender (male), an ascribed status characteristic, was negatively related to perceptions of meeting psychological safety ($b_{04} = -.33, p < .01$).

Finally, Hypotheses 3a and 3b concern the cross-level moderating effect of job-level on the relationships between surface acting and both perceptions of meeting psychological safety and perceived meeting effectiveness. As shown in the bottom of Table 5, job level was not a significant moderator of the relationship between surface acting and perceptions of meeting psychological safety ($b_{11} = -.18, n.s.$). Thus, Hypothesis 3a was not supported. Job level (Level-2) was significantly associated with the Level-1 relationship between surface acting and meeting effectiveness ($b_{11} = -.33, p < .01$), which provides initial support for Hypothesis 3b.

Insert Tables 3- 5 and Figure 1 about here

In order to plot the significant interaction displayed in Figure 1, we used the tool developed by Preacher and colleagues (2006). The plot reveals that as job level increases, the relationship between surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness becomes more strongly negative, which supports Hypothesis 3b. The region of significance on the moderator is -2.93 to -.32, with simple slopes statistically significant outside of that region. This illustrates that, in our sample, the negative effect of surface acting on perceived meeting effectiveness is significant only for individuals with mid-to-higher level jobs because centered job level ranged from -1.47 to 1.53. The simple slope is -.04 at -1SD job level ($p = .75$, not significant.), -.27 at the mean job level ($p = 0$, significant), and -.50 at +1SD job level ($p = 0$, significant).

Discussion

Contributions to Theory

The current study make several contributions to the research on emotion regulation and workplace meetings. First, this study builds on the existing literature on emotional labor by examining surface acting through the lens of the expectation states theory of status and socioemotional behavior. The integration of expectation states theory with the study of surface acting helps to explain why employees may fake their emotions with organizational insiders in certain situations and not others. Our results suggest that surface acting in meetings may be partially attributable to a relative hierarchical status disadvantage, although this effect was small. Of particular importance, the present study examines the influence of hierarchical status disadvantage in a context involving multiple actors with both ascribed and achieved status characteristics. We illustrate that job level is a salient status characteristic that influences emotional labor even in the presence of other real-world contextual conditions and ascribed

status characteristics (e.g., gender, race, and age), which builds on what is currently known about status differences and emotional labor (cf. Diefendorff et al., 2010).

The integration of status theories and emotional labor theories also helped us to illustrate that one's position in the organization's hierarchy (i.e., job level) is a significant moderator of the relationship between surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness. Our results suggest that the negative relationship between surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness, as first identified by Shanock and colleagues (2013), is dependent on one's job level. In the present study, the negative effect of surface acting on perceived meeting effectiveness is significant only for individuals in mid-to-higher level jobs and the relationship between the two variables is more strongly negative for individuals in higher-level jobs than for individuals in mid-level jobs. Thus, this study builds on what we know about the negative consequences of surface acting for employees with differing levels of status, not only for lower-status employees who are exposed to leader surface acting (Fisk & Friesen, 2012), but also for higher-status individuals who engage in surface acting.

In terms of workplace meetings, this study contributes to meetings theory by demonstrating the ways in which meetings can reinforce and maintain an organization's status structure. Previous meetings theory suggests that meetings provide a context through which status is "played and displayed" (Schwartzman, 1986, p. 244). Additionally, prior research on workplace groups has illustrated how power asymmetries and emotion regulation processes are related in a self-reinforcing cycle (Hinds et al., 2013). This study integrates meetings theory and groups research by highlighting the ways in which meetings, through emotional labor, may also reinforce and maintain existing status hierarchies. Specifically, by engaging in surface acting in response to higher status meeting attendees, lower-status employees support the existing status

order by enacting a subdominant role within the group (Jones & Pittman, 1982), and reaffirming the higher status individuals' standing in the existing status hierarchy.

The present study also contributes to the growing body of research on emotional labor with organizational insiders by illustrating that surface acting is negatively related to perceptions of meeting psychological safety. Prior research has suggested that "...both deep and surface acting are likely to increase employees' beliefs that it is safe and worthwhile to speak up, enhancing the probability that they will do so" (Grant, 2013, p. 1701) . Although this causal chain was implied by Grant (2013), only the direct relationship between emotional labor and voice behavior was tested. Our finding that surface acting is negatively related to perceptions of meeting psychological safety highlights the complex relationship between surface acting and subsequent safety perceptions and behaviors in workgroups. In contrast to the line of reasoning provided by Grant (2013), it is possible that in certain situations, employees who surface act feel *less safe* and may, perhaps, engage in less voice behavior. Although voice was not examined in the present study, our research helps to understand the relationship between surface acting and a known antecedent of voice, psychological safety perceptions (Detert & Burris, 2007; Liang et al., 2012). The present study, therefore, sets the stage for future research to examine the mediating role of psychological safety perceptions in the relationship between emotional labor and subsequent outcomes of psychological safety such as voice, learning behaviors (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009), and social network ties (Schulte et al., 2012).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations of the current research. First, there is the possibility of common method bias due to the self-reported measurement of surface acting, perceived meeting effectiveness, and perceptions of meeting psychological safety. However, and in line with the

recommendations of Conway and Lance (2010), we took several steps to address common method bias in this study. Perhaps most important to note is that our outcome variables were perceptual, and thus experienced by the individual, which explains our choice of self-report measures over ratings from other sources (Conway & Lance, 2010). Our underlying theoretical rationale is tied to meeting attendees' emotional labor and their *perceptions* of workplace meetings (e.g., "perceived meeting effectiveness" and "perceptions of meeting psychological safety" in our conceptual model). Additionally, we used measures that were developed and validated in past published research to rule out issues of construct validity and method effects (Conway & Lance, 2010) and we controlled for trait affectivity in our analyses in an effort to, at the very least, partially control for participants' affective response tendencies (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) We also assured participants of the anonymity of all surveys and used a participant-generated unique identifier for matching surveys across time points to limit the effects of social desirability, leniency, and demand effects (Conway & Lance, 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

What could be done in future research to reduce concerns about common method bias would be to use an observational design to measure surface acting. This type of design could preserve ecological validity and generalizability, while also allowing for occurrences of surface acting to be captured in real time. Specifically, observers could note facial expressions (e.g., authentic smiles and fake smiles) to examine the relationship between the hierarchical status of meeting attendees and emotional labor. Prior studies have illustrated that observers can discriminate between authentic and inauthentic facial expressions (Ekman, Friesen, & O'Sullivan, 1998) and that observers can be trained to rate real vs. fake smiles in organizational settings (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, Sideman, 2005).

A second limitation is that we assessed hierarchical status using a measure that asked participants to “assume there are five levels within your organization” and to identify their job level (Survey 1) and the job levels of meeting attendees (diary surveys) in this assumed hierarchy. This measure can be considered a “ranking” measure, which is common in status research (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014). It is possible, however, that certain departments or workgroups may have had more than five levels or less than five levels. Thus, although the limitation of our measure is that the status hierarchy provided by participants may not exactly reflect the structure of the organization in the same way as the formal organization chart, status is theorized to matter to the extent that others acknowledge and perceive relative differences among themselves and others.

A third limitation is that we did not focus on sub-groups within the meeting. It is possible that the formation of sub-groups could influence several variables in our tested model, particularly perceptions of meeting psychological safety. Roussin and colleagues (2016) suggest that identity-based subgroups create “microclimates” for psychological safety. These identity-based subgroups form when people perceive similar others as sharing values/social characteristics. In the present study, it is possible that subgroups formed based on hierarchical status or other status characteristics. Thus, perceptions of meeting psychological safety may have been influenced by the behaviors/experiences of similar others.

Finally, it is also important to note that the generalizability of our findings could be limited by having a predominantly male (79%) sample and by conducting this research in what is most likely a male-dominated organization. Although we were unable to collect organization-level demographic data, our choice of industry (construction materials) is largely male-dominated in the United States. Due to the low percentage of female participants in our sample,

it is likely that a large proportion of the within-meeting interactions occurred between males. Hochschild originally suggested that women are more likely to perform more deferential forms of emotional labor than men (1983). Thus, it is possible that the effects of hierarchical status differences on surface acting during workplace meetings could be even stronger for females than males. It is also possible that male-dominated organizations might have different emotion display rules compared to other organizations.

In regard to future research, it would be fruitful for scholars to examine the relationship between surface acting and psychological safety climate (as a shared, group-level construct). Grandey and colleagues suggested that a shared-group level climate of authenticity (similar to psychological safety) moderates the relationship between surface acting and job burnout by providing self-regulatory resources to employees (2012). Psychological safety may function differently at the group-level, as an antecedent or moderator, and future research could examine this.

We also encourage future research on status, surface acting, and the outcomes of surface acting in meetings to focus not only on face-to-face meetings but also on virtual meetings. Although the present study did not exclusively focus on teams and team dynamics, the ability to effectively manage emotions is one of the most important requirements of successful virtual teams (Ayoko, Konrad, & Boyle, 2012). The communication of emotions in virtual teams, even negative emotions, can help build a sense of camaraderie by developing a shared understanding among team members (Ayoko et al., 2012). Thus, the consequences of surface acting in virtual meetings, particularly in the early stages of a team's development, may negatively affect the team's subsequent goals, processes, and conflict (Ayoko et al., 2012).

Another important future direction would be to examine surface acting throughout all workplace interactions in comparison to the meeting context. Prior research and theory suggests that high-status individuals have greater autonomy (Galinsky et al., 2008) and likely engage in less routine forms of emotional labor (Yam et al., 2016). Our study, however, cannot empirically verify whether high-status employees had greater surface acting variability across all of their workplace experiences compared to low-status employees. Thus, future research could benefit from directly testing the assumption that high-status individuals experience greater surface acting variability in their workplace interactions than low-status employees (Yam et al., 2016).

Lastly, it would also be useful for scholars to examine some outcomes of emotional labor in workplace meetings that are on the “bright side” as opposed to only the negative consequences of this behavior (Humphrey, Ashforth, & Diefendorff, 2015). There are additional variables that may influence the positive outcomes of surface acting in meetings such as the perceived effectiveness of surface acting or positive personality variables such as hope and optimism (Humphrey et al., 2015). For instance, as noted earlier, Grant (2013) found that surface acting plays a central role in voice and is uniquely important to voice for challenging types of interpersonal citizenship behaviors (e.g., speaking up in meetings with high status members). This research suggests that surface acting may be related positively to perceptions of meeting effectiveness if the employee believes that his/her surface acting is effective in displaying context-appropriate emotions.

Practical Implications

In regard to the practical implications of this research, we encourage managers and meeting organizers to be cognizant of the status differences that might be displayed and maintained in meetings and to actively work toward mitigating these differences. For example,

meeting organizers could explicitly explain to meeting attendees that all are equals in contributing to meeting outcomes and/or decisions made in the meeting (Hinkel & Allen, 2013). Meeting organizers could also set ground rules in the beginning of the meeting to promote effective communication processes (Rogelberg, 2006) and to lessen the display of high-status behaviors from certain individuals by encouraging deferent and respectful behavior from all attendees. This can include avoiding interrupting others (Kollock, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1985) and acknowledging points made by other speakers when possible (McLaughlin, Cody, Kane, & Robey, 1981).

Additionally, there is now evidence that surface acting in workplace meetings may have negative consequences for both short-term and long-term meetings-related attitudes (Shanock et al., 2013). Providing instruction and training for employees on how to effectively regulate emotions may prove useful for employees who regularly attend meetings (Shani, Uriely, Reichel, & Ginsburg, 2014). This training may be most important for leaders and for those higher-up in the organization's hierarchy (Edelman & van Knippenberg, in press) due to the more pronounced negative effect of surface acting on meeting perceptions for higher-status employees and because of the known negative effects of leader surface acting on subordinates (Fisk & Friesen, 2012).

Conclusion

As organizations continue to utilize workplace meetings, understanding how status differences among meeting attendees influences the expression and suppression of felt emotions is critical. Our results suggest that hierarchical status differences among meeting attendees may help to explain, in part, why employees choose to surface act in meetings. Our findings also highlight that this behavior has negative consequences for employees in the short term, particularly for individuals who are higher-up in an organization's hierarchy.

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Appendix A

Surface Acting Items

1. Put on an act in order to deal with others in an appropriate way.
2. Fake a good mood when interacting with others in the meeting.
3. Just pretend to have the emotions I need to display in my meeting.
4. Put on a “show” or “performance” when interacting with others in the meeting.
5. Put on a “mask” in order to display the emotions I need for the meeting.

Table 1
ICC(1) values for study variables

	ICC(1)
Relative hierarchical status disadvantage	.27
Surface acting	.50
Meeting size	.05
Perceived meeting effectiveness	.29
Perceived meeting psychological safety	.36
Prior meeting in the same day	.03

Note. Level 1 $N = 337$; level 2 $N = 80$.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Relative hierarchical status disadvantage ^a	1.84	1.45	--										
2. Surface acting ^a	1.69	.54	-.11	--									
3. Meeting size ^a	7.90	3.39	.24*	-.03	--								
4. Prior meeting in same day ^a	.10	.16	-.17	-.11	-.07	--							
5. Trait NA	1.49	.35	.03	.37**	-.02	-.08	--						
6. Trait PA	3.80	.52	.02	-.30**	.17	.06	-.28*	--					
7. Age	46.16	8.73	-.19	-.15	.06	.13	-.08	.10	--				
8. Gender	.80	.40	-.40**	.14	.03	.15	.06	.12	.07	--			
9. Race	.91	.28	-.15	.19	-.03	.15	.16	-.15	.06	.18	--		
10. Job level	3.46	.71	-.43**	.16	.11	.12	.07	-.02	.12	.39**	.28*	--	
11. Perceived meeting effectiveness ^a	3.84	.42	.12	-.38**	.28*	.16	-.12	.37**	.16	-.06	-.06	-.13	--
12. Perceived meeting psychological safety ^a	3.96	.45	.12	-.33**	.23*	-.02	-.12	.22	.20	-.23*	.12	.01	.43**

Note. $N = 80$ (correlations with gender $N = 79$). NA = trait negative affectivity, PA = trait positive affectivity. Prior meeting in same day was coded 1 = yes, 0 = no, gender was coded as 1 = male, 0 = female, and race was coded as 1 = Caucasian, 0 = non-Caucasian. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. (^a Level 1 variables were assessed after each meeting and then aggregated to the individual level for reporting in this table). These correlations are reported in the interest of completeness only and they should be interpreted with caution as the within-person relationships might be masked in aggregated correlations.

Table 3

Multilevel regression results of the relationship between relative hierarchical status disadvantage and surface acting

	<i>b</i>	SE
Intercept (b_{00})	1.69**	.05
<i>Level 2 Predictors</i>		
Trait negative affectivity (b_{01})	.41*	.16
Trait positive affectivity (b_{02})	-.20	.11
Age (b_{03})	-.01	.01
Gender (b_{04})	.18	.14
Race (b_{05})	.19	.20
<i>Level 1 Predictors</i>		
Relative hierarchical status disadvantage (b_{10})	.05**	.02

Note. Level 1 $N = 332$; Level 2 $N = 79$. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Level-1 predictors were group-mean-centered at individuals' means, Level-2 predictors were grand mean centered. Values (b 's) are unstandardized regression coefficients. Gender was coded as 1 = male, 0 = female and race was coded as 1 = Caucasian, 0 = non-Caucasian.

Table 4

Multilevel regression results of the relationship between surface acting and outcome variables

	Perceived Meeting Psychological Safety		Perceived Meeting Effectiveness	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Intercept (<i>b</i> ₀₀)	3.96**	.05	3.83**	.04
<i>Level 2 Predictors</i>				
Trait negative affectivity (<i>b</i> ₀₁)	-.07	.14	-.03	.13
Trait positive affectivity (<i>b</i> ₀₂)	.21*	.10	.30**	.09
Age (<i>b</i> ₀₃)	.01	.01	.01	.01
Gender (<i>b</i> ₀₄)	-.33**	.12	-.12	.12
Race (<i>b</i> ₀₅)	.27	.18	.00	.17
<i>Level 1 Predictors</i>				
Surface acting (<i>b</i> ₁₀)	-.33**	.08	-.29**	.07

Note. Level 1 *N* = 332; Level 2 *N* = 79. ** *p* < .01, * *p* < .05. Level-1 predictors were group-mean-centered at individuals' means, Level-2 predictors were grand mean centered. Values (*b*'s) are unstandardized regression coefficients. Gender was coded as 1 = male, 0 = female and race was coded as 1 = Caucasian, 0 = non-Caucasian.

Table 5

Moderating effect of job level on the relationship between surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness and the relationship between surface acting and perceived meeting psychological safety

	Perceived Meeting Psychological Safety		Perceived Meeting Effectiveness	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Intercept (<i>b</i> ₀₀)	3.96**	.05	3.84**	.04
<i>Level 2 predictors</i>				
Trait negative affectivity (<i>b</i> ₀₁)	-.07	.14	-.03	.13
Trait positive affectivity (<i>b</i> ₀₂)	.21*	.10	.25**	.09
Age (<i>b</i> ₀₃)	.01	.01	.01	.01
Gender (<i>b</i> ₀₄)	-.36**	.13	-.09	.12
Race (<i>b</i> ₀₅)	.25	.18	.05	.17
Job level (<i>b</i> ₀₆)	.05	.08	-.06	.07
<i>Level 1 predictors</i>				
Surface acting (<i>b</i> ₁₀)	-.32**	.08	-.27**	.07
<i>Cross-level predictors</i>				
Job level x surface acting (<i>b</i> ₁₁)	-.18	.13	-.33**	.12

Note. Level 1 $N = 332$; Level 2 $N = 79$. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Level-1 predictors were group-mean-centered at individuals' means, Level-2 predictors were grand mean centered. Values (*b*'s) are unstandardized regression coefficients. Gender was coded as 1 = male, 0 = female and race was coded as 1 = Caucasian, 0 = non-Caucasian.

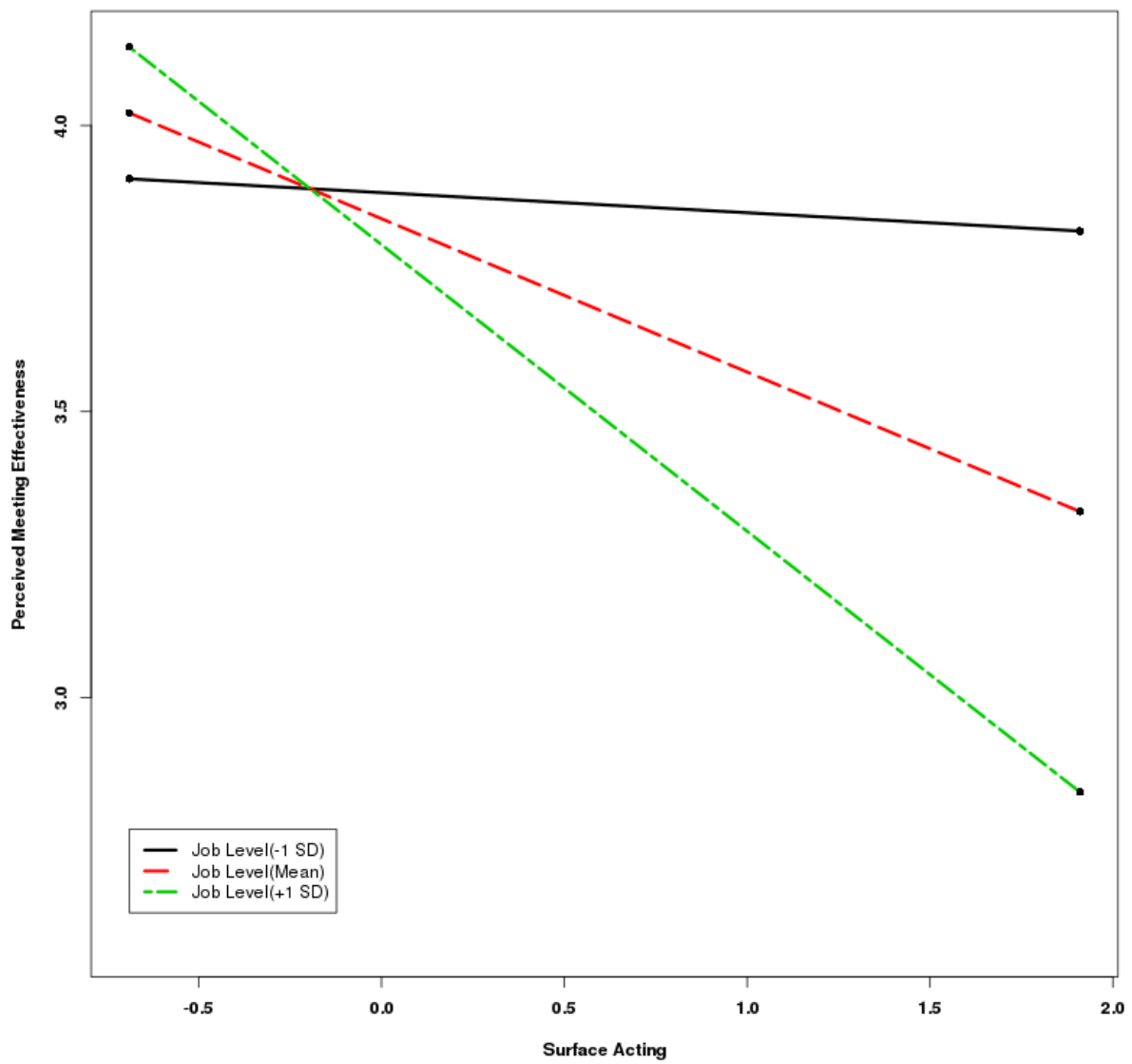


Figure 1. Cross-level interaction plot of the moderating effect of job level (Level 2) on the relationship between surface acting (Level 1) and perceived meeting effectiveness (Level 1).