

Employee Behavior in a Service Providing Environment: An Overall Test of Potential Differences Among Men and Women

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Abstract:

The authors examine the attitudes and behaviors of employees who provide frontline service and address the extent to which relationships vary among male and female employees. The overall model predicts effects of role stress and work/nonwork conflict on customer-contact employees' job performance, job and life satisfaction, and quitting intent. Results of structural equations modeling suggest an important role for work/nonwork conflict overall as well as two areas of interesting variation across gender. Specifically, multisample structural equations analyses suggest that role stress affects female service providers' job performance more negatively than it does males', and that job satisfaction is related more highly to quitting intent among males. Overall, results suggest interesting similarities and differences across gender.

Keywords: service employees | job satisfaction | role stress | job performance

Article:

Researchers increasingly are recognizing important and unique demands and far-reaching consequences associated with the customer–management interface. A significant body of literature addressing affective and behavioral outcomes that result from boundary-spanning employees' stress has emerged (Brown and Peterson 1993, 1994; Lusch and Serpkenci 1990; Singh 1993). Nevertheless, stress-related marketing research focuses primarily on industrial sales and purchasing positions as representatives of boundary-spanning occupations. Far more common in number are customer-contact service providers, who occupy a critical role in heavily trafficked servicescapes including retail stores, hotels, tourist venues, restaurants, and other service environments (Bitner 1992). Male and female frontline service providers are charged with implementing strategic marketing decisions at the exchange point. By carrying out actions at the "critical moments of truth" at which customers and employees interact, these service providers become the most salient and conspicuous indicators of a marketing organization's quality (Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994, p. 95).

The boundary-spanning literature generally has overlooked potentially important moderating factors such as gender (Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads 1996). Because typical frontline service-

providing jobs are occupied by both men and women, service organizations have an interest in research that suggests how male and female employees might respond differently to workplace events. The potential for differing responses to like policies and supervisor actions occurs when a person's job role does not override his or her sex role. Previous studies investigating gender effects generally describe gender-related differences in levels of important organizational constructs, particularly role stress and job satisfaction (Busch and Bush 1978; Lefkowitz 1994; Schul and Wren 1992). However, organizational studies more often are conducted in male-dominant occupations with little consideration of potential gender-based differences (Thomas and Ganster 1995). Therefore, managerial thinking based on descriptive organizational research suffers from a strong agentic bias.

The research presented here expands current knowledge of employee behavior by addressing two relatively underresearched issues. First, an overall theoretical model is tested using a sample of nonmanagerial, frontline service providers. Considering the crucial role these employees play in linking a firm with its customers and thus in building relationships, there is great interest in understanding factors that affect their performance, satisfaction, and quitting intentions. Second, rather than examining differences in *levels* of key constructs across gender, our primary focus is on differences in *relationships* across gender among selected key constructs. Even if men and women report similar levels of a specific construct, there still might be differences in how a construct affects endogenous factors. This study specifically focuses on this potential moderator in a theoretical model that examines role stress consequences. The model operationalizes role stress as two related constructs, role conflict and role ambiguity, and predicts various direct and indirect effects on work/nonwork conflict, job performance, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and quitting intent.

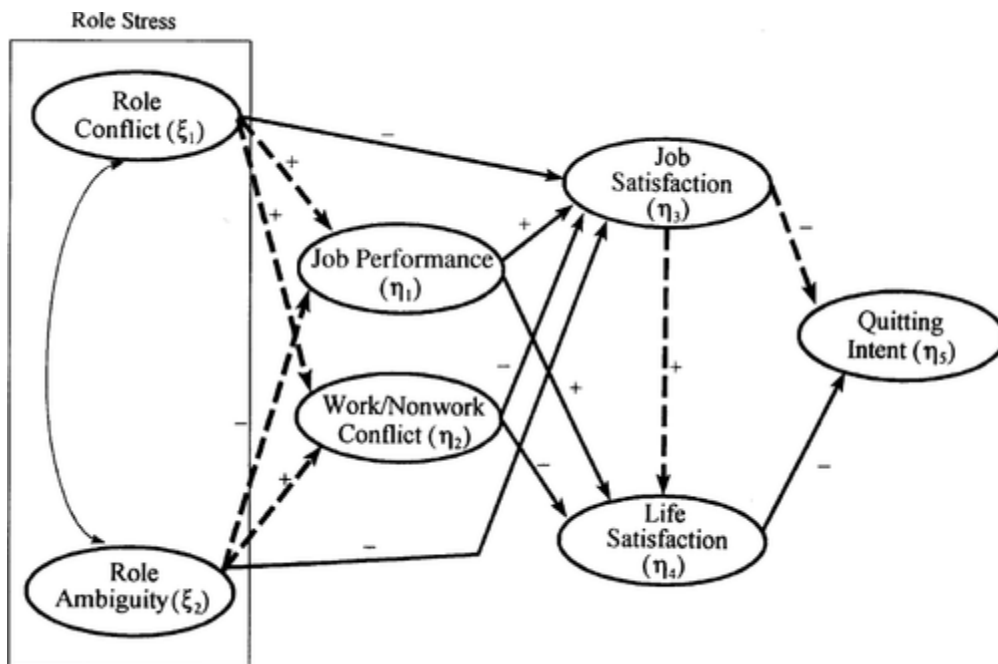


Figure 1 Hypothesized Model of Customer-Contact Service Provider Behavior

Note: Hypothesized direction of relationships indicated by + or -. Dashed lines indicate relationships with hypothesized gender differences.

Service Provider Model Overview

Figure 1 displays the proposed path model. We include these constructs because they are applied widely in organizational research and maximize relevance in this particular context. Given the extensive literature theoretically linking constructs examined in this study (Behrman and Perreault 1984; Good, Sisler, and Gentry 1988; Hartline and Ferrell 1996), a detailed review is not presented. We highlight key rationale and findings subsequently.

In a typical servicescape, service providers believe that rules, regulations, and policies enforced by management and often motivated by cost control are the primary reasons for failing to satisfy customers completely (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990). However, the customer-contact employee, not the decision maker, is exposed to the customer's wrath. Service providers cope by making system "adjustments" to avoid a negative service encounter (Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994; Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990). Appropriate employee adjustments are consistent with empirical results that suggest a positive role conflict–performance relationship in customer-contact settings (Behrman and Perreault 1984; Dubinsky and Hartley 1986; Hartline and Ferrell 1996).

Previous research indicates that stress results in many detrimental effects. Role ambiguity affects both performance and job satisfaction directly and negatively and increases work/nonwork conflict and quitting intent (Behrman and Perreault 1984; Good, Sisler, and Gentry 1988). Role ambiguity is characterized by uncertainty as to expected behavior in common job situations, and it reduces performance through diminished effort and delays in taking action (Brown and Peterson 1994). Stress perpetuates negative affect, lowers positive job appraisals, and results in lower job satisfaction.

Role stress also exerts influence through key facilitating constructs. Both work/nonwork conflict (negatively) and performance (positively) are related to job satisfaction (Bagozzi 1978). The negative feelings associated with the work/nonwork conflict eventually spill over and reduce job satisfaction. Previous empirical research suggests a modest positive, direct relationship between performance and satisfaction (Brown and Peterson 1994).

Job satisfaction and life satisfaction are hypothesized as affecting quitting intent directly (Good, Sisler, and Gentry 1988; Netemeyer, Johnston, and Burton 1990). Low job satisfaction perpetuates negative affective appraisals, which represent threats to a worker's overall well-being and increase his or her avoidance (quitting) motivations (Brown and Leigh 1996). Life satisfaction is perceived as a positive outcome of job satisfaction and a negative outcome of work/nonwork conflict (Adams, King, and King 1996; Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian 1996). A desire to have both constructive work and nonwork lives generates tradeoffs that can be detrimental to overall life satisfaction. For example, extra time at work may mean that an employee cannot maintain an effective exercise program, does not perform well on an exam, or misses a family or social engagement. Therefore, whereas job satisfaction's impact on quitting intent is direct, work/nonwork conflict's effect is mediated by its impact on the employee's life situation, as reflected by life satisfaction. Overall, an important goal of this research is to examine the validity of the proposed model. Thus, the following model suggests a test of the overall model:

H_{om}: The path relationships shown in Figure 1 can be used to reproduce the correlations among the constructs depicted.

The Impact of Sex Roles on Marketing Employees

Previous Organizational Research on Gender Differences

Investigating differences between men and women has not been an overly popular research area for many reasons, including issue sensitivity (Eagly 1987). The lack of popularity contributes to the small number of organizational studies that examine how gender might alter relationships among constructs. Most existing research compares amounts of constructs expressed by female and male employees (Busch and Bush 1978; Schul and Wren 1992; Sigauw and Honeycutt 1995). For example, research indicates that female employees exhibit relatively high psychological and mental distress (Nelson and Quick 1985), whereas male employees report relatively high physical distress (Jick and Mitz 1985). Other research suggests that women report greater emotional exhaustion than do men, but male employees display higher levels of coworker depersonalization (Himle, Jayaratne, and Thyness 1989). Prior studies also suggest that women experience lower levels of work-related role clarity than do men (e.g., Busch and Bush 1978).

Women, consistent with female role expectations, report taking on relatively high levels of family responsibilities compared with men (Reifman, Biernat, and Lang 1991), which contributes to greater interference between work and nonwork responsibilities (Greenhaus, Bedeian, and Mossholder 1987). Previous research also indicates gender-based differences with respect to consequences of work/nonwork conflict (Duxbury and Higgins 1991; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). Work/nonwork conflict occurs when a person's work role interferes with his or her family role demands, personal responsibilities, and/or social life and is accentuated by time pressure and job-related role stress (Boles and Babin 1996; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Research demonstrates that employees with even the simplest family arrangements (i.e., young and single) suffer this type of anxiety and its related consequences (Thomas and Ganster 1995).

Differences in self-reported measures of attitudes such as job satisfaction, performance, and life satisfaction also have been examined (Busch and Bush 1978; Schul, Remington, and Berl 1990). Female industrial salespeople report lower self-rated job performance than males (Schul and Wren 1992). Women also report greater satisfaction with pay and promotional opportunities and, in general, pervasively higher overall job satisfaction (Hodson 1989).

Work and Sex Roles

Male and female employees can become socialized and behave similarly in their roles as police officers, psychologists, professors, chefs, and so on, rather than as men or women (Chao et al. 1994). The work role and its prescriptive attachments often override behavioral or attitudinal differences attributable to gender. Despite this socialization, there are instances in which sex role differences override work roles, which suggests different reactions and behavior between men and women. The strongest, most identifiable and resilient sex role difference can be described in terms of an agentic-communal dimension (Eagly 1987; Iacobucci and Ostrom 1993). Differences

arise on the basis of male tendencies toward high assertiveness, task mastery, and individualism (“I can find it myself”), and female tendencies toward concern for people, devotion, and acquiescence (“Let's ask for directions”). Personality research is generally consistent with men showing relatively high levels of exploratory (mastery) tendencies and women showing greater passiveness (Pulkkinen 1996).

Coworkers also have certain expectations about others that are influenced significantly by gender-based stereotypes (Deaux 1985).¹ Social cognition research suggests that the most commonly associated characteristics of the typical female or “woman” stereotype are “emotional, weak, dependent, passive, uncompetitive, and unconfident” (Fiske and Stevens 1993, p. 179). Clearly, stereotypes contain misconceptions, but they do serve as prescriptive devices regarding behavior and sometimes contain “kernels of truth” (Hoffman and Hurst 1990, p. 197). Role expectations can be biased by stereotypes, and research suggests that consumers’ performance expectations vary correspondingly (Iacobucci and Ostrom 1993).

Despite progress, there is still a workplace power discrepancy with correspondingly fewer numbers of women in managerial positions. Female employees often face the dilemma of behaving consistently with the gender stereotype or more aggressively (an aggressive act is inconsistent with the female schema and therefore stands out and provides a cue for contrast) and risk negative evaluations because they are not behaving as expected of a woman. As Fiske and Stevens (1993, p. 181) point out, “discrimination would result from not behaving like a woman should and, in the other case, from behaving too much like a woman.” In summary, male and female service providers might react differently to phenomena present in the service encounter environment. This is particularly so for situations evoking agentic or communal qualities. Specific gender-based difference hypotheses follow.

Role Stress and Performance

There is ample evidence that suggests gender-based variation in a person's reaction to stress and uncertainty (Cournoyer and Mahalik 1995). As discussed previously, strong gender-based differences exist such that men are and are expected to be relatively more aggressive and autonomous than women (Eagly 1987; Hoffman and Hurst 1990). In the workplace, men, even in like positions, behave more authoritatively and are more dominating, whereas women display more submissiveness and compliance (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980). This submissiveness and compliance creates a tendency for women to behave more consistently with voiced organizational policies and rules (Eagly 1987), which makes it more difficult for them to make the needed adjustments to establish a positive stress-performance relationship (Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994).

When a confrontation occurs, a man is likely to experience feelings evoking approach rather than avoidance responses. Traditional female stereotypic (consistent with the sex role) behavior would lead to a greater avoidance of conflict than would the stereotypic male behavior. In a boundary-spanning situation, positive conflict–performance relationships are expected when a

¹ Technically, gender-based differences sometimes are distinguished from sex-based differences in that they are more specific and due to sociological as opposed to biological processes. Here, the term “gender-based difference” is adopted.

service provider uses specific coping strategies involving actions aimed at resolving, not avoiding, conflict (Brown and Peterson 1994). Many studies showing a positive role conflict–job performance relationship have involved boundary-spanning samples, such as salespeople, that were traditionally populated disproportionately by men (cf. Behrman and Perreault 1984). Furthermore, the masculine tendency toward mastery and task proficiency promotes greater initiative when men are confronted with uncertainty (Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonosky 1992).

Evidence from the helping literature also supports a more positive (negative) role stress performance relationship among men (women). In many situations women tend to help as much or more than men. However, meta-analysis of research on helping shows that the strongest moderator of the helping relationship is risk. When risk is present, men tend to help to a greater extent than women (Eagly 1987). In the service-providing environment, in which both customers and managers are present, potential deviations from expectations are seen as risky and create stress (Ramaswami 1996). Therefore, to the extent that the customer is seen as needing help, and service provider performance is ultimately measured by relationships established with customers, men may cope with stress more positively than women.

H₁: The relationship between role stress and job performance is moderated by gender, such that the overall positive role conflict–performance relationship is greater (more positive) among men than among women and the negative role ambiguity–performance relationship is greater (smaller in absolute value, less negative) among men than among women.

Role Conflict and Work/Nonwork Conflict

Women increasingly have entered the workforce at all job status levels. However, to the extent that women have made inroads in job markets, they still appear to bear disproportionately the burden of family and homemaking responsibilities (Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). Since 1970, working men report increasing the amount of time spent each week on family and household responsibilities from approximately 81 to 83 minutes (Crosby and Jaskar 1993). So, while women allocate more time in the paid workforce, men have compensated by spending an extra two minutes a week on family responsibilities. The female sex role and typical expectations are consistent with results that show greater communal and expressive properties, which include nurturing of loved ones and a strong motivation for family maintenance (Deaux 1985). Although this discrepancy has obvious and familiar effects on married couples with children, evidence suggests it exists even in very simple family arrangements (Hodson 1989).

Research documents the interplay between work and nonwork stress. Persistent expectations for women to perform family and home responsibilities may not leave room for the stress to dissipate (Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). In contrast, the male sex role, which places less emphasis on family obligations, allows a greater separation of conflict on and off the job (Biernat and Wortman 1991). Furthermore, to the extent that increased stress is associated with increased hours at work, a significantly greater correlation between hours at work and work/nonwork conflict is observed among women (Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991).

H₂: The relationship between role stress and work/nonwork conflict is moderated by gender, such that the overall positive role conflict–work/nonwork conflict relationship is greater among women than among men and the positive role ambiguity–work/nonwork conflict relationship is greater among women than among men.

Job Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction

Potential gender differences in the job satisfaction–life satisfaction relationship have probably received more attention than any other organizational relationship. A recent meta-analysis suggests systematic variation in previous findings (Tait, Padgett, and Baldwin 1989). Studies published before (after) 1974 show greater (similar) job satisfaction–life satisfaction relationships among men than among women. Traditionally, a person's nondomestic occupation is a more (less) important component of the male (female) self-concept and sex role (Biernat and Wortman 1991; Hoffman and Hurst 1990; Josephs, Markus, and Tafarodi 1992). Men find more self-gratification in their work; therefore, a stronger relationship might be expected between job and life satisfaction. In the interest of comparing results with those of workers studied previously and examining the relative strengths of sex roles versus work roles in forming this relationship, the following hypothesis is offered:

H₃: The positive relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction is moderated by gender, such that it is stronger among men than among women.

Job Satisfaction and Quitting Intent

Gender differences in the job satisfaction–quitting intent relationship also might be expected. A potential rationale again involves the aggressive (noncompliant) nature of the male sex role (Eagly 1987) and women's tendency to be more resigned to their fate than are males, both in general (Pulkkinen 1996) and on the job (Reifman, Biernat, and Lang 1991). A male employee is more apt to take an extreme action such as quitting than a female in the same situation.

Statistical evidence also shows a differential in the benefits of time unemployed. On average, men benefit financially from a period of unemployment as evidenced by a wage-gain rate nearly twice as high as that for women (Ben-ham 1993). In other words, men usually take a job earning more money than they did on their previous job. This effect is not observed among women experiencing the same level of unemployment. Heightening this effect is the high turnover rate common to service industries, which gives employees considerable experience in the effects of unemployment. Therefore, a woman might believe that it will be more difficult to find a comparable or better job if she leaves her present job.

In addition, despite increases in gender equity, the norm is still that a married woman is given second priority in family job decisions. A married woman remains more likely to follow her husband to a new location than vice versa. Therefore, she may leave a job despite being satisfied. All of this evidence points to a stronger relationship between job satisfaction and quitting intent among men than among women.

H4: The negative relationship between job satisfaction and quitting intent is moderated by gender, such that it is stronger (more negative) among men than among women.

Research Methodology

Sample

A sample of employees who provide retail service offered data for analysis. Specifically, food servers at relatively upscale, full-service restaurants in a large metropolitan area were interviewed with drop-off questionnaires. The restaurants included a wide range of locations around the city and a wide variety of menu types. Completed questionnaires were returned directly to us by a postage-paid envelope.

Approximately 500 questionnaires were distributed. Questionnaires were returned by 331 respondents. Of those, 328 had complete information, which represent a 65.6% usable response rate. The cooperation of management and distribution during employee meetings helped the response rate. Demographically, 43.3% of the respondents were men, and the typical respondent was 26 years of age with approximately six years' industry work experience. The sample is similar in profile to that of a previous study examining hotel service employees (Hartline and Ferrell 1996).

Measures

Role stress was measured using Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) role conflict and role ambiguity scales. These scales have been used extensively in marketing and organizational research (e.g., Brown and Peterson 1994; Michaels and Dixon 1994). An exhaustive measurement analysis supports the scales' validity in representing job-related role stress as two related constructs (Netemeyer, Johnston, and Burton 1990).

The work/nonwork conflict measure consists of five questions from Burke, Weir, and DuWors' (1979) study as adapted by Parasuraman and colleagues (1989). This measure addresses a variety of issues related to areas in which work- and nonwork-related issues can conflict, including relationships with friends, mental and physical states at home, and participation in home activities.

Ten five-point Likert items assessed overall job satisfaction of respondents (Brayfield and Rothe 1951). Similar to other recent attempts (Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads 1996), the items reflect overall satisfaction and not any specific dimension of satisfaction. Overall life satisfaction was measured by Quinn and Shepard's (1974) Quality of Life Scale. Performance was assessed through a seven-item self-report measure similar to that reported by Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads (1996). These questions focus on a respondent's view of his or her performance relative to coworkers. Five-point Likert scales were used as indicators. This measure was adapted from similar self-reported measures, used in previous marketing studies, to reflect the specific requirements of a waitstaff position.

Quitting intent was assessed using items developed by Bluedorn (1982). Respondents were asked how likely they would be to leave their job within given time frames. Responses were reported on a one to seven scale anchored by “1 = terrible chance” and “7 = excellent chance.” All measures were scored so that higher numbers reflect correspondingly greater amounts of the construct. We provide construct descriptions and summaries in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Overall Model Constructs

Construct	Description	Key Citations
Quitting Intent	The likelihood that a person will leave his or her job within the foreseeable future. Quitting intent is a function of job satisfaction and an employee's overall life satisfaction, among other things.	Bluedorn (1982); Good, Sisler, and Gentry (1988); Johnston et al. (1990)
Life Satisfaction	The degree to which people judge the quality of their lives favorably. It can be equated with a general degree of happiness. Life satisfaction is generally viewed as a function of job satisfaction and other personal considerations.	Adams, King, and King (1996); Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996)
Job Satisfaction	A positive emotional state that results from employees' appraisal of their job situation. High performance is appraised positively and results in higher satisfaction. Stress-related factors generally lower job satisfaction.	Bagozzi (1978); Brown and Peterson (1994); Good, Sisler, and Gentry (1988); Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads (1996)
Work/Nonwork Conflict	The degree to which role responsibilities from the work and nonwork domains are incompatible. That is, fulfilling responsibilities in the nonwork role is made more difficult by participation at work. For example, overtime at work may interfere with a part-time employee's ability to prepare for an important marketing exam. Work-related stress spills over and causes work/nonwork conflict.	Boles and Babin (1996); Burke, Weir, and DuWors (1979); Parasuraman et al. (1989)
Job Performance	The level of productivity of an individual employee, relative to his or her peers, on several job-related behaviors and outcomes. Job performance is affected by work-related variables including role stress and work/nonwork conflict. Relatively high performance generally leads to higher job satisfaction.	Busch and Bush (1978); Kohli (1985); Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads (1996)
Role Conflict	The degree to which work expectations and work requirements of two or more persons are incompatible. For example, a restaurant might have a policy of no splitting of entrees. A waitstaff member might face a customer who requests that he and a family member be allowed to share an entree. Thus, management's expectations conflicts with the customer's.	Behrman and Perreault (1984); Brown and Peterson (1994); Good, Sisler, and Gentry (1988); Michaels and Dixon (1994); Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970)
Role Ambiguity	The degree of uncertainty about one's job including uncertainty regarding management's expectations. For example, improper training may result in employees not knowing the expected response to frequently occurring job events.	Behrman and Perreault (1984); Brown and Peterson (1994); Good, Sisler, and Gentry (1988); Michaels and Dixon (1994); Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970)

Table 2. Standardized Measurement Coefficients and T-Values Resulting from Confirmatory Factor Analysis^a

Item Abbreviation	Construct						
	Roll Stress		Performance	Work/ Nonwork	Job Satisfaction	Life Satisfaction	Quitting Intent
Role Conflict	Role Ambiguity						
RC1	.59 (10.4) ^b						
RC2	.60 (10.4)						
RC3	.64 (11.5)						
RC4	.65 (11.9)						
RC5	.75 (14.4)						
RC6	.64 (11.4)						
RA1		.68 (12.8)					
RA2		.69 (13.3)					
RA3		.75 (14.6)					
RA4		.80 (16.0)					
RA5		.70 (13.1)					
JP1			.69 (13.3)				
JP2			.76 (15.2)				
JP3			.79 (16.1)				
JP4			.63 (11.9)				
JP5			.71 (13.8)				
JP6			.60 (10.7)				
JP7			.74 (14.6)				
WNW1				.78 (15.4)			
WNW2				.65 (12.0)			
WNW3				.60 (11.1)			
WNW4				.75 (14.6)			
WNW5				.59 (10.1)			
JS1					.84 (18.4)		
JS2					.69 (13.6)		
JS3					.73 (14.8)		
JS4					.72 (14.7)		
JS5					.80 (16.9)		
JS6					.73 (14.9)		
JS7					.78 (16.3)		
JS8					.80 (16.8)		
JS9					.68 (13.5)		
LS1						.73 (14.6)	
LS2						.77 (16.1)	
LS3						.82 (17.6)	
LS4						.78 (16.3)	
LS5						.67 (13.3)	
LS6						.88 (19.6)	
LS7						.84 (13.5)	
QI1							.90 (14.4)
QI2							.74 (12.2)
Variance Extracted	.42	.53	.50	.46	.57	.62	.68
α	.80	.84	.89	.80	.92	.92	.80

^a $\chi^2 = 1232.6$, 758 degrees of freedom ($p < .001$), CFI = .93, parsimony normed fit index (PNFI) = .71, RMSE = .05.

^b T-values shown in parentheses. All are significant ($p < .001$).

Results

Measurement Results

Overall measurement quality was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson and Gerbing 1992). Although measurement quality is sometimes assessed factor by factor, each multiple-item indicator was considered simultaneously to provide for the fullest test of convergent and discriminant validity. Initial analyses suggested five items with low factor loadings (below .50) that were dropped from further analyses (see Table 2).

All loadings exceed .5, and each indicator t-value exceeds 10.0 ($p < .001$). Coefficient α exceeds .8 for each scale. The overall fit supports the measurement model. The χ^2 fit statistic is 1232.6 with 758 degrees of freedom ($p < .001$). The root mean squared error (RMSE) is .05, the comparative fit index (CFI) is .93, the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) is .83, the parsimony normed fit index is .71, and the χ^2/df ratio is 1.63. All support the overall measurement quality given a large sample and number of indicators (Gerbing and Anderson 1992). Furthermore, the variance extracted in each measure exceeds the respective correlation estimate between factors, which provides evidence of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Therefore, the measures are adequate for further analysis (see the Appendix for items).

Factor Structure Invariance

The research objectives require testing theoretical models on the overall sample and on split samples examining relationships among only male and female respondents, respectively. Therefore, construct validity must be exhibited in the measurement model, tested over the entire sample and in each subsample. Therefore, an examination of the factor structure across gender was conducted (Bandolos and Benson 1990; Byrne 1988).

Factor structure invariance was tested by comparing results of a confirmatory model fitting separate models for men and women. Initially, model coefficients were freed, such that separate loading estimates were computed for each subsample. Next, the model was retested adding the constraint that Λ , the matrix of factor loadings, remains invariant across samples. A comparison of the two fits enables an assessment of factor structure invariance. The overall χ^2 for the two sample model is 2213 with 1516 degrees of freedom ($p < .001$; CFI = .90) for the “totally free” model and 2247.5 with 1557 degrees of freedom for the constrained model. The χ^2 difference statistic between these two models is 34.5 with 41 degrees of freedom and is nonsignificant ($p > .1$), which provides evidence that the measurement model depicted in Table 2 holds across both samples. As is expected from this result, all factor loadings are highly significant, and reliability estimates remain above .8 in each gender group.

In addition, the model was examined with the added constraint that Φ , the matrix of interfactor correlations, remains invariant across subsamples. The χ^2 difference resulting from a comparison of this model, with the model constraining only factor loadings, was 42.1 with 21 degrees of freedom ($p < .01$). A significant difference provides preliminary evidence that gender-based differences among construct relationships might exist.

Differences in Means

Table 3 displays construct means by gender. Although no hypotheses were proposed as to mean-level differences, we present them for comparative purposes. Results are based on two-tailed t-tests. In general, few differences are found. T-tests for equality of means across samples indicates a significant difference in work/nonwork conflict ($t_{df=303} = 2.37; p < .05$) and in role conflict ($t_{df=317} = 3.14; p < .01$), such that men report relatively high levels of each compared with women. In addition, women report marginally higher job satisfaction than men ($t_{df=306} = 1.91; p < .10$). No other significant differences are indicated.

Table 3. Correlation Estimates (Φ) and Construct Means

	JP	WNW	JS	LS	QI	Role Stress		Mean Values	
						RC	RA	Men	Women
Job Performance	1.00							2.85 (4.6) ^a	27.3 (4.6)
Work/Nonwork Conflict	-.09	1.00						15.1 (3.3)	14.3 (3.3)
Job Satisfaction	.14	-.65	1.00					31.6 (7.7)	32.3 (7.9)
Life Satisfaction	.19	-.52	.45	1.00				31.2 (7.9)	32.1 (7.7)
Quitting Intent	-.14	.34	-.49	-.30	1.00			8.1 (3.9)	7.8 (4.0)
Role Conflict	.06	.31	-.45	-.23	.09	1.00		18.3 (4.8)	16.6 (5.4)
Role Ambiguity	-.26	.31	-.37	-.19	.26	.58	1.00	10.6 (3.4)	10.0 (4.4)
Variance Extracted	.42	.53	.50	.46	.57	.62	.68		

^a Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

Structural Model Results

Because of the large number of indicators included in this model and the supportive measurement results, summated indicators of each construct were used in the structural analyses reported subsequently. Technically, this procedure involves constraining measurement coefficients to the square root of a scale's reliability and the corresponding error coefficients to one minus scale reliability (Kenney 1979). This allows for a more parsimonious presentation of results.

H_{om}(overall model results)

The hypothesized model was tested across the combined sample (both men and women; $n = 321$). The resulting χ^2 is 11.2 with 7 degrees of freedom ($p > .10$; CFI = .99; AGFI = .96; RMSE = .026), which suggests that the hypothesized model fits the data. In Table 4, we present the resulting standardized parameter estimates.

In general, estimates are consistent with expectations, because all direct paths are significant ($p < .05$) and in the expected direction, with the exception of the role ambiguity–job satisfaction ($\gamma_{3,3} = -.03$, n.s.) and the life satisfaction–quitting intentions scale ($\beta_{5,4} = -.10$, n.s.). The strongest direct relationships suggested are from role ambiguity to job performance ($\gamma_{1,2} = -.41, p < .001$), work/nonwork conflict to job satisfaction ($\beta_{3,2} = -.55, p < .001$), and job satisfaction to quitting intent ($\beta_{5,3} = -.44, p < .001$). The results are supportive of H_{om} (see Figure 2).

Table 4. Standardized Structural Path Estimates Across the Full, Male, and Female Samples

to	Path from																	
	Role Conflict			Role Ambiguity			Job Performance			Work/Nonwork			Job Satisfaction			Life Satisfaction		
	Full	Men	Women	Full	Men	Women	Full	Men	Women	Full	Men	Women	Full	Men	Women	Full	Men	Women
JP	.24	.38	-.06	-.41	-.19	-.46												
t-value	2.6	2.6	.41	-4.7	-1.8	-3.2												
WNW	.18	.14	.23	.20	.28	.14												
t-value	2.0	1.3	1.4	2.3	2.5	.92												
JS	-.27	-.32	-.33	-.03	-.17	.09	.09	.21	.06	-.55	-.45	-.58						
t-value	-3.6	-3.4	-2.7	-.37	-1.8	.70	1.7	2.6	.78	-9.6	-5.2	-7.9						
LS							.16	.13	.17	-.38	-.40	-.35	.18	.12	.22			
t-value							2.6	1.6	2.3	-4.7	-3.4	-3.2	2.2	1.1	2.2			
Quit													-.44	-.62	-.28	-.10	-.08	-.13
t-value													-6.6	-5.3	-3.3	-1.5	-.91	-1.4
χ^2	14.5	5.0	9.5															
df	14	7	7															
p	.39	.66	.20															

$t_{crit \alpha = .01} = 2.3.$

$t_{crit \alpha = .05} = 1.6.$

$t_{crit \alpha = .10} = 1.3.$

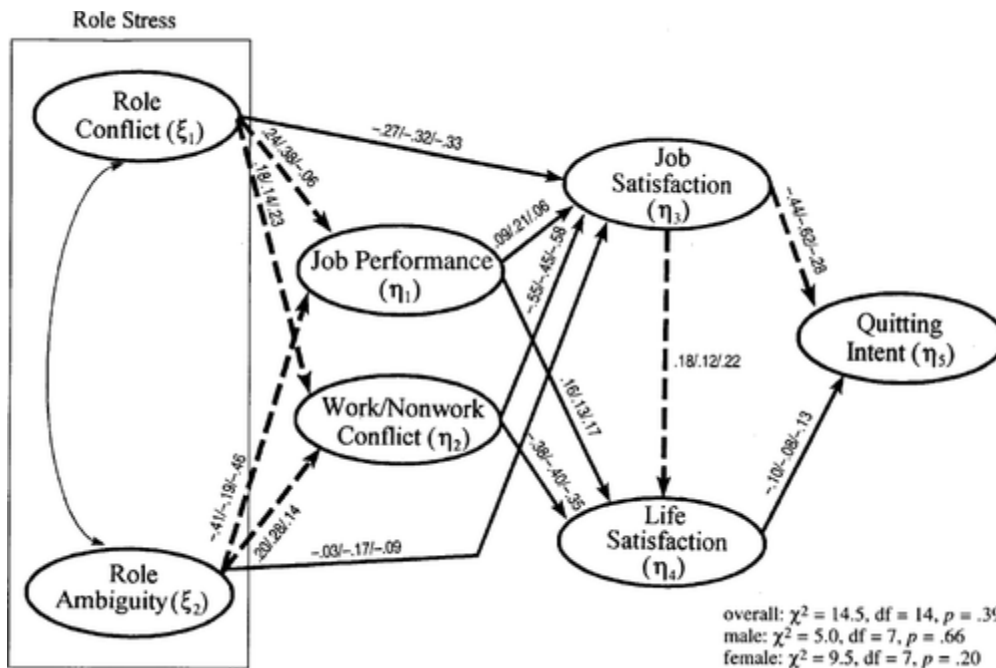


Figure 2. Standardized Structural Path Coefficients for the Overall, Male, and Female Samples
 Note: The path estimates are presented for the overall sample first, followed by the male sample, with the coefficient estimated for the female sample appearing third. For significance levels, see Table 4

Split sample analyses

Multisample analyses were conducted to examine potential differences in relationships across men and women. A model was tested that enables all hypothesized parameters to be estimated freely for both men and women. Separate parameter estimates resulting from this analysis are shown in separate columns of Table 4. The resulting χ^2 is 14.5 with 14 degrees of freedom ($p = .39$), which suggests adequate fit.

H_1

H_1 predicts that role stress has a more negative (positive) impact on female (male) service providers' job performance. This effect should be evidenced in both the role conflict–job performance and the role ambiguity–job performance relationships. For role conflict, this prediction suggests a stronger positive coefficient for the male sample. Path estimates displayed in Table 3 are consistent with this prediction. Among men, the role conflict–job performance path is positive and significant ($\gamma_{1,1} = .38$; $p < .01$), and the corresponding path estimate among women is negative and insignificant ($\gamma_{1,1} = -.06$).

For role ambiguity, H_1 predicts a weaker negative relationship between role ambiguity and job performance among male service providers. Results are consistent with this prediction as evidenced by a negative path estimate smaller in magnitude among the male sample ($\gamma_{1,2} = -.19$; $p < .05$) than among the female sample ($\gamma_{1,2} = -.46$; $p < .01$).

A further examination of H_1 was conducted using nested structural equations models. The multisample model described previously was refit, with an additional constraint that the paths

corresponding to the stress–performance ($\gamma_{1,1}$ and $\gamma_{1,2}$) relationship remain equal across the male and female customer-contact employee samples. The resulting χ^2 is 30.8 with 16 degrees of freedom ($p = .014$) and the constrained paths are .19 ($p < .05$) and $-.39$ ($p < .001$) for the role conflict and role ambiguity to performance paths, respectively. The difference in fits between this and the totally free model ($\chi^2 = 16.3$ with 2 degrees of freedom; $p < .001$) supports gender as a moderator of role stress's effect on job performance. Overall, results support H_1 .

H₂

H_2 suggests that role stress affects female service providers' work/nonwork conflict more severely than it does male service providers'. This translates specifically into a positive coefficient in the female sample stronger in magnitude for both the role conflict and role ambiguity relationships. Unlike the strong support shown for H_1 , the results here are equivocal. As H_2 predicts, the role conflict–work/nonwork conflict estimate is slightly stronger among female service providers ($\gamma_{2,1} = .23$) compared with male service providers ($\gamma_{2,1} = .14$). However, the difference in the role ambiguity–work/nonwork conflict relationship conflicts with predictions. The estimate among women ($\gamma_{2,1} = .14$) is smaller than it is among men ($\gamma_{2,1} = .28$). The χ^2 that results from constraining these paths to be equal across samples is 15.4 with 16 degrees of freedom and does not indicate a significantly worse fit than the totally free model ($\chi^2 = .9$ with 2 degrees of freedom; n.s.). Therefore, there is only partial support for this hypothesis in the form of a greater role conflict–work/nonwork conflict relationship among female service providers.

H₃

H_3 predicts that male service providers will display a stronger positive relationship between job and life satisfaction than will female service providers. Neither the path estimates ($\beta_{4,3} = .12$, n.s., for men and $\beta_{4,3} = .22$, $p < .05$, for women) nor the χ^2 difference (.4, 1 df) that results from constraining this path across samples support H_3 . Results suggest that female service providers account for the significant positive coefficient observed in the overall sample ($\beta_{4,3} = .18$, $p < .05$). Whereas the relationship is significant and positive for women, it is not significant for men.

H₄

H_4 predicts that the negative relationship between job satisfaction and quitting intent is greater in magnitude among male service providers. Path estimates are consistent with this prediction. Among men, this path estimate is $-.62$ ($p < .001$), whereas among women the estimate is $-.28$ ($p < .01$). Moreover, the χ^2 difference (1 df) between the totally free model and a model adding a path equality constraint is 4.1 ($p < .05$). Overall, H_4 is supported.

Other results

Given the general interest in the degree to which male and female employee behavior might differ and an argument that findings showing no differences are equally as important as those showing differences (Lefkowitz 1994), a look at the overall pattern of relationships between men and women is warranted. Path estimates resulting from multisample analyses shown in Table

4 exhibit more relatively small (.10 or less) than large differences. Therefore, the observed invariance in correlation estimates noted previously is concentrated among a few relationships.

Among nonhypothesized differences in relationships, only two exceed .10. The work/nonwork conflict–job satisfaction relationship path estimate is $-.55$ ($p < .001$) overall, $-.45$ ($p < .001$) for men, $-.58$ ($p < .001$) for women, and is directionally consistent with the notion that job satisfaction is damaged more by work/nonwork conflict among women. Given similar average respondent hours worked per week, this difference is consistent with a gender role explanation of work/nonwork conflict (Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). In addition, the job performance–job satisfaction estimate is $.09$ ($p < .05$) overall, $.21$ for men ($p < .05$), and only $.06$ (n.s.) for women. The observed variation complements meta-analytic research into the performance–satisfaction relationship and offers a potential explanation for differing results (Brown and Peterson 1994). This result is also consistent with a male orientation toward mastery.

Discussion

We offer two important contributions. First, an organizational model of customer-contact service providers' perceived role stress and related consequences, including job and life satisfaction, work/nonwork conflict, performance, and quitting intent, is tested. This model builds on the relatively scant literature that deal with service provider/customer-contact employee behavior. Second, potential gender-based differences in relationships between constructs constituting the overall theoretical model are examined. Specific attention is paid to gender-based differences in the outcomes of role stress on the job. Differences in these and similar relationships indicate that gender should be considered a potential moderator.

Overall Results

Structural equations analysis supports the hypothesized model. Path estimates suggest that service provider role stress affects customer-contact service providers' job performance, work/nonwork conflict, and job satisfaction directly and influences life satisfaction and quitting intent indirectly. However, it appears that stress-related effects can be disaggregated into productive and counterproductive components. A meta-analysis of boundary spanners in general commented on the conflicting findings with respect to this relationship by discussing salespersons' capability to cope with stress by avoiding confrontation (Brown and Peterson 1994). In a service-providing situation, a customer sits at your table or comes to your counter, making escape quite difficult. Therefore, results presented here support the idea that conflict is dealt with most productively through confronting rather than avoiding the situation.

Results also point to the important role played by the work/nonwork interface. Increased stress on the job, manifested as either role conflict or ambiguity, induces greater work/nonwork conflict as evidenced by significant, positive path coefficients. Although work/nonwork conflict is normally addressed in more professional domains with employees who generally are older and married with children, in this sample of frontline service providers, work/nonwork conflict is a major contributor to job dissatisfaction, life dissatisfaction, and, indirectly, higher quitting intent. Although we might expect work/nonwork to be less of a factor among employees who appear to have a "simpler" nonwork living arrangement, the results suggest otherwise. Results from a

study of retail managers suggest a far weaker work/non-work–job satisfaction relationship than that reported here (cf. Good, Page, and Young 1996).

Gender-Based Differences in Relationships

Schul and Wren (1992) examine differences in important attitudinal and behavioral constructs across gender in an industrial sales setting and conclude that there were too few differences to recommend highly different managerial policies for men and women. Here, four hypotheses regarding gender-based differences in relationships were hypothesized specifically. These hypotheses were based largely on social role theory that contrasted work versus gender-based role expectations. Similar to the previous study (Schul and Wren 1992), not all predictions found empirical support. However, two key relationships with important implications for service quality and service provider well-being exhibited significant and nontrivial differences.

First, service provider role stress affects job performance differently among men than among women. Results suggest that female service providers' performance is affected more negatively by increased role conflict or role ambiguity. The observed path estimate between role conflict and job performance is significant, nontrivial, and positive among men, but the like path among women is nonsignificant. Ambiguity's effect is negative overall, but the observed path between role ambiguity and job performance is significantly more negative among women than among men. These results are consistent with sex role characteristics, which suggests a more aggressive reaction to stress among men.

Previous research suggests variation in the effects of the stress–performance relationship among boundary spanners. Although a plurality of studies report a positive relationship (Brown and Peterson 1994), this finding should be reconsidered because most organizational behavioral research has been conducted using predominantly male samples. By not considering gender as a moderator, previous studies can report an attenuated relationship for men and an overstated and potentially misleading relationship for women.

Second, job satisfaction affects quitting intent differently among female and male service providers. Although the relationship is significant and negative for both, the path estimates suggest a stronger relationship for men than for women. Therefore, it may be more difficult to keep a less than satisfied group of male service providers employed than a like-minded group of female service providers. The stronger relationship between job satisfaction and quitting intent observed among men also means that work/nonwork conflict has a greater indirect impact on quitting intent among men than among women (.28 versus .16). Stress-related constructs and selected organizational outcomes similar to those considered here explain male service providers' quitting intent better than they do that of female service providers. Thus, female service providers might leave their jobs for reasons other than dissatisfaction. This might be due partially to the limited opportunities for mobility that women experience.

Contrary to traditional role expectations, men did not exhibit a stronger job satisfaction–life satisfaction relationship. In contrast, a slightly more positive and significant relationship was observed among female service providers. Evidently, women today identify with their work, even in nonprofessional settings, to a degree that makes its importance to their overall life

satisfaction virtually indistinguishable from its importance to men. Businesses accommodating the work/nonwork interface can expect higher levels of employee life satisfaction as well as job satisfaction. Also, the relationship between role stress and work/nonwork conflict did not differ significantly across women and men. Both groups indicate a strong relationship between work-related role stress and perceptions of conflict between work and nonwork responsibilities.

Managerial Implications

Overall model

The effective management of employee satisfaction, turnover, and service quality is essential to success in a service industry. The overall model of service provider behavior suggests important roles for role stress and work/nonwork conflict in understanding variance in turnover and service quality. Several interesting findings involve the productive and nonproductive reactions to work-related role stress.

The service-providing environment presents significant friction between customer and organizational goals (e.g., incompatible requests, doing things that please the boss but not the customer, and so on). It is the effective management of this friction by service providers that sometimes can change a potentially disastrous service encounter to one that creates high customer satisfaction and helps build a long-lasting relationship (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990). The positive role conflict–job performance relationship suggests that an absence of stress perceptions among service providers could lower overall job performance and customer perceptions of service quality. Although a manager might try to reduce conflict through greater communication of procedures and the implications of deviating from those procedures (Reardon and Enis 1990), if the result is reduced perceptions of initiative to resolve conflicts, lower service quality could result. Increased flexibility is likely to improve service quality but increase stress (Hartline and Ferrell 1996). In contrast, role ambiguity, indicated by attitudes such as uncertainty regarding authority, seems to have only counterproductive outcomes.

Service managers, as a result, might consider acknowledging the inherent customer-contact stress elements (e.g., incompatible requests, accepted by one and not the other) and making clear the degree to which employees can “bend rules” in performing their job duties. Clearly, this question ties into the current debate on the effects of process versus output-based marketing controls (Lusch and Jaworski 1991; Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads 1996). Rather than building a single type of control environment, service management might consider a blend in which employees are motivated by certain outcomes but also are given clear guidance on how much deviation from accepted procedures will be tolerated and/or rewarded.

Overall results suggest an important role for work/nonwork conflict, which directly lowers job and life satisfaction and indirectly increases quitting intent. Furthermore, work/nonwork conflict, to a large extent, facilitates the nonproductive effects of role stress by mediating relationships between role ambiguity and important outcomes. Therefore, the effective management of turnover is, to some degree, a function of helping service providers manage their work/nonwork conflict.

Because service-providing employees are relatively young, single, and more often part-time than employees in other workplaces, managers might not recognize potentially deleterious effects of work/nonwork conflict. Common restaurant, hotel, and retail practices, which include irregular schedules, limited weekend time off, and altering schedules with little or no notice, affect the work/nonwork interface. To the extent that these situations can be minimized, the payoff is decreased turnover.

Gender-based differences

Managers must consider the gender effects found here in interpreting the role stress–performance relationship. Results indicate that women are affected more severely by increased stress. Therefore, in managing role conflict and role ambiguity, these differential effects might need to be considered. For example, female employees in high stress, customer-contact environments might need more concrete guidance about what they can and cannot do to remedy conflict between managers’ expectations and customer demands.

Once again, these results can be pertinent to the debate on process versus output controls. For example, if the rationale that men respond aggressively to conflict by taking liberties with stated policies and rules is valid, the results suggest a differential effect of output versus process control on male and female employees. As no operationalization of control methods is presented in this study, this is clearly a research area worthy of further attention.

The differential results observed in the job satisfaction–turnover relationship also have implications for practice. A straightforward implication is that steps taken to improve job satisfaction will reduce turnover more effectively among men than among women. That is, managerial policies might have more effect on male than on female quitting intent. The stronger relationship among men might suggest that women will tolerate more negative working conditions on the job before they quit. Upper management concerned with acting ethically should take extra precaution to reduce or eliminate these negative work conditions.

Limitations

Studies of employee behavior always are subject to attack on the basis of the constructs selected for study. Ideally, other constructs would be included. An operationalization of the control environment would be a worthy addition and would extend the contribution offered here. Also, a self-report job performance measure was used here. Although previous research shows considerable correspondence between self-report and other performance measures (Churchill et al. 1985), the relationships examined might be distorted because all measures are self-reports. From the customer's standpoint, amounts tipped would be good indicators of job performance. Evidence suggests that male and female consumers differ in their judgments of male and female service provider performance (Iacobucci and Ostrom 1993). Further research might consider more closely the matching process between consumer and employee gender and its affect on performance perceptions. Furthermore, other affective constructs are worthy of consideration and might be relevant to potential gender versus work role differences. Some possibilities for further consideration include commitment and burnout.

Our sample provides service in full-service restaurants. However, a comparison of the results presented here with those from other marketing contexts is worthwhile. For example, had the sample also involved marketing positions considered more professional, such as many business-to-business sales settings, further analyses could have examined level of professionalism or customer respect as further moderators.

Conclusion

We present results and implications relevant to the effective management of customer contact positions. Service providing environments involving the dyadic interchange between customers and employees inevitably involve conflict that has beneficial and detrimental consequences. Furthermore, the study shows that men and women, though reacting similarly to many workplace constructs, react differently to role stress and job satisfaction. Most organizational research has been conducted on wholly or predominantly male samples and occupations; therefore, many of the relationships demonstrated might be male phenomena. This study provides empirical evidence that at least some of these relationships might vary between male and female service providers. Perhaps the results will help marketing managers reexamine the treatment of service providers overall and of women in particular. At the least, the results provide evidence useful in developing theory related to managing customer-contact service provider relationships.

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Appendix. Description of Construct Item Indicators

(Abbreviation)	Scale Items
Job Performance (JP)	
Relative to other workers here, I ... (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"):	
JP1.	am a top performer.
JP2.	average higher sales per check than other servers.
JP3.	am in the top 10 percent of servers here.
JP4.	get along better with customers than do others.
JP5.	know more about menu items.
JP6.	know what my customers expect.
JP7.	get better tips than most.
Work/Nonwork Conflict (WNW)	
The impact your current job has on (insert phrase) is ...? ("Strong negative impact" = 1 to "Strong positive impact" = 5) (Burke, Weir, and DuWors 1979):	
WNW1.	your mental and physical state away from work.
WNW2.	your participation in home activities.
WNW3.	concern for your health and/or safety.
WNW4.	your personal development.
WNW5.	your weekend, vacation time, and social life.
Job Satisfaction (JS)	
Five-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree")	
JS1.	I consider my job unpleasant.*
JS2.	I am often bored with my job.*
JS3.	I feel fairly well-satisfied with my present job.
JS4.	Most of the time, I have to force myself to go to work.*
JS5.	I definitely dislike my work.*
JS6.	Most days, I am enthusiastic about my work.
JS7.	My job is pretty uninteresting.*
JS8.	I find real enjoyment in my work.
JS9.	I am disappointed I ever took this job.*
Life Satisfaction (LS)	
Respondents marked the blank (seven-point semantic differential scored from 7 to 1) that described best how he or she saw his or her life at that particular point in time (Quinn and Shepard 1974).	
LS1.	interesting–boring
LS2.	enjoyable–miserable
LS3.	worthwhile–useless
LS4.	full–empty
LS5.	hopeful–discouraging

(Abbreviation)	Scale Items
LS6.	rewarding–disappointing
LS7.	friendly–lonely
Quitting Intent (QI)	
Respondents were asked to rate their chances of ... (sevenpoint scale ranging from 1 = "Excellent Chance" to 7= "Terrible Chance") (Bluedorn 1982):	
QI1.	Quitting this job in the next three months.*
QI2.	Quitting this job sometime in the next year.*
Role Stress	
Five-point Likert (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree") (Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970)	
<i>Conflict (RC)</i>	
RC1.	I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it.
RC2.	I sometimes have to bend a rule or policy in order to carry out my job.
RC3.	I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.
RC4.	I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others.
RC5.	I receive assignments with inadequate resources and materials to execute them.
RC6.	I work on unnecessary things.
<i>Ambiguity (RA)</i>	
RA1.	I feel certain about how much authority I have.*
RA2.	There are clear, planned goals and objectives for my job.*
RA3.	I know what my responsibilities are.*
RA4.	I know exactly what is expected of me.*
RA5.	The explanations are clear as to what I have to do.*

Note: Starred items were reversed scaled prior to analyses, so higher scores indicate higher levels of constructs.