

## ABSTRACT

### Understanding What Happens on the Other Side of the Door: Emotional Labor and Motivation in Direct Sales

Kayde Givens, M.A.

Mentor: Lacy G. McNamee, Ph.D.

This study's central purpose is to expand the research conducted within the field of communication on motivation and emotional labor. Specifically, this paper proposes an ethnographic examination of the intricate interplay of emotional labor and motivation within the working life of a summer salesperson. The results of this study revealed the dichotomous nature of door-to-door sales. Specifically, three dichotomies are discussed in the findings: making sense of the job as one to abhor/ admire, the emotional dichotomy of obscenity and humanity, and the relational dichotomy of care and competition. Throughout the study special attention was devoted to the discourse of the sales team. This study provided rich insight into the emotional labor of door-to-door sales representatives while also expanding the current literature on employee motivation.

*Keywords:* employee motivation, emotion management, emotional labor, door-to-door sales, employee burnout, sensemaking, sensegiving

Understanding What Happens on the Other Side of the Door:  
Emotional Labor and Motivation in Direct Sales

by

Kayde Givens, B.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Communication

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David W. Schlueter, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Thesis Committee

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Lacy G. McNamee, Ph.D., Chairperson

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David W. Schlueter, Ph.D.

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Tony L. Talbert, Ed.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Many people can identify with the classic scenario of evading the door-to-door sales representative, tactics for which may include: ignoring the knock on the door, shutting off the lights in order to have it appear as if no one is home, or simply using the phrase, “I’m not interested.” The presence of a door-to-door salesperson is a quintessential encounter that people almost universally hope to avoid, or even loathe. On the other side of the door, a salesperson may anxiously await a greeting yet simultaneously wish against a hostile response. According to Schweingruber and Berns (2005), door-to-door sales teams often describe their jobs as an emotional rollercoaster. These jobs are physically, emotionally, and socially draining. Yet, it has been estimated that approximately 15.1 million people have been involved in direct sales in recent years (K. Johnson, 2009).

One specific form of direct sales is direct-to-home selling (i.e., door-to-door sales) which has also assumed the title of “summer sales” given that most of these sales efforts transpire during summer months. Door-to-door summer sales representatives participate in a unique form of work. That is, sales representatives leave their homes and travel to another state, sometimes as far as the opposite side of the country. Living quarters are often shared apartments. Work weeks span from Monday to Saturday with an average work day lasting up to ten hours. In the past, door-to-door sales representatives were rejected an average of 179 times for every one sale (Jolson, 1972). Thus, in a job as

challenging and prevalent as summer sales, it is important to study how these employees maintain their motivation and manage the emotional stress inherent to their roles.

The present study provides insight into this critical concern by examining how summer sales teams make sense of their experiences with emotional labor and how that communicative process shapes their motivation at work. According to Sullivan (1988), past research on supervisor-subordinate communication noted a tendency for employees to construct their own versions of work, subsequently making sense of the supervisors' communication based on their personal constructions. Zorn and Ruccio (1998) supported this position by stating that scholars should also consider employees' interpretations of motivational communication as important, specifically because these interpretations are most closely linked to their motivated actions.

Building upon previous scholarship which has focused on managerial discourse as a key link to motivation in emotional labor contexts, the proposed study considers messages shared among sales team members as a critical element in a sales representative's motivation. To date, motivation has largely been conceptualized as a psychological rather than communication-centered construct. For example, Maslow (1943) classically defined motivation as a desire to achieve or maintain various conditions upon which basic satisfaction rests. Sullivan (1988) introduced a variant view of workplace motivation that studied the impact of manager language on employee motivation. Utilizing Sullivan's past findings, the present study seeks in part to conceptualize motivation not as a mere psychological condition, but as socially constructed and shaped in communication with others.

While researchers (e.g., Leidner, 1993; Schweingruber, 2006; Schweingruber & Bern, 2003; 2005) have conducted studies within the context of door-to-door sales, the social life of and communication between sales team members as a link to motivation or de-motivation has been neglected. Rather, most research has focused on salesperson's social influence techniques like: foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face, reciprocity, or disrupt-then-reframe (eg., Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Davis & Knowles, 1999; Fennis, Das, & Pruyn, 2004; Hickson, et al., 2013; Gass & Seiter, 2011).

This study explores how door-to-door sales representatives make sense of their encounters with emotional labor and how this sensemaking process impacts their motivation. This was done by conducting research in a sales office of a nationwide security company. The work of a door-to-door sales representative is particularly difficult. These representatives have to navigate the emotional terrain of both themselves and their customers while staying motivated in a highly autonomous job. From a scholarly, as well as a practical standpoint, this research will help expand what is known about emotional labor and its impact on motivation while also exploring the uncharted territory of door-to-door sales.

The following chapter draws from two avenues of research to be addressed in turn: (1) scholarship on emotional labor and emotional exhaustion, and (2) scholarship on motivation. The subsequent chapters detail the qualitative methods and data analysis techniques used to guide this study, the findings from the data, and a discussion of the potential implications of these findings.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

The proposed study draws from two avenues of research to be addressed in turn: (a) communication scholarship on emotion labor and emotional exhaustion, and (b) interdisciplinary scholarship on employee motivation at large, as well as the more narrow context of door-to-door sales. Each section concludes with the research questions that will be explored throughout the remainder of the research project.

#### *Emotions and Direct Sales*

Door-to-door salesmen maintain a variety of interpersonal relationships that have the ability to illicit a diverse range of emotions. For example, relationships with fellow sales team members and managers may spur positive emotions like camaraderie and encouragement. Alternatively, consumer interactions may incite feelings of frustration and despondence. In order to help sales teams manage emotions while working, managers seek ways to satisfy grievances and motivate employees to continue production through motivational tactics (Jolson, 1972). Developing an understanding of the role emotion has on an employee's motivation is a crucial step to understanding work from the other side of the door. The following section provides an overview of the extant literature on emotional labor and emotional exhaustion in relation to door-to-door sales.

As stated previously by Schweingruber and Berns (2005), many sales representatives describe their jobs as emotional rollercoasters. The pervasiveness of emotion in the workplace has led a growing number of scholars to consider emotion at

work, and, as Berscheid (1987) previously articulated, there is an important connection between emotion and communication:

The experience of emotion promotes our welfare and survival... (and) the expression of the experienced emotion to another person is also vital to our welfare... The truly important communication that takes place between humans... occur[s] when the communicator is experiencing emotions. (p. 79)

Understandings of motivational discourse in an emotional labor job like door-to-door sales has been somewhat facilitated by previous studies of emotion and communication.

During the early years of communication research on emotion at work, Tracy and Tracy (1998) stated that there was a “wealth of information about emotion in interpersonal relationships” yet a lack of research on emotion in organizational life (p.391). Guerrero and Andersen (1998) advanced the study of communication and emotion by examining social emotion, or the idea that interpersonal relationships are the primary elicitor of most emotion. At this same time there was an influx of research on emotion within organizational life (e.g., Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Leidner, 1999; Tracy, 2000; Waldron & Krone, 1991; Waldron, 1994).

As scholarship on emotion has progressed, communication scholars began to face what Miller et al. (2007) described as “unruly literature” on emotions in the workplace, or a vast amount of literature that needs to be organized. Miller et al.’s (2007) article on emotion organized this body of literature by underscoring five types of organizational emotion: emotional labor, emotional work, emotion with work, emotion at work, and emotion toward work. The subsequent section focuses on the first type of organizational emotion, emotional labor.

## *Emotional Labor*

Emotional labor has been a prominent topic within academic research and continues to be researched in various contexts including, for example, 911 dispatchers, restaurant staff, and correctional officers (Hochschild, 1983; Mars & Nicod, 1984; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991; Schweingruber & Berns, 2005; Tracy, 2000). The most notable area of research on emotion at work stems from Hochschild's (1983) seminal research on flight attendants and the construct of emotional labor. Emotional labor refers to an individual's efforts to display their emotions in accordance with organizational norms. These emotions are often inauthentic and are typically encouraged in an employee handbook (Hochschild, 1983). Scholars have conceptualized two distinct forms of emotional labor: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting refers to workers' abilities to express emotions they may not be feeling at the time. For example, those who work in the food service industry will typically smile at customers who enter their restaurant even if they are having a bad day. According to Waldron (2012), "surface acting is perhaps the most crucial communicative requirement of our many service jobs" (p. 6).

Of particular relevance to the current study, Buzzanell and Turner's (2003) findings suggested that those who experience strong emotions from workplace stress express their emotions in ways that are considered in accord with white middle-class gender norms. Specifically, they found that male participants who expressed their experiences with workplace emotion did so in ways that were consistent with masculine norms such as engaging in competition, concern for status, and displaying dominance over others who were members of their interpersonal circle. Based on these findings, it follows that the direct sales industry, which is a predominantly male dominated industry,

may also be characterized by these forms of emotion management and responses to emotion-centered messages.

A similar study conducted by Tracy (2005) concluded that correctional officers also adopted masculine gender norms in dealing with workplace emotions. For example, a predominate practice used by correctional officers who experienced emotional labor was to, “suppress weak emotions and be tough” (p. 269). Tracy also concluded that the officers’ motivations for displaying masculine forms of emotional control was reinforced through formal mandates by administrators, and were generally encouraged by the organization. Thus, an enduring question remains: If employees align their emotions with an organization’s expectations, how does this shape their motivation at work?

A qualitative study of 911 dispatchers conducted by Shuler and Sypher (2000) revealed that certain dispatchers found enjoyment in their performance as emotion laborers when they focused on the comic relief on an encounter. These workers used humor as a form of emotion management, a fix, or as an altruistic service which led to an increase in job satisfaction and overall happiness in the workplace. Furthermore, Tracy, Myers, and Scott’s (2006) study on 911 dispatchers revealed that humor (i.e., cracking jokes) provided relief in the face of difficult workplace duties. In areas of work where emotional labor is prevalent, research has shown that humor becomes a tool for sensemaking.

Similar to food servers (Leidner, 1993), cruise ship staff (Tracy, 2000), financial planners (Miller & Koesten, 2008), and many other customer service positions, door-to-door sales representatives must overcome negative emotions and align their emotions with organizational norms (Schweingruber & Berns 2005). Negative encounters that

salesmen are presented with daily, such as rejection and disdain from customers, require reactions that are consistent with organizational norms and expectations of professionalism. The discrepancy between actual emotions felt and the physical display of a contradictory emotion makes door-to-door sales another context of emotional labor that warrants investigation. As the amount of time a representative spends selling increases the ability to manage emotions in accordance with organizational norms becomes increasingly important for production. Thus, contextually broadening the research on emotional labor provides scholars with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the potential consequences of emotional labor such as, higher or lower motivation.

Workplace personnel who are involved in emotion management may also have an increase in emotional exhaustion and burnout, an extension of the emotion literature that occupies an important part of a door-to-door sale representative's work. The following section highlights the literature on emotional exhaustion.

### *Emotional Exhaustion*

An issue closely connected with emotional labor is burnout. Burnout is an antecedent to feelings of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occur frequently among individuals who work with customers while seeking to gain customer satisfaction (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Maslach and Jackson posited that employee burnout deteriorates the quality of customer care and service which can also lead to personal distress and increased levels of exhaustion for employees. The risk of burnout for door-to-door sales representatives is high. According to Schweingruber (2003), one-third of



door-to-door salesmen typically experience burnout and leave their companies within the first month.

Expanding the research on emotional exhaustion, Miller and Koesten (2008) found that financial planners experienced a great deal of emotion when working with clients, and often times client relationships, the main producer of emotions in the workplace, were more central to the work of a financial planner than the finances. Further, she stated, “financial planners were not as ‘controlled’ as other front-line service personnel...in part because they had much more autonomy regarding client contacts and client relationships” (p. 26). Door-to-door sales representatives risk a drop in commission if they are selective about client contacts potentially exposing them to more emotionally exhaustive scenarios than other professions, which may lead to a higher risk of burnout.

Based on previous findings offered by Buzzanell and Turner (2003) and Tracy (2005) on emotional labor, emotional exhaustion has the potential to appear in a door-to-door sales jobs because sales representatives are exposed to a line of work that is considered emotional labor. In order to maintain a high level of motivation emotion management strategies are crucial in an area of work driven by high levels of autonomy. Likewise, furthering the knowledge on motivational communication that occurs within a sales teams in order to promote emotion management and, as stated previously, how this emotion management subsequently alters employee motivation will further the literature on emotion in the workplace while also introducing motivation as a communicative construct that warrants further research. In order to accomplish this in the present study the following research questions are explored:

RQ1: How does a sales team (managers and members) communicate about their experiences with emotional labor?

RQ2: How does this communication shape the motivational messages that arise within the sales team?

### *Past and Present Research on Motivation*

Walker, Churchill, and Ford's (1977) meta-analysis on motivation and performance stated, "One particularly crucial aspect of sales management that has received little attention from marketing scholars is the motivation of salesmen and the determinants of sales performance" (p. 156). This section reviews various overarching theories and concepts of motivation that fall into Walker and colleagues' four-pronged discussion of motivation: (a) the ability of the salesman, (b) financial compensation and incentives, (c) psychological incentives, and (d) organizational and managerial factors. I conclude this section with special emphasis on this fourth area. Motivational language theory fits within this fourth classification and when applied to direct sales can move the research toward a more communicative understanding of motivation. Subsequently, the final portion of this review highlights the growth of this theory and the potential it has to further the research done in door-to-door sales from a communicative perspective.

#### *The Ability of the Salesperson*

McGregor's (1957) Theory X and Theory Y offered contrasting views of employees' motivations. Theory X espouses that employees were incapable of acting for the company without strict and timely management intervention, while Theory Y

envisions employees as intrinsically motivated people bearing the potential to direct their actions toward organization goals without an abrasive push from management.

Schein (1975) championed Theory Y, stating, “as organizations and technology become more complex in response to more turbulent environments it becomes progressively more important for managers to hold the set of assumptions about human behavior that McGregor attempted to capture in his Theory Y” (p. 19). Schein claimed that in maintaining the set of assumptions posited in Theory Y, managers have an objective and realistic view of human behavior that Theory X does not capture.

According to Schein, managers who view subordinates through a Theory Y lens will have managerial tactics that are better matched to each specific task. Theories like Theory X and Theory Y have sought to understand motivation tactics by comparing them to the ability of the subordinate, or what a person is or is not psychologically capable of doing. As the research on motivation expanded, scholars began to study what outside forces moved subordinates toward production.

### *Financial Compensation and Incentives*

Historical and current research has sought to understand the role of financial compensation and incentives for motivating employees, with most literature to date suggesting the powerful impact money has on motivation. For example, Rynes, Gerhart, and Minette (2004) contended, “meta-analytic studies of actual behaviors in response to motivational initiatives nearly always show pay to be the most effective motivator” (p. 382). Likewise, Frenen, McCaleb, Shaw, and Denny (1980) stated, “money is a crucial incentive...no other incentive or motivational technique comes even close to money with respect to instrumental value” (p. 379). However, the average door-to-door salesperson is

not paid an hourly wage (Jolson, 1972), and it is not unusual for a salesperson to end a work day with no financial compensation due to lack of production.

### *Psychological Incentives*

Early theories of motivation suggested that a person should be rewarded for productive behavior and punished for nonproductive behavior, and that the reward alone was an effective mechanism for motivation. Subsequent scholarship more specifically considered intrinsic versus extrinsic reward systems such as Vroom's valence-instrumentality-expectancy model which focused on a person's desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. According to this model, an employee's goals are motivated by the probability of obtaining an outcome, the anticipated satisfaction in obtaining a certain outcome, and a subjective evaluation of effort that leads to performance or an output (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). In summary, this model points to an employee's high level of intrinsic motivation as a force pushing him or her toward action.

As the focus of motivational research began to shift towards understanding what impact a leader had on motivation, theories such as Locke and Latham's goal-setting theory emphasized the major constructs: goal specificity, goal difficulty, and goal acceptance as a process through which supervisors encouraged subordinates to act (Zorn & Ruccio, 1998). More recently, Latham and Pinder (2005) argued, "...motivation is a psychological process resulting from the interaction between the individual and the environment" (p. 486). While these psychological aspects of motivation are important theory development, the lack of theorizing around the communicative aspects of motivation neglects the reality that managers that attempt to motivate their employees are participating in a process of symbolic interaction (Zorn & Rucio, 1998).

### *Organizational and Managerial Factors*

In Walker and colleagues' (1977) meta-analysis, organizational and managerial factors are defined as motivation that is visual within policies, procedures, and even organizational climate. Schweingruber's (2003) and Leinder's (1993) research on positive mental attitude (PMA) described how organizational and managerial factors effect motivation. Schweingruber's findings suggested that the PMA of door-to-door sales representatives is enforced and encouraged on a company wide basis through trainings. These trainings are used as a form of motivation in hopes of decreasing work stress. Research, such as Schweingruber's (2003) and Leindner's (1993), are some of the scant works in the academic literature that document motivational communication within a direct-to-home sales context while also making a connection with emotion management in a profession where emotional labor is pervasive.

These articles, while important to furthering this research agenda, lack the crucial understanding of motivation as social and constructed through communication with other organization members. While their work is important to the present argument an expansion should be considered in order to develop a greater focus towards the communicative aspects of motivation and how emotional labor impacts this phenomenon.

Due to the fact that door-to-door salesmen are considered independent contractors, a major managerial and organizational factor in this line of work is that a company's opportunity for direct or bureaucratic control is limited. Instead, companies' managers attempt to change the way workers think, feel, and communicate about on-the-job stress. Schweingruber's (2006) research analyzed how managers encouraged

salesmen to, “read and listen to positive self-help books and motivation tapes, memorize and repeat positive phrases, and commit specific goals to writing” (p. 53).

Past work by Zorn and Ruccio (1998) and Sullivan (1988) began to consider communication skills as a fundamental aspect of organizational motivation. Sullivan’s (1988) motivational language theory expanded past theories of motivation to include three speech acts: perlocutionary, locutionary, and illocutionary. He argued that past motivation theory focused solely on language that informed and reduced worker uncertainty. In expanding past theories, Sullivan sought to understand motivating not only as a means of informing, perlocutionary speech acts, but also as meaning-making, locutionary speech acts, and human bonding, illocutionary speech acts. Motivational language theory paved the way for a foundational understanding of the interconnectivity of communication and motivation. Research conducted by Zorn and Ruccio (1998) sought to further develop the intricate interplay of communication and motivation. Zorn and Ruccio (1998) stated:

With...motivation socially constructed as central to employee performance and ultimately organizational performance and profits, it is no wonder that organizations spend millions of dollars every year to train managers in skills needed to motivate employees. Of course, such skills are almost entirely communication skills. (p. 468)

Motivation is facilitated and shaped by communication. Research that seeks to further understand the implications of motivational communication within the workplace will benefit from expanding conceptualizations of motivation beyond intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.

As established in Zorn and Ruccio’s (1998) study, research that takes into consideration employees’ interpretations of motivational communication is important

because an employee's interpretation can lead to action or inaction. Therefore, the current study will explore whether or not the particular attempts of managers to motivate are perceived as motivational and the impact high levels of workplace emotion have on representative's motivation by examining the following question:

RQ3: How do sales representatives collaboratively make sense of managers' motivational messages in an emotional labor job?

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact emotional labor had on door-to-door sales representatives' motivation. This study was conducted by examining a sales office within a major home automation company. Featuring a qualitative research design the following project consists of data that was collected in the form of in-depth interviews, recordings, and field notes. The subsequent sections detail the research design, data collection procedures, and analytic processes that guided this project.

Data for this study were collected from a leading home automation and security company, Specticate<sup>1</sup>. Each summer more than 3,000 Specticate sales representatives temporarily relocate to major cities throughout the United States, many of whom also bring their families. Each day, their goal is to persuade consumers to purchase and sign multi-year home automation and security contracts, and by doing so secure a commission, which is their chief form of compensation. In the present study, 15 Specticate sales representatives based in southeast Texas consented to participate in semi-structured interviews and be observed in the field.

#### *Research Design*

For the purpose of data collection, I adopted the role of participant observer. However, I was first exposed to this context during my spouse's previous employment as a Specticate sales representative. In this previous position I received secondhand accounts

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<sup>1</sup> Company name, participant's names, and other identifying information has been replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect anonymity.



of the arguably unconventional tactics used by managers and employees to cope with emotional labor. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), when discovering something, what matters most is not just the experience of that thing but in how we problematize our own, as well as others actions. These experiences prompted more deliberate questions about what it means to perform emotional labor in a door-to-door sales job.

Initially, analysis for this study began with an examination of the literature and theories that would assist in a reasonable interpretation of these events. These preliminary steps provided what Lindlof and Taylor (2011) defined as sensitizing concepts which are, “conceptual tools for foreshadowing the relevant features of the phenomenon we are about to face in the field” (p. 78). My previous native role within the company facilitated contact with the Chief Executive Officer, regional managers, and team managers who ultimately granted me access to conduct fieldwork with their employees. Through purposeful sampling I gained full access to my spouse’s previous office in southeast Texas, the unconventional techniques used by this office are, in part, what prompted this study. Prior to entering the field, IRB approval was received and each participant voluntarily consented to being a part of the study.

#### *Data Sources and Collection Methods*

In order to effectively answer the proposed research questions, data for this study was gathered over a six-month time period in the form of individual interviews and field observations. Access to this office was granted for four months during the course of the summer sales season. The remaining two months of data collection consisted of member checking interviews in various locations in order to increase validity of findings. Primary observations for fieldnote data and recordings were: (a) meetings intended to train and

motivate sales representatives and (b) daily sales routes with individual sales representatives. A majority of fieldnotes recorded the training content, power structures within the team, and notes on the discourse between sales representatives and managers. Written fieldnotes were typed and direct recordings were transcribed to text. The total time spent in the field observing equated to 18 hours. Observations produced a total of 58 pages of single-spaced fieldnotes.

Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with sales representatives and managers. A total of 15 interviews were conducted, designed to elaborate on elements examined in participant observation and issues of emotion and motivation within the sales context. Questions included how sales representatives communicated about emotions with the rest of the team, how they talked about training meetings with each other, and messages concerning company and managerial motivation tactics. This interview schedule was used as a guide for semi-structured conversation rather than a strict protocol (Tracy, 2013). Within this particular sales office there were 15 representatives. Of the 15 interviews, 14 were completed in person and, at the participant's request, the remaining interview was conducted over email using a questionnaire comparable to the content in the interview question guide. Member checking interviews were conducted over the phone with questions being asked in order to clarify and expand ideas gathered in the field. . The total number of hours spent interviewing equaled 17, with an average interview length of 50 minutes. Interviews produced a total of 74 pages of single spaced, transcribed text.

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis process initially started with extracting data that were related to the research questions on emotional labor and motivation and pulling these excerpts from the large data set. Based on experiences in the field and an understanding of the literature, the following criteria was inductively developed in order to determine codes that centered on motivation and/or emotional labor. This was the resulting criteria: 1) instances where representatives narrated a situation involving the instrumental suppression of felt emotions, 2) moments where participants described or labeled a situation as motivational or motivating, 3) places in the data where the researcher noted a display or talk about emotional labor or motivation, and 4) discussions between team members about emotional or motivational encounters.

Throughout the next stage of analysis a chart was created to organize codes and categories. The codes and categories were found by relying upon a two-level analysis characterized by Tracy (2013) as iterative analysis wherein I alternated between emic-level categories that emerged from the data and etic-level categories that were based in existing research and theory. Iterative analysis was an important factor in this step of the analysis process because the expansion of certain themes was based off of current and new literature. In order to refine the coding I focused on Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) description of coding as "a data condensation task that enables you to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily available units" (p. 73).

Throughout the coding process it was important to reanalyze the research questions for the proposed study in order to accurately and distinctly describe each

participant's viewpoints in relation to the aim of the study and in order to ensure interpretive validity (see R. Johnson, 1999). In order to obtain interpretive validity, additional time was spent verifying findings. Specifically, participant feedback, also called member checking, was used, which allowed the participant to affirm whether the researcher's interpretations of his or her experiences were accurate (see Tracy, 2013). These member checking interviews were some of the most insightful.

Throughout the duration of this analysis process emotional labor and motivational episodes appeared to be interdependent on one another. It was during the second cycle of coding that the dichotomous nature of sales member's experiences and communications became apparent. Over multiple sessions the data was read and reread. Various organizational communication theories were researched in order to assist in explaining particular aspects in the data that were not captured well by a few of the current categories. By doing this the data was condensed into dichotomies to see if it proved insightful. Through this analysis it became clear that the motivational tactics used in door-to-door sales were closely linked to and formed because of the high level of emotional labor that was present, particularly in this case. These dichotomies serve as an explanation for how door-to-door sales representatives make sense of and cope with their emotional labor experiences and how this subsequently shapes their discourse about motivation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

I learned so much in the months I was out selling but the funny thing is, that the things I learned seemed be on the opposite ends of the spectrum. I learned dirty sex terms I never want to hear again one day, and then listened intently to an eighty year old recount story after story to me because she had no one else to talk to another day.

–Drew

#### *The Dichotomous Nature of Door-to-Door Sales: Emotion and Motivation*

Through interviews, observations, and fieldnotes I found emotion to be central to the work of door-to-door sales. Communication among sales team members and with customers played an integral part in the sales team's management of emotional experiences and maintaining motivation throughout the summer. The following presentation of findings illuminates the disparity pervasive in the participant's' door-to-door sales experiences.

The first research question asked how sales teams communicated about their experiences with emotional labor. Findings revealed that, within their daily routine representatives were co-participants to the obscene side of human nature as well as displaying the best of humanity. These encounters with emotional labor led them to communicate using crude humor while also sharing tales about the positive experiences while selling. Subsequently, the second research question asked how emotional labor shaped motivational messages. Findings revealed that sales representatives focused on maintaining a level of pride for what they did while at the same time loathing the actual work. This finding also answered the final research question of how sales representatives

collaboratively made sense of managerial motivation. Lastly, findings revealed that while living in such close quarters, these representatives encountered the challenge of caring for their team like a family while also being encouraged daily to compete with them like rivals.

Therefore, the following qualitative interpretation demonstrates the dichotomous nature of door-to-door sales. First, the dichotomy of *admiration and abhorrence* represents the range of sensemaking that participants did concerning the job itself. Within this dichotomy three themes are discussed. Subsequently, *the emotional dichotomy of obscenity and humanity* is presented in which four themes revolving around the concept of emotion at work are presented. Finally, the *relational dichotomy of care and competition* is explored and three themes are presented that illustrate the complex relationships that occur among coworkers.

#### *A Job to Abhor/ Admire*

Larger societal discourse portrays door-to-door sales representatives as dishonest, greedy, and often times corrupt. To make up for the lack of heroism in their job title, Specticate sales representatives were constantly in flux between admiring and abhorring their company, product, and the work they do. As such, sensemaking theory became crucial to understanding how these sales representatives made sense of their job and subsequently constructed their admirable identity at work for a job that they disdained.

At its core, sensemaking is how meaning is constituted in communication and in organizations' collective communication. Weick's (1995, 2001, 2005) theoretical model of organizational sensemaking helps highlight various ways in which representatives made sense of their lack of occupational prestige, permitting them to uphold a more

prestigious identity. Specifically, throughout this description the concepts of labeling and bracketing, retrospection, and the social/ systemic nature of sensemaking are emphasized. Sensemaking developed as an appropriate theory for further explanation of door-to-door sales after analysis pointed to findings which showed the necessity of the sensemaking process during moments of tension and paradox (Weick, 1995). These dichotomies represent the constant presence of tension and paradox within the work of the participants, pointing to the necessity of sensemaking theory.

According to Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005), a crucial feature of sensemaking is labeling and bracketing. A key concept of labeling is plausibility, which suggests “imposing labels on interdependent events in ways that suggest plausible acts of managing, coordinating, and disturbing” (p.411). These labels are inherently plastic because they are socially defined and depend on circumstances and peripheral instances. Much of the data revealed that sales representatives would label their jobs as, “hard work,” “dreadful,” and “hell.”

When posed with the hypothetical situation of whether they would return to their sales work after winning the lottery, the resounding response was, “hell no,” with the exception of one outlier. Luke, a fifth year representative, illustrated his general disdain for the job in this response: “Hell no, very few people knock doors because they actually enjoy it. They do it for the money, so if the money was taken out of the equation no one would knock doors. I don’t know a single person who would.” Another sales representative simply stated, “I hate this job.” Beyond their own constructions of what it means to be a door-to-door sales representatives, customers would also impact their construction of identity at work.

One sales representative recounted a time when a customer answered his door, realized it was a door-to-door salesman and immediately interrupted him by saying: “Hey man, I don’t need your salesman crap, you can leave now.” The general consensus among the team was that they had a horrible job. In addition to this label, the constant retrospective analysis of encounters with customers that supported this label led sales representatives to alternatively construct their identity while still appropriating a label of contempt for their work.

Researchers have defined the term dirty work as jobs that society considers undesirable (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Hughes, 1951). Findings from this study would suggest that door-to-door sales representatives, while also performing emotional labor, perform dirty work. Subsequently, the following three themes illustrate the various ways in which the representatives would make sense of the undesirable nature of their work by crafting versions of work that were far more admirable: an acknowledgement of the substantial monetary gain available to sales representatives (*wealth*), emphasis on fulfilling a *greater good*, and a desire to *cherish the good people*.

*Wealth.* The extent literature on motivation has presented various studies supporting the power of financial incentives. Many have reached the conclusion that monetary gain is one of the strongest motivators when on the job (Frenen, McCaleb, Shaw, & Denny, 1980; Locke, 1968; Rynes, Gerhart, & Minette 2004). Yet, throughout the summer it was not uncommon for over half of the office to “bagel” on a given day—that is, end the day without any sales or commissions. Nonetheless, wealth was still constantly touted as an admirable feature of the job. While discussing the most rewarding aspect of his job Grant, a fourth year sales representative, stated:



The most rewarding aspect is realizing at the end of the summer that all the hard work has paid off and you've made more money in 3-4 months than most people making working an entire year at another job, I feel a real sense of accomplishment.

In this office, the average sales representative made \$400 to \$500 a sale, and while most sales representatives sold one system a day, many would sell as much as three or four a day. Thus, while the work of a door-to-door sales representative is extremely difficult and for most people, rather unappealing, those in the job envisioned the earning potential as the advantageous trade-off that legitimized and even revered the work. As one representative vividly stated, "I'd clean up dog poop for \$80,000 a summer." The communicative construction of the availability of wealth allowed representatives to make sense of their difficult job in a more admirable way.

The social and systemic nature of sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005) is another important aspect of sensemaking theory that is present within this theme. This portion of the theory claims that knowledge does not exist solely in the head of each individual but is system wide, meaning knowledge can come from previous discussions with other sales representatives, trainings, and power structures within the organization. Morning meetings when the incentives for the day were discussed often became moments of sensemaking, as well. Throughout the week, Specticate would offer various incentives to promote sales, including, for example: an iPad for those who sold a system before 1pm, shoes for the group of representatives with highest single-day sales, and a Nike gift cards for representatives who exceeded their individual sales records.

One meeting where the team was presented with their weekend incentive was a specific illustration of the systemic and social nature of sensemaking. The incentive for that weekend was an additional \$400 dollars on top of the representative's typical

compensation for any sales that were made before 4:00 p. m. The team immediately reacted with comments like: “Is this for real?” “I like that,” and “That’s why we do this.” Based on the team’s energetic reactions it was clear they deemed the incentive worthwhile and motivating. From a sensemaking perspective, this demonstrated that one representative’s view of the incentive is actually distributed across a system, and others’ knowledge of the organization, incentives, and experiences shaped how they constructed these incentives as worthy of the hard work. This illustration also answers the third research question by highlighting how representatives would collaboratively make sense of manager’s motivational messages, thus impacting the value of the message.

Previous research from the literature review highlighted the power of financial incentives (Rynes, Gerhard, & Minette, 2004; Frenen, McCaleb, Shaw, & Perry, 1980). Yet, findings revealed that, although successful sales representatives are highly compensated, the remaining themes of a greater good and cherishing the good people were more effective at motivating and constructing admiration for the job than the potential for wealth. The remainder of this section explores the themes, adopted from in vivo language, of a greater good and cherishing the good people.

*A greater good.* Due to the generally negative view society has of door-to-door sales representatives, it is important to understand how these employees nonetheless craft a positive view of their work. Past research on dirty jobs has suggested that one way employees cope with the taint inherent in their work is to engage in reframing. One form of reframing is infusing. Infusing occurs when the stigma of the work is overcome with positive value, which transforms it instead, into an honorable position (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Consistent with this idea, many representatives made sense of their

tainted position by reframing their work as beneficial and contributing to a higher cause. Particularly, most references to a higher cause focused on the concept of providing protection to customers through their product.

One first year sales representative referred to this higher cause frequently. When asked what part of door-to-door sales appealed to him he replied: "...the potential to make a difference and sell a product that will help people for the better." As our conversation continued, Dustin, the representative, told the story of his first experience knocking on doors. The first door Dustin ever knocked was while shadowing a manager, the homeowners only spoke Spanish and Dustin's manager was fluent in English. Dustin, being bilingual, was able to sell them a security system. He recounted, "That sale changed my idea of what I could accomplish and gave me the excitement to work another day and hunt for those families that I could benefit." Many sales representatives described their job in a similar way. For example, Drew said, "I get excited about helping people protect themselves. I believe in the product and I like when a customer gets really excited and happy about the system. That's what made a day go well."

By infusing positive value into a stigmatized job, sales representatives, much like public service workers (e.g., McIntyre, 1987; Tracy & Scott, 2006), were able to diminish the negative aspects of their work by masking them with a higher purpose. From a sensemaking perspective, how the representatives made sense of their work as providing protection is a defensible and a plausible construction (e.g., by selling someone a security system you are protecting them from potential danger), which could explain why representatives continue to do a job they so adamantly despise.

Further data that supported the theme of a greater good expressed the importance of communicating a sense of belief and pride in the product and company. Specifically, the following discussion shows how participants collaboratively communicated about pride in their company and in the product they sold. During a training session, one of the managers discussed never being “afraid of the product.” Specifically, he said: “there is no doubt in our minds that this product is lacking in any order...our product stands for itself, sells itself. I promise you the trash that’s here, the alarm systems that are here, do not come toe-to-toe with Specticate, they can’t.” This overflowing pride for the company and belief in the value of the product was constantly present in the representatives’ discourse, functioning as a way to refocus on the less stigmatized aspects of the job (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

Representatives also frequently shared narratives of customers’ positive experiences with their systems. Logan, a fifth year sales representative told a story of a widow he had sold earlier in the summer. The previous day he had called her to see how she was liking the system she had purchased from him. During the meeting he shared the following conversation:

I called her last night and one of the things she said was, ‘thank you so much, I really really love this system, you were right.’ She was a really hard sale but I knew we had the better product. I really honestly truly believed in it and now that it is in her home she loves it and was super thankful. She said she felt so much safer in her house, especially at night.

Almost every morning meeting someone shared a narrative similar to the one above, where a customer had a positive experience with the product. After each narrative, discussion would take place, serving as moments of sensemaking and identity construction. Referencing back Weick’s model of organizational sensemaking and the

importance of plausibility when labeling, the act of sharing positive customer experiences provided support for the label of a higher cause. As such, providing representatives with a semblance of plausibility that what they were doing was important and helpful to others. Recollecting on these interactions with customers allowed the representatives to communicatively reconstruct the taint of their work by focusing on the valuable aspects of the job.

*Cherish the good people.* This final theme additionally illustrates how participants made sense of their jobs as admirable, all the while abhorring them. Cherish the good people refers to how representatives' cherished positive experiences with people during the summer. The experiences they cherished functioned as a way for them to make sense of their unpleasant job in a more admirable light, allowing them to persist in their work.

For example, some narratives like Drew's showed the good deeds and kind words provided by customers or strangers while "out on the doors:" "One man saw me outside and came out. He told me he didn't want the security system but gave me \$100 because he felt bad that I was out knocking." Doug, a first year, expressed his gratitude for these people by saying: "I'm grateful for the nice people, those that are really nice. Yesterday started off with some guy telling me that we were a scam and then the next house was a super nice guy. I appreciate the nice people out there." One potential interpretation of representatives' continual discourse about the good people could be what Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) described as supporting the supporters. This occurs when those involved in dirty work, "come to place more credence in those outsiders (if any) who provide a positive view of their work" (p. 424).

Ultimately, one participant described this situation of cherishing the good people best when he said: “these are the moments that I cherish from that summer; I met some amazing folks, and about 90% of them were over the age of 60.” What these representatives remembered most were those customers that provided them a positive view of their work, allowing them to make sense of their identity and negate the negative aspects of door-to-door sales.

Beyond positive customer interactions, representatives utilized encouraging words from friends and loved ones to maintain admiration for their work amidst their general sentiment of disgust. Logan, a representative whose wife and daughter were out with him for the summer stated: “I’ve got a really good wife. She’s always positive no matter how bad the job gets. It’s surprising how many times I call my wife and she’s super positive... and I’m just thankful for her positivity and different look on life.” In these examples friends and loved ones assisted representatives in making sense of their job by providing sensegiving.

According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), “sensemaking is particularly acute for...dirty work occupations, because they must confront and reconcile themselves to the disparaged aspects of the work” (p. 426). In this study sensemaking theory played a role in how participants’ constructed their identity while participating in taint work. Additionally, the previous experiences in this section have demonstrated that customers and love ones functioned as sensegivers in aiding the representatives with identity construction.

Gioia and Chittipeddi’s (1991) research referred to an individual’s attempt to “provide a viable interpretation of a new reality and to...adopt it as their own” (p.443) as

sensegiving. The previous quotes showed how customers and loved ones would make sense for the representatives, providing them with interpretations of their identity at work. By employing sensmaking and sensegiving into an understanding of the dichotomous nature of door-to-door sales, specifically the contradiction of admiration and abhorrence in the job, a better understanding is reached for how representatives made sense of a job that is hated by most, in an admirable way.

In this study the research questions that were presented sought for a better understanding of how participants communicated about their experiences with emotional labor and how these experiences impacted their motivational messages. This section revealed that the emotional labor that was experienced while “on the doors” led many participants to loathe their job. As such, their communication about these experiences focused on the positive aspects of the job, leading them to cherish the good people they came into contact with. Another important note is that their motivational messages were also focused on the positive aspects of the job such as the fulfillment of a greater good and the opportunity for increased monetary gain. The following section further explores the dichotomous nature of door-to-door sales by discussing the emotional terrain in the participant’s lives.

### *The Emotional Dichotomy of Obscenity and Humanity*

Door-to-door sales representatives are subject to enduring an onslaught of customers’ negative and positive emotions while simultaneously managing their own emotions in accordance with company standards. Another major theme that emerged from the data was the dichotomy of obscenity and humanity. Obscenity and humanity characterizes the range of characteristics representatives encountered while “on the

doors,” such as, lewd behavior at one door and acts of charity at the next. Although, a portion of this dichotomy examines emotional labor displays while on the doors it also applies to coworker encounters. As such, this dichotomy is an examination of the emotional displays of the reps themselves and others they come into contact with such as, coworkers and customers.

Emotional labor and emotion management are two concepts that are frequently referred to within the explanation of this dichotomy. Emotional labor occurs when an employee’s emotional reactions are in line with company policy. Instances of emotional labor would occur while knocking doors and the management of emotions preceded. The explanation that follows details how representatives communicatively described their experiences with obscenity and humanity and how this opposition was then reflected in their communication about emotions and motivation. Four themes emerged within this dichotomy that are referred to as: (1) *on the doors*, (2) *crude humor*, (3) *holy cause*, and (4) *attitude of gratitude*.

*On the doors.* Participants described various encounters while knocking on doors during the summer. These experiences ranged from near death encounters with hostile home owners to special moments spent in the living room of a home owner sharing stories about life and family. Representatives recounted situations of a homeowner offering them water during a hot day or allowing them into their house while a storm passed. Many of these customers never purchased an alarm system, but it was evident that their kindness was remembered in the stories told by the representatives. A common occurrence many representatives recounted was of the stranger that did not buy a system but offered them money nonetheless. For example, Luke, a fourth year sales



representative, recalled that "One man gave me \$20 because I was a college kid out selling and wished me well after we had talked for a couple hours."

In juxtaposition to the care and kindness received on the doors, each sales representative also experienced hatred and disgust. The following example paints an image of the brutality that door-to-door salesmen would often times face during their daily encounters with homeowners. Logan, a fifth year sales representative, recounted a particularly jarring situation he had during the summer:

One guy pulled a gun on me, literally, we were talking peacefully about a camera system at his house. His wife appeared looking pissed, he went upstairs to her for a second and came back down with a gun and told me to 'get the fuck out of his house.' His wife flipped me off as I exited. Once I was out of sight I ran as fast as I could.

These heated, emotional encounters were not uncommon and many were recounted during morning meetings. One morning Dustin, a first year sales representative, shared the story of his first dog bite, another common occurrence in door-to-door sales. In his account a medium size dog was let out of a house bit his leg. The owner, without acknowledging the dog's behavior, called the dog off and walked back inside the house, slamming the door behind him. The meeting continued with each of the guys sharing tales of their first experiences being bit while knocking doors. Frequently, these narratives emphasized the dog owner's lack of care for the situation.

Drew, a second year sales representative, described a situation with a customer that epitomizes emotional labor and the obscenity these representative faced. The following narrative acknowledges the pressure to perform in a particular way and how that pressure can often times result in burnout, dissonance, and resentment (Myers, Considine, & Garner, 2007; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). During my initial interview with

Drew he frequently mentioned the difficulty of putting the customer first, even in uncomfortable situations. His continual performance of emotional labor ultimately resulted in his leaving early which supported the previously mentioned literature that found burnout as a result of performing emotional labor (Miller & Koesten, 2008). Throughout the summer most sales representative in the office offered their phone number to potential customers because, as they say, “the whole point of selling is hoping they call and change their mind and you make 500 bucks.” During his first summer Drew had given a customer his number who eventually began harassing Drew through phone calls and text messages. Drew felt torn by how to respond recalling, “I texted back rarely but the problem was that, as my customer and as a rep of Specticate, I couldn’t tell them to stop talking to me because they would either complain or worse, cancel.”

This scenario is a quintessential example of employees displaying their emotions in accordance to organizational norms which Hochschild (1983) defined as emotional labor. The types of brutality that was experienced at the hands of homeowners while on the doors, was often reflected in the communication and actions of the sales representatives while off the doors. Humor in particular was used to cope with these encounters with brutality and emotional labor and is described in turn.

*Crude humor.* Similar to the correctional officers, 911 call-takers, and fire fighters examined in Tracy, Myers, and Scott’s (2006) study of humor and sensemaking, door-to-door sales representatives also employed humor as a way to distance themselves and provide relief. While humor served a variety of functions within the context of door-to-door sales, a majority of the data suggested that one of the most common ways sales representatives would use humor was through joking which provided them an outlet to

relieve stress and manage emotions that came from working in a paradoxical environment. This finding resonates with Hatch and Elrich-Sanford's (1993) research which concluded that strategic use of humor may be an indication of contradiction or paradox within an environment.

In the present study, humor often functioned as a covert way of making fun of customers. According to previous research on superiority theories, sales representatives may have joked about their customers in order to feel superior to and distanced from them (Duncan, 1985). Evidence of this came during Specticate's morning meetings wherein representatives often acted out their sales pitches to other representatives role-playing as homeowners. For example, while role-playing a wealthy plastic surgeon, Franky, carried on off-colored banter with practicing salesman Josh. In response to Josh acknowledging that the pretend homeowner did "tits and stuff," Franky, acting as the surgeon homeowner boasted, "you probably see my daughters over here, I've done those by hand as well." At this point, the office bursts into laughter. As a representative known for selling well in upper class neighborhoods, Franky's mocking homeowner representation enabled him to poke fun at his wealthy customers while also allowing other team members a quick laugh. Interactions such as this demonstrate the sales team's use of humor, and often, dirty jokes, to cope with the trials of working knocking on doors. Legman (2007), explained that a dirty joke occurs when the joke teller projects their fear and uneasiness onto the recipient by exposing the listener of the joke so that they have insight into the fear or uneasiness.

While crude humor allowed the representatives to regain a sense of control and superiority in an otherwise tumultuous environment, it also provided them a form of

distraction from the monotony of practicing sales pitches. Supporting this claim, various humor research has found that employees use humor as a mechanism for distracting themselves from tense or boring situations (Schuler & Sypher, 2000; Tracy & Tracy, 1998; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2007). Also supported by the research on humor, these displays allowed for a distraction from tense situations such as hostile encounters the representatives faced on the doors. An analysis of the crude humor enacted during practices provided a window into the mental health and wellbeing of the sales representatives (Vangelisti, Crumley, & Baker, 1996). The crude humor that was displayed created a glimpse of the obscenity that was faced on the doors as it seeped into work meetings.

While dirty jokes served as a means to distance themselves and manage the paradoxes inherent in their job, humor also served in identity formation. Consistent with past studies of the high emotional stress encountered in human service work (Tracy, 2005; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2007), self-deprecating humor (i.e., humor that allows individuals to laugh at themselves while elevating their position) was particularly employed as a powerful act of identification. The following narrative, told during one of Specticate's morning meetings illustrates this concept:

As usual I spent most of my day knocking doors, well something funny happened yesterday. I knocked on a door and a very attractive 20ish year old answered the door. I could tell she was the homeowner. I tried to think of something casual and a little flirty to say. Literally after 5 to 7 seconds of awkwardness where I'm not saying anything at all the only thing that came out of my mouth was, 'are you the homeowner?' It's the only thing I know how to do anymore, sell security systems.

Another representative chimed in saying that has happened to him at least five times recently. By collectively sharing such self-deprecating humorous stories, representatives

collaboratively constructed positive identities despite potentially embarrassing experiences.

In summary, crude humor functioned as a way to regain control and establish covert superiority over customers. It also allowed representatives to relieve themselves from the tense situations on the door and find excitement in the monotony of daily sales pitch practices. In contrast to the obscenity pervasive in the representatives' talk, they also exhibited humanity and caring in their communication, often within the same conversation. The following two themes exemplify this second portion of the obscenity and humanity dichotomy, reflecting key phrases within their language: *holy cause* and *attitude of gratitude*.

*Holy cause.* “There will be a day that comes when \$5,000 won't get you on a door. This is when you will need your holy cause. Have your holy cause and don't forget it,” said Neal, a regional manager for the company. During Neal's training session, he cited a statistic that one third of Specticate sales representatives quit or go home early during the summer. Talk centered on the holy cause of their work helped to mitigate the burnout that often provoked such turnover. One team member defined what a holy cause meant to him when he said: “I think it's something that makes people go hard when it's raining or when people just yelled at you and I think...its extreme focus on what's important to me and why I am out here.”

A portion of the sales team's morning meetings focused on training, largely emphasizing the technical skills needed in sales but also discussing ways to cope with obscenity faced on the door. Throughout my observations, discussion about the representative's holy cause was the most widely and openly discussed. For many

representatives, family was the ultimate holy cause. Josh a fifth year sales representative stated: “I want to be able to make as much money as I can so that if anything happened I am able to provide for my family.” Similarly, Dustin’s holy cause was to “provide for his wife.” A majority of the sales representatives had family as their holy cause. Those who did not reference family as their holy cause throughout the summer typically referenced “financial stability” and “financial freedom” as their holy cause.

Having a holy cause allowed representatives to better manage their emotional encounters while also motivating them to get out and sell when, as their regional manager put it: “nothing else would get them out on the door.” One representative illustrated this notion by frequently referencing a picture he kept with him of his daughter and wife: “When I’m like, this sucks, I look up the picture of them and for whatever reason it’s my refocus, it helps me get back in the moment.”

Throughout my observations I watched as this team communicated through these dichotomies, performing a balancing act between obscenity and humanity. During meetings, representatives would swing from obscene to humane by make dirty jokes about tampons (an obscene display) and then without notice switch to discussing their family as their benevolent holy cause. In addition to holy cause, another depiction of humanity was the team’s focus on an attitude of gratitude, which is described in turn.

*Attitude of gratitude.* When discussing the hardest part of their job many representatives referred to their ability to control their thinking and actions. Grant, a third year sales representative, stated: “You must be self-motivated and willing to work when no one’s watching.” Another representative referenced having an “internal drive to succeed.” This emphasis on the ability to self-motivate comes from the highly

independent nature of door-to-door sales, where a lack of bureaucratic control is replaced with an emphasis on maintaining high levels of positivity (Schein, 2006). In order to maintain high levels of positivity, managers sought to boost morale. A chief way in which this was accomplished was by expressing gratitude as a group, which this office termed, “attitude of gratitude.”

Attitude of gratitude occurred during morning meetings. Representatives would spend the allotted time frame documenting moments, items, or people they were grateful for. After a few minutes the team would go around and share a few of the items on their list. These moments served as mood changers for the team allowing them to shift their mental state in order to perform better on the doors.

A number of researchers (Perrow, 1986; Schein, 2006; Leidner, 1993) have labeled an organization’s attempts to shift the way an employee thinks as premise control. Based on Leinder’s (1993) study of insurance agents, premise control was used to elicit a positive mental attitude that led to control. Correlating with Leinder’s research, when representatives were trained to shift their mental attitude they were able to, “construe...a job that involved a good deal of flattery ingratiation, and acceptance of poor treatment,” allowing them to, “appreciate the power their training gave them over their work and the edge they gained over the people they met” (Leinder, 1999; p. 92).

Speticate’s promotion of a holy cause and allotting time for an attitude of gratitude also functioned as a form of unobtrusive control. By instilling value-laden premises into the representatives training the company gained a greater amount of control over their organizational decisions (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). For example, as Logan previously stated, instead of quitting when it was raining he remembered his holy cause,

his wife and daughter, and continued selling. Having a holy cause and performing an attitude of gratitude gave the company unobtrusive control over the representatives even in their autonomous form of work.

During my time in the field, moments for attitude of gratitude were designated in multiple meetings yet, in one particular meeting, the impact of this practice was particularly salient. With three weeks left in the summer, all of the wives and kids had gone home while representatives lodged in rundown motels. Each day they would bring all of their belongings to their car, sell during the day, and then travel to a new city at night. At the beginning of the meeting some of the representatives mentioned potentially going home early due to their unfavorable conditions.

Then, following a typical off-color joke, one manager announced a time for attitude of gratitude. In turn, Brad, a second year sales representative stated, “I’m grateful for the opportunity to be here, realistically we can move around and live out of cars but we still have the opportunity to sell and make money on any given day and any given door.” Likewise, Logan, a fifth year sales rep, concluded the meeting by saying:

I’m grateful for opportunity. That’s the one thing I’ve learned in life and that’s one of the gifts we have in life... I’m pretty grateful for the opportunity to take these moments and seize them and make something big out of them. I think that’s part of the reason why we’re all living in a motel that is the worst in town, because we all have a golden opportunity that we want. I like watching this sacrifice and seeing what we do.

Other expressions in this moment involved being grateful for the experience of being in the less than ideal situation that the representatives were in at the time. Thus, the obscenity of the communication happening at the beginning of this meeting was juxtaposed with the goodwill present at the conclusion of the meeting, further demonstrating the dichotomy of obscenity and humanity at play in the sales team’s



emotions. Much like joking, these moments of gratitude provided the representatives' with an opportunity to distance themselves from the objectionable moments in their job by incorporating and realizing the good. Ultimately, this provided the sales representatives with another way to productively communicate about their emotions while also maintaining their motivation throughout the summer.

### *The Relational Dichotomy of Care and Competition*

Specificate representatives spent the majority of their summer in extremely close quarters. Often, these men would leave friends and family to travel to the other side of the country for a few months out of the year. The proximity, as well as the nature of work being done, created an ever-present relational dichotomy of caring like family, while competing like rivals.

Competition was an important part of Specificate's, incentive program. Each day incentives would be offered to representatives who sold the most. On weekends the team would typically be split in half or thirds, and the smaller teams that sold the most would receive a large incentive. Due to the emphasis placed on competition, representatives were forced to deal with the complexity of also being encouraged to demonstrate caring for those they were in competition with. A portion of the data revealed that representatives would manage this dichotomy of caring for the team like family and competing with them like rivals by appropriating tools provided by the company that were intended to encourage competition.

The main tool utilized by each of the representatives is called Report. Report is a tool created by the company that allowed representatives to track how every person in the company was doing throughout the day. When discussing the role of Report in his day to

day selling Luke stated: “It is huge because you want to know how other people are doing and you also don’t want to be the worst in the office so it pushes you.” Some representatives admitted to checking report more than once every hour.

Functionally, Report was a way for the representatives to track their progress in comparison to others in their office and within the company. Yet, many representatives appropriated it, using the information to show support for the members of their team. One representative stated that he would check Report to see how other members of the team were doing. If there were members struggling he would send them encouraging messages.

Alternatively, many participants commented that Report still served to increase their competitive drive. For these representatives the thought of being the worst on the team was still a motivating force for performing well. This finding supports Buzzanell and Turner’s (2003) findings in the literature which highlighted a rise in gender normative behaviors, like competition, when performing emotional labor. Consequently, the following section demonstrates how this relational dichotomy manifested in ways I refer to as: (1) *brotherhood*, (2) *rituals*, and (3) *relational maintenance*.

*Brotherhood.* A number of representatives within the company and outside of the company refer to Specticate as a brotherhood. The close ties that are formed from performing a difficult job while living with one another created a sense of family at work. Sibling relationships, like a brother to brother relationship, often intermingle feelings of care and competition. The following analysis reveals data on how this brotherly relationship is maintained through the use of nick names and how these ironically demonstrates both care and competition.

In conjunction with the presence of dirty jokes that were mentioned in a previous dichotomy, joking through the use of insulting nicknames was a common occurrence in the daily meetings. As John described it: “most of us got assigned names; little nicknames that we give to each other, it brings us closer and makes it more fun I guess. For example one guy is Beavis, or Little Bitch, and then there is Dynamite.” Specifically, a popular phrase coined by the team that was used by all was “baby dick” which described someone who had not been selling well or who was complaining. Some salesmen described feelings of disdain for such nicknames. One representative specifically stated: “most of the time there wasn’t a huge filter, but I didn’t make too much of a fuss by saying can you please not say that, most of these guys are grown men with families so saying that gets intimidating.” Yet, all representatives, including the one previously quoted, still participated in the act of name calling: The use of nicknames and name calling was heard in every meeting, according to Drew: “when you go to the meetings there is always mention of dicks or someone being a baby dick.”

In Collinson’s (1988) study on shop floor humor, jokes and insulting nicknames were used to stimulate conformity by eliminating feelings of superiority. While there is a formal power structure within the office, there is no one person visibly in charge. The role of leading the meetings and trainings is shared within the team, even the managers of this particular office were called “baby dicks” when they did not perform adequately. Consequently, nicknames functioned as a tool for creating conformity and bonding with the team while also encouraging competition.

*Rituals.* Another aspect of the data that warrants discussion is the ritualistic events the team used to draw closer together and relieve stress. Consider the following

exchange. Logan, one of the team's managers ends the meeting by saying, "so that's the challenge today, everyone sells today and I'll take the belt tonight. You guys can decide, nominate who wants to give me the belt and I'll do it bare ass." Franky, another sales representative eagerly volunteered, "I want to give you the belt." Logan concedes, "Okay you guys... I'll take the bare ass belt tonight from Franky if we all sell seven."

Throughout my summer in the field I witnessed many people get "the belt." The belt was an event that involved being whipped in front of the team, often "bare ass." Upon initial glance, and even as a participant observer, the belt ritual may seem to be a negative tactic to motivate underperforming sales members. That is, with their consent, representatives would get the belt if they did not sell a system that day. Others would offer to "take the belt" if their sales paled in comparison to others. Often times whipping is also commonly interpreted as a disciplinary act which, could reinforce competitive dynamics. However, upon further inspection, this ritual bore different significance.

During a member checking interview with one of the representative from the team, I inquired further about this practice. Visibly upset by my assumption that this ritual was designed to motivate and increase competition, the rep Luke responded, "That is barbaric. We don't whip each other to get motivated. We do it for fun. It's a way for us to relieve stress and just have some fun." The thought that someone else saw the whippings as a form of motivation was appalling to him, and he later reiterated, "I would never work for a company that did such a thing and that is not the type of company we are at all."

One whipping even ended with one of the sales representatives patting the other on the back and saying, "nice job bro, you took that like a champ." Thus, after further

analysis and continual member checking, these ritualistic whippings were ultimately interpreted as a way to cope with the emotional extremes of the job and foster relationships and unity among the representatives. As Waldron (2012) has contended, rituals can reinforce feelings of camaraderie and affection while allowing employees to vent emotions that are otherwise more difficult to process in normal situations.

Another ritual commonly performed during morning meetings involved shooting a person multiple times with a pellet gun. This was done for various reasons such as wearing the wrong color shirt, “being a puss,” or mouthing off too much in meetings. The following is an example of a typical shooting. During a morning meeting near the conclusion of the summer, Logan asked Franky if he has been shot yet, to which Franky replied, “Yeah I just got shot, where the hell have you been?” Logan then lifts up the gun and asks to see it again because he must have missed it while commenting, “Dude, you think it doesn’t hurt, but you forget how much it hurts every time you get shot. I’m like, ‘Oh this isn’t as bad as last time,’ - son of a bitch!” The reps then discussed representative Brad’s impending departure and shot him, as well. After, Franky reasoned, “It’s his last day, he needs an ass whoopin.”

The concept of ritualistic whippings and shootings as means of bonding and coping, while seemingly barbaric to many, functioned as therapeutic and has been considered somewhat normal in unpleasant situations. For example, Running, Woodward, and Girards’s (2008) examination of rituals during death suggested that symbolic objects, such as jewelry and knick-knacks, functioned to spotlight a revered moment. Likewise, at Specticate the presence of the belt in front of the room and the

pellet gun under someone's chair were symbolic objects that represented the beginning of this ritual.

Running, Woodward, and Girad (2008) also noted that designating times and places for emotional expression is often an important part of ritualistic grieving. Thus, while the emotions felt during grieving and while doing summer sales are inexorably different, the whipping and shooting rituals similarly provided the representatives with a "sense of release and catharsis" (p. 305). Another element of grief rituals is structure, a limited space where grieving can occur. During a small portion of morning meetings this was demonstrated as representatives let loose in order to "relieve stress" and "have a little fun." Finally, the narrative act of reminiscing is the final element of ritualistic grieving and was observed when sales representatives recounted various whippings. Recordings would be shown of whippings from other offices, allowing the representatives to communicatively construct a ritual that gave them a space to cope with the emotions they experienced and encountered while on the doors. As such, rituals that outsiders may consider obscene nonetheless provided a level of therapeutic relief for the representatives who were faced with the constant presence of emotional labor. The ritual of whipping and shooting provided them with the ability to manage the complexity inherent in their work as summer sales representative. Relational maintenance behaviors the team used to strengthen their bonds as a work family are a third and final element of the care and competition dichotomy and are described in turn.

*Relational maintenance.* According to Waldron (2012), "Relationship maintenance refers to the processes that stabilize and preserve relationships, often through the ordinary and routine kinds of discourse that pervade daily life" (p. 121).

During the summer, relationships among the team were often representatives' only opportunities for bonding. This theme is an illustration of the care that was present in the representative's discourse, and the relational maintenance behaviors of assurances and openness that were employed to maintain a level of caring (Canary & Stafford, 1992).

Comments like Logan's: "Franky does really well because...he simply breaks down the system and that's why everyone wants it and why he does so well" are common illustrations of reps offering assurances to one another. Such assurances would often be directed to the entire team and subsequently bring the team closer together. For example, comments like, "We can all sell. Everyone in this room has sold over 100 or has 100 sales on the year, we can all sell today" functioned as a way to boost team morale and foster connections and caring within the team. Another way the team drew closer was by displaying an elevated level of openness. When discussing holy causes during one meeting Logan stated, "I remember what you guys say in here, and I think about them during the day while I am working, and thinking, 'oh man I hope they hit their level.' What a good cause." Also common was meta-communication about maintaining team relationships, like one representative's insistence on the importance of "know[ing] each guy's individual needs so that we can make the team cohesive." These assurances and elevated levels of openness helped the team maintain healthy caring relationships.

### *Summary*

This study was conducted in order to better understand how door-to-door sales representatives make sense of their emotional labor encounters and how this sensemaking impacts their motivational discourse. Participants' of this study reported multiple encounters with emotional labor while knocking doors. These encounters shaped their

discussion about emotional labor and motivation. Specifically, three dichotomies were present in the daily life of door-to-door sales representatives (see Table 1). First, the dichotomy of a job to abhor/ admire explored the sensemaking process used by the representative in this office. Within this dichotomy sensemaking and sensegiving were employed as a way representatives' reframed their job in a positive light. The emotional dichotomy of obscenity and humanity explored the emotional terrain of the representatives work lives and their interactions with customers. Finally, the relational dichotomy of care and competition discussed how representatives managed the contradiction of caring for their team like family while competing like rivals through the use of nicknames, adopting rituals, and participating in relational maintenance.

It is important to note that these dichotomies are not independent of another. The obscenity seen and experienced on the doors not only was communicatively expressed through dirty jokes but also in the rituals that brought the team together. Likewise, the humanity expressed during some meetings also appeared during moments of caring between team members in the midst of competition. Subsequently, the following section will underscore the implications of this ethnographic study for future research and practice, while also acknowledging its limitations.



Table 1. The dichotomous nature of door-to-door sales findings

Dichotomy	Themes	Description of Theme
<p>A Job to Abhor/ Admire</p> <p><i>The range of sensemaking participants did concerning their job.</i></p>	Wealth	Participants' emphasis on earning potential.
	A Greater Good	Participants viewed their work as helping those in need.
	Cherish the Good People	Participants' memorialization of those who supported them in their work.
<p>The Emotional Dichotomy of Obscenity and Humanity</p> <p><i>The emotional terrain of sales representatives work life.</i></p>	On the Doors	Description of the obscenity participants encountered while knocking doors.
	Crude Humor	Participants' use of dirty jokes and obscene humor.
	Holy Cause	A motivating factor that kept the representatives going when times got hard. Represented humanity of participants.
	Attitude of Gratitude	Scheduled moments of gratitude. Represented humanity of participants.
<p>The Relational Dichotomy of Competition and Brotherhood</p> <p><i>The constant balance of caring for their team like family while competing like rivals.</i></p>	Brotherhood	The ironic display of both caring and competition.
	Rituals	Rituals used for coping with emotional labor encounters and bonding.
	Relational Maintenance	Acts of caring that helped maintain the relationships among team members.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

Most people know very little about life on the other side of the door. Similarly, much of the scholarship and popular literature on sales demonstrate limited insight, especially from an ethnographic standpoint, into the everyday stories and practices of door-to-door sales representatives. Rather, most recognition of door-to-door sales representatives has centered on unethical behavior and negative customer feedback (e.g., Schwartz, Zimmerman, & Ross, 2014; Cohen, 2014). These reports create a perception of door-to-door sales that is characteristically unappealing. In the present study the work life of a door-to-door sales representative was alternatively explored, with particular emphasis on understanding the role emotional labor has in motivating summer sales representatives. The following discussion summarizes the findings of this study, overviews the limitations, and suggests areas for future research as well as the practical implications of this research.

#### *Summary of Findings*

Throughout this ethnographic analysis, the nature of emotion in a door-to-door sales office was explored. Findings revealed three specific dichotomies present in the representatives' experiences with emotional labor and motivation. The first dichotomy of a job to admire/ abhor represented the range of sensemaking representatives did about their job. Representatives' disdain for their job and homeowners' predominant disdain for door-to-door sales existed in a dichotomous balance with representatives' eloquent

construction of their work as admirable and worthy. Specifically, the representatives would often communicate strong identification with the product, the potential to earn income, and the good the product did for others as the most appealing and venerable aspects of the job. Representatives also managed the hatred for their work by cherishing the good people, or those who left a positive impact on their lives while selling (e.g., kind customers, family members). These various discourses provided the representatives with ways to positively reframe their work.

Next, dichotomy of obscenity and humanity highlighted the various emotions and emotional encounters sales representatives endured on the doors and how these experiences translated into their daily discourse. The themes of on the doors, crude humor, holy cause, and attitude of gratitude captured the ways in which this dichotomy arose in their experiences of work. Specifically, the theme on the doors highlighted the range of obscenity and humanity representatives would face while knocking doors. Consequentially, crude humor gave the representatives a medium to distance themselves from unpleasant and frustrating situations, feel superiority over customers, and mitigate boredom and tension. Holy cause and attitude of gratitude were the benevolent enactment of emotional labor management, allowing the representatives to distance themselves from their work and remember what mattered most when they wanted to quit.

Finally, the third dichotomy presented was the relational dichotomy of care and competition. Participants in the present study were constantly faced with simultaneous pressure to care for their team like a family while also competing with them like rivals. This contradictory situation resulted in various communicative and ritualistic coping mechanisms such as whipping rituals, openly disclosing care for one another, and

appropriating various company tools meant to increase competition in order to continue caring for one's team. The remainder of this section discusses the limitations of the research and concludes with an explanation of the theoretical as well as the practical implications of this study.

### *Study Limitations*

This research offers rich understanding into emotional labor and motivation in door-to-door sales. Nonetheless, the results of this study are limited in several ways including a small sample size (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), author positionality, and a limited context. First, with a study of only 15 participants, situated in one context, the transferability of these findings to sales at large is questionable. Until further research is conducted it will be difficult to know if the experiences in this office are faced by other door-to-door sales representatives in other companies and offices.

Second, my position as a researcher as well as my previous experience with the company may have impacted the data collection process and the responses of those participants who were familiar with me prior to data collection. Another potential limitation was the limit placed on my time in the field. In order to increase the rigor of qualitative research (Tracy, 2010) future studies should be conducted with door-to-door sales offices that work beyond the summer months, or conduct a longitudinal study of summer sales spanning across multiple summers.

This study was conducted with a summer sales team that left their homes for an extended period of time to work while following a strict summer timetable. As such, the unique context of this study was another limitation. Future researchers should seek to expand these findings into other areas of direct sales. Specifically focusing on various

company structures and geographic locations. Finally, several variables, including the type of direct sales, proximity of sales team members, and amount of time spent selling, as well as, proximity to family should be investigated for any potential impact these may have on representatives communication about emotional labor and motivation.

However, given these limitations, the findings of this study reveal an intriguing look into the life of one door-to-door sales office. First, this study approaches emotional labor and employee motivation through a discursive lens. Focus was on how participants talked about the challenges of their jobs and, how others who they communicated with helped construct an identity of work that was appealing. Furthermore, this study offers a “complex, detailed understanding” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40) of some important aspects of emotional labor, organizational sensemaking, and motivation in door-to-door sales. The following section is a summary of the theoretical implications of this study as well as a discussion of future areas for research.

### *Theoretical Implications and Future Research*

In the past decade research on emotional labor has grown immensely. Researchers have examined a variety of occupations that face emotional labor, like flight attendants (Hochschild, 1983), financial planners (Miller & Koesten, 2008), and 911 call takers (Tracy, S. J. & Tracy K., 1998). The findings within this area are just as extensive with research showing how workers cope with emotional labor positions (Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2007), how members of an organization manage their emotions (Scott & Myers, 2005), and how organizations manage their employees in jobs that are inherently emotional (Kramer & Hess, 2002). Nonetheless, little research has been done on understanding how emotional laborers communicate about their experiences customers

and family. Nor, have many studies sought to understand how this communication, with various others impacts their motivation.

Understanding the complexity door-to-door sales representatives are faced with contributes to theory in four ways. The following section provides an outline of the theoretical implications based on these findings. Areas for future research based on these implications will also be discussed. First, this study provides support for various other findings on sensemaking and identity in the workplace, while also extending the research done on sensegiving. In addition, this research leads to important insight about the impact of emotional labor that has been previously developed in other studies. Lastly, this study provides a discursive examination of employee motivation in a job full of drudgery that requires high amounts of self-motivation.

### *Sensemaking*

Previous research on sensemaking has indicated that employees used sensemaking to construct organizational identity (e.g., Deetz, 1996; Murphy, 2001; Tracy, Myers, and Scott, 2007; Weick, 1995). This analysis extends theory by emphasizing the importance of sensemaking in crafting favorable identities in unfavorable work. Specifically, participants for this study engaged in labeling by interpreting their identity as a door-to-door sales representative using knowledge they had gained from customer experiences, sales trainings, and discourse with other representatives. Based on these interactions, representatives would construct an identity that was plausible but that also helped them make sense of their job in an appealing way. These findings supported Weick's (1995) argument that sensemaking is a crucial component of identity construction and is based on relationships with organizational

members. However, for this study findings also revealed that identity construction was also based in relationships with those outside of the organization such as friends and family back home. As a result, these findings complemented past research on sensemaking while expanding the research on sensegiving.

### *Sensegiving*

Alternatively, this study extends the work on sensegiving. To date, a large portion of the research on sensegiving has sought to understand how leaders and stakeholders effect organizational change (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Maitilis & Lawrence, 2007). This analysis extended the research on sensegiving beyond the walls of the organization. Therefore, furthering the understanding of how friends and loved ones communicatively helps construct identities at work. Specifically, when cherishing the good people representatives would often memorialize the supportive identity construction offered by friends and loved ones. This supportive identity construction provided them another plausible interpretation of their reality that they could then choose to adopt as their own. Further research should analyze the impact a families sensegiving interactions has on employees that perform dirty work outside of the door-to-door sales context and within other direct sales contexts.

### *Emotional Labor*

This research also revealed important findings about emotional labor in door-to-door sales while expanding the research into an understudied context. Previous findings on the management of emotional labor were supported. For example, in Tracy, Myers, and Scott's (2007) research on correction officers it was found that highly identified

employees were more likely to experience frustration in emotional labor jobs where success was difficult to measure. In juxtaposition to these findings, though, this study revealed that strong identification with the values and products of the company allowed representatives to more effectively engage in emotional labor and make sense of their job in a positive light. Many times at the conclusion of a day “on the doors” representatives had nothing to show for their work. Humor and other strategies provided them with a way to create meaning in a job that was often felt meaningless. This finding supported previous literature on the function of humor as a way to create happiness in an otherwise stressful job (Shuler & Sypher, 2000; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006).

Other areas of research have found that humor in emotional labor served various functions such as relief, superiority, coping, and avoidance (e.g., Collinson 1988; Tracy, 2000; Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2007). Tracy, Myers, and Scott’s (2007) discussion of humor as a coping mechanism focused on the power of humor to affirm identity and make sense of a difficult job. The crude humor enacted by the representatives is an extension of Tracy and colleagues’ findings. A specific aspect of the current findings that warrants further investigation is the potential dangers of using humor, specifically crude humor, on the well-being and motivation of employees.

Lastly, this study revealed the importance of adhering to organizational emotional labor norms and the subsequent impact this had on employee communication. Much like financial planners (Miller & Koesten, 2008), door-to-door sales representatives have a large amount of autonomy when forming customer contacts while out “on the doors.” However, unlike financial planners representatives still had to be control their emotions during customer encounters due to the fragile relationship door-to-door sales



representatives had with home owners. For example, participating in emotional labor made it possible for them to avoid the risk of escalating conflict that resulted in law enforcement interference. Subsequently, these findings revealed that by displaying emotions that aligned with organizational norms representative's communication was impacted while off of the doors. Examples of this were explored in various themes throughout chapter four such as, attitude of gratitude and crude humor.

#### *Discursive Examination of Motivation*

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, this study furthered research on the discursive nature of motivation. In Sullivan's (1988) motivational language theory emphasis was placed on communication as a fundamental aspect of organizational motivation. Within this theory motivation becomes not only information sharing but meaning making and human bonding. Within this study representatives would communicatively construct various motivational messages with one another. Examples, such as the representative's adoption of a holy cause, provided a glimpse into the importance of discourse in motivating during difficult times. Further research should continue to expand a discursive understanding of motivation by examining how employees communicatively construct motivational tactics, like the representatives holy cause.

Another important area to note in the discursive expansion of motivation is the findings that supported McGregor's (1957) Theory X and Theory Y. Highlighting a key point of Theory Y, Grant stated: "You have to be intelligent, self-motivated, and introspective. Be able assess yourself and your weaknesses in order to be successful. There is no one out there with you telling you what you have to do. You need to be able

to push yourself.” This quote supports the notion in Theory Y that employees are intrinsically motivated and can accomplish organizational goals without a strong push from management. More importantly, like Grant stated a majority of this motivation for the representatives was autonomous and as this study revealed occurred through discourse. Examples of this can be seen in chapter 5 of this study.

As future directions for communication research are considered it would be beneficial to look at contexts, such as door-to-door sales, that are understudied within the field. Expanding into understudied contexts will increase cutting edge theory development. This will also give researchers the opportunity to offer practical applications that can improve and promote a more beneficial understanding of the unique forms of motivation required in emotional labor positions. The final section of this chapter explores the practical implications of this study.

### *Practical Implications*

Most direct sales companies give their representatives the tool and training to perform emotional labor. Yet, very little information is given to representatives on how to deal with the repercussions of this form of work. Specifically, these findings revealed various ways sales teams managed, or were unable to manage, a job rife with emotions. As such, the research presented in this project has various pragmatic implications for the workplace. First, managers should note how others outside of the organization impact how employees react to emotional encounters while on the job. The communication that occurs outside of the organizations walls can alter an employee’s identification with their organization. Not recognizing the importance of what others to employees can have an impact on organizations that encourage strong identification with the company.

Second, as the findings show, representatives were better able to manage their dirty work by re-conceptualizing their identity at work in a way that negated the negative aspects of the job. As such, organizational leaders can expand trainings beyond the technical skills involved in doing emotional work and a dirty just job. Trainings should begin to focus more on shaping a positive identification with work. While this study provided a few examples of how this sales team encouraged positive identification, such as fostering an attitude of gratitude, organizations can incorporate other options that focus on fostering positivity prior to experiencing emotional labor.

Lastly, it is important for employees who work in emotional labor to know that there is a name for what they do. Training employees to adopt various strategies to manage emotions will encourage them to see that they can gain enjoyment from performing emotional labor. In direct sales, representatives are one of the most important parts of an organization. As this study shows they have the potential to influence other representatives and are also the ones that produce the largest amount of capital for the company. Companies should invest in training programs that address the specific challenges these representatives face. Doing so has the potential to decrease emotional burnout and increase job satisfaction. These programs that reach beyond performing emotional labor and making the next sale will provide them with the knowledge to manage their experiences with emotional labor.

This study formed a foundation for the growth of future research on emotional labor and motivation, specifically within the context of door-to-door sales. Previous research has developed important information on emotional labor and motivation. A large portion of which is of interest not only to scholars but to organizations. As the research

expands it will be important to move into untouched concepts and contexts such as, door-to-door sales and motivation.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Informed Consent Form

#### Baylor University Certification of Informed Consent

##### Principal Investigators

Kayde Givens, BA, Department of Communication Studies

[Kayde\\_Givens@baylor.edu](mailto:Kayde_Givens@baylor.edu)

702-767-4267

Lacy McNamee Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Organizational Communication

[Lacy\\_McNamee@baylor.edu](mailto:Lacy_McNamee@baylor.edu)

##### **Study Overview**

This form asks for your consent to participate in communication research. For this research you and your sales team will be asked to participate in in-depth interviews and participant observation. The purpose of this study is to understand how sales representatives and managers make sense of a demanding job. Your participation in this study will take the form of individual interviews and will last no longer than 60 minutes. There will also be observations done with your sales team for 15 weeks. On average observation time will be 5 hours a week, 1 hour a day. Active participation is not necessary for these observations. Participation in observations and interviews is voluntary. Interviews will be scheduled at your leisure.

##### **Procedures**

If you agree to take part in this study, you may participate in one or both of the following ways:

Observation: In this portion of the study the researcher observes the sales team interactions, chiefly in the context of meetings and transportation to individual areas. Any participant that opts out of this portion of the study will not be included in the data or field notes during observation time. The researcher will watch and take notes during meetings as a detached observer. In no way will the researcher intervene or inject herself into the meeting process.

Audio taped observation: On occasion the researcher may request to audio record a meeting for close analysis. *The researcher will only audio-record a meeting when there is unanimous consent among the members present.*

Interview: The second portion of the study will involve semi-structured individual interviews. Interviews will be audio recorded for collection purposes unless specified by the participant. You have the option to not be recorded throughout the interview. You may also stop the interview at any time. I will ask you a series of questions about your job as a summer salesman for example, (a) How you make sense of difficult situations while selling and/ or (b) explain important experiences you have had while selling. You may refuse to answer any questions throughout the duration of the interview.

**Potential Risk**

There will be no physical risks at any time. In this study the only potential risk is psychological strain during interviews and the possibility for loss of confidentiality of interview responses. Since observations will be done in a group setting your actions and words are at a higher risk for loss of confidentiality. You may elect either now or at any time during the study, to withdraw from participating, with no penalty or loss of benefits. You should understand that your participation is completely voluntary. While I will still be observing the sales team, if you choose to decline participation during observations you will not be included in any of the data collection or presentation. Procedures have been put in place to minimize risk.

**Procedures to Minimize Risk**

Upon signing this consent form any identifying information will be coded and pseudonyms will be used to guarantee complete anonymity. Data collected from the study will be stored in a password-protected computer only accessible by the researcher. After the data is used it will be stored in a locked office in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher. At the conclusion of the study all audio recordings will be destroyed. If you feel uncomfortable during observations or interviews you can elect at that time to withdraw from the study with no penalty. If you choose to withdraw participation from observations I will still remain in the environment but you will no longer be included in the observational data collection or presentation.

**Benefits**

The data collected will be transcribed within the coming months. The summary of the results will be available for you, should you wish to see the outcome. This data will allow scholars to see how summer salesmen describe their experience with motivation in a demanding field. It may also give your company insight into how sales teams motivate each other.

**Further Inquiries**

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, or any other aspect of the research as it relates to you as a participant, please contact the Baylor University Committee for Protection of Human Subjects in Research, Dr. David W. Schlueter, Ph.D., Chair Baylor IRB, Baylor University, One Bear Place #97368 Waco, TX 76798-7368. Dr. Schlueter may also be reached at (254) 710-6920 or (254) 710-3708.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read and understand this form, am aware of my rights as a participant, and have agreed to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be made for you to keep in your records.

I consent to being observed at organizational meetings \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to being interviewed \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol

#### INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW: Questions for Sales Representatives

[Intro overview: summarize study purpose and preview questions to be asked]

*Overview of history with the door-to-door sales in general...*

1. How did you first get involved with Specticate?
2. If you were recruited, what part of the idea of doing door-to-door sales seemed appealing to you?
3. What were your first thoughts on Specticate before going out and selling?
4. Describe your daily routine during the summer from sun up to sundown.
5. Describe your first experience knocking doors? Has your experience changed since then?
6. If someone who has never done door-to-door sales asked you what it was like, what would you tell them?

*Now, onto what makes you tick and keeps you going throughout the day...*

1. What motivates you to get out of your car and start knocking?
2. What do you get excited about when you're selling?
3. How do you feel after a day of selling when you don't make a sale?
4. Specticate hosts competitions like walk days, what are your overall feelings towards these types of incentives?
5. How do you feel after a day of selling when you make one or more sales?  
How do you feel after a day of selling when you don't make a sale?
6. What drives you to push forward during a sale?
7. What impact does Specticate's training videos have on your desire to sell?
8. If you were to win the lottery tomorrow would you stay out for the rest of the summer? Why or why not?

*Now, let's talk a little bit about your interactions with other team members and your managers...*

1. What do you communicate with other sales reps about throughout the day?
2. How big of a role does Report play in your day to day life as a salesmen?
3. How do you feel after morning meetings?
4. What do you typically talk to other sales reps/techs about on the car ride to your area?
5. What would you tell a new sales rep who hasn't sold for a few days?



6. How would you describe a good sales representative?
7. In an ideal world what would your managers do in order to motivate you on a daily basis?
8. How does this ideal match up with your current reality?
9. What would you say is the purpose of your morning meetings? Is that purpose achieved?
10. When you leave your morning meetings how do you feel?

*Wrap up questions....*

1. What would you say is the most challenging aspect of your position here at Specticate? What is the most rewarding?
2. Does your family, and/or significant other have any concerns with your doing door-to-door sales?

### **INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW- Questions for Managers**

[Intro overview: summarize study purpose and preview questions to be asked]

*Overview of history with the door-to-door sales in general...*

1. How long did you do door-to-door sales before you decided to become a manager? What brought you into management?
2. Tell me about your day from some up to sun down?
3. If some asked you to write a job description for your current position, what would it say?

*Now, let's talk a little bit more about sales representatives...*

1. What makes a good sales representative?
2. How would you deal with a rep that is frustrated because he/she is not selling?
3. If a rep had a customer call the cops on them and threaten them on their first door, what would you say to that rep?
4. If you had to give your reps the top five tips to getting through the day successfully what would they be?
5. Is there a rhyme or reason for which sales representative has a responsibility in the meeting agenda?
6. How satisfied are you with your office, and the overall quality of your sales reps?

*Let's talk a bit more about your job as a manager...*

1. What are the specific items you hope are covered in the morning meetings?
2. How do you decide what incentives to offer during the week?
3. How do you feel after morning meetings?

4. How does the corporate material Specticate generates impact your job as a manager?
5. What is the hardest part of your job? What would you consider to be the easiest part of your job?
6. If you had to pick the most rewarding aspect of your job what would it be?
7. Has anything that your manager did when you were a rep carry over into your position as a manager now?
8. Describe for me your perfect day as a manager and on the doors, how does this match up with reality?
9. Is there any other information about your job do you think I would find particularly useful?

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