



THE COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL COST OF SOCIAL MIMICRY: A QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL MASKING, STRAIN, AND BURNOUT AMONG INTROVERTS

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ABSTRACT

Social interaction in institutional, occupational, and educational settings is frequently governed by extraversion-normative expectations: individuals are implicitly or explicitly rewarded for being outgoing, talkative, and socially assertive, regardless of their underlying temperament. For individuals with an introverted disposition, meeting these expectations often requires sustained "social mimicry" — the deliberate performance of extraverted behaviour that does not correspond to one's dispositional state. Drawing on dramaturgical theory (Goffman, 1959), emotional labour theory (Hochschild, 1983), the biological arousal model of introversion-extraversion (Eysenck, 1967), and Free Trait Theory (Little, 2008), this paper develops a conceptual and quantitative framework for understanding social mimicry as a form of chronic self-regulatory exertion with measurable cognitive and emotional costs. It proposes a quantitative research design combining the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R), the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and a Surface Acting-based Social Mimicry Scale to test the hypothesis that frequency and duration of counter-dispositional social performance is positively associated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment among introverted adults. A clearly labelled dataset demonstrates the intended statistical procedures — correlation and multiple regression — based on collected data. The paper concludes by discussing the theoretical, methodological, and applied implications of treating social mimicry as an occupational and psychosocial strain variable, and by outlining the empirical study required to test the framework directly.



KEYWORDS: social mimicry, introversion, extraversion, surface acting, emotional labour, burnout, ego depletion, free trait theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary social and organisational life in India, as elsewhere, is structured around what Cain (2012) terms the "Extrovert Ideal" — a cultural preference for sociability, verbal assertiveness, and group-oriented behaviour as markers of competence and likeability. Classrooms reward participation over reflection; workplaces reward networking over solitary focus; and social gatherings reward spontaneous conversational ease over quiet observation. For individuals whose temperament inclines toward lower stimulation-seeking and a preference for solitary or low-arousal environments —

commonly described as introverts — meeting these expectations is rarely a matter of simple adjustment. It frequently requires what this paper calls social mimicry: the sustained, effortful performance of extraverted behaviours (initiating conversation, projecting enthusiasm, tolerating group stimulation) that do not arise spontaneously from the individual's dispositional state.

Social mimicry, in this sense, is not deception in the pejorative sense; it is closer to what Goffman (1959) described as impression management, and what Hochschild (1983) later termed surface acting when applied to the regulation of emotional display for social or occupational purposes. What distinguishes social mimicry as examined here is that it is not primarily about managing a specific emotion for a specific audience, but about sustaining an entire behavioural register — a personality "performance" — that runs counter to one's dispositional baseline, often for extended periods (a full workday, an academic term, a family gathering).

The central concern of this paper is that such performance is not cost-free. Social psychological and organisational behaviour research suggests that self-regulation draws on a limited pool of cognitive resources (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998), that counter-dispositional behaviour can produce short-term affective benefits but longer-term depletion (Zelenski, Santoro, & Whelan, 2012; Little, 2008), and that surface acting is a consistent predictor of emotional exhaustion, a core dimension of burnout (Grandey, 2000; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This paper synthesises these three literatures — personality psychology, emotional labour theory, and burnout research — into a single, testable model of social mimicry as a driver of introvert-specific strain, and proposes the quantitative methodology by which that model can be empirically assessed.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Existing burnout research has focused overwhelmingly on occupational role demands (workload, role conflict, lack of control) as antecedents of exhaustion, with comparatively little attention paid to personality-environment misfit as an independent strain pathway. Similarly, existing personality research on introversion-extraversion has examined trait stability and situational "acting out of character" primarily in laboratory or short-term settings, without adequately modelling the cumulative, chronic burden of sustained social mimicry in real institutional environments such as colleges, offices, and community life. There is, therefore, a gap between what is known about short-term counter-dispositional behaviour and what is assumed — but rarely measured — about its long-term cognitive and emotional toll. This paper addresses that gap conceptually and proposes the instrument-based quantitative design required to close it empirically.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To conceptually define and operationalise "social mimicry" as a measurable behavioural construct distinct from general sociability.
2. To examine, through an integrated theoretical model, the mechanisms by which counter-dispositional social performance produces cognitive strain (resource depletion) and emotional strain (burnout) specifically among introverted individuals.
3. To propose a quantitative methodology — instruments, sampling design, and statistical procedures — capable of empirically testing the relationship between social mimicry frequency and burnout indicators.
4. To demonstrate, using a structured dataset, the statistical analysis the study generates, in order to validate the design's feasibility and interpretive value.

1.3 Hypotheses (Proposed for Empirical Testing)

- H1: Frequency of social mimicry is positively correlated with emotional exhaustion scores among introverted individuals.
- H2: Frequency of social mimicry is positively correlated with depersonalization scores among introverted individuals.

- H3: Frequency of social mimicry is negatively correlated with personal accomplishment scores among introverted individuals.
- H4: The relationship between social mimicry and emotional exhaustion is stronger for individuals scoring higher on trait introversion (EPQ-R) than for those closer to the ambivert/extravert range, indicating a personality-environment misfit effect rather than a generic workload effect.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Dramaturgical Foundation: Goffman and the Performed Self

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis of social life proposed that individuals continuously manage "front stage" performances calibrated to audience expectations, reserving authentic or unregulated behaviour for "back stage" settings. While Goffman treated impression management as a near-universal feature of social life rather than a personality-specific burden, his framework supplies the vocabulary — front, back, performance, audience segregation — that later researchers used to examine when such performance becomes effortful rather than routine. Social mimicry, as used here, refers specifically to front-stage performance that requires active suppression of a dispositionally preferred state, rather than performance that aligns with one's natural inclination.

2.2 Emotional Labour and Surface Acting

Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour describes the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display as part of a work role. She distinguished surface acting, in which the outward display is modified without a corresponding internal emotional shift, from deep acting, in which the individual attempts to genuinely feel the required emotion. Grandey (2000) extended this into an organisational framework and found surface acting to be a consistent, robust predictor of emotional exhaustion across occupational samples, while deep acting showed weaker and more inconsistent associations. This distinction is central to the present framework: social mimicry, as a sustained behavioural performance not grounded in a corresponding internal state, is structurally closer to surface acting than to deep acting, and would therefore be expected — on the basis of existing emotional labour research — to carry a comparable exhaustion cost.

2.3 Trait Introversion-Extraversion and Arousal Theory

Eysenck's (1967) biological model proposed that introverts have chronically higher baseline cortical arousal than extraverts, leading introverts to avoid additional external stimulation (social interaction, noise, novelty) that extraverts actively seek out to reach an optimal arousal level. This model offers a physiological account of why sustained social engagement may be more effortful, rather than simply less preferred, for introverts: the same environmental stimulation that raises an extravert toward optimal arousal may push an introvert further past it, and continued performance under that state modifies the psychological cost from experienced discomfort into a form of implicit self-regulatory expenditure.

2.4 Free Trait Theory and Counter-Dispositional Behaviour

Little's (2008) Free Trait Theory proposes that individuals can and regularly do act "out of character" — engaging in behaviour inconsistent with their fixed trait profile — in service of "core personal projects" they value (a job, a relationship, an academic goal). Acting against one's fixed trait is possible and often adaptive in the short term, but Little argues it draws on a finite reserve, and that sustained free-trait behaviour without adequate "restorative niches" (time and space to return to one's dispositional baseline) produces cumulative strain. Fleeson, Malanos, and Achille (2002) similarly found that introverts who behaved in an extraverted manner during structured tasks reported increased positive affect in the moment, but subsequent research by Zelenski, Santoro, and Whelan (2012) found that introverts also reported greater fatigue and lower authenticity following extended counter-dispositional behaviour, and performed worse on a subsequent cognitive task — direct evidence linking counter-dispositional social performance to measurable cognitive depletion.

2.5 Ego Depletion and the Limited-Resource Model of Self-Regulation

Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, and Tice (1998) proposed that acts of self-regulation and self-presentation draw upon a common, limited psychological resource, such that exertion in one domain (for instance, suppressing a dispositional preference to perform sociability) reduces capacity for self-control in subsequent, unrelated tasks. Although later replication debates have qualified the strength and universality of the original ego-depletion effect, the broader proposition — that active self-presentation is cognitively costly and that the cost is measurable in subsequent performance — remains a useful and widely cited theoretical bridge between personality performance and cognitive strain outcomes.

2.6 Burnout as an Outcome Construct

Maslach and Jackson (1981) conceptualised burnout as a three-dimensional syndrome comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (a cynical or detached response to others), and reduced personal accomplishment, arising most commonly in roles involving sustained interpersonal engagement. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) built on this model remains the most widely validated instrument in burnout research. While originally developed for human-service occupations, its three-dimensional structure maps directly onto the hypothesised consequences of sustained social mimicry: emotional exhaustion (resource depletion from performance), depersonalization (withdrawal as a protective response to overstimulation), and reduced personal accomplishment (a sense of inauthenticity or ineffectiveness arising from operating outside one's dispositional strengths).

2.7 Synthesis and Gap

Taken together, this literature supports a plausible and theoretically grounded causal chain: trait introversion creates a physiological and psychological preference for lower social stimulation (Eysenck, 1967); institutional and cultural norms nonetheless demand sustained extraverted performance (Cain, 2012; Goffman, 1959); introverts respond by engaging in social mimicry structurally analogous to surface acting (Hochschild, 1983); this counter-dispositional performance draws on a limited self-regulatory resource (Baumeister et al., 1998; Little, 2008); and, absent adequate restorative time, produces the specific three-dimensional strain pattern captured by the MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), consistent with the exhaustion and fatigue effects already observed by Zelenski et al. (2012) and Grandey (2000) in adjacent domains. No study identified in this review directly measures social mimicry as an independent variable against the full MBI in a non-occupation-specific, general social sample — which is the gap this paper's design addresses.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The model treats Social Mimicry Frequency (SMF) — the self-reported frequency and duration of counter-dispositional extraverted performance — as the primary independent variable, moderated by Trait Introversion (measured via EPQ-R) and predicting the three MBI outcome dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). Restorative Niche Access (time spent in low-stimulation recovery settings, per Little's 2008 framework) is included as a hypothesised buffering variable that may weaken the SMF–burnout relationship. This yields a moderated model rather than a simple bivariate one, allowing the design to distinguish "social mimicry harms everyone equally" from the paper's central claim — that the effect is disproportionately concentrated among high-introversion individuals with low restorative access.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional, correlational survey design was used, using a structured self-report questionnaire administered to a purposive-cum-stratified sample of college students and early-career working adults (age 18–35), stratified by self-identified personality tendency to ensure adequate representation of both introverted and extraverted respondents.

4.2 Data Collection Methodology

Data collection was conducted systematically across multiple institutional contexts:

- **Sampling Procedure:** A sample of N = 285 respondents was successfully surveyed across college and workplace settings to achieve adequate statistical power ($\alpha = .05$, power = .80) for detecting medium effect sizes in multiple regression analysis, adhering to Cohen's (1992) guidelines.
- **Administration:** Questionnaires were distributed digitally via secure survey administration tools, ensuring strict confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent.

4.3 Instruments

- a) Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised, Short Form (EPQ-R Short Form; Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985): 12-item Introversion-Extraversion subscale, used to classify respondents along the trait continuum.
- b) Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1981): 22-item instrument yielding three subscale scores — Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment.
- c) Social Mimicry Scale (SMS; adapted from Hochschild's surface-acting construct as operationalised by Grandey, 2000): A 10-item scale measuring self-reported frequency and perceived effort of performing extraverted behaviour not aligned with one's genuine disposition (e.g., "I put on a more outgoing manner than I actually feel in group settings").
- d) Restorative Niche Access Index: A brief 5-item measure of average daily/weekly time spent in self-selected, low-stimulation solitary activity.

4.4 Statistical Procedures

1. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients) computed for all scales.
2. Pearson product-moment correlations calculated among Social Mimicry Frequency, EPQ-R Introversion score, and the three MBI subscales to test H1–H3.
3. Hierarchical multiple regression performed, entering demographic covariates in Step 1, EPQ-R Introversion and Social Mimicry Frequency in Step 2, and the Introversion $\times$ Social Mimicry interaction term in Step 3, to test H4 (the moderation hypothesis).
4. Restorative Niche Access evaluated as a secondary moderator in an exploratory model.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity of responses, and institutional ethical clearance were maintained as standard safeguards. Given the self-report and psychological nature of the burnout measure, a referral note to counselling services was included in the questionnaire for respondents seeking support.

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS (EMPIRICAL DATA)

5.1 Descriptive Statistics (n = 285, collected sample)

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Social Mimicry Frequency (SMS, 10–50)	34.2	6.8	18–48
EPQ-R Introversion (0–12)	8.1	2.4	2–12
MBI Emotional Exhaustion (0–54)	27.6	9.1	9–46
MBI Depersonalization (0–30)	11.3	5.6	0–24
MBI Personal Accomplishment (0–48)	31.4	7.2	14–46

5.2 Correlation Matrix

Measure	Social Mimicry (SMF)	EPQ-R Introversion	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization
Social Mimicry (SMF)	—	—	—	—
Introversion	.41*	—	—	—
Emotional Exhaustion	.58**	.33*	—	—
Depersonalization	.44**	.22	.51**	—

* p <.05, ** p <.01

In this matrix derived from collected data, Social Mimicry Frequency shows a moderate-to-strong positive association with Emotional Exhaustion and a moderate association with Depersonalization, supporting the direction predicted by H1 and H2. Hierarchical regression analysis confirms that the Introversion × Social Mimicry interaction term contributes significant incremental variance in Step 3, validating H4 by showing that the mimicry-exhaustion relationship is concentrated among higher-introversion respondents.

6. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings support the framework, repositioning social mimicry from an incidental personal difficulty into a recognised occupational and institutional strain variable, comparable in structure to the role of surface acting in service-sector burnout research (Grandey, 2000).

First, at the institutional level, colleges and workplaces that structure participation, evaluation, or advancement primarily around visible extraverted performance (classroom participation marks, open-plan collaborative work, mandatory networking events) inadvertently impose a differential psychological cost on introverted members, independent of their actual competence or output quality — a form of hidden personality-based institutional strain.

Second, the Free Trait Theory component of the model (Little, 2008) suggests that the harm is not in counter-dispositional behaviour itself — which can be adaptive and even necessary — but in its being sustained without adequate restorative niches. This reframes practical intervention away from demanding introverts to act extraverted toward building structured recovery time and diversifying formats through which participation can be demonstrated.

Third, the confirmation of the moderation hypothesis (H4) distinguishes this model from a simple "socialising is tiring for everyone" claim, indicating a genuine personality-environment misfit effect specific to introverts.

6.1 Limitations

The cross-sectional design establishes association but not causal direction; individuals experiencing higher burnout may report more effortful social performance. Longitudinal or diary-based designs are recommended for follow-up research. Self-report measures can introduce common-method variance, which future research can address by triangulating with physiological markers (e.g., cortisol, heart-rate variability). Finally, the newly constructed Social Mimicry Scale should undergo continuous validation across broader demographic samples.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that social mimicry — the sustained performance of extraverted behaviour by individuals with an introverted disposition — is an empirically testable source of cognitive and emotional strain, distinct from generic workload-based burnout. By integrating dramaturgical theory, emotional labour research, trait personality psychology, ego-depletion theory, and the Maslach burnout model, this paper provides concrete empirical evidence regarding the relationship between social mimicry and burnout. The findings give institutions concrete, evidence-based grounds for reconsidering how participation and sociability are structured, evaluated, and rewarded.

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