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The Authenticity of Positive Emotional Displays: Client Responses to Leisure Service Employees

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This field study examined leisure employees' emotional expression, and its effects on clients' satisfaction with group fitness classes. Participants were 132 clients of five fitness instructors at a fitness club. Client perceptions of their instructor were compared over two conditions—classes in which the instructors reported that they often deep acted (tried to create appropriate emotional expression), and classes in which the instructors' emotional expression was naturally felt. Clients were able to detect whether the instructor's enthusiasm for the class was genuine, and these perceptions were related to the clients' positive affect, satisfaction with the instructor and attitudinal loyalty to the instructor. The implications of the findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Emotional expression, group fitness, client satisfaction, client loyalty.*

"Enthusiasm is contagious, so let yours show."
"If you're having a bad day, that's your problem, not [*the customers'*]*, and it's up to you to put on a smile and fake it so well that they assume it's your birthday."*
—Training manuals for leisure services employees

Leisure services are designed to refresh, stimulate and entertain; to provide pleasurable emotional experiences for people in their free time (Hull, 1990; Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986). Companies who provide leisure services recognize the need to create positive feelings in their customers. As the training-manual quotes above illustrate, leisure-service providers exhort employees to manage their own emotions so as to encourage the customers' enjoyment—to be a "pleasant host" for the paying customers (Holyfield, 1999, p. 7; Sharpe, 2005). Thus, employees in the leisure industry are often compelled to display positive emotions, whether they are feeling them or not. This management of emotions has been termed "emotional labor" (Hochschild, 1983), and extensive research has demonstrated that the control of employees' emotional expression is a feature of a wide range of service jobs—from bank tellers and hotel receptionists to accountants and academic staff (Andrus, Ott, & Donnelly, 1990; Grayson, 1998; Panikkos & Gibbs, 2004; Pugh, 2001).

To what extent does emotional labor actually influence customers' behavior? It generally has been assumed that appropriate emotional expression

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on the part of employees will create satisfaction and loyalty among customers, but relatively few researchers have tested these assumptions empirically (Pugh, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002). Similarly there is limited research on the question of the authenticity of these emotions, that is, does it matter to customers whether the employee's emotions are genuine or not (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005; Grayson, 1998)?

In the leisure field, scholars have noted that there is a paucity of research on emotions, and on the emotional demands of leisure employees' jobs (Lee & Shafer, 2002; Price, Arnould, & Tierney, 1995; Sharpe, 2005; Stewart, 1998). The goals of this study are to explore customer perceptions and emotional expressions—to examine whether customers can detect differences between authentic and fake emotional displays, and to test whether customer perceptions of authenticity have an impact on satisfaction and loyalty.

Our review of the literature begins with a description of the research that links the emotional display of employees with customer satisfaction. We then present research findings on people's ability to detect authenticity—the extent to which emotion expressed by employees is genuinely felt—drawing on basic psychological literature (Weiss, 2002) as well as organizational literature (Pugh, 2001). Finally, we propose specific relationships between authenticity, customer perceptions and customer behavior in the leisure domain. The leisure context used here is group fitness instruction. The fitness instructor is enjoined to demonstrate skill, encourage participants' progress and ensure safety, all while displaying friendliness, vitality and enthusiasm, so as to provide a fun learning environment where customers are happy to spend their free time. This study examines the authenticity of the emotional displays that fitness instructors send to clients, and how the clients react to those displays.

Literature Review

Employee Positive Emotions and Customer Satisfaction

The management of impressions through control of one's emotions has a long history of scholarly attention (Goffman, 1959). Hochschild (1983) coined the term "emotional labor" to describe the emotional expressions that workers are expected to display on the job so as to ensure customer satisfaction. Since then, considerable research attention has been paid to how employees work to display appropriate emotions, how they actually feel, and the consequences to the employees themselves of this emotion work (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Côté & Morgan, 2002; Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Until recently, there has been much less focus on how emotional labor affects customers (Pugh, 2001).

Recent studies have consistently found that positive emotional displays by employees create positive responses in customers. Pugh's (2001) field ob-

servations of bank tellers' displayed emotion—smiling, making eye contact, saying "hello" and "thank you"—led him to conclude that these displays were positively related to measures of customers' positive affect taken immediately after they had concluded their banking. Similarly, Tsai and Huang (2002) found a modest correlation between displayed positive emotion of employees in a retail shoe store and the customers' perception of the employees' friendliness and customers' positive mood. Perceived friendliness and positive mood both increased the customers' intention to return to the store. In a study that used videotapes of service encounters, Lemmink and Mattsson (2002) likewise discovered a link between employees' positive facial expressions, speech and movements, and observers' feelings of warmth towards the service employees.

How might we explain this relationship between an employee's positive emotional display and customer satisfaction? Soderlund and Rosengren (2004) proposed that this is a multi-step process. An employee's smile leads customers to attribute joyfulness to the employee. An innate human need for smooth social interaction then leads to "emotional contagion" (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994), which occurs when one person automatically mimics the displayed emotions of another. Thus the customer, through emotional contagion, adopts an emotional state that is similar to that of the service employee. Sy, Côte, and Saavedra (2005) have recently demonstrated the proposed process of emotional contagion in their empirical study of leaders and small groups. Finally, the customer's joyful state may cause selective attention and retrieval of positive cues, increasing the number of associations with pleasant experiences. Alternatively, the customer's positive emotional state may color the customer's evaluation directly, perhaps leading him/her to assume: "If I'm feeling good, I must be satisfied". Either way, it is believed that cognitive processes cause the customer to infer a positive evaluation of stimuli, and feelings of satisfaction with the employee, service or organization ensue. Other research has provided support for this link between the customer's emotions and evaluations of the service encounter and the organization as a whole (Mattila & Enz, 2002).

Soderlund and Rosengren (2004) contended that it is not the employee's smile per se that causes customer joy. Rather, the customer's perception of the employee's emotional state is a key *mediator* between the employee's emotional display and the customer's affect. If the smile seems false, the customer will not attribute joyfulness to the employee, and such a customer will not experience joy or satisfaction. The researchers concluded that the "smiling imperative" policies adopted by service firms are misguided, and there are limited benefits to enforcing smiles (Soderlund & Rosengren). Similarly, Tsai and Huang (2002) hypothesized that "mechanical" emotional displays are less likely than genuine emotion to result in customers' positive affect. It is important, therefore, to understand how customers perceive emotional expression, and their ability to recognize authenticity—or lack of it—in employees' emotional displays.

Producing and Detecting False Emotional Displays

To produce a believable false emotion, one must know what an authentic emotional display "looks like." A large body of empirical literature demonstrates that observers can agree on the facial emotion that a focal person is expressing, and agreement among observers extends across cultures, age and social context (Ekman & Oster, 1979). This apparent knowledge of what an emotion looks like is far from simple, however—the ability to produce, recognize and label emotions may be much lower outside a structured laboratory context (Russell, Bachorowski, & Fernández-Dols, 2003). When people are asked to produce emotions that they are not feeling, they generally think of controlling their facial expressions, and pay little attention to other bodily movements. Cues about their true feelings may thus "leak out" through body activity, which can allow observers to detect their deception (Ekman & Friesen, 1974; Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993). In brief, when a person is asked to assume an emotional display that he or she is not feeling, a host of normally unconscious actions of face, voice or body may make it possible for observers to detect the deception.

Ambady and Rosenthal (1992) performed a meta-analysis that summarized 19 studies of the ability of observers to judge expressive behavior accurately. They concluded that, even on the basis of brief encounters of less than five minutes, people were quite accurate at these judgments. Subsequently, Frank et al. (1993) found that student observers were also able to identify genuine "enjoyment" smiles, and attributed more positive characteristics to these smilers than "non-enjoyment" smilers. All this literature suggests that if observers can "see through" manufactured displays, producing a false, yet believable, emotional expression may be extremely difficult. Supporting this conclusion, Gabriel and Griffiths (2002) suggested that the power of emotions is such that they cannot be easily controlled. Because emotions arise from deep within the unconscious, they are impervious to learning and cannot be regulated or "tamed" into being a "servant of the organization's bottom line" (p. 215). Telling employees to turn on appropriate emotions and turn off inappropriate ones, these authors claim, is likely to fail. Thus it may be only those employees who are truly satisfied with their work who would be able to present genuine emotional displays to their customers, and thus will create customers' satisfaction as suggested by Soderlund and Rosengren (2004).

Organizational research has indeed found support for a link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Bowen, Gillliland & Folger, 1999; Koys, 2001; Ott & van Dijk, 2005; Payne & Webber, 2006; Schmidt & Allscheid, 1995). In explaining the link, Bowen et al. and Payne and Webber suggested that satisfied employees are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, including courtesy, civic virtue, conscientiousness, sportsmanship and altruism, and these behaviors foster positive attitudes among customers. Although this explanation focuses on employee behavior, scholars also have invoked the notion of affect and emotional expression in explaining the

process by which employee satisfaction may result in customer satisfaction. Bowen et al. and Koys discussed a "spillover" effect in which the positive attitudes of employees spill over onto customers. Schmidt and Allscheid proposed that "happy or satisfied employees should have intentions to share and extend these emotions with customers" (p. 523). George (1991) reported that employees' positive mood increased sales in a retail setting. Although none of these studies included a direct measure of perceived emotional display, in our terms their explanations suggest that satisfied employees would be expected to have authentically positive emotional expression in their dealings with customers.

Deep Acting and the Impact on Customers

Despite the argument that employee satisfaction is a necessary precursor of genuine displays of positive emotion, it is clear that some people can do a very good job indeed of creating false but convincing emotional displays. Theatrical actors are experts at the task and are sometimes employed by research laboratories to portray "genuine" emotions (e.g., Grandey et al., 1998; Grayson, 1998). In fact, a theatrical metaphor has long permeated the literature on impression management and emotional labor in organizations (Goffman, 1959; Hochschild, 1983). Terms like the *front stage,* the *back stage, surface acting* and *deep acting,* have been used by scholars in their discussion of emotional expression among service employees (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005; Grandey et al., 2005, Grayson, 1998; Kruml & Geddes, 2000). The front stage is the area in which customers are observing the employee, so the employee who is not feeling the appropriate emotions must put on an act. In the back stage, employees are not being observed by customers so acting is not necessary and true feelings prevail (Grayson). Surface acting means faking emotional expression such as "painting on" a smile during a service encounter, all while being aware that one is feeling bored or angry inside. Deep acting on the other hand, parallels a drama technique in which the actor first works to change the emotions s/he is feeling into ones required by the role, and then emotional expression that is congruent with the adopted emotion follows. Conceivably, employees who are skilled at deep acting while on the front stage may be able to produce convincing emotional displays, and in these cases, customers might be unable to detect the deception.

Grayson (1998), in an audio-taped simulation of hotel employees' emotional expression, found that participants' evaluations of the service encounter were most favorable when there was an authentic positive emotional display, but only when people expected to have repeated interactions with the employee and hotel. Authenticity had no effect on customer evaluations when the hotel encounter was a one-time-only business transaction. Grayson surmised that Western values emphasize sincerity in long-term, relational interactions—people should show their "real" selves. In short-term service encounters, on the other hand, customers do not care whether emotions are

genuine or not, so employees can save their emotional effort and deliver a pre-written script (surface acting) to the customers with no negative impact (Grayson).

In his field study of retail banking interactions, Pugh (2001) reported that bank tellers' inner feelings were unrelated to their displays of positive emotions during interactions with customers. We can interpret this to mean that the tellers' emotional displays were surface acted, not deep-acted emotion. He also found that false emotional displays led to customer satisfaction. Perhaps the customers did not realize that the employees were simply surface acting, believed in the authenticity of the emotional display—a necessary mediator of customer affect, according to Soderlund and Rosengren (2004)—and so experienced positive affect. A better explanation may come from Grayson's (1998) notion that the duration of the interaction makes a difference to the preference for authenticity. Encounters with bank tellers are often short-term transactions in which customers might notice that the employee is just putting on an act, but might simply not care.

In another empirical study set in a hotel-reception context, Grandey et al. (2005) videotaped an actress who had been given deep-acting instructions in one scenario (encouraged to create positive inner feelings and portray them sincerely), and surface-acting instructions in another scenario (told to manipulate her face muscles without modifying her thoughts or feelings). The researchers found that respondents were able to distinguish reliably between surface-acted and deep-acted emotional expressions, and deep acting was linked to ratings of perceived friendliness of the hotel employee as well as ratings of satisfaction with the service encounter. Grandey et al. (2005) replicated this finding in a field study of restaurant customers. Customers' ratings of the authenticity of the restaurant server's emotional expression were correlated with attributions of friendliness as well as overall satisfaction. In this field study there was no independent measure of authenticity (such as servers' self-ratings of their inner emotions, for example), so the result potentially suffers from common method bias, (that is, inflated correlations among variables that are all measured with the same instrument). Despite this drawback, the field research confirmed their laboratory findings, adding robustness to their conclusion that perceptions of inauthentic emotion led to a decrease in customers' positive affect and satisfaction.

To summarize, the empirical research findings about false and genuine emotional displays are mixed. The psychological literature has found consistently that observers are not deceived by false emotional displays. On the other hand, the few existing studies in organizational literature suggest that while observers can see through surface-acted emotional expression, deep acting may convince them that the emotional expression is authentic, and this is positively linked with customer satisfaction. It is conceivable that the psychological research has focused mainly on surface-acted emotion, which would reconcile these apparently conflicting findings. The title of one influential paper, "Smiles while lying," (Ekman, Friesen & O'Sullivan, 1988) suggests that this might indeed be the case.

What is more interesting is that, both in conceptual arguments and empirical work, researchers tend to treat deep acting as synonymous with authentic emotion. Yet one might reasonably argue that skilled deep acting is still, in fact, putting on an act, and so is different from the natural expression of felt emotion. There has been relatively little attention paid to employees' spontaneous, naturally-felt emotion (Diefendorff et al., 2005). On the basis of their 2005 survey, Diefendorff and his colleagues concluded that naturally-felt emotional expression plays a prominent role in work interactions and is actually more common than either surface acting or deep acting. They called for more study of naturally-felt emotional expression in organizations. The present article responds to that call.

Contagion, Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty in Leisure Services

A central feature of many leisure activities is to create a particular state of mind in participants. Whether the leisure service employee is a masseur at a spa, a leader of a recreational wilderness hike, a tour guide taking foreigners through a city, a teacher at a community arts program, or a group fitness instructor, his or her job usually is to ensure that customers feel happy and enriched as a result of the leisure experience. Employees depend on emotional contagion to create this effect in customers. Holyfield (1999), in a study of white-water rafting guides, noted that "guides must *embody* (author's italics) the excitement they are selling, as customers look to them for feeling cues (p. 10)." Sharpe (2005) presented an ethnographic account of the emotion work of adventure guides, whose job consisted of taking groups of people on wilderness canoe trips. The employees' display of emotions emerged as a central aspect of the job—they had to display vitality and enthusiasm to ensure that customers had fun, to display calm and suppress fear in dangerous situations so that customers felt safe, and to express happiness and openness to create a sense of community in the group. Emotional contagion seemed to be important in this context as well. The employee manual of this adventure company stated that "the best way for staff to establish a positive atmosphere is to model the types of behaviors they would like to see," and one employee whom Sharpe interviewed remarked: "I try to laugh and smile a lot, because usually it's contagious" (both quotations cited in Sharpe, p. 38). It is not known, however, whether the phenomenon of contagion exists in situations that are less exciting than rafting or wilderness trips. In general, however, we surmise that when service relationships are of extended duration, have affective content, and involve relative intimacy (close physical distance), emotional labor is a part of the employee's job (Price et al., 1995) that can affect customer satisfaction.

Finally our research explores the relationship between satisfaction with fitness classes and customer loyalty. Although many studies in marketing research have found a positive association between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Butcher, Sparks & O'Callaghan, 2001; Castro, Armario & Ruiz, 2004; Dick & Basu, 1994; East, Gendall, Hammond, & Lomax, 2005), other re-

searchers have not found a strong satisfaction-loyalty link. For example, satisfaction among Guenzi and Pelloni's (2004) fitness center clients did not predict their frequency of usage, and Skogland and Siguaw (2004) found that satisfaction and loyalty were only weakly connected in the sample of hotel guests they studied. East et al. (2005) also concluded that although the link between satisfaction and loyalty is generally positive, the findings are mixed, and when a positive satisfaction-loyalty relationship is found, it is usually modest.

Oliver (1999) surmised that satisfaction might lead to loyalty in certain types of organizations, but not others. In certain product or service categories, he argued, loyalty may simply not be achievable. In his view, for example, loyalty can only emerge when there is clear superiority of the product or service over that of competitors—one will not develop loyalty to a commodity. Another example he provides is that the product or service has to be part of a social network with which people can identify, and something that is potentially "lovable" like a car or "cherished memorabilia" (p. 41). In a related vein, other researchers have noted that it is important to specify the object of loyalty—a customer may be loyal to a firm, a program or an employee (Guenzi & Pelloni, 2004; Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999). Thus if a particular context or object is not conducive to the development of loyalty, a relationship between loyalty and satisfaction will not emerge.

Another reason for the mixed findings about the satisfaction-loyalty link may be the complexity of the loyalty construct. Park (1996) noted that there was little consensus about how loyalty should be measured in the sport and leisure field. A decade later, consensus is still elusive (East et al., 2005; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). Loyalty has been conceptualized as an attitude, a behavior, or a combination of both, and the operational definitions in different studies vary widely (Butcher et al., 2001; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Oliver, 1999; Park, 1996; Petrick, 2005). Further research is therefore needed to clarify the antecedents of loyalty in a leisure context.

In summary, in the present research, we study the expression of emotion in a group fitness context. Our study extends previous work by including naturally-felt emotional displays measured in a field context (as opposed to a simulation), by matching employee reports of inner feelings with customers' perceptions of their emotional display, and by exploring an underresearched area, emotions in the leisure field.

Our respondents are fitness instructors and their clients (as customers tend to be labeled in a fitness setting). We predict that when fitness instructors are deep acting, as opposed to expressing naturally-felt emotion, this will be detectable as such by clients, since myriad unconscious and uncontrolled facial and body expressions will betray the instructors' true feelings. Fitness classes are usually one hour long and clients often attend class one or more times per week, for several weeks per session. Thus we judge that the interaction between instructor and client is a long-duration, relational exchange; as such, clients will have a preference for authenticity (Grayson, 1998). Through contagion, perceptions of employees' positive, naturally felt emotional display will create positive affect in the client, and under the in-

fluence of positive affect, selective cognitive processing of cues will create satisfaction with the instructor (Soderlund & Rosengren, 2004). In fitness classes, explicit imitation of the instructor's actions is part of the modus operandi. Imitating what is perceived to be vigorous and enthusiastic physical activity (see below) might also have a direct impact on satisfaction.

In this study, we explore the construct of client loyalty in a group fitness context, testing the impact of clients' satisfaction on their loyalty to a specific instructor and to the fitness center, in terms of their attitudes (attitudinal loyalty) and their attendance behavior (behavioral loyalty). We propose that there is potential for clients to become loyal to a fitness instructor (Oliver, 1999), and so we predict a positive satisfaction-loyalty relationship. This theoretical framework is pictured in Figure 1.

In group fitness classes, the fitness instructor demonstrates exercises, and encourages clients to do the exercises energetically and safely. The enthusiasm shown by the instructor is a key emotion that can make a fitness class involving and fun. Ryan and Frederick (1997) have explored the construct of *vitality,* which they describe as "a specific psychological experience of possessing enthusiasm and spirit" (p. 530). A subsequent study by Nix, Ryan, Manly, and Deci (1999) used the same vitality construct, and further defined it as "a positive feeling of aliveness and of possessing personal energy" (p. 268). On the basis of these studies, we opted to use this well-validated construct of vitality to describe the level of enthusiasm displayed by fitness instructors. Our hypotheses follow.

H1: When instructors' emotional displays are naturally felt, their clients will perceive them to have higher vitality than when their displays are deep-acted.

H2: Perceptions of vitality will be directly related to positive affect experienced by clients.

H3: Perceptions of vitality and positive affect will be directly related to client satisfaction.

H4: Client satisfaction will be directly related to attitudinal loyalty to the instructor as well as behavioral loyalty.

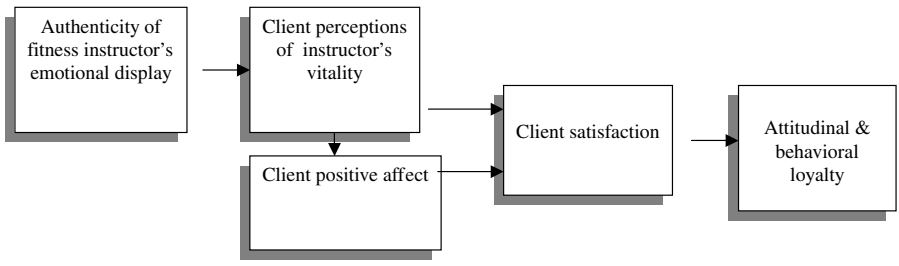

Figure 1. Authenticity of fitness instructors' emotional display and its impact on clients.

Methods

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 132 clients of five fitness instructors in a fitness facility in a Canadian urban center. FitCity (a pseudonym) is part of a national chain, but all participants in our study were employed by or attended the same branch of the organization. This sampling strategy had the advantage of controlling for organizational norms and display rules.

Four of the five instructors were female (as were most instructors at FitCity), but a predominance of women is not unusual among recreational instructors in particular, and service workers in general (Guy & Newman, 2004). They were all certified as group fitness instructors. Their ages ranged between 18 and 55 years old, and they had been teaching at the FitCity for a mean of ten years, ranging from a low of three years to a high of twenty years. On average, they taught fitness classes six hours per week. The time period in which the data were collected was in the middle of the winter class session; at this point the clients had taken classes for many weeks. We surmised that they would therefore have a clear impression of the instructor and their feelings about the classes.

The clients came from classes taught by each of these five instructors. The classes were scheduled at different times of day, which has been suggested to reduce sampling bias (as in Park, 1996), and can also reduce the likelihood that participants would be sampled more than once. A survey questionnaire was distributed as clients were arriving for, or leaving, their class, as recommended in the literature (Nicholls, Gilbert, & Roslow, 1998; Wirtz, 2001). All surveys were collected after the class. If clients were in a hurry to leave the facility after class, they were given the option to receive an electronic version of the questionnaire by email. There were 25 clients who chose to respond electronically. Most of the electronic responses were received on the same day, within two or three hours of the class.

The total number of responses received was 132, with an average of 26 responses per instructor. This sample size was approximately 70% of the attendees at the ten classes. Of these respondents, five were eliminated because they had more than half of the items missing on at least one of the scales. Eighty-five percent of the respondents were female. Eleven percent were 25 years old or younger, 62% were between the ages of 26 and 55, and 27% were over 55.

Measures

As the study was performed in a bilingual (English/French) city, the questionnaire for clients was translated into French to accommodate respondents. The translator was familiar with the fitness context, and also with concepts related to emotional labor, and two experienced French-speaking researchers reviewed the questionnaire, as well as a (bilingual) fitness-instructor coordinator at FitCity. Sixty-eight percent of the clients chose to

respond in English, and the others returned French questionnaires. Most of the questionnaires were completed on site, and respondents worked on clipboards in corridors near the gym and exercise rooms, and beside the swimming pool. For this reason it was important that the survey be brief for the comfort and continued motivation of the respondents. The measures are described below.

Client perceptions of instructor's vitality. To measure client perceptions of the instructors' emotional expression, we adapted Ryan and Frederick's (1997) vitality scale. There were seven items in the measure, which included perceptions that the instructor appeared lively, spirited, energized and alert. The original Ryan and Frederick (1997) scale was slightly reworded to form third-person statements and placed into a fitness context. Thus, for example, "Sometimes I feel so alive I just want to burst" became "The instructor seems so alive that he/she might burst," and "I look forward to each new day" became "The instructor appears to look forward to each new class time." As noted above, these perceptions of vitality were seen as being a key aspect of the group fitness instructor's emotional display. The seven items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from Never (1) to Always (7).

Client's positive affect. This was a measure of the emotions experienced by the clients during the classes themselves. We started with Richins' (1997) adjective checklist. With the counsel of the FitCity coordinator, a subset of four emotions was selected as particularly relevant to the group fitness context. The adjectives included were "enthusiastic," "happy," "encouraged," and "proud," and participants rated on a 7-point scale (1 = Not at all to 7 = Very much) the extent to which they felt each emotion during the fitness class.

Client satisfaction. Here we measured the client's general evaluation of the skills and behavior of the instructor. We used six items that were tailor-made for this study, though we drew heavily on Nicholls et al.'s (1998) research in which they developed a parsimonious measure of personal service encounters. Participants rated the extent to which the instructor was helpful, knowledgeable, punctual, courteous, and "treats me as a valued member of the class." A sixth item was added after consultation with the FitCity coordinator: "Overall this person is a very good instructor." All items were rated Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

Attitudinal loyalty to the instructor. This five-item scale was a combination of three items adapted from Butcher, Sparks, and O'Callaghan (2001), and two items tailor-made for this research in consultation with the FitCity coordinator. The measure tapped the extent to which the instructor was preferred over other instructors at the FitCity. The original Butcher et al., (2001) scale items were based on customer loyalty to cafes, and these items were modified to fit our research site by changing "cafe" to "instructor" or by referring to an instructor's class. The modified items read: "This is my favorite instructor by a long way," "It wouldn't bother me if another instructor taught this class" and "I would strongly recommend this instructor's classes to friends." The tailor-made items read: "I only attend this class when this

instructor teaches it" and "I attend as many of the classes that this instructor teaches as I can." All items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7).

Behavioral loyalty. This was a single item that asked clients to state the average number of hours of classes attended at FitCity per week.

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis using all 22 multi-item measures in the customer scales in order to establish that the scales were measuring distinct constructs. The first solution, using an oblimin rotation, suggested six factors. On the basis of this analysis, we screened out four items that loaded on multiple factors. Having eliminated these items, we repeated the factor analysis and the result was a four-factor solution with a much cleaner factor structure (see Table 1): We retained five perceived vitality items (Cronbach alpha = .83), four positive affect items (alpha = .73), four satisfaction items (alpha = .89) and four loyalty items (alpha = .69). One

TABLE 1
Pattern Matrix for Client Measures

Item	Vitality	Positive Affect	Satisfaction	Attitudinal Loyalty
This instructor is courteous			.856	
This instructor is helpful			.856	
This instructor treats me as a valued member of the class			.798	
Overall this person is a very good instructor			.776	
The instructor is energetic in class	−.873			
The instructor seems so alive that she/he might burst	−.787			
The instructor is lively and spirited	−.777			
The instructor is energized when teaching a class	−.753			
The instructor has energy and spirit	−.668			
(I feel) proud		.801		
(I feel) happy		.735		
(I feel) encouraged		.627		
(I feel) enthusiastic		.535		.440
I attend as many classes this instructor teaches as I can				.764
If this instructor teaches other classes, I will try them				.620
I only attend this class when this instructor teaches it				.564
This is my favorite instructor by a long way				.514
I'd strongly recommend this instructors' classes to friends				

Note: Factor loadings smaller than .40 are not shown.

loyalty item: "I would strongly recommend this instructor's classes to friends" did not load significantly on any factor. When we included the item in the index of loyalty, however, there was a tiny improvement in the reliability coefficient, bringing it to .70. Since .70 is the traditional cut-off for acceptable reliability, we decided to retain this item in our index. We will discuss this anomalous item in greater detail later on in the paper.

Authenticity of instructors' emotional display. Our major independent variable was the extent to which the participant's instructor displayed deep-acted or naturally-felt emotions. Our research remedies a shortcoming of the Grandey et al. (2005) field research since our measures of authenticity use employee self-ratings that are independent of customer perceptions. At the start of the study, instructors filled out a questionnaire on which they rated the extent to which, in general, they engaged in *deep acting* when they taught their classes. Our measure consisted of four questions adapted from Kruml and Geddes' (2000) emotive effort scale. The items were: "I try to change my actual feelings to match those that clients expect of me," "When working with clients, I attempt to create certain emotions in myself that present the image that a group fitness instructor should," "When I'm teaching my class I try to talk myself out of feeling what I really feel," and "I work at conjuring up the feelings that I need to show to the clients." Wording changes from the original Kruml and Geddes (2000) scale set the questions in a group fitness context. For example in various questions, the word "customer" was replaced with "client," "working with customers" became "teaching my class," and "the image my company desires" became "the image that a group fitness instructor should [present]." These adaptations were a result of feedback on pre-tests of the items. Ratings were made on a 7-point scale ranging from Never (1) to Always (7).

Two instructors were identified as high on deep acting (means = 5.00 and 6.25) and three were identified as low on deep acting (means = 2.00, 2.00 and 3.75). Although this split was arbitrary, there was a clear demarcation between these two groups, in terms of their reported scores and also in terms of the scale's mid-point.

We inferred that a high score on the deep acting scale would mean that instructors' emotional expression was not naturally felt. A low score on the deep acting scale could mean that instructors were displaying genuine positive emotions, however it could also mean that they were displaying genuine negative emotions. To differentiate between these two possibilities, the instructors' questionnaire also contained measures of their own *positive affect* and their own *feelings of vitality*. These measures paralleled the items on the client questionnaire (see above), except that third-person items were written in the first person on the questionnaire for the instructors themselves. We noted that the three instructors who were low on deep acting had mean positive affect scores ranging from 5.18-5.71 on the seven-point scale, and mean vitality ratings of 5.14-6.57 on the seven-point scale. Since all these scores were well above the scale's midpoint, we inferred that these instructors were displaying genuine positive emotions. The two instructors who were

high on deep acting also rated themselves as having positive affect (means = 5.61, 6.29) and feeling vitality (means = 5.71, 6.00). This finding is consistent with the norms at FitCity, which were that employees should look cheerful and enthusiastic at all times.

Thus participants were divided into two groups, which constituted the major independent variable—82 participants took classes from an instructor who was expressing naturally-felt positive emotions, and 45 participants took classes from an instructor who was deep acting his or her display of positive emotions.

Results

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas, and intercorrelations among the variables. The hypotheses were tested using t-tests, zero-order correlations, and regression analyses. All analyses were conducted at the individual level. However, given that participants rated five instructors, variance due to the instructor was controlled for in regression analyses.

In general, participants enjoyed their classes—they reported very positive perceptions of their instructor's vitality ($M = 6.50$, $SD = .63$), quite a lot of positive affect ($M = 5.87$) and satisfaction with the instructor ($M = 6.32$, $SD = .88$). Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants would perceive that their instructor had more vitality when their instructor's emotional display was naturally felt than when it was deep acted. Comparing the high and low deep acting groups revealed a significant difference in participants' perceptions of their instructor's vitality ($t(125) = 3.79$, $p < .05$, two-tailed). Participants whose instructors reported high levels of deep acting rated their instructors' perceived vitality higher ($M = 6.73$, $SD = .36$) than participants whose instructors reported low levels of deep acting ($M = 6.37$, $SD = .71$). Although both means were high, a statistically significant difference between the means still emerged. This difference, however, was opposite to the expected direction. The high deep acting group was seen as having more vi-

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alphas, and Intercorrelations among Client Variables

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Vitality	6.50	.63	**.83**				
2. Positive Affect	5.87	.96	.35**	**.73**			
3. Satisfaction	6.32	.88	.52**	.38**	**.89**		
4. Loyalty	5.21	1.18	.41**	.41**	.55**	**.70**	
5. Attendance	3.61	1.69	.06	.26**	.02	.09	—

Note: Diagonal elements in boldface represent coefficient alphas for each scale. Off-diagonal elements are correlations between measures.
* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

tality than the low deep acting group. Hypothesis 1 was therefore not supported.

In order to investigate further the impact of deep acting on client outcomes, we conducted exploratory independent sample t-tests with the other variables in the model. We found that there was no significant difference between the high- and low-deep acting groups in clients' positive affect ($t(125) = .79$, $p = .43$), satisfaction ($t(126) = .79$, $p = .43$), attitudinal loyalty ($t(127) = .90$, $p = .37$) or attendance ($t = .37$, $p = .71$).

Hypothesis 2 posited that there would be a positive relationship between clients' perceptions of their instructor's vitality and their positive affect. The zero-order correlation supported this hypothesis ($r(124) = .35$; $p < .001$). A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in order to control for the instructor. In Step 1 of the regression analysis, instructor was not a significant predictor of positive affect. However, the addition of vitality in Step 2 yielded a significant change in the squared multiple correlation. Vitality accounted for an additional 15% of the variance in positive affect, over and above the control variables. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported (see Table 3).

As expected, there was a significant and positive correlation between client perceptions of their instructor's vitality and their satisfaction ($r(125) = .52$, $p < .001$) and between positive affect and client satisfaction ($r(124) = .38$, $p < .001$). A hierarchical regression was conducted to test the unique contribution of these two variables to explaining client satisfaction. After controlling for instructor, the addition of vitality and positive affect yielded a significant change in the squared multiple correlation. Together, the variables accounted for an additional 33% of the variance in satisfaction, over and above the control variables, and both contributed significantly. Thus Hypothesis 3 was supported (see Table 3).

We expected that satisfaction, in turn, would be positively related to both attitudinal loyalty to the instructor and attendance at the fitness center. As can be seen in Table 2, satisfaction was positively and significantly related to attitudinal loyalty ($r(126) = .55$, $p < .001$). However, it was not significantly related to behavioral loyalty, that is, attendance ($r(125) = .02$; $p = .82$). Regression analyses confirmed these findings. After controlling for instructor, the addition of satisfaction yielded a significant change in the squared multiple correlation in the case of attitudinal loyalty, but not attendance. In the case of attitudinal loyalty, satisfaction accounted for an additional 30% of the variance over and above the control variables. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported (Table 3).

Finally, although there were no specific hypotheses with regard to mediation, the model presented implicitly suggested some mediated relationships. All tests of mediation were conducted according to guidelines outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, the mediating role of client positive affect in the relation between vitality perceptions and satisfaction was tested. It was previously established that vitality was significantly related to satisfaction and positive affect, and that the latter variables were related to satisfaction (see Table 3). Thus, the conditions for mediation were met. In a regression anal-

TABLE 3
Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relations Among Client Variables

Positive Affect	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF[a]	β
Step 1	.05	.05	1.71	
Dummy 1				−.11
Dummy 2				−.21
Dummy 3				−.19
Dummy 4				.04
Step 2	.20	.15	22.11***	
Dummy 1				−.07
Dummy 2				−.09
Dummy 3				−.10
Dummy 4				.21
Vitality				.41***
Satisfaction				
Step 1	.06	.06	2.00	
Dummy 1				−.32
Dummy 2				−.10
Dummy 3				−.17
Dummy 4				−.14
Step 2	.40	.33	33.67***	
Dummy 1				−.24
Dummy 2				−.09
Dummy 3				−.03
Dummy 4				.06
Positive Affect				.20**
Vitality				.50***
Attitudinal Loyalty				
Step 1	.09	.09	3.00	
Dummy 1				−.29*
Dummy 2				−.39**
Dummy 3				−.12
Dummy 4				−.16
Step 2	.39	.30	58.95***	
Dummy 1				−.11
Dummy 2				−.33**
Dummy 3				−.02
Dummy 4				−.08
Satisfaction				.56***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

ysis, after controlling for instructor, client perception of their instructor's vitality was entered into the equation. Vitality was a significant predictor ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$). After the introduction of positive affect, the beta weight associated with vitality decreased but remained significant ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$). This suggests partial mediation. A Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) confirmed this conclusion (Sobel's $z = 2.37$, $p = .018$).

We also investigated the mediating role of satisfaction in the relation between vitality and loyalty, and between positive affect and loyalty (it should be noted that mediation tests could not be conducted with class attendance as this variable was not related to the mediator). These were tested separately. First, the mediating role of satisfaction in the relation between vitality and loyalty was examined. All conditions for mediation were met. After controlling for instructor, loyalty was regressed onto vitality, which was a significant predictor ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$). Then, the hypothesized mediating variable, satisfaction, was introduced. Satisfaction was a significant predictor of loyalty ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$), but the beta weight associated with vitality became non significant ($\beta = .13$, $p = .14$). These results suggest full mediation, which was confirmed by a Sobel test of mediation (Sobel's $z = 4.29$, $p < .001$).

A similar analysis was conducted to test the mediating role of satisfaction in the relation between positive affect and loyalty. After controlling for instructor, positive affect was entered into the equation and was a significant predictor of loyalty ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$). In a third step, satisfaction was introduced and the beta weight associated with positive affect decreased but remained a significant predictor ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$). Satisfaction was a significant predictor of loyalty ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$). This suggests partial mediation, which was confirmed by a Sobel test of mediation (Sobel's $z = 3.64$, $p < .0002$).

Discussion

Overall, the results paint an interesting picture of the fitness instructor's emotional display and its impact on client outcomes. The inferences we drew from these results are now discussed. It appears that low levels of deep acting on the part of the instructors may have led clients to perceive their instructors as having lower, as opposed to higher vitality. It appears that our participants, like those of Grandey et al., (2005) found deep acted emotional displays to be convincing and responded positively to them. When instructors felt natural positive affect and vitality, but did not work hard to show these emotions to their clients, they were perceived as having lower vitality. This result is consistent with the view of authors like Hochschild (1983) and Morris and Feldman (1996) who have maintained that even when we are actually feeling the emotions we display, some measure of acting is involved since we have to ensure that our true feelings actually show in our demeanor.

We must deal with an alternative interpretation of this result; it is possible that this difference in perceived vitality might have been due, not to the level of deep acting, but to other differences between the two sets of

participants. Additional statistical testing suggested that the two groups of clients were similar in age (t = .97; p = .33), gender (chi square = .08; p = .77) and hours of classes taken per week (t = .37; p = .71). This increases confidence in our inference that differences in clients' perceptions were based on actual differences between the two sets of instructors, and not differences in the clients themselves.

It is also still probable, however, that the high-deep-acting instructors differed from the low-deep-acting instructors in ways other than their emotional display. Repeating this study with a much larger sample of instructors would be helpful, although it would not entirely rule out the problem. A more efficient way to rule out alternative explanations based on differences among instructors would be to do within-instructor comparisons. Future research could take multiple measures of instructors, asking them the extent to which they were deep acting in various classes taught. The reactions of clients could then be compared to see if the extent of deep acting was related to perceptions of vitality, controlling for instructor differences.

Another area that would profit from further study is an in-depth exploration of dimensions within the construct of emotional labor. Perhaps we were incorrect in our inference that low levels of deep acting meant that the instructor was experiencing naturally felt emotion. It is possible that they were surface acting, and that their reports during this research of their own positive affect and vitality were part of their act. In developing measures for this study, we noted that questionnaire items which Kruml and Geddes (2000) labeled as measuring surface acting (reverse-scored) were adapted by Diefendorff et al. (2005) to measure naturally-felt emotion. Moreover, some researchers have treated the display of naturally-felt emotions and surface acting as opposite ends of the same continuum (Kruml & Geddes); others have treated naturally-felt, deep-acted and surface-acted displays as three distinct constructs (Diefendorff et al.); and still others have treated deep- and surface-acting as high and low levels of the same construct, authenticity (Grandey et al., 2005).

We must also tackle the question of what authenticity really means. On the one hand, some scholars (Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996) believe that naturally-felt emotions still need to be enhanced by making an effort to show them to others. Other authors like Sharpe (2005) have contended that although we adopt various personas at different times or in different parts of our lives (for example "wilderness-group-leader" in the summer and "city-dweller" the rest of the year) in each case our emotional expression may be authentic—we are not acting at all. The present data from our very small sample of instructors can contribute little to these debates. We simply call for more research attention to the issues of the dimensionality of emotional labor and the nature of emotional authenticity.

Client Perceptions and Client Outcomes

As expected, the clients' perceptions of the instructor's vitality were directly related to their positive affect, most likely through emotional conta-

gion. Contagion has previously been demonstrated in adventure settings. Our study suggests that similar processes can occur in fitness classes, with positive client outcomes. Emotional contagion has been described as unconscious mimicry, but in this fitness setting, mimicry is also conscious. The instructor demonstrates the exercises and the client intentionally copies her motions, possibly trying to achieve the same level of vigor and perceived enthusiasm. We believed that this intentional mimicry would directly affect satisfaction with the instructor, that is, the perception that the instructor was knowledgeable, helpful and good. As well, vitality perceptions should have an impact on satisfaction via generalized positive affect. The analyses supported this reasoning. Vitality perceptions correlated directly with client satisfaction with the instructor; positive affect also partially mediated a link between perceptions of vitality and client satisfaction with instructor performance.

Consistent with some studies in the literature and our prediction, the client's emotional experience of the class was, in turn, related to loyalty to the instructor. Satisfaction accounted for the relationship between clients' positive affect and their attitudinal loyalty, that is, the clients' positive emotional experience was associated with satisfaction with the instructor which, in turn, led them to say that they preferred the instructor to others at the facility, and to make a specific effort to take this particular instructor's classes. Moreover, levels of satisfaction fully mediated the link between perceptions of vitality and loyalty. In Oliver's (1999) terms, a fitness instructor and his or her classes would appear to have the attributes that (potentially) inspire loyalty.

On the other hand, behavioral loyalty—hours of attendance per week at FitCity—was unaffected by levels of satisfaction. We noted that our measure of behavioral loyalty was directed to the center as a whole, not just to the individual instructor as a loyalty object. Perhaps if we had asked participants to report the number of hours per week they spent with the instructor, there might have been a correlation between their attitude and behavior. On the other hand, this finding is similar to the result found by Guenzi and Polloni (2004) at the Italian fitness center they studied. It is true that attendance behavior has many antecedents, including the weather, participants' busyness at work, health, and other factors beyond the individual's control. Such environmental constraints would naturally weaken correlations among different loyalty outcomes. Moreover, participants paid a fee for a session, and for economic reasons might continue to attend, no matter what their level of satisfaction (Guenzi & Polloni, 2004; Park, 1996). In general, our results confirm the notion that the object and type of loyalty must be carefully specified and separately measured (East et al., 2005). Recall that our factor analysis suggested that loyalty, as represented by word of mouth recommendations to friends, should have been separated from loyalty represented by "usage" of classes. The various dimensions of attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty may not necessarily go hand in hand.

Limitations

Our theoretical framework was supported in part, but there are, of course, limitations to our conclusions. We noted earlier the need for further testing of the relationship between authenticity of emotional display and client perceptions. Another limitation of our study is related to the fact that our research design does not allow us to rule out the problem of reverse causality. More specifically, it is possible that high levels of client positive affect, satisfaction and loyalty may have caused instructors to work harder to present positive emotions and keep clients happy. In this real-life setting, reciprocal causality remains a viable possibility. Longitudinal studies with time-lagged measures might shed more light on the causal direction of the relationship. We also need to take into consideration the impact of time on our measures. In particular, clients might be responding either to the particular class they just took or the cumulative impact of the classes they have taken with this instructor. In this regard, it may be useful to compare results when clients make their ratings before class, immediately after class, or a few hours after class (as did the participants who completed electronic questionnaires). The modest sample size in this study made it impractical to make the comparisons within these data, but it might be wise for future studies to control the time variable, or to use repeated measures to reveal its effect.

As noted, this was a relatively small sample at a single organization with large class sizes. It is likely that smaller establishments or different types of classes (such as yoga) may have somewhat different demands for emotional expression, with different importance placed on authenticity. That said, we believe that while the focal emotion may change, (for example, calm instead of vitality), authenticity will continue to be an important predictor of client perceptions and responses.

Implications for Practice and Conclusion

Our findings suggest that perceptions of fitness instructors' emotional displays have an effect on clients' satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty. Certainly, fitness clubs should try to ensure that the emotions that instructors express are spontaneous and naturally felt. This can be achieved by careful personnel selection, allowing instructors to choose the classes and schedules they truly enjoy, and ensuring the instructors are well trained, and therefore feel at ease with the activities they must demonstrate. Yet even when emotions are genuine, employees need to ensure that they are exhibiting felt emotions in their expression. We noted during data collection that instructors are visible to their clients, therefore still "on stage" outside of the exercise rooms and pool—in the corridors before and after class, and in the changing rooms. In fact, these common areas outside of class are what Grayson (1998) might call a "staged back region" in which customers are especially likely to accept emotional expression as genuinely felt. If employees continue to exhibit appropriate emotional displays outside of the exercise rooms, client

perceptions of authenticity should be particularly high, and their satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty should increase.

This research contributes to our understanding of expressed emotion in leisure fitness classes. We note that the scope of its applicability may be broader. Service jobs in diverse fields require employees to manage their emotional expressions in order to sustain relationships with clients and serve them well. The emotion may vary. It may be enthusiasm for entertainers, warmth and optimism for educators or health-service workers, compassion for counselors or funeral directors. Whatever the emotion, we suggest that making an effort to express it correctly has an impact on clients' responses to the service employee.

Emotional display has been an object of interest for many decades. Understanding authentic emotional display in leisure and other organizations promises many benefits for personnel practices, employee satisfaction, and positive customer outcomes.

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