Beasting or Bullying: Managing Emotions in Fitness Professional Worker/Client Relationships

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This paper explores the connection between managed emotions and workplace bullying between workers and long-term service relationships with clients. The material used in this exploration arose from an eight-month long ethnography in a small, privately own fitness facility in the UK. The thematic analysis of material contains excerpts from field notes from participation observation, observations, informal conversations, and semi-structured interviews. The paper unveils how group membership can influence perceptions of when, and if, emotions are managed. The experiences demonstrate that managed emotions and types of bullying occur by both the fitness professional and the clients in the service space and thus co-created rather than isolated incidents.

Keywords: workplace bullying, relational services, ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Employment in service industries in the UK continues to rise, with 85% of workers employed in service-related industries by 2018 (ONS, www.ons.gov.uk accessed 10/11/2021) and over 180,000 employed in sports and fitness specifically (Statista accessed 11/2/2024). Understandably, as the potential for working in services and sport and fitness service-related positions becomes more prevalent, there continues to need to be an understanding of the relationship between fitness service provider and client/customer.

Services industries rely on a client's willingness to pay for the services, and thus, rely on workers who can manage successful relationships with new or existing customers (Gedajlovic et al., 2013). In management and organizational behaviour, researchers are often concerned about how these interactions relate to an employee's job performance, employee job satisfaction, required KSAO's, and the emotional labour involved with providing the services (Lee and Yoo, 2023). This paper will focus on service interactions. Research in service interactions focuses on where the employee and the customer come together within the greater service ecosystem (Growth et al., 2019).

Service providers may often have conflicting responsibilities that negatively impact successful working relationships: Workers are often required to adhere to organizational policies and procedures (Pressy and Harris, 2024) or industry norms (Karadag and Near, 2024); they have to provide effective services to clients; and they often have to manage their emotions in order to please the client (Hochschild, 2012) even though effectiveness and pleasing might be in conflict with one another.

Many studies on service interaction and managing emotions focus on workers employed within an organization (for example, Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Chiu et al., 2019; Curth et al., 2014; Huang and Ryan,

2011). Recent work by Davidson, Gleim, Johnson and Stevens (2023) examined the role of gig workers who are freelance workers but still represent an organization (such as Lyft). It is important to understand the journey of self-employed workers. Self-employed service professionals may be even more reliant on gaining and maintaining long-term client relationships as the relationship is not created nor maintained by brand loyalty to an organization (Wang et al., 2017). This paper answers this need by taking an intimate look into the tensions that can arise when a self-employed fitness professional struggles to manage emotions while trying to provide effective fitness programs and building pleasing long lasting relationships with clients. Fitness falls into the service industry where managing personality and emotions are important facets of the work, especially in entry-level gym positions (Lloyd, 2008; Maguire, 2001). In these roles, it is typically expected that workers should project a sense of warmth and engagement, regardless of how they actually feel (Ashforth and Humphry, 1993; Hochshild, 2012; Otterbring et al., 2023).

This paper emerges from an ethnographic study on careers in the fitness industry. The findings in this paper help answer gaps in existing knowledge by showcasing the "interrelated and reciprocal nature" (Growth et al., 2019, p.106) of the service interaction whilst it is happening. The next section of this paper sets the theoretical frame of the analysis, followed by describing the ethnographic arena and methodology. The paper then provides in-depth scenes on the theme of incivility in the shared space. The paper then concludes with a discussion of how these scenes relate to the wider knowledge of service interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Labour

Emotional labour, emotional contagion, and customer mistreatment are in the centre of research on service interactions (Growth et al., 2019). One of the tenets of emotional labour is that the worker is expected to interact with a customer and manage their own emotions to "produce an emotional state in another person" such as happiness, joy, gratitude, obedience or fear (Hochschild, 2012, p.147). Research has shown that emotional labour such as suppressing or masking one's true 'self' in the work environment can negatively impact the service provider, such as creating emotional conflict within the worker (Scott and Barnes, 2011) or feeling burnout (Grandey, 2003).

Emotional labor can lead to job burnout and negatively impact health, mental wellbeing, and cognitive processes (Ybema and Van Dam, 2014). Workers who encounter aggressive and uncivil actions from customers can also get caught in cognitive mental rumination cycles which further impact the workers mental wellbeing and can even lead to customer sabotage (Baranik et al., 2017). It can also negatively impact client relationships as the emotional distance created through a mask can result in the client not wanting to build a rapport with the worker (Butler et al., 2003).

Many agree there are different levels of managed emotions in service work (for example Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 2012; Lloyd and Payne, 2009; Scott and Barnes, 2011) and different reasons for managing emotions (Bolton, 2002). Most common is Hochschild (2012) description of where-in "surface acting we deceive others about what we really feel, but do not deceive ourselves" (p.33), whereas in deep acting the worker takes on, or comes to believe, the actual feelings they are portraying. It has also been suggested that different states of our personality are activated in different situations. Huang and Ryan (2011) suggested that some people may be prone to situational activation of a trait, such as having a heightened sense of extraversion in the moment, while some workers may be more consistent in varying service situations.

Workers might express their authentic emotions based on the immediate context of service interaction such as having a similar family role or similar life experience as the current client (Yagil and Medler-Liraz, 2013). Further, research suggests the amount of time and frequency of the service interaction can impact emotional management, as the more familiarity both parties have with one another, the further the service worker moves away from scripted emotional regulation (Harness et al., 2020).

Extended duration and frequent contact were the norm for most of the fitness professional/client interactions in the study of this paper.

This paper uses Bolton's typology of managed emotions in the service space as a framework for analysis. Bolton (2000; 2005; Bolton and Boyd, 2003) suggested that employees manage their emotions in four overarching ways, based on circumstances and internal motivating factors. Objective controls are those regarding organizational/industry policies and procedures (prescriptive emotional management) and those based on achieving financial security (pecuniary emotional management). Subjective controls are more linked to ways that the worker may have internalized the need to showcase a certain persona (Goffman, 1959), which includes presenting a self that is based on the workers understanding of what is expected in societal roles (presentational emotional management) or presenting the best self as a service 'gift' to others (philanthropic emotional management). This paper demonstrates that the form of managed emotions the fitness professional attempts to adopt is related to the form of emotional labour and resultant client interaction Figure 1 below outlines the typologies based under internal motivation and pressures, and external motivation and pressures.

FIGURE 1
TYPOLOGY OF EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT (BOLTON, 2005)

Subjective internal 'authentic' self and pressures	Objective external self and pressures
Presentational Adherence to social norms of group or sub-groups	**Prescriptive** Industry standards Professional feelings Status conflicts
Philanthropic The giving and receiving of emotional labor service as a gift to others	**Pecuniary** Organizational 'scripts' Display rules Limited social engagement

Emotional Labour and Workplace Elastic Relational Service Ties

Service work can involve a one-time, or infrequent interaction between worker and customer, and could be verbal only, such as call centre work, or could be recurring interactions in a shared arena, such as hairdressing (Bitner, 1992; Goldberg and Grandey, 2007; Harness et al., 2020). The emotional relationship between worker and customer can be influenced by how long the service interaction occurs and how often the worker and customer interact in the co-production of work (Chiu et al., 2019; Harness et al., 2020).

In relational services a recurring and intensive interaction between the worker and client can make the boundary between financial gain and friendship fuzzy (Cranford and Miller, 2013). This interaction with clients can be meaningful to the worker as they get to connect with others (Bhave et al., 2019). One aspect that makes the study of relational services and emotional labour in the fitness industry interesting is understanding the relationship between club member themselves, the club member and the facility, and the relationship with the club members and the fitness professional. Club members can use the 'third space' as part of building their social life (Crossley, 2008; Griffiths and Gilly, 2012). Additionally, when customers generate affective commitments to one another they can develop a strong commitment to the organization (Curth et al., 2014). Further, studies have suggested that customers who co-create services (such as is done in fitness) become more satisfied and value the service more (Chiu et al., 2019). Therefore, creating a space where customer can build relationships with one another can become a financial benefit to a fitness centre and self-employed fitness professionals.

Relational Services, Emotional Labour and Workplace Aggression

In relational services 'third spaces', where services are co-created between customers and workers, a sense of in-group membership can form. In-group members can begin to create norms and symbolic membership based on shared continual interaction and can identify a 'we' versus 'them' (Allport, 1979; Harrington and Fine, 2000). Indeed, the relationship between the informants of this study share tenants of elastic ties where group members "do not recognize each other as confidants but who nonetheless provide each other with the support and practical assistance typically seen in strong-tie-relationships" (Torres, 2019, p.87). This paper shows how it is in this membership that bullying behaviour can take place (Crossley, 2006; 2008).

Aggression in the workplace often includes an intent to do emotional harm towards a particular person or group of persons (Al-Hawari et al., 2020) and is often about trying to exert control over others (Henningsen and Henningsen, 2020). Bullying is one form of workplace aggression and might include verbal abuser, undermining another's work, or belittling someone (Brotherdige, 2013). Korczysnki and Evans (2013) suggested that stronger relationships between the worker and the customer will often reduce the abuse the customer uses on the service provider. However, Yagil and Melder-Liraz (2013) indicated that in service industries, the worker may try to manage their emotions to help alleviate customer abuse, but stepping away from organizational scripts can also create situations where clients become angry (Yagil and Melder-Liraz, 2013). The findings discussed in this paper will further demonstrate how the elastic ties of group members and the worker resulted in workplace bullying.

METHODOLOGY

Many work roles occur within a setting that have objective policies, procedures, and prescribed responsibilities and duties.

These codified expectations and experiences can be measured with survey questionnaire and structured interviews. However, work production and career success also happens in an interactive cultural setting (Watson, 1994). Ethnography is well suited to understanding the interplay between actors and the acted upon in a particular setting (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Thus, in order to provide a 'thick description' (Bechky, 2006; Geertz, 1993) of what was symbolically important to those in this occupational setting, the ethnographic approach was utilized. The findings of this paper arose from materials collected during an eight-month long ethnographic study on the career identities and career success of fitness professionals. The setting for the ethnography was a privately owned small fitness facility in the Southwest region of the UK which is named Exclusive Workout in this paper.

On average I spent four to five hours per day, seven days a week in the arena for eight months. As a participant-observer, I spent time in the field taking classes such as Spin, Pilates, kickboxing, strength fusion, and basic aerobics. I participated in each trainers' classes at different days and times until a point of data saturation occurred (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). As a participant-observer I engaged in reflexive notetaking (Emerson et al., 1995) within my field notes to address what was symbolically significant to me as a class member and how this was similar or different to others within the arena. When not taking classes I would work out on my own on equipment such as the treadmill or lifting weights. During these sessions I was observer-participant, doing a similar activity as others in the setting but observing how the trainers worked with the client at the time or interacted with one another. In addition to these sessions, I would also 'hang out' in the reception area where members and trainers would hang out and socialize.

Data included field notes, notes from informal conversations, transcripts from formal semi-structured interviews, and secondary data analysis (Emerson et al., 1995; Hamersley and Atkinson, 2007; Holliday, 2007; Van Maanen, 2011). Field notes were written up on each session. Field notes captured descriptions of behaviour, events, appearance and demeanour, tone and word choices, who was included/excluded, and description of the Exclusive Workout as an organization (Holliday, 2007).

Recorded formal interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The audio-recordings were transcribed, and each informant was provided a copy for review before analysis commenced. Over 375 data documents resulted from this collection, which exceeds the needs for ethnographic data saturation (Wutich et al., 2024).

Approval for the study was provided through the university ethics board. Access to the site was first negotiated with the owners of the gym. Upon their approval each fitness professional was approached independently for informed consent. Two individuals declined to be involved. At no time were observations conducted that included them. The overall study included sixteen fitness professionals. Similar to other ethnographies that included participants in third spaces (see, for example, Atkinson, 1976; Gale, 2007; Wilson, 2007), the voices of others are included. The others who were included were aware of the author's role as a researcher in the setting and often proactively shared their thoughts and feelings as clients of Exclusive Workout. Table 1 below provides a brief synopsis of the informants included in this paper.

TABLE 1
INFORMANTS OF THIS STUDY

Name	Role	Characteristics
Dylan	Trainer	Male 20-25 year old Professional athletic
Emily	Club member	Female 25-30 year old Has boyfriend who also attends club In-group status to Dylan In-group status to others in the gym
Izzy	Club member	Female 20-25 year old In-group status to Dylan Sometimes hired Dylan for one-on-one training Not a strong in-group status with others in the gym
Madison	Club Member	Female 20-25 year old In-group status to Dylan In-group status to others in the gym Best friend with Amelia
Amelia	Club Member	Female 20-25 year old In-group status to Dylan In-group status to others in the gym Best friends with Madison
John	Club Member	Male 60-70 year old Club member who regularly attends classes but not substantial 'group' membership
Tracy	Trainer	Female 55-60 year old Class fitness trainer

Data Analysis

The findings in this paper were formed through abductive reasoning, whereby there was iterative process between raw material (field notes and interview transcripts) that had previously been gathered through inductive, ground theory techniques (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), and the existing literature on emotional labour and workplace aggression (Griesbach, 2021; Zhuang and Song, 2019). Capturing field notes was the first phase of the analytical process (Charmaz, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007); I

attempted to capture symbolic cultural meanings (Blumer, 1969) from the participants' perspective. I also made conscious decisions to capture 'observer-identified' concepts based on focus of the study.

Open and axial coding was begun on the field notes one month into the ethnography (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). During open coding each line of material was reviewed and concepts that seemed to be particular to this setting were identified (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Multiple concepts could overlap within on sentence; I wanted the setting to tell me what was happening. Once a month, I would review the open coding and apply axial coding where I would identify patterns of concepts that linked together (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The findings of this paper arose after the close of the study and a theoretical story emerged about these people and this setting that emerged through the axial coding. 'Beasting' was a symbolic cultural meaning to the people within this setting. As an observer, I could recognize there was 'bullying' flipside to this meaning. When this theme emerged from a deep reading of the materials I engaged with the theoretical framework on emotional labour and workplace bullying. Using this framework, I applied a selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) process whereby I organized applicable material (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001) as it related to the theory of emotional labor and workplace bullying. Importantly, these findings comply with the guidelines by Strauss and Corbin (1988) in that they frequently occur within the material, the explanations are not forced or contrived, and can explain variation.

THE STUDY

The Setting

This paper follows the story arch of Dylan. Dylan was a young (early 20s) competitive professional athlete. At the beginning of the ethnographic story Dylan had been working at Exclusive Workout for two years, starting out as a staff member and working his way to becoming a fully self-employed personal trainer and business partner with Luis. As a self-employed personal trainer, he paid monthly 'rent' to Exclusive Workout where he and his clients were able to use the space whenever needed. The sports training business with Luis was focused on training young rugby players.

Luis was a mature man in his mid-40s. Luis had played on a rugby team as a young adult, had been a rugby coach for over twenty years, and was well regarded in the local sporting community. Luis had a short and stocky build with an imposing stature and a gruff demeanour (though very friendly and talkative when 'off duty'). He often displayed power over the fitness space whenever the owners of the club were not around (self-citation). His social 'credit' allowed him to 'get away' with treating clients and club members in a certain manner that many other trainers in the setting could not pull off (Bourdieu, 1986). He was a very popular trainer with clients that wanted to be 'Beasted', that is, being shouted at and pushed to the limits until the client cried, puked, or both (in the words of clients).

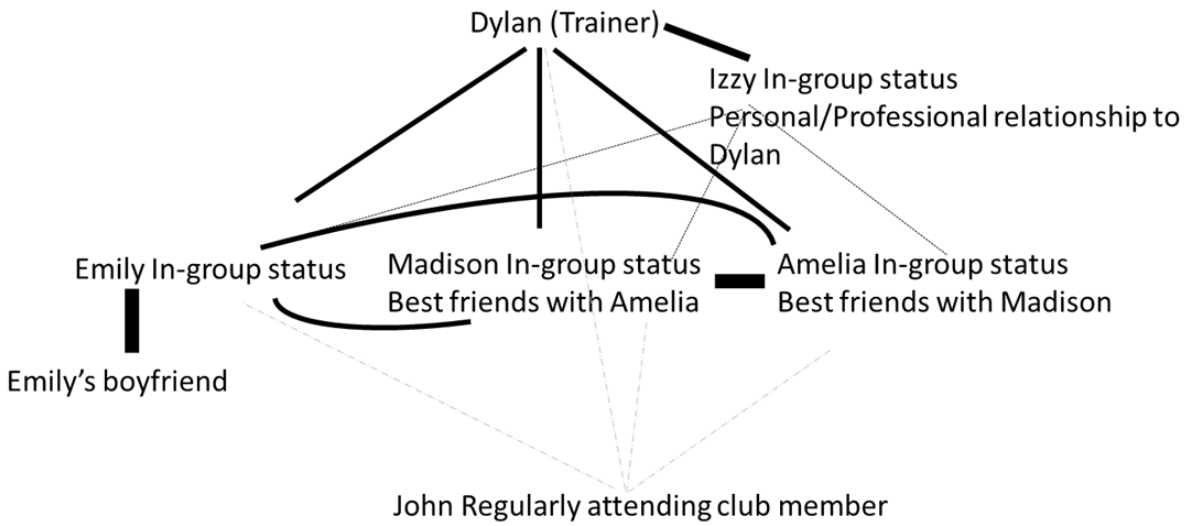
At the time of the study Dylan had already been developing his human capital by achieving his Level 3 Register of Exercise Professionals (REP) and was building his book of business by recruiting club members and athletes to train. (In 2020, REP migrated to CIMSPA. CIMSPA is "the professional development body for the UK's sport and physical activity sector" (accessed 10.30.2024). At the time of observation qualifying for REPs 3 allowed the fitness professional to offer personal one-on-one training at which point the individual can opt to stay employed with a gym or become a self-employed trainer.

During semi-structured interviews Dylan expressed that fitness was his career of choice and would someday like to be a strength coach for a professional rugby or football team. However, many field site observations captured an individual who seemed to be conflicted with the social dynamics required by the job role of this career. Existing research has shown that personal trainers often must utilize prescriptive emotion management by their host gyms even when not directly employed by the facility (Harvery et al., 2017). As a young inexperienced professional fitness worker Dylan still seemed to be searching for his 'trainer' persona (Goffman, 1959; Read et al., 1968). As a professional triathlete, many of his personal training clients sought him out to be trained for triathlon racing. Triathlon training generally involves hours of solitary and disciplined training. Likewise, his clients required firm, but limited, interaction during training sessions.

Dylan's observable personality, which seemed to denote 'introversion' (Read et al., 1971) was a good match for these types of clients. However, he often had difficulty controlling class sessions, or clients he had taken on from the gym. He was still trying to learn when to encourage clients with a form of cheerleading and when to push. His attempts to 'Beast' members during class sessions, using the same 'Beasting' techniques learned from his business partner Luis, were often met with resistance and emotional responses that seemed to trouble him. Dylan also had a large in-group following at Exclusive Workout, which seemed to border on fandom.

Emotional-social relationships were often acted out during his class sessions when some girls would try to vie for his attention or approval. Figure 2 below provides a visual map demarking the strong and less strong relationships between the individuals discussed in this paper. The thickness of the line indicates the strength of the relationship tie.

FIGURE 2
RELATIONAL IN-GROUP STATUS



By the end of the ethnographic study, Dylan had quit working at Exclusive Workout and had quit the fitness industry altogether to move onto something else. His trajectory demonstrates the need to understand how emotional labour can shape a service career in settings where there is interdependence between the client and the service provider (Balji et al., 2016; Ponder et al., 2016). The following section provides scenarios that demonstrate these interactions in relation to Bolton's typology of emotional management.

Scene One: Having Fun

The number of class participants varied depending on the type of class, the instructor, the day of the week, time of day, and local and national events that were happening. During this particular scenario there were only three participants in the spinning session; myself, a non-regular member, and Emily*. I set up my bike at one end of the studio and the other girl set her bike at the other end. Emily was setting up her bike near the other girl and Dylan told her to fill in the gap between the two of us. Emily moved her bike over to me and Dylan gave her a hard time, saying:

> *I said fill in the gap, not just move all the way over to the other side.*

His tone of voice was an over-the-top mock aggression. Emily interpreted his comment as teasing. She giggled and moved her bike more towards the centre of the studio. As the session was underway, Emily,

who almost always had a playful, happy disposition in class, was swinging her head to and fro during the routines, and in general was playing around quite a bit.

Regular class members, used to set routines, would sometimes anticipate the next movement before the instructor provided the cue. At one point during this session Emily stood up before he told us to. He looked at her and said: *Did I tell you to stand up*? Using a similar mock-serious tone of voice, face blank. She said '*No'* and sat back down.

As soon as she was seated, he said '*now, stand up!*' and started laughing. He is amused at tricking her. At another point in the session, he is trying to get us to pedal faster and said to Emily '*Anytime Emily!*' insinuating that she was dawdling around and not working hard enough.

The mood in this session was relaxed and Emily responded to each command with a giggle and increased her level of exertion.

The session demonstrates that he likes to tease his female friends when they are in class, and how they appear to enjoy the teasing, responding with laughter and maybe pushing through the routine with a bit more effort. His and her laughter indicate that the interaction is not seen as Beasting or bullying by either member, but rather it is good-natured teasing between friends.

He provides general cues to me and the other class member such as: '*pick up the pace', 'turn up the tension',* but does not single either of us out by calling our names, nor even looking directly at us. The use of pecuniary emotional labour creates a sense of out-group membership for the other two of us (Allen and Wilder, 1975; Tanghe *et al*., 2010) which could result it us not working out as hard.

In this session, Emily is the only member of his in-group; therefore, there is no competition for his attention. The following scenario however follows one particularly emotional class that illustrates how some of the in-group members acted as if they had a claim on him, how bullying can occur from both the client and the service provider, and how he has not yet developed enough experience to know how to manage his emotions in the fluctuating sociality of the session.

Scene Two: Club Member Aggression

Exclusive Workout was a small, detached building with limited space and equipment. The gym owned twelve "spin" bikes.

The gym had a semi-formal sign-up policy for all classes but oftentimes in-group members would get preferential access to classes. All twelve bikes had been pre-booked in this particular session and there was a waiting list of interested members. Dylan pulled one of the bikes from the main floor into the studio to create more available spots. Though this bike was not a proper "spin" bike it had many similar functions and was the bike he would often train his triathlon clients on; therefor he was familiar with the bike's capabilities and limitations. Using the bike indicated that in his professional opinion the bike was suitable for the task.

He assigned the bike to Izzy, one of his close female friends. He had her mount the bike and was adjusting the frame to fit her body and shed joked that he now had a chance to:

> *'touch my butt'*

Dylan did not respond to the comment and focused on setting up the bike for her. She waited a few seconds and then asked if he had heard her, that he could not touch her butt.

He replied:

> '*Yes. I heard you.'*

He did not look at her and his tone of voice did not sound pleased, suggesting that perhaps he did not find the comment amusing, it was an unwanted sexual comment in general, or an unwanted sexual comment in a public space with an audience. A few minutes into the class her water bottle fell onto the floor. She made him walk over to her bike and pick it up for her, demanding he pick it up rather than asking, and he obliged. When it fell a second time, he told her she had to take care of it herself.

As the class continued, he would give the whole class normal directions such as *'Stand up*' or *'increase the resistance'*.

At each command Izzy would complain that she could not do the same things on the makeshift spin bike. At the first complaint Dylan walked over to the bike and showed her how to adjust the resistance on the bike. This did not appease her, and she continued complaining every time he called out an instruction. After his first demonstration to her on her bike he ignored her complaints, sometimes looking at her without saying anything, and sometimes not looking at her.

Midway through the class she folded her arms while pedaling at half-speed, as if sulking, then dismounted the bike and walked out of the studio. In the bullying literature Henningsen and Henningsen (2020) outline that "whining", which includes "pouting", "feigned hurt feelings", and "playing the victim" can be considered aggressive behaviour to get one's way.

When Izzy could not bully Dylan into giving her preferential treatment, she continued to use aggressive behavior from a different tactic. When she could not get her way, she left the arena. Dylan did not say anything to her as she walked out, nor did he address any of us still in the class. He tried to carry on teaching in a level tone of voice as if nothing unusual had happened.

In this scenario Izzy is bullying him by making sexual comments and making him serve her, such as retrieving her water bottle. Additionally, Izzy is also consciously or unconsciously questioning his legitimacy as a trainer (Bitektine, 2011; Tost, 2011) as he enacts prescriptive emotional labour. She has refused to accept that the bike she has been assigned could offer a beneficial workout if she followed his instructions and thus demonstrates a lack of confidence in his professional decisions.

Scene Two: Emotional Contagion and Confusion

Izzy's behaviour and final exit were not the only situation Dylan had to contend with during this one session. It seemed that drama was contagious (Barsade et al., 2018). Amelia, one of the most popular young women at Exclusive Workout, had called in advance to get her name on the sign-up sheet, thus reserving a spot for the class. She had not arrived by the time the class had started so Dylan gave the spot to a club member on the waiting list. This decision upset other in-group members because they thought it was unfair.

At the time of this observation the gym had an *official* policy that club members could call during the same day and put their name on the list, whilst non-club members could only register for the class in person, half an hour prior to the class. However, on many occasions, I witnessed in-group members being allowed to put their name on the sign-up sheets several days in advance.

Both the official policy and the informal practices allowed for classes to become fully booked by clients who had achieved in-group status at the club. Further, in many of the classes taught by other trainers, if the in-group member had not arrived by the start of the class, the instructor would set up a spot for them so that it was ready when the member arrived five or ten minutes later.

Dylan's decision to take a "hard" approach regarding punctuality and attendance was not the norm for Exclusive Workout and violated the social rules of the in-group members (Barker, 1993; Jones, 1986). (Interestingly, after the observation period for the study ended, the gym changed their policy regarding class sign-up; if a club member called to register for the class but did not arrive in time, they forfeit their space, and additionally, were not permitted to register in advance for an entire month.)

Amelia's best friend Madison was one of the young women upset by Dylan's decision. Madison also had a very strong in-group status with the trainers and other gym members. She was perceived as very "tough" and "fit" under normal circumstances and seemed to thrive when trainers singled her out during class sessions to "Beast" her. However, during this session she seemed to be having an emotionally difficult day that was exacerbated by Amelia being omitted from the session.

During the routine Dylan shouted at us, a general reminder to all participants, to turn-up the resistance and pick up our speed. He then focused on Madison and shouted at her to pick up her pace. She shook her head, looked as if she was ready to cry, and then put a towel over her face. Her body language prior to this, and lack of social engagement with others, had already suggested that she was not in a positive emotional state, but Dylan had misread the situation, or did not understand how to deal with it.

At her response he did try to quickly recalibrate himself. During the rest of the session he would shout things like - *Everyone but Madison turn up by half a turn* – thus still singling her out but trying to be gentle. A few times during the session he would ask her: *Are you alright Madison?* Or he would encourage her tenderly, saying "*Come on Madison".*

Here I use the word "tender" to describe his voice. "Tender voice" and "loving face" were two descriptions I often used in felid notes when capturing Dylan's verbal and nonverbal communication (Buck and Van Lear, 2002) and seemed unique to him. His "tender voice" did not seem to be a part of a soft or cheerleading trainer role, but seemed to come from his heart and soul when he himself was emotionally moved or affected by what was happening around him.

He seemed to lack the experience, ability, or desire to enact managed emotion in the role as service provider but displayed his authentic personality (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Yagil and Medler-Liraz, 2013). Additionally, the change in his voice and his words during this session indicated that he did know how to change to meet the needs of Madison, which demonstrates how he was unwilling to change to meet the needs of Izzy (Al-Hawari *et al*., 2020).

As the session was ending and we were cooling down Dylan turned to Emily and told her she never stopped talking. Emily had been chatting with her boyfriend on one side of her, and to the cyclist on the other. Though she normally giggled and laughed at Dylan's comments, as evidenced in Scenario One above, this time she became defensive and said that she had been working hard all session. Whether it was the energy already in the room, or the tone of his voice, Emily's interpretation at that moment was one of being chastised not teased.

Dylan laughed and said '*You are working hard but you never shut up.*' He then looked at her with his "loving face"; big grin, eyebrows up, eyes wide open, an internal light that seemed to shine from his face and said: *'You're like my little ray of sunshine. I can look over at you and be happy*.' He paused and then added *'I want you to come and sit in the corner of my room and I can just look over at you…*' He raised his hands open, raised his eyebrows even higher, as if the sun were shining on him and he was happy. This display of affection was not about trying to woo her as it was clear she was in a committed monogamous relationship with her partner who was cycling right next to her. Still, rather it seemed like genuine tender feelings he had towards her.

The comments and interactions between him and the members of his in-group indicate a lack of experience in knowing how to manage professional expected emotions and energy from multiple people, he is not adept at interpreting body language, and his awkwardness in trying to say something nice by starting with an insult first.

When I asked another trainer if they can "read" a client, the trainer responded:

> '*If you've got a [regular] customer in a class you do get to know people quite well and I'm sure it goes the other way that participants get to know the instructor and you can look at people and think* "you're, you're tired. Somethings bugging you. You're not focused." *You can see it. And then you sometimes say to people quietly*, "you okay tonight?", "no, I had a bad night", *or* "No I've an upset tummy" *or* "I've had a lousy day at work" *and then they look at bit surprised* "She's noticed". *Well, yes, I do know you fairly well*." (Tracy).

An experienced trainer, Tracy can read the subtle changes in her well-known clients that signify when they are having an off night. She also refers to the member as "customer', designating specific roles for each party, which perhaps assists with creating an emotional distance between the trainer and client, which suggests a pattern of behaviour (Fine and Kleinman, 1983). However, Dylan seems too emotionally connected with members of his in-group and almost ignores class participants in the outgroup. The decision to suddenly be tender with Madison seemed to be because he is emotionally connected to her, not because of a professional role that suggest he act in a certain way.

The absence of voices from other class participants was not due to the inability of field notes to be collected, but rather, these voices did not exist in the space. Class members who were not a part of the in-group rarely spoke to the trainer or to one another.

Scene Three: Norm Violations and Trainer Aggression

In the session described above Dylan quickly went from "Beast" to "tender heart" as his abilities and interpretations of the situation allowed him. Scenario Two A showed he could ignore bullying behaviour and Scenario Two B showed that he could try to recalibrate to soothe hurt feelings. But there were times when the emotional energy from class sessions seemed to encourage bullying behaviour from him.

For example, during another spin session, one of the young women who seemed to have a crush on him but was not a member of any in-group complained about the music he was using in class. He ignored her the first few times but then finally turned to her and asked:

'Holly! Holly! Do you have an I-pod?'

She did not respond to his question at first and he repeated it. Once she acknowledged that she did he said in a sassy tone of voice:

'Next week you're in charge of music!'.

In my previous career we would call this getting "hooked" by clients; allowing the comments or emotions of the client to catch you into their emotions rather than remaining calm and professional. Academic literature refers to this as emotional contagion (Heaphy, 2017; Liu *et al.,* 2019). Field notes taken during observations with other trainers captured how sometimes a trainer might respond to a client with an abrupt and sharp 'joke' which seemed to indicate they were losing patience with a class member but would then quickly adjust or amend their emotional response.

Dylan's style of singling out people during classes may also contributed to increased emotional responses. Tracey's comment in the section above suggests that she approaches a customer privately to assess their emotional needs for that day, whereas Dylan will call out and comment in front of the class.

Like other trainers, he would make general motivational instructions to the entire class such as "*Pick up the pace*."

However, as demonstrated above, he also singled some people out to shout at or encourage them. Being singled out in a positive manner can make that class member feel good and can sometimes create positive competition between class members. For example, if he tells Madison she is pushing through a hill climb really well, Emily or Izzy or Amelia will turn up their resistance to try to outdo her. But it can also cause conflict if one in-group member does not feel like they have been singled out for doing something well. Additionally, some class members did not like being singled out, especially when Dylan used "Beasting" mode. For example, while substituting for another trainer in a circuits class he shouted at a class member who regularly attended that circuits class:

'John! Get your hands up!'

John, an older man, was notorious for not fully executing routines. The other trainers normally would watch his form and remind the entire class to maintain a certain position, but never confronted John directly. When Dylan shouted at John, John smiled at Dylan but did not change his body position.

Dylan shouted again '*Come on John! Get those hands up!'.* When John finally complied Dylan said '*Yes, that's what I want to see!'.*

John never took another class from Dylan again during the remainder of the observation period, though he continued to regularly attend classes from other trainers. There was no build-up of tolerance for being bullied but rather immediately thereafter avoided Dylan (Karaturna 2015).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper aims to illuminate the experiences of a fitness service provider and clients in an embedded setting by illustrating worker/client interactions. This story allows us to interpret how emotional labour is

enacted, perceived, and controlled by the context of the arena. The present study adds to the literature on managing workplace emotions, relational service, and bullying. The four scenarios above illustrate that in this arena, both the service provider and clientele are using emotions (managed or not) and their relationships as part of the service encounter, influencing how each other act and react (Liu et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017). Using Bolton's (2005) framework it seems Dylan does not concern himself with pecuniary nor presentational forms of emotional management but rather fluctuated between the prescriptive and philanthropic forms. In the prescriptive form he is influenced by his own athletic background, adopting Beasting techniques used by older and more experienced trainers, and what he believes will be expected from training in team sports.

Brach et al. (2015) highlighted that customers are more likely to perceive that employees care about their needs when the employee authentically follows an organizational (prescriptive) script. In a gym setting where class members are there for general health and social benefits (Crossley, 2008) ignoring presentational emotional management altogether hurt some club members where they refused to take his classes again. In this setting, the trainer works with or aims to work with clients in an established service relationship (Wessel and Steiner, 2015). The professional relationships are ongoing, interdependent, and collaborative (Heaphy, 2017; Ponder et al., 2016; Tabrani et al., 2018) and can often blur the line with personal relationships. Unlike extend relational services worker-client relationships such as attorney/client or hairdressing, in fitness, the client must be part of the co-creation of the service (Chiu et al., 2019; Harness et al., 2020). Clientele in Exclusive Workout was small and there was regular attendance by core members. Trainers had a stable group of clients, seeing some club members seven or eight hours a week every week. Not only does this increase the level of intimacy between the service provider and service users, but it also makes it difficult for the trainer to manage their emotions constantly (Harness et al., 2020). Even if a trainer attempted to present prescriptive or pecuniary emotional management, the' real' personality in these extended service relationships leaked into the setting.

Scenarios with Dylan show that he did not often manage his emotions or emotional states (Butler et al., 2003; Huang and Ryan, 2011). Additionally, counter to the findings of Scott and Barnes (2011), Dylan, a male, is deeply impacted by the emotional situations occurring in the work arena. In some ways he does benefit from this by building relationships with those in his in-group as members have an authentic connection with him (Brach et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2019). It could be interpreted that he was demonstrating philanthropic emotional management when he was going above and beyond for those in his close circle (even when the clients themselves didn't appreciate the efforts). However, evidence showed that Dylan lost clients as often as he retained some, thus reducing needed social capital for him to build a book of business (Gedajlovic et al., 2013; Grimlan et al., 2012). The requirements for managed emotions may explain why Dylan left the profession. Working in an industry and environment that required emotional management may have been more than he was willing or able to do at that time. It was the ultimate way for he, himself, to avoid bullying behaviour (Karatuna 2014).

This study provides further understanding of different service roles and emotional management forms. Much of the literature on customer-facing managed emotions focuses on front-line employees who are employed by an organization (for example Ashforth, 1993; Brach et al., 2015; Goldberg and Grandey, 2007; Hoschild, 2012, Scott and Barnes, 2011). Even in service research such as Moxham and Wiseman (2009) and Macintosh and Doherty (2007) which focus on the fitness industry, the view is often from the organizational context. In this study, the informants are not front-line nor entry-level employees. They are self-employed, semi-autonomous individuals. They are not bound to the organization and, therefore, not technically bound to being managed by a script or organizational culture and rules (Hoschild, 2012; Lloyd and Payne, 2009; Wang et al., 2011; Yagil and Melder-Liraz, 2013).

Additionally, unlike studies such as Chiu, Lee and Lin (2010) and Macinstosh and Doherty (2007) the self-employed trainers were not responsible for generating sales for the organization, in providing services to general club members, nor for the repair and cleanliness of the gym. Though it may seem that some of the trainers in the setting did choose to manage their personality to fit the prescriptive 'role type' (Bolton, 2000) of a fitness professional, for some, such as Luis, it was the human and cultural capital the client was

purchasing (Bourdieu, 1986) regardless of the displayed emotion. Dylan did not yet have this capital to cash in on.

Finally, this study extends our understanding of workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is not a black-and-white situation, but rather can be contextual based on target, perpetrator, and ambiguous organizational roles (Jenkins et al., 2012) and the role of victim/perpetrator can switch (Mortensen and Baarts, 2018). This current study goes further to illustrate perceptions of bullying can also be contingent on feelings of attachment to group membership and if, when, and how perpetrators and targets can manage their emotions.

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