

MOMENTS OF TRUTH: EXAMINING TRANSIENT AUTHENTICITY AND IDENTITY IN SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

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We explore service employees' transient authenticity in their interactions with customers. Drawing on interviews with employees, we present a model of authenticity that begins with the salience of a customer's nonservice identity characteristics and an employee's identification with his or her task, both of which generate a sense of autonomy in employees. This psychological autonomy enhances the behavioral expression of authenticity, though such expression may yield costs involving loss of resources. Authenticity is reflected in uncalculated honesty, viewing a task as a personal endeavor, and conveying distinctive interpersonal closeness to customers.

A Russian-speaking customer called. . . . She was very upset, you could hear in her voice that she was trying not to cry. She asked me to check if the electricity company had billed her. . . . Although in these cases we ask the customer to refer the company to us, I told her to wait on the line while I myself contacted the electricity company. . . . I identified with the customer and her language difficulties. -Employee in a credit card company

Authentic functioning is crucial to psychological well-being. A fundamental notion of humanistic theories is that failing to satisfy the basic need of authenticity and losing touch with one's true self can cause considerable human misery (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Rogers, 1951; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009). However, not all situations or roles are conducive to authentic behavior (Ryan, 1995; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). Inhibition of employee self-expression is germane to service roles, as the dramaturgical metaphors used to describe the service encounter, such as "service script" and "backstage/front-stage" (Grove & Fisk, 1989), indicate. These metaphors imply that service roles involve considerable "acting" on the part of employees (Grandey, 2003; Grove, Fisk, & Bitner, 1992). The most researched dramaturgical aspect of

service is emotional labor, the management of emotions for purposes of public appearance, presented in Hochschild's (1983) analysis of service organizations' display rules for controlling employees' emotional behavior.

The restricted service environment provides a fruitful context for studying authenticity, which is conceptualized in regard to tensions between personal inclinations and social obligations (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). The core notion of emotional labor research is that in the conflict between organizational display rules and individuals' drive toward self-expression, organizational rules prevail (Hochschild, 1983). Accordingly, emotional labor theories tend to focus on inauthenticity in service roles, to the almost complete exclusion of considering authenticity (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Diefendorff & Croyle, 2008; Grandey, 2000; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Wharton, 1993).

Suppression of employee authenticity is not, however, the only possible outcome of the conflict between organizational rules and employees' authenticity needs. Because of the strength of individuals' drive toward authenticity (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Rogers, 1951), cases of authentic self-expression occur even in the restricted service context. As exemplified in the quote at the beginning of this article, employees may act upon their emotions, regardless of the service script their job demands. To gain a better understanding of employee self-expression, this study examines instances in which

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personal inclinations prevail over social obligations and employees express their authentic selves. As well as neglecting authenticity as a topic, emotional labor research has chiefly explored self-expression in terms of consistent antecedents (display rules, personality characteristics), regular behavior patterns (emotional labor strategies), and long-term outcomes (e.g., burnout and depression). However, authentic self-expression may be transient, affected by immediate situations and having immediate consequences. This is especially likely in an environment that habitually restricts self-expression, such as a service environment. We therefore analyze temporal experiences of authenticity that offer insight into the variance in employees' expressions of their true selves from one situation to another. Given that service organizations train employees to behave inauthentically, provide scripts of required interpersonal behaviors, and closely monitor service encounters, what triggers employees' authentic self-expression during a service interaction? How do employees experience and express their true selves? If pretense is the norm, what does authenticity cost them?

To date, only one study has directly explored authenticity in service interactions. Ashforth and Tomiuk (2000) examined inauthentic displays and aspects of service interactions that increased or reduced employees' sense of authenticity. Content analysis of the data showed that positive customer characteristics, length of acquaintance, and alignment of mood and beliefs with tasks increased employees' sense of authenticity. The present inductive study builds on this research, providing empirically grounded insights into why employees experience transient authenticity in service encounters and how those experiences affect them. These insights are essential to a comprehensive view of the dynamics of interplay between employee self-expression and organizational restrictions.

Our findings show that when a customer's non-service identity characteristics are salient, or when an employee identifies with her/his service task, a psychological autonomy is generated that promotes behavioral expression of authenticity in interactions with customers. Authentic behavior may involve personal costs for service employees, depending on how much it departs from customer and organizational expectations. Our model challenges previous views regarding the stability of employee inauthenticity in service encounters while providing deeper insights into humanistic psychological theories about the human drive to express

the true self. As such, our study advances a balanced view of employee self-expression that considers the impact of both organizational rules and human drives and that indicates the importance of considering the diverse outcomes of the tensions between these opposing influences. Our exploration elaborates the theoretical perspective on employee self-expression by documenting psychological aspects that go beyond a focus on emotions; by analyzing transient incidents; and by addressing situational conditions that influence the outcomes of self-expression. Consideration of all such aspects is vital to research of both authenticity and inauthenticity.

The literature review first defines the concepts of enduring and transient authenticity. Literature on role identities is discussed, highlighting the interplay between personal and service identities that affects authenticity in service roles. We then refer to literature on the outcomes of authenticity and inauthenticity, thereby establishing our focus on the costs of authenticity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Enduring and Transient Authenticity

According to Harter, authenticity refers to "owning one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs," and further implies that "one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (2002: 382). Per theories of humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1951), authenticity is a basic need, motivating individuals to maintain and enhance their sense of true self (Erickson, 1995). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1995, 2000) associates authenticity with self-regulation in ways that satisfy basic psychological needs for competence, self-determination, and relatedness.

However, because of ambiguities regarding stable and variable authenticity, to date, no cohesive body of literature on authentic-self behavior exists (Harter, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Some theories of enduring authenticity propose that it is consistent across time, situations, and behavioral content (Kernis, 2003; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008), but others emphasize a more contextual view, suggesting that momentary thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of events exert a fundamental influence on self-expression (Ryan, 1995; Sheldon et al., 1997).

The concept of authenticity as an enduring personal pattern is demonstrated in Kernis and colleagues' (Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2005, 2006) construct of dispositional authenticity as comprised of four discrete but interrelated components, namely: self-knowledge; objective processing of internal and external self-relevant information; free and natural behavior; and self-disclosure to close others. Dispositional authenticity is a personality trait that affects individual experiences and behaviors across roles and situations. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) also associated authenticity with continuity, suggesting that during macro role transitions, such as organizational entries or exits, employees' perceived authenticity depends on a sense of continuity between who they were and who they are becoming. Employees thus engage in identity work designed to sustain feelings of continuity despite what they are experiencing.

This study explores an alternative approach, a concept of transient authenticity that offers a more dynamic view of individuals as varying in the degree to which they enact their true feelings and values (Sheldon et al., 1997). Ryan (1995) suggested that integration, defined as an individual's mastery and ownership of actions in such a way that they are experienced as proceeding from the self, should be viewed not just as a generalized human tendency but also as a process that is either supported or undermined by improvised conditions. Self-determination theory posits that roles and situations differentially afford support for authentic self-expression: in some roles behaviors are initiated and regulated through choice as an expression of self, whereas in other roles behaviors are pressured and coerced by intrapsychic and environmental forces (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan, 1995). The latter roles foster false self-presentations or departures from how the individual ideally chooses to be (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991; Sheldon et al., 1997). Variations in individuals' levels of integration thus reflect systematic and meaningful person-in-context dynamics (Ryan, 1995). Based on the notion that self-expression fluctuates owing to changeable and context-specific factors, the concept of transient authenticity refers to temporal expressions of true self.

The present study addresses transient authenticity in service contexts. Service environments offer organizational cues indicating that individuals must express service role identity regardless of personal tendencies. Nevertheless, individuals have an inherent drive toward authenticity that mani-

fests itself in conditions that are conducive to its expression (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Accordingly, we expect fluctuations in service employees' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors relating to the experience and expression of their true selves in interactions with customers. Our first research question therefore concerns the antecedents of temporary expressions of authenticity:

Research Question 1. When are service employees authentic in their relationship with customers?

Authenticity involves acting in ways that reflect an individual's true self as a person—"the real me" (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996). Felt authenticity across different social roles is related to the expression of personal characteristics in those roles (Sheldon et al., 1997). Therefore, employees' authenticity involves the expression of their personal identity in a service context.

Employees' Personal and Service Role Identities

In different social roles such as employee or parent, people's role identities are comprised of personal characteristics, goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons associated with that role (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Role boundaries exist within and across social domains (e.g., work vs. home), defining the scope of a role and its relevance in certain locations and at certain times (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006a). The relative salience of a role identity, reflected in the individual's willingness to act it out, is a function of commitment to the role to which the identity belongs (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). A possible outcome of incongruent role identities is the perceived inability to show one's identity to others, conceptualized by Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2006b) as "lack of identity transparency." The authors found that priests often felt the need to mask true selves that were incongruent with their role identities.

Employees' identity as service providers comprises internalized display rules and strategies of emotional labor that inhibit authentic self-expression. For service employees, their feelings are objects they have learned to govern and control rather than spontaneous natural occurrences (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Consequently, employees may experience emotional numbness during interaction with customers, loss of access to their own emotions, or emotional dissonance, reflected in an intense sense of their own "phoniness" (Abraham, 1998; Hochschild, 1983).

How then do service employees cope with the fact that their work identity inhibits expression of their real self? Previous researchers have suggested that employees use two strategies, namely segregation and integration. Ashforth, Kulik, and Tomiuk (2008) described how service employees segregate their personal and service role identities or maintain distance between themselves and customers through depersonalization of the latter (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Kreiner et al. (2006b) found that priests maintain their individuality by separating their identities from the duties associated with the role of priest. Conversely, personal and service-role identities may be integrated when employees identify strongly with their organizational roles, so that their service role becomes a salient and valued component of who they are (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

Though segregation and integration of work and personal identities embody opposing strategies, both address employees' inauthenticity. To cope with emotional labor, employees either keep their true selves out of the work scenario or assimilate the service role identity into their personal identity to mitigate negative outcomes of emotional labor. However, this does not explain how employees experience authenticity when their identity as service providers inhibits such experiences.

To be true to oneself within a role is to behave in ways that feel personally genuine or self-determined (Harter et al., 1996; Sheldon et al., 1997). We suggest that authenticity is experienced as the result of the temporary salience of employees' personal identity associated with a role that allows them to express themselves freely (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). The salience of the personal identity generates experiences and behaviors that are not inhibited by the employee's identity as a service provider. Because authentic employee behaviors evidently affect customers' satisfaction and loyalty (e.g., Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009), understanding how employees experience authenticity and the types of authentic behaviors they perform offers important practical implications about, for example, service organizations' investment in inhibition of employee authenticity. We thus explore the following questions:

Research Question 2a. How is authenticity experienced in service encounters?

Research Question 2b. What are the behavioral manifestations of authenticity in service encounters?

Employees' authentic behaviors in service encounters involve customers and are aligned with an organization's success. Because inauthenticity is the default, deviating from norms of emotional labor is likely to incur reactions both from customers and the organization itself.

Outcomes of Authenticity

Reviewing the research on the outcomes of inauthenticity and authenticity reveals that although the outcomes of inauthenticity are discussed in terms of both benefits and costs, only the benefits of authenticity are addressed. The notion that inauthenticity involves major cost for service employees was first presented by Hochschild (1983), who suggested that constant management of emotions is conducive both to alienation from self and to strain. Emotional labor was found to have negative outcomes such as burnout (e.g., Grandey, 2003), emotional dissonance (Abraham, 1998; Morris & Feldman, 1997), and depression (Erickson & Wharton, 1997). However, researchers have also suggested that emotion work may help to make a social interaction more predictable (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) and increase an employee's sense of personal accomplishment (Zapf & Holz, 2006).

Studies concerning authenticity have unanimously addressed its benefits while overlooking potential costs. In personality theories, authenticity is seen as essential to eudaimonic well-being and reflected in the extent to which individuals are fully functioning (Wood et al., 2008). Authentic people are described as choosing how to behave out of a sense of agency, being open to experience and adaptable, and creative in their approach to living (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Authenticity is thus allied to aspects of healthy psychological and interpersonal functioning, including high self-esteem (Heppner, Kernis, Nezlek, Foster, Lakey, & Goldman, 2008), satisfaction (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Harter et al., 1996; Sheldon et al., 1997), and quality of relationships (Brunell et al., 2010; Harter et al., 1996).

Yet authenticity may also involve costs when a person expresses his or her true self's conflicts with social obligations or with peers or authority figures (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Kernis & Goldman, 2005). Authentic behavior implies courage because it refuses to succumb to social influences (e.g., peer pressure, social norms, others' expectations) (Erickson, 1995; Gillath, Sesko, Shaver, & Chun, 2010). This is especially relevant in an environment of strict behav-

ioral norms, such as the service context; however the nature of the costs involved requires clarification. Hence, our third research question is:

Research Question 3. What are the costs of authenticity for service employees?

METHODS

Research Design and Sample

In our research, we sought to understand the experiences of transient authenticity among front-line employees in customer service roles. We used a grounded theory approach to better understand the unexplored phenomenon of authenticity in service. Sampling considerations were based on the qualitative work of Ashforth et al. (2008) and on the notion that broad sampling helps to generate new theoretical insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We used Larsson and Bowen's (1989) typology of service interdependence patterns as our guideline for sampling dimensions. Larsson and Bowen categorized service occupations according to diversity of customer demands (which is related to service standardization) and customer disposition to participate actively in a service interaction. A service role in our sample that is characterized by low diversity and low customer participation is that of a cellular phone technical support representative; low diversity and high disposition to participate is embodied in a retail salesperson; high diversity and low disposition to participate by a flight attendant; and high diversity and high disposition to participate by an insurance agent. We aimed for both depth and breadth by sampling a larger number of employees in occupations that represent the central characteristics of the service environment, and one or two employees from other occupations. Thus, our sample included ten representatives of cellular and internet companies, in which work tends to take place in highly controlled service environments with strict display rules and standardized service scripts. To achieve breadth for gaining representativeness of concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), we also sampled a few employees in other occupations, such as engineering or travel agencies.

All participants were volunteers, recruited to the study through personal contacts. We interviewed 57 employees, excluding 6 employees who reported standard interactions with customers with no indications of authenticity (e.g., "A customer called and said he forgot his internet password. It

was imperative that he should buy shares because the market was rising. After a few questions I gave him a new password and that saved him time"). In addition, only 7 employees described authentic situations involving expressions of negativity; the majority of employees described incidents that reflected positive intentions toward customers. Positive and negative incidents of authenticity may reflect different types of authenticity, but we did not have a sufficient number of negative authenticity incidents to perform comparisons. However, we believe that the description of positive incidents offers reasonable representation of authenticity experiences in service jobs. First, because organizational display rules insist on suppression of negativity in employee interactions with customers (Hochschild, 1983), outspoken expressions of negative emotions or attitudes tend to be rare. In addition, people feel more authentic when behaving positively (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010).

The final sample consisted of 44 employees from 27 service organizations, 18 men and 26 women. Ages ranged from 22 to 48 years (mean = 26.77). Most of the employees were in their 20s; average job tenure was 20.8 months. Six employees had worked in their current job for 2–5 months, and 5 employees had tenures of 4–5 years. Number of customers served per day was 2–200 (mean = 53.9), and the majority of employees served 20–100 customers per day. Sixteen employees worked in financial organizations (banks, investment house, and credit card companies) as service representatives (10), bankers (4), or tellers (2). Ten employees worked in cellular or internet companies, as service representatives (4), salespeople (2), or in customer maintenance (2) and technical support roles (2). Five employees worked in restaurants as waiters/waitresses; 3 worked in shops as salespeople; 2 in insurance companies (an insurance agent and a service representative); and 2 in high-tech companies (an assimilator of information systems and a service engineer). We also interviewed an administrator in a parent-child activity center, a service representative in a municipal citizens' service center, a flight attendant, the leader of an airport security team, a travel agent, and a service representative in a flight reservations center.

Data Collection

The interview protocol comprised questions about authentic and inauthentic experiences (see the Appendix). Harter (2002) claimed that individ-

ual self-reports best reveal perception of behaving in accord with the true self or falsely because deeming that behavior qualifies as authentic behavior requires the phenomenological experience of actions as authentic or not authentic. Like identities, the sense of authenticity is grounded in self-meanings permeating basic assumptions that individuals make about who they are (Stryker & Serpe, 1994), thereby enabling their differentiating experiences of authenticity from those of inauthenticity (Erickson & Wharton, 1997). In total, the data comprised 88 experiences of authenticity (44 of which were responses to requests for experiences that involved costs), and 88 experiences of inauthenticity. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and lasted for 45–60 minutes. Respondents were first asked to describe a recent experience of authenticity during a service interaction. This was followed by questions about the experience itself and the actual and potential outcomes. Participants were then asked to describe a recent experience of inauthenticity, followed by questions relating to the experience and its outcome. Interesting comments and themes were pursued in more detail. We conducted trial runs with ten employees to check for relevance and clarity and slightly revised some questions according to the results.

Data Analysis

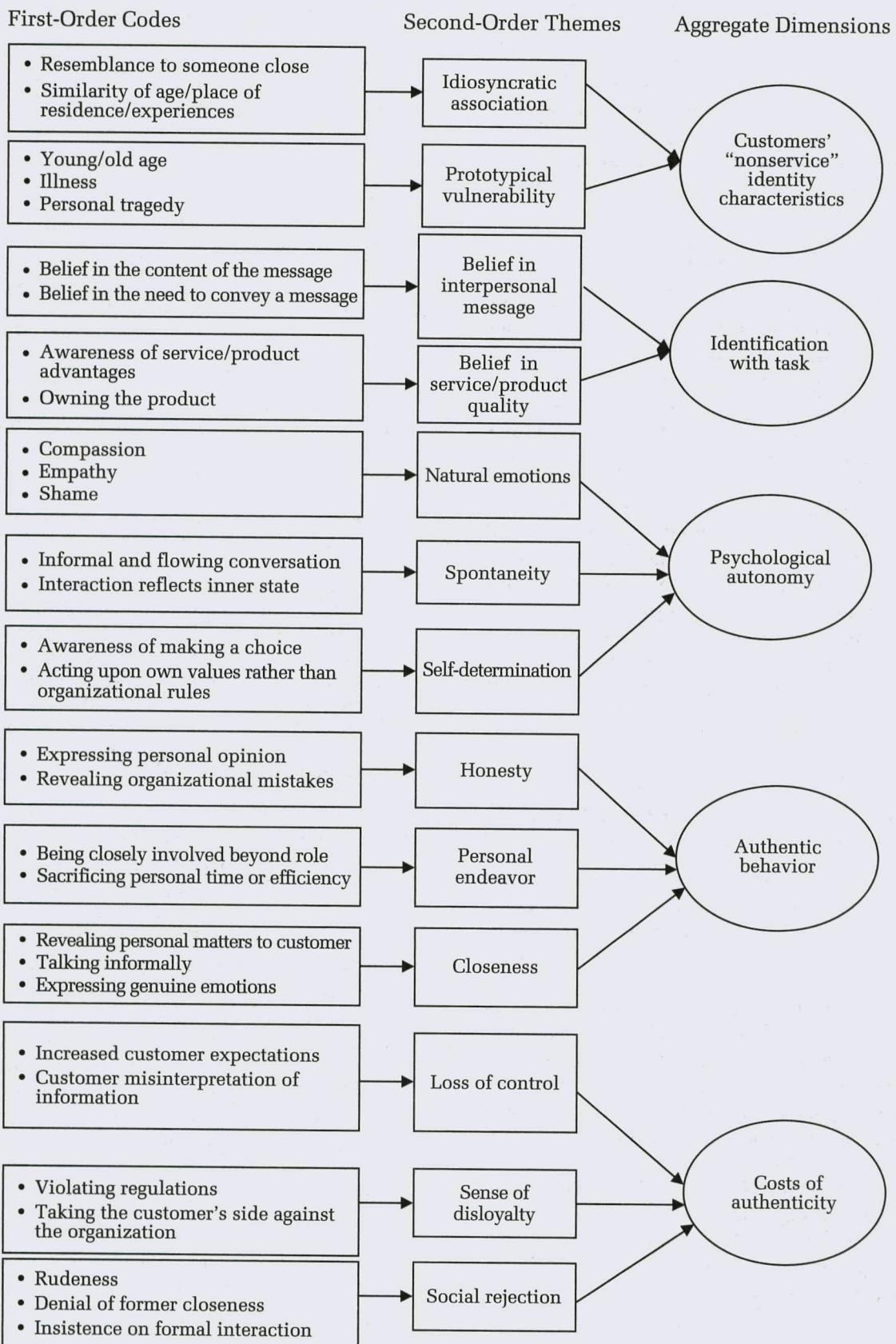
Because the research questions focused on situational occurrences, our units of analysis were the experiences of authenticity and inauthenticity. We analyzed the data using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The first phase of the analysis consisted of open coding through which we identified concepts and dimensions in the data and grouped them into categories. In this phase, each author independently read each interview and marked words or sentences according to codes that emerged from the texts (e.g., "customer characteristics," "interpersonal rejection"). The second phase was axial coding—searching for relationships among categories in order to group conceptually similar codes and relating them to higher-order themes. Then we gathered second-order themes into theoretical dimensions, as described below. Figure 1 summarizes our process, showing our first-order categories, second-order categories, and aggregated theoretical dimensions (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kauffmann, 2006).

We began by analyzing employees' experiences of authenticity, continued with experiences of inauthenticity, and then compared authenticity and inauthenticity for similarities and differences. Regarding these comparisons, we realized that the themes would probably not be contradictory. For example, although authenticity was associated with a customer's nonservice identity, no relationship was found between inauthenticity and a service recipient's identity as a customer. We constantly moved back and forth between employees' raw data, the patterns emerging from the data, and the authenticity, emotional labor, and role identity literatures. This helped us to find higher levels of conceptualization connecting the themes that emerged and to formulate propositions concerning the association between the parts of the model.

Our first research question addressed the antecedents of authenticity in service. Employees' descriptions suggested that customer characteristics may play an important role in the emergence of employee authenticity. We then focused on employees' descriptions of customers and noted distinct nonservice customer characteristics. Our understanding of how these characteristics affect expressions of authenticity was based on the notion that role identities are associated with specific individuals (Ashforth et al., 2008; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). We concluded that awareness of customers' nonservice identity generated employees' movement from "service provider" to personal identity. The second authenticity theme was employees' identification with their specific task. Again we relied on notions concerning factors that affect role identities (Ashforth et al., 2000) for interpreting the results and defined identification as an antecedent of authenticity.

Our research questions 2a and 2b address experiences and expressions of authenticity in service encounters. Both internal (e.g., emotion) and external (behavior) expressions emerged, but the difference between them was not always clear. For example, honesty was reflected in an employee's genuine emotions as well as in conveying truthful information to customers beyond the norms of information provided in service encounters. Hence, data were categorized as representing internal experiences when they could be inferred only indirectly, through the mediation of behavior (e.g., guilt), and as behavior when they could be observed directly (e.g., apologizing to a customer). Internal experiences were conceptualized as states of psychological autonomy, on the basis of the no-

FIGURE 1
Data Structure



tion of psychological empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Behavioral expressions of authenticity were categorized as honesty, orientation toward a task, and closeness.

Our third question addresses the costs of authenticity. Eleven authentic interactions could be described as costless because employees described them as unequivocally enjoyable and relaxed. Other interactions involved costs associated with violating organizational or customer expectations.

FINDINGS

This section presents aspects of transient authenticity, namely: antecedents, inner experience, behavioral expression, and potential costs. We show that onset of employee authenticity is associated both with perception of specific customer characteristics and with employee attitudes toward specific tasks. We then describe the inner experience of authenticity and its external expression in employees' behavior toward customers. Lastly, we present possible costs of authenticity. To illustrate the relationships between these aspects of authenticity, the text includes complete incidents, and additional brief illustrations are provided in Table 1. The findings are followed by propositions and development of a model of the relationships between aspects of authenticity. We conclude with implications of our findings for both theory and practice.

Antecedents of Authenticity: Customer Identity Characteristics and Identification with the Task

We sought to understand when employees are authentic in their interactions with customers. Our data reveal that transient authenticity is related to specific customers or certain tasks performed by employees.

Salience of customer nonservice identity characteristics. Employee authenticity is associated with two customer identity characteristics: idiosyncratic association and prototypical vulnerability. In both cases, employees become aware of customer characteristics that are not related to either the service context or the purpose of the service interaction. *Idiosyncratic association* refers to employees' perceiving association between themselves and customers as the outcome of customers' actual or perceived connection with someone/something from the employees' personal (nonservice)

domain. A waitress described an encounter with a family that reminded her own family:

This week I served a family who came to celebrate the birthday of their 20-year old daughter. It was funny because there were eight of them: two parents, two sons, two daughters, a grandmother and a grandfather. They were charming, and their behavior and their ages reminded me a bit of my own family. From the moment I got to their table and introduced myself as their waitress for the evening I felt the connection, and I knew that I wanted to give them a real fun experience and to enjoy myself with them, without distance and without all kinds of acting that I sometimes do on other evenings with other customers. I introduced myself and told them about the restaurant and about the chef. They asked questions and showed interest. Because I like the place and the job, I enjoyed sharing stories about the place and the chef, where he came from, about the special evenings we have, about special dishes that I personally recommend. I felt as if friends were sitting in front of me and I truly wanted them to enjoy themselves, have a "wow" experience. I didn't have to pretend to be nice, I could be myself—in my tone of speech, facial expressions, the language I used, the choice of words. It was so nice to feel that I was not expected to preserve conventions, that they didn't expect me to pour drinks like waiters are expected to, but wanted to pour for themselves. I didn't have to clean the table four times as custom requires, they asked me not to, saying that the table was already shiny and there was nothing to clean. When they opened the wine they invited me to drink a toast with them. In other cases I would have refused politely, but this time I agreed and informed the manager. (employee 1)¹

This description illustrates how idiosyncratic association may derive from subtle indications of common ground, in this case, family characteristics that were personally meaningful to the employee. Other employees described such examples as customers being in a situation that the employees had also experienced personally; speaking the same language; or having a similar style of speech. The waitress above associated the customers with various in-group members, first family and then friends, viewing them as differentiated from "other customers" in other inauthentic service interactions. The data suggest that indications of association between customer and employee modify employees' perceptions from "customer," an out-group member, to in-group, thereby extending the

¹ Numbers from 1 to 15 identify employees who provided the incidents described.

TABLE 1
Additional Data Examples

Themes	Illustrative Quotes
<i>Customer Nonservice Identity Characteristics</i>	
Idiosyncratic association	Place of residence: "When I looked at his details I found out that he was from the village where I grew up. I felt solidarity toward the customer." (service representative in an investment house)
Prototypical vulnerability	Age: "The customer was about my age and therefore we had an identical style of speech and mutual understanding." (service representative in a cellular phone company)
	Health condition: "I confirmed a cancellation to a customer who registered for the special offer that has no cancellation option, because his son was ill." (administrator in a center for parent-child activities)
	Age: "An elderly woman came in and asked to buy clothes for her husband." (saleswoman in a shop)
<i>Identification with Task</i>	
Belief in interpersonal message	Required apology: "The customer was angry and shouted at me that he had lost a lot of money because he could not give the order. The customer was annoyed, worried, stressed and felt that he had not received an appropriate response from the organization. I felt that I really had to apologize in the name of the organization and that we had done a lot of damage to the customer." (employee in an investment company)
Belief in service or product quality	Personal use: "I recommended choosing the infrastructure I have at home because I think it is the best." (service representative in an internet company)
<i>Psychological Autonomy</i>	
Natural emotions	Aversion: "I was shocked and appalled by the agent's conduct and did not hide my emotions from the customer." (customer maintenance in a cellular phone company)
	Shame: "I remember that beyond the unpleasant feeling caused by the situation, I experienced a sense of shame about the wrong that was done to her as a result of our problem. I apologized in my own name and on behalf of the company and felt a strong need to do so several times during the interaction." (service representative in a bank)
Self-determination	Making one's own rules: "When visiting a customer I located a very simple software problem in the system. According to company regulations, software problems require extra payment. However, I fixed the problem without payment because I didn't think the customer should pay for such a simple repair." (engineer in a high-tech organization)
	Action follows from inner need: "I felt a stronger need than usual to help her to solve her problem, and I was completely honest with her about what she has now and what can be done to solve the problem." (service representative in a cellular phone company)
Spontaneity	Speaking without having to think: "I felt as if I was talking to someone I had known for a long time, and did not think about my words before saying them, and everything was very honest and straight from the heart." (service representative in a bank)
	Interaction reflects inner state: "The conversation was flowing and fun. I enjoyed providing service to the customer and did not feel the need to fake a smile or conduct artificial 'small talk.'" (service representative in a cellular phone company)
<i>Behavior</i>	
Dishonesty vs. honesty	<i>Authentic</i>
	Personal opinion: "I told the customer exactly what I thought, without citing this or that conversation script." (service representative in an investment house)
	Personal advice: "I told him he would be wasting his time and money, even though it is in the organization's interest to make a profit." (teller in a bank)
	<i>Inauthentic</i>
	Partial information: "I told the customer that the cancellation request had just arrived and was being processed. But I didn't tell him how long the processing would take." (service representative in a credit card company)
	Lying: "I argued that there was no problem with the phone, and that we recommend it, even though it is not sold anymore because of multiple malfunctions." (customer maintenance in a cellular phone company)

Continued

TABLE 1
(Continued)

Themes	Illustrative Quotes
Minimal behavior vs. personal endeavor	<p>Performing an unfamiliar task: "I felt quite helpless in that situation because I wanted to help the customer but have never opened the check machine. After a minute of indecision I told the customer that I would try to fix the problem with the machine" (head of a quick banking team)</p> <p>Continuous association with the task: "In the following days I took care of the matter and made sure to update the customer about each development." (service representative in an investment house)</p>
Closeness vs. distance	<p>Personal information about the customer: "I saw that she was carrying bags so I asked her if she had really waited or gone for a walk. She said she went and bought some things in the mall. She showed me what she bought and we laughed a bit." (service representative in a cellular phone company)</p>
	<p>Joking: "We actually laughed and it was a fun and flowing conversation. I felt very open with her and that I could make jokes." (service representative in an investment house)</p>
<i>Costs of Authenticity</i>	
Loss of control	<p>Customer expectations: "While visiting a customer I found a problem that was repeated on several occasions. I decided to give the customer a one-time discount after checking for permission. After a few weeks I found another problem with the same customer, and asked for full payment for the repair. The customer got annoyed with me because he wanted to receive the discount again." (engineer in a high-tech organization)</p> <p>Customer's interpretation of closeness: "Sometimes people open up to me and think that I'm their psychologist, and then closing a deal gets further away and I don't know how to bring the conversation back to sales." (salesperson in a cellular phone company)</p> <p>Customers' interpretations of information: "I strongly identified with the customer and told him that he was right, and that he should have been updated. He got even angrier as a result, and started shouting that the company people were liars and thieves and that you can't believe them." (service representative in a cellular phone company)</p>
Sense of disloyalty	<p>Misrepresenting the organization: "I showed him that I understood, and from that he concluded that I admitted to a mistake by the investment house." (service representative in an investment house)</p> <p>Violating organizational norms: "I don't think my supervisors would have been pleased if they knew that I ask favors of the agents or treat them unequally." (service representative in an investment house)</p>
Social rejection	<p>Customer denies closeness: "When he comes I know exactly what he orders, what he likes and dislikes. He always orders for himself first. When I said 'So you want . . . x? He looked at me with surprise and said 'Don't you speak English? Can't you see that I'm with a client who doesn't speak Hebrew? Don't you have any special dishes today to tell me about? Maybe we'd like to order one of the specials?' So I understood that today the authentic service doesn't fit and I must wear a 'different hat' that signals distance, less smiling, and I sort of started to take the order again, from the beginning." (waitress in a restaurant)</p> <p>Lack of reciprocity: "Throughout the flight I looked after of him, spoke to him, asked how he was, and at the end of the flight he didn't even bother to say goodbye." (flight attendant)</p>

context from a service encounter to a social interaction and elaborating the service context into that of a social group. Such a transformation is demonstrated by the waitress's willingness to drink a toast with her customers, a social behavior that goes beyond her usual service behavior and that she would not have performed in a regular service encounter.

Another customer-related characteristic, *prototypical vulnerability*, refers to employee awareness of customer attributes that invoke social prototypes suggesting the need for protection (e.g., young children, the elderly, pregnant women). A salesperson described an encounter in which a customer's vulnerability so affected his emotional reactions that he became determined to provide the service and to persist in the face of difficulties:

In August, which is the busiest month in our company, a customer whose mother had cancer and had been operated on a few days earlier called the service center. The customer needed service for the air conditioner. It was on a Thursday afternoon when the service we could schedule at that point was for the following Monday. The daughter pleaded with me to provide the service sooner, because her mother could not be left without air conditioning for four hot days. I tried to communicate as much empathy as possible because the case really touched my heart. I took time to explain how to operate the air conditioner, and waited with her on the line after each phase. When I realized that this was not helping, I again explained that the service would be for the following Monday, but the customer refused to accept what I said, and asked me again to do something. I told the customer I would come back to her in two hours and, after making incredible efforts, I reached the company's operation manager and succeeded in arranging for service on the following morning by one of the senior technicians. (employee 2)

Like the waitress, the salesperson mentions a significant aspect of the customer's nonservice identity, namely being a daughter, rather than referring to her merely as a "customer." The customer's vulnerability is highly salient in the employee's description of the experience, including her illness, medical treatment, and anticipated suffering if the service were not provided. The employee reacts to the customer's vulnerability by doing much more than expected in his service role. The following experience of a flight attendant is another example of the effect of customer vulnerability:

One of the passengers was a ten-year-old child who was flying alone. I went to him several times to

check if everything was OK with him and to see if he wanted to drink or to eat. At one time I saw that he was crying. After talking to him, I realized that he was worried about the flight delay and wanted to let his mother know that he would be late, but he didn't have her phone number. I tried to locate the phone number through the station managers, and then I called her and explained that we were delayed and that she shouldn't worry. Then I let her son speak to her. I felt empathy and compassion for the boy, who was in a complicated and unfamiliar situation. It was a natural and real feeling because this is how I would like others to behave toward my own child. (employee 3)

The flight attendant also refers to the boy in the incident as "the child" rather than "the customer" and describes herself as an adult looking after a child rather than an employee serving a customer. She indicates that she was motivated not by her formal obligation to look after passengers but by an accepted social norm; she would have helped the boy even if she were not in the service role, just as she would expect others to help her own child. To help the child, the employee engaged in exceptional behaviors, such as calling the child's mother, which were not part of her role but are expected in a similar situation outside the service context.

Both the above examples demonstrate that by invoking compassion, prototypical vulnerability modifies employee framings of the entitlement of a customer, who goes from one who is entitled to help because of organizational obligations to one who is entitled to help because of social norms of aiding the weak. Interaction is thus modified from service ("an employee providing service to a customer") to the larger social context ("a person helping another person in need"). Table 1 presents additional customer characteristics related to nonservice identity as well as illustrations of the themes discussed in the following sections.

Identification with task. We found that employees associate authenticity and identification with both the interpersonal message included in the service script and the quality of the product or service they provide. The following examples, provided by a waitress and a service representative in a flight reservations center, demonstrate employees' identification with an interpersonal message they are expected to convey to customers, which is aligned with their own convictions:

With regular customers who trust the organization, I truly want to give service that will make them feel welcome and allow them to enjoy the experience. I

had customers who waited for a long time in a busy shift for their food. After they had been waiting 50 minutes for their hamburgers I went over to their table and apologized for their having to wait such a long time and said I knew how unpleasant that can be. I explained that we would not charge them for the food they received too late, and that we would compensate them with dessert "on the house." (employee 4)

It was a special order for the company's president, and you can't "screw up" with someone in that position. Airport service must be perfect. I went over the reservation for a long time with her, and during the day we finalized the last details to close the deal. I assured her that everything would be OK, and that I myself would take care of it. (employee 5)

Both employees viewed their experience as authentic because they conveyed a sincere message to customers. The waitress's apology and offer of compensation might have been prescribed by the service script, but she also really wanted the customers to enjoy themselves and sincerely conveyed the message of caring about customers' satisfaction. The employee in the flight reservations center genuinely felt that the importance of the task required close inspection and her personal attention. The message of assuming personal responsibility that she conveyed to the customer reflected her conviction that highest-quality service was required in this case, rather than merely an attempt to generate an image of such service to impress the customer.

Identification is also an outcome of an employee's belief in the quality of a product or service provided to customers. In the examples below, two service representatives of a cellular phone company described their conviction that they were making a good offer to customers.

I offered a customer a net-surfing package that was really worthwhile and could save a lot of money in his account. I really believed that I was making him a good offer and convinced him to take the deal with the best of intentions. I felt that if I had been in his place I would have certainly taken the deal. The conversation was sincere and I really connected with the customer without thinking of how to convince him, because I believed in what I said and that is why the conversation flowed. (employee 6)

I explained the terms of the deal to the customer, she understood them and wanted the deal because it was especially cheap. I promoted the deal because I really knew that it would reduce her costs and she would also be able to enjoy the new apparatus. (employee 7)

Both employees used the word "really" to express their belief that they were offering a good deal that would save the customers money and/or increase the customers' satisfaction. In the sales context, where employees are expected to promote services or products regardless of their own views, inner conviction of the quality of a product or service creates authenticity, because they are telling the truth.

Internal Authenticity: The Experience of Psychological Autonomy

When employees described transient authenticity, they referred to natural emotions, self-determination, and spontaneity. Although these may be taken for granted in the nonservice domain, they are conspicuous in a service environment in which employees are required to regulate their emotions, have little control over their behavior, and interact with customers according to service scripts. This lack of autonomy was strongly expressed in descriptions of inauthentic experiences in which employees repeatedly used the expressions "There was no choice" or "I had to," suggesting that inauthenticity is regarded as a default and as virtually inherent to service jobs. Our data suggest that authenticity is characterized by a temporary state of psychological autonomy that reflects internal rather than external control over emotions, motivation, and planning of behavior. The following example was provided by the head of an airport security team. In this interaction, the passenger's vulnerability due to her pregnancy aroused strong emotions, spontaneity, and self-determination:

Two security people came and told me about a passenger in an advanced stage of pregnancy, who was traveling to her family in the U.S. to give birth, but all the signs and the regulations showed that she must be examined and they asked me to come with them because she was accompanied by a relative who was a lawyer, and he constantly threatened to sue us. I went to talk to the passenger and felt that I just couldn't follow the regulations. She broke my heart. I did all I could not to examine her. I told her the truth about the regulations, and I was very empathetic and honest, which absolutely does not fit the job and its demands. I felt that I behaved as I wanted to, and not how it was dictated to me. I consulted my supervisors and asked for their approval. I did everything. (employee 8)

The employee's compassion and concern for the customer illustrate the association of authenticity

with *natural emotions*. The depth of the emotion experienced is conveyed by the employee's reference to the customer's vulnerable situation "breaking her heart," an expression used in several variations (e.g., "touched my heart") by employees describing compassion or empathy when faced with a customer's distress. Compassion is not part of the job of being in charge of a security team, nor were most of the other employees in the study in the helping professions, so that emotions such as compassion, empathy, and concern were not considered relevant to their service jobs. Nonetheless, these are common reactions to the needs of close or vulnerable people in the larger social context. Employees also experienced positive emotions when they truly enjoyed interacting with customers, as in the case of the waitress in the first example (employee 1).

The second component, *self-determination*, is reflected in the employee's description of her behavior as initiated by what she wanted to do rather than by what the organization wanted her to do. Self-determination is thus reflected in the realization that, even in a controlled service setting, employees are free to make a behavioral choice initiated by their own emotions and values, rather than in expectation of organizational rewards or fear of sanctions. A sense of self-determination may generate a refusal to obey organizational rules that are seen as unacceptable, as demonstrated by the employee's description of her efforts to avoid the physical examination of the passenger.

Authenticity is also characterized by *spontaneity* reflected in interaction with a customer without reference to the service script. This is evident in the employee's spontaneous initiation of a conversation when she felt that she could not proceed with her examination of the passenger. Spontaneity is marked by personal initiative, lack of deliberation before initiating interaction, and effortless flow of conversation.

Expressing Authenticity: Crossing Boundaries between Service and Personal Domains

Our findings suggest that authentic behavior involves several dimensions: (a) dishonesty versus honesty, (b) minimal performance versus personal endeavor, and (c) distancing versus approach to customers. Honesty, personal endeavor, and interpersonal closeness imply authenticity; dishonesty, minimal performance, and interpersonal distance are associated with inauthenticity.

Dishonesty versus honesty. Honesty is reflected in the accuracy of the information conveyed to customers, which may range between outright lying to "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Between these extremes, employees convey half-truths or distorted versions of the truth. Authentic employees offer uncalculated disclosure of information for the customers' benefit or simply to share what they know. Honesty and authenticity are thus reflected in supplying more information than is necessary, sometimes involving the violation of service encounter rules or regulations. On the other hand, dishonesty toward customers occurs partly because certain forms of dishonesty are endemic to the service role. Employees may not be explicitly instructed to lie to customers, but the service script sometimes distorts the truth, just as organizational display rules imply that employees are expected to fake emotions. In addition, employees' emotional expression ranges between suppressing negative emotions and/or faking positive emotions to genuine emotional display. A bank employee describes how a customer who reminded her of her grandmother generated a sense of self-determination, resulting in an honest interaction that ignored the service script:

One and a half years ago there was a big storm in the financial market. Customers lost lots of money and felt helpless in the face of differing reports about the market. I had a call from an elderly woman who sounded completely lost, did not know what to do, and the situation made her very worried. I felt as if I was talking to my grandmother. We had a real conversation in which she revealed her concerns about money and about her financial situation. Instead of saying what we were instructed to say in this situation, I told her exactly what I thought she should do. I didn't try to please her or to end the conversation quickly, but explained the situation honestly, even though it could have impaired service because of the long conversation. (employee 9)

This example illustrates an uncalculated disclosure of information for the customer's benefit. Honesty involved self-determination because the employee acted out of intrinsic motivation rather than attempting to please the customer. In addition, by being honest and providing comprehensive information to the customer, the employee explicitly violated the service script in terms of both content and length of conversation. Authenticity may thus involve behavior that downgrades performance according to organizational criteria.

Minimal performance versus personal endeavor. Minimal performance is regarded as inauthentic, a gap between apparently satisfactory behavior and employees' awareness of doing less for customers than they should have. At the other end of the spectrum, viewing the task as a personal endeavor is an expression of authenticity resulting from genuine caring and interest, an attempt to ensure that customers receive personal attention until their problems are solved. Assuming personal responsibility for solving the customer's problem may involve self-initiated disclosure of employees' personal identity such as giving their name or promising to personally make sure that a task is completed. A cellular phone company employee described an interaction with a vulnerable customer and the efforts he made on her behalf:

A customer came to me to repair her phone. Before I sent it to the laboratory she said she didn't want them to update or do any other procedure that might erase her files because she had kept pictures her husband sent in an SMS message when he was on reserve duty during the last war in Lebanon and he was killed there. It was important for me personally to make sure that nothing would be erased from the phone because this customer had a bad experience and these files were the last memory from her husband. So I wanted to give her the best service and do all I could to please her. During the repair I was near the laboratory, so I checked every few minutes with the technician, to make sure he was not doing something that might erase the pictures, because I cared about the customer, and if something had been erased I would have felt so bad about myself. (employee 10)

The description illustrates that viewing the task as a personal endeavor involves responsibility that is voluntarily assumed, which, in this case, was also motivated by the negative emotions the employee anticipated feeling if he failed. The employee's personal approach to the task is associated with a specific customer rather than with general, positive job-related attitudes. Moreover, because personal endeavor involves behaviors that deviate from standardized service responsibilities, such as constantly checking that a seemingly routine task is being properly performed, it might reduce the employee's efficiency.

Interpersonal distance versus closeness. This behavior reflects the degree of adherence to a service script. Our data suggest that inauthenticity is associated with distant and formal behavior toward customers, as a means of self-protection that helps

employees to avoid taking offense and to cope with difficult customers. Conversely, authenticity is associated with close interpersonal behavior performed without self-consciousness or considerations and similar to behavior outside the service context, such as disclosing personal information, asking questions not related to the service encounter, joking with a customer, or sharing the customer's distress. An insurance agent described such an emotional interaction with a customer:

A customer called because his employer had not transferred his insurance payments to the insurance company. Because money was not deposited for 5 consecutive months, the company sent a letter announcing that the fund would be closed, assuming that the employee no longer worked there. The employee was crying on the phone, telling me that he was fighting with his employer and that he didn't want his insurance to be harmed. I realized that this was a helpless elderly person who had been suffering for many years from employment problems. The conversation touched my heart very much, and I tried to calm him. I had to expose my emotions because it was so hard to hear him crying, and therefore I had to calm him. I really understood him because I had had a similar experience myself, and this made me open up. The moment I decided to show compassion and empathy the interaction with this person was without pretense and broke all the conventions of service employees, who are supposed to be tough and finish the interaction quickly. (employee 11)

This example illustrates how an interpersonal behavior that is considered natural outside the service context, such as expressing compassion and empathy in reaction to another's distress, is viewed as unique and generates a sense of authenticity in the service context. The employee expressed her genuine emotions, knowing that she was deviating from the service script, which prescribes remote behavior and short service interactions. Thus, although organizational display rules usually involve expression of positive emotions toward customers, employees' expression of their real emotions may go beyond these rules.

These findings suggest that authentic behavior involves temporarily crossing boundaries between behavioral norms in the organizational domain and in the personal domain in regard to honesty, task performance, and closeness. In other words, authenticity is expressed in behaviors that deviate from the service script and may violate organizational display rules but are quite common in the

larger social context, where people share information, express genuine emotions, and make special efforts on behalf of people who invoke caring. However, unlike the clearly defined boundaries that separate social domains, such as time and space, the boundaries between authentic and inauthentic behavior in the work domain seem to be subjective. Whether an employee's interaction with a customer will generate a sense of crossing role boundaries may depend on organizational climate, employees' and customers' characters, and their type of relationship.

Costs of Authenticity: Instrumental and Emotional Resources

When employees express authenticity in service encounters, they may be renouncing the safety net provided by differentiating between service role and personal identity. Authentic behavior involves possible loss of control over job aspects such as time, space, and degree of closeness to a customer; a sense of disloyalty as a result of behavior contradictory to organizational rules or interests; and possible rejection by the customer as a result of crossing the boundary between formality and friendliness.

Loss of control. Authentic behavior may involve loss of control because of a customer's reaction. Excessive honesty may result in customer misuse of information to get what she or he wants from an organization. Performing a task as a personal endeavor may elevate customers' expectations of future service. Customers may interpret expressions of closeness as indicating a closer relationship than intended. Informal behavior that conflicts with professional display rules can impair an employee's professional image and lead to derogation by customers. The following example, provided by a salesperson, describes the cost of conveying honest information to a customer:

A customer I knew well asked for a very quick service on a Friday. I explained that there was a shortage of technicians on that day because one employee was away, so we had a problem with providing service. I decided to behave with full transparency because he is an old and important customer and, from past experience, I thought he would understand and accept what I said. He said he understood but wanted me to try and see if I could help him. We agreed that I would try and would get back to him. Half an hour later the service manager called and said that the customer had

called him and was very dissatisfied with my answers, and that he was not interested at all in how many technicians the company had on that day because his case was very urgent. The manager solved the problem and I really regretted my behavior. I had shared the organization's problems with the customer because I thought that my good relationship with him and his long-term relationship with the company would influence him to accept what I said, and to set the service appointment for the beginning of the following week. (employee 12)

The employee trusted the customer and behaved as he might have behaved toward an old acquaintance, thus providing the customer with information that was not part of the employee's service script. The customer, however, maintained his role and would not extend the encounter beyond his entitlement to service, regardless of logistic problems. From his point of view, being a loyal customer increased entitlement to superior service in return for his long-term loyalty to the organization. Thus the employee made the wrong assumption, and once he had disclosed the information to the customer he was no longer in control of the interaction.

Sense of disloyalty. Service employees perform boundary roles as intermediaries, attending to the sometimes conflicting needs of organizations and customers, which necessitates taking sides. Authentic behavior in such situations may involve the inclination to side with the customer, thereby generating a feeling of neglecting duty to the organization. In addition, the boundaries that employees cross when they behave authentically are set by organizations to protect their interests and encourage successful performance (such as norms of disclosing only part of the truth or emotional display rules). Crossing these boundaries involves awareness that such behavior may harm organizational interests. A bank employee described her sense of disloyalty:

I talked with an employee who had difficulties in getting compensation from her previous place of employment. She "faced a blank wall" when she tried to find out how to get the money she was owed. After a conference call with her employer I understood that her frustration was justified and took her side. I said something like "In these big organizations everything is much more complicated" and let her understand that I too thought her employer had not behaved appropriately. Later, I thought I should have maintained neutrality because her employer was our client, and therefore I should have respected him. (employee 13).

This employee genuinely identified with the customer and saw the situation from the customer's perspective, describing the customer's difficulties as "facing a blank wall." To show her empathy, she spontaneously expressed a negative view of the employer who was the cause of the customer's difficulties. Taking sides is common behavior for demonstrating identification with an injured party. However, in service roles taking the customer's side when an organization (or one of its customers) is the cause of the customer's trouble implies going against the organization.

Social rejection. Initiating close interaction with a customer in a service setting creates emotional vulnerability in service employees, owing to the risk of rejection by customers who are not interested in such a degree of closeness. A representative in a municipal citizens' service center described a customer's reaction to her attempt to calm him down:

A customer called the center and was very annoyed because the garbage bin outside his house had not been emptied. I tried to calm him down. I said "Why are you getting so upset, what good does it do you? It's unhealthy to get upset, it's just a garbage bin and there are more important things in life." This didn't calm him, and he started to scream at me about interfering in his life, that I was talking nonsense, that I should make sure the bin was emptied, do my work and not give people advice about healthy living. I was deeply offended by his reaction because all I had tried to do was to kindly calm him down. (employee 14)

The employee deviated from the conventions of service interaction by addressing personal issues (the customer's health) rather than relating only to the service. Although the employee felt that her behavior reflected kindness, the customer saw this as an excuse to avoid providing service. This is an example of how employee authenticity may arouse customers' aggressive reactions. Another example of a more restrained rejection of closeness was provided by a waiter who addressed customers informally:

A customer came with his wife and children. I usually address customers as "my darlings." The second time I addressed them like that he said "What's this thing with my darlings?" I replied "I'll stop if it bothers you." The situation became distant—I was just a waiter, not a waiter and a friend. The customer received standard service, like in any restaurant. (employee 15)

Addressing customers informally may generate closeness and a sense of personal rapport if the customer is willing to cooperate. However, trying to initiate closeness with an uninterested party, as the employee did, suggests misinterpretation of social signals. When the customer objected, the waiter saw it as a cue for returning to normative standardized behavior. Thus, customers' rejection may generate a return to inauthenticity.

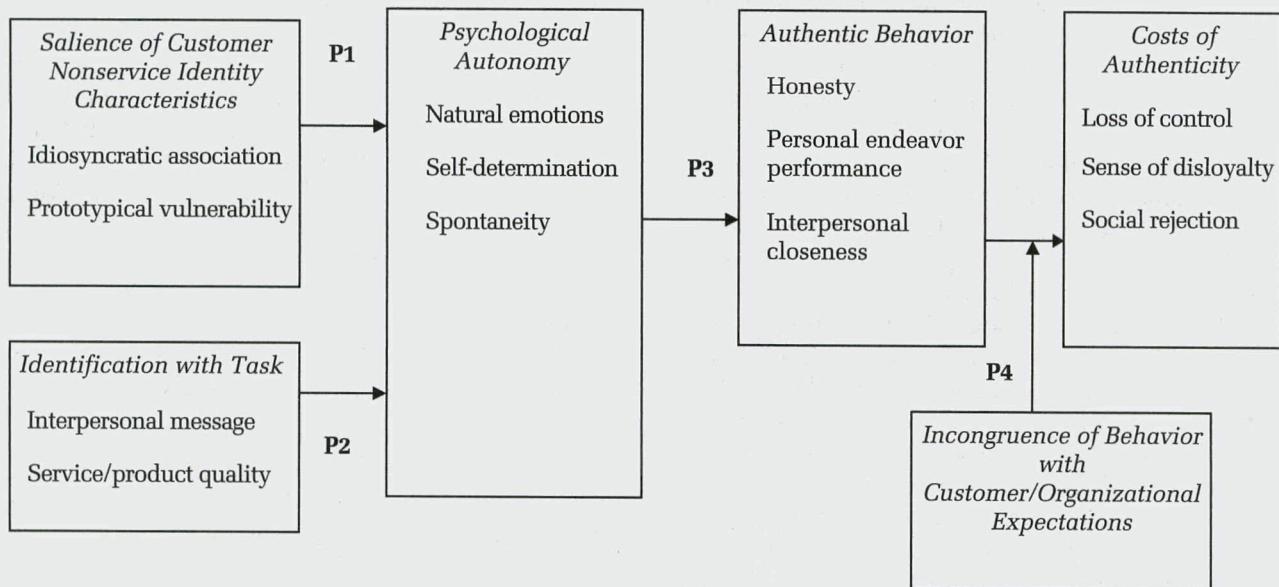
DEVELOPING A MODEL OF SERVICE EMPLOYEE AUTHENTICITY

This section presents propositions, based on findings, regarding connections among aspects of transient authenticity. The theoretical model is presented in Figure 2.

The first part of the model addresses the relationship between the salience of customers' nonservice identity characteristics and employees' identification with their task and sense of psychological autonomy. Sluss and Ashforth (2007) described how individuals interact with one another as role occupants, thus perceiving each other through the filter of role expectations that predict the interaction. Employees often see customers in relation to a specific service encounter and focus on customer aspects relevant to that interaction (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). Previous studies have shown that to reinforce their personal identities, service employees distance themselves from customers by depersonalizing them and "actively ignoring the qualities that make customers unique and engaging people" (Maslach et al., 2001: 403). Our data suggest that viewing customers from the perspectives of idiosyncratic association and/or prototypical vulnerability amplifies employees' perceptions of social networks connecting them with customers. Thus, the opposite of depersonalization may also occur: when a customer's nonservice characteristics are salient, an employee acknowledges the qualities that make the customer a unique and engaging person.

Interpersonal contexts affect the salience of role identities as well as self-expression (Ashforth et al., 2008; Stryker & Serpe, 1994), and individuals tend to express themselves more freely when their interaction partner is a close person (Diefendorff, Morehart, & Gabriel, 2010). Thus, viewing a customer from these perspectives generates a temporary experience of autonomy characteristic of employees' identity in their personal domain. Outside the service context, self-determination and spontaneity

FIGURE 2
A Model of Service Employee Authenticity



are experienced during interpersonal interactions, and positive emotions toward people in one's ingroup and toward vulnerable people are natural. For example, Goetz, Keltner, and Simon-Thomas (2010) maintained that compassion probably emerged evolutionarily as a care-taking system, so that decisions to help favor the vulnerable. Kanov, Maitlis, Worline, Dutton, Frost, and Lilius (2004) viewed compassion as a social emotion that is inherently altruistic, and awareness of another's need or suffering is a critical first step. Thus, employees do not forget that they are performing in a service role, but aspects of their personal identity become salient. The incidents presented in our findings demonstrate the effect of customer identity characteristics on psychological autonomy: The waitress (employee 1) encountered a family that reminded her of her own family; hence, the positive emotions she expressed were not merely the result of a service script but were genuine. The salesperson (employee 2) genuinely wanted to help a sick customer. The head of the security team (employee 8) decided to act according to her personal values rather than follow the rules for examination of a pregnant passenger. We present the following propositions:

Proposition 1a. Idiosyncratic association with customers increases employees' sense of psychological autonomy.

Proposition 1b. Customers' prototypical vulnerability increases employees' sense of psychological autonomy.

Identification with a task is expected to affect psychological autonomy since it affects regulation of performance. With high levels of identification, displayed emotions reflect natural emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Similarly, views and attitudes are expressed relatively freely and spontaneously because they are motivated by personal convictions. Our data demonstrate how identification with specific tasks increases employees' psychological autonomy: The waitress (employee 1) expressed genuine pride in the restaurant where she works by freely and spontaneously telling the customers about it. The internet representative (employee 6) promoted a product that she believed was good and talked spontaneously without trying to convince the customer. This effect is presented in the following propositions:

Proposition 2a. Belief in the interpersonal message increases employees' sense of psychological autonomy.

Proposition 2b. Belief in the quality of a service or product increases employees' sense of psychological autonomy.

The next part of the model addresses the relation-

ship between the inner experience and external expression of authenticity, psychological autonomy, and authentic behavior. Role boundaries indicate appropriate behaviors for different social domains (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2006a). Service generally requires more rigid and formal behaviors than the personal domain (Diefendorff & Croyle, 2008; Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005). Mischel (1976) suggested that personal inclinations are less likely to be expressed in strong situations in which aspects of the situation induce uniform expectations about the most appropriate behavior. Psychological autonomy is required to counteract the almost automatic inclination of service employees to behave inauthentically owing to organizational regulations and assumed customer expectations, and such autonomy is thus a prerequisite of authentic behavior. In addition, the genuine emotions, self-determination, and spontaneity that employees experience have the power to generate action. One example is the notion of compassionate responding (Kanov et al., 2004), which suggests that experiencing compassion engenders behavior intended to help another. The experiences of the salesperson who provided service to a sick customer (employee 2) and the cellular phone representative serving a widow (employee 10) demonstrate how compassion and empathy toward a customer motivated them to view the service as a personal endeavor. The insurance agent (employee 11) described the effects of compassion and identification on the closeness of his interaction with the customer. This effect was also evident when natural emotions were positive, as in the waitress's (employee 1's) description of how her genuine emotions even gave rise to drinking a toast with the customers.

The sense of self-determination is also energizing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Employees who experience autonomy in their emotional displays can pay less attention and energy to their behavior and are therefore more energetic than employees who work according to strict display rules (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). The decision of the head of the security team (employee 8) to behave according to her own convictions influenced her honesty toward the customer and her view of the task as a personal endeavor. The bank employee (employee 9) was honest with the customer instead of acting merely to please the customer or shorten the interaction. When motivated by self-determination, employees engage in what Schwartz and Sharpe (2006) described as a "practical wisdom" approach

to morality that is reflected in trying to do "the right thing" in a specific situation, rather than blindly following organizational rules.

A sense of spontaneity during interaction with a customer is also related to behavior. The head of the security team, the bank employee, and the insurance agent all engaged in honesty instead of planning their part in the interaction or quoting their service scripts. The following proposition addresses the effect of psychological autonomy on authentic behavior:

Proposition 3. Psychological autonomy increases employees' honesty, personal endeavor, and/or closeness to a customer.

Lastly, the model addresses the effects of behavior-expectations incongruence on the potential costs associated with authentic behavior. These costs threaten important resources that have instrumental value (e.g., control over interaction time), symbolic value (e.g., loyalty to the organization), or emotional value (social acceptance) (Hobfoll, 1989). The findings suggest that the costs of authentic behavior derive from violation of organizational or customer expectations. This is demonstrated in the example of the salesperson (employee 12) whose honesty generated a customer's complaint because the information provided by the employee violated the customer's expectations. Incongruence also occurs if an employee's behavior violates a customer's script regarding the closeness of the service encounter, resulting in social rejection, as exemplified by the experiences of the municipal employee (employee 14) and the waiter (employee 15). Employee behavior is obviously incongruent with organizational expectations if an employee takes a customer's side. The example of the bank employee (employee 13) demonstrates that violating internalized organizational expectations generates a sense of disloyalty. Other costs of transient authenticity are experienced only in subsequent encounters. When employees' temporary behavior (being especially nice, providing a one-time discount) is accepted as a norm by customers and raises their expectations, the incongruence between customer expectations and the standardized service they receive subsequently gives rise to dissatisfaction. On the other hand, employees' authentic behaviors that are congruent with customers' and organizational expectations are costless. For example, the flight attendant (employee 3) and the cellular phone representatives (employees 6 and 7) engaged

in authentic behaviors that yielded satisfying service encounters.

Behavior-expectation incongruence may involve costs for behaviors that employees perform with no intention of violating organizational rules or customer expectations. Being honest, expressing closeness, or supporting the customer's view might have been costless with another customer or in a different organizational context. Thus, the costs of authenticity may be unpredictable. The salesperson (employee 12) who shared organizational information with a customer did not foresee the latter's negative reaction. The municipal employee (employee 14) spoke to her customer as she might have talked to someone outside the service context and was not prepared for the customer's angry reaction. The moderating role of expectations-behavior incongruence is formulated in the following proposition:

Proposition 4. Authentic behavior that is incongruent with organizational or customer expectations is positively related to loss of control, sense of disloyalty, and/or social rejection.

DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest that transient authenticity in service roles is associated with an influence of the nonservice social domain on service encounters when customers' nonservice identity characteristics are salient to employees and when employees identify with the task at hand. Authenticity is experienced as psychological autonomy and expressed as honesty, viewing the task as a personal endeavor, and engaging in close interpersonal interaction. In expressing their true selves, service employees may experience loss of control, a sense of disloyalty to their organization, and social rejection by customers. We posit that customers' non-service identity characteristics and employees' identification with their task increase psychological autonomy (Propositions 1 and 2). The sense of autonomy, in turn, increases authentic behaviors (Proposition 3), which may involve costs that are due to incongruence of behavior with organizational or customer expectations (Proposition 4).

Theoretical Contributions

The study integrates the psychology of authenticity, emotional labor in service roles, and role

identity in organizations. Our findings contribute to each of these areas of theory and research.

Authenticity and emotional labor. The prevailing view that self-expression is stable across situations (Hochschild, 1983; Kernis, 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Wood et al., 2008) has generated research on enduring aspects and correlates of authenticity and inauthenticity. Studies have explored the personality construct of authenticity (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood et al., 2008); organizational display rules that standardize service employees' engagement in emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983); life satisfaction associated with authentic predisposition (Goldman & Kernis, 2002); and depression deriving from inauthenticity (Erickson & Wharton, 1997). Our findings offer a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of authenticity by documenting the erratic nature of transient authenticity. It is affected by temporary situational variables associated with customers or tasks; reflected in a momentary sense of psychological autonomy; expressed in behavior toward a momentary target; and involves costs directly related to that behavior.

An additional contribution is that of increasing understanding of the outcomes of authenticity, previously regarded as primarily involving personal benefits (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Our findings question this view, showing that authentic behavior may also involve considerable costs, in the form of reprimands from supervisors and rejection by customers, as well as inner conflict generated by defiance of norms. Although authentic individuals are viewed as having considerable control over the expression and outcomes of authenticity (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), our data suggest that, in situations of transient authenticity, control of outcomes is much more limited. The costs of authentic behavior are unforeseen, and employees may spontaneously engage in authentic self-expression out of lack of awareness or miscalculation of risks.

The study also challenges two basic views of emotional labor literature. First, the prevailing notion generated by the dramaturgical view of the service context is that service employees are typically inauthentic. The perspective underlying our study is that because a strong drive for authenticity exists, it will be expressed even in a controlled service environment. Our research sheds new light on service work by documenting employee authenticity in service encounters and describing how it is experienced and expressed.

In addition, since the publication of Hochschild's seminal work on emotional labor in 1983, self-expression among service employees has been discussed almost exclusively in terms of emotional display. Our data explicate the construct of authenticity in service beyond emotions, documenting inner experiences of authenticity and the ways in which authenticity is expressed in service encounters, including information sharing, personally relating to tasks, and interpersonal closeness. These findings enrich the theory of employee self-expression and are germane to future research on both authenticity and inauthenticity.

Role identities. Role-transition theory (Ashforth et al., 2008) refers to transitions between roles or domains marked by different people associated with a role, at different times or in different physical environments. Our study expands the understanding of how people assume role identities. It demonstrates that, because of changes in identity salience, employees' between-role movement may be less marked and may occur with the same people, in the same environment and at the same time. This happens when evidence of another social domain triggers experiences and behaviors characteristic of individual roles in that other domain. Thus, during a formal service interaction, elements of other personal roles, such as that of friend, give rise to an authentic experience characteristic of an employee's inner experience and behavior in the personal domain.

The findings also offer insight about cues that signal which role identity is appropriate in a given situation. Theories of role identity (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2006a) discuss objective and explicit cues, such as time and space, that separate work roles from home roles. For example, a key element that strongly affects the salience of role identities is an individual's role set—others in the individual's social network (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). This is a boundary marker that defines a role and how it is to be performed (Ashforth et al., 2008). We show the effect of personal cues, such as idiosyncratic association, on the salience of role identities. In our data customers' nonservice identity characteristics indicated the effect of their role set on the salience of an employees' role identity. For example, an employee's description of feeling as if she were interacting with her grandmother implies the salience not just of the customer's nonservice identity characteristics but also that of the employee's identity as a grandchild. Thus, subtle and subjective cues also affect the enactment of role identities.

Limitations and Future Research

Most employees in our sample associated authenticity with benevolent behaviors; hence, we did not have enough data to analyze situations in which employees experiencing authenticity departed from display rules by behaving negatively or even "not positively enough" toward customers. Such incidents are likely to be rare in service encounters because emotional labor disguises reluctance to express positivity, although one can assume that service employees do have such experiences from time to time. For example, in the few incidents of negative authenticity reported in our study, employees viewed their behavior as a reaction to unreasonable demands or unjust accusations by customers. In addition, our sample does not provide enough information about possible differences in authenticity in diverse service contexts. It would be desirable to sample a larger number of employees from several service environments and compare them for authentic and inauthentic behaviors.

Customers may play a part in triggering authenticity; they might actively try to create a perception of association between themselves and an employee, or emphasize their vulnerability, especially when trying to gain special treatment. Brunell et al. (2010) found that one party's authenticity affects another party's relational behavior. Through contagion, customer inauthenticity may elicit inauthentic reactions from a service employee, thus generating an artificial interaction in which both parties engage in pretense and are possibly aware of the other's inauthenticity. It would be desirable to explore the dynamics of the service interaction in terms of the evolving effects of employee authenticity and customer reactions.

Employees participating in our study generally expressed the view that direct supervisors and top management expect inauthentic behavior and that they are expected to present the desired emotions or information to customers or maintain standardization. They sometimes viewed authentic behavior as contravening managerial expectations and speculated that supervisors would have condoned this authenticity, yet little is known about managerial views on the subject. Future research could explore managerial beliefs concerning effects of authenticity on employees and customers, which might ultimately influence the rigidity of organizational display rules and service scripts. Our findings do not tell us about dilemmas deriving from a

situation comprising both authentic and service role identity (for example, a manager explicitly commands that a vulnerable customer is to receive standard service). Exploring such dilemmas would help to explain the relative impact of the various participants in service encounters. Additionally, our research focused only on the movement from inauthenticity to authenticity; but the movement is bidirectional, so that although our data provide some information on antecedents of movement from authenticity to inauthenticity (i.e., customer rejection of closeness), it would be desirable to explore its other possible antecedents (e.g., the presence of a supervisor). In addition, in this study we have focused on a general level of authenticity, addressing basic questions such as "When does authenticity occur?" and "How is it manifested?" Future research into authenticity in service roles should go beyond the general level. For example, there were some indications in our study that in a state of authenticity employees are open to customer negative feedback. Future research should explore psychological processes such as self-awareness and information processing, which the literature associates with authenticity.

On a more general level, the findings are relevant to related areas of employee self-expression in organizations, such as voice behavior (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) and the creation of facades of conformity (Hewlin, 2003). Research has indicated that employees are usually reluctant to voice their opinions in organizations and that, like authenticity, voice behavior is discretionary and carries potential costs (Liu, Zhu & Yang, 2010). Facades of conformity are described as survival mechanisms, created when employees withhold their opinions and pretend to embrace organizational values (Hewlin, 2003). It might be desirable to explore "holes" in facades of conformity or employees' silence for temporal expressions of employees' views and values.

Practical Implications

Hochschild maintained that "the value placed on authentic or 'natural' feeling has increased dramatically with the full emergence of its opposite" (1983: 190). The benefits of employee authenticity affect customers (Groth et al., 2009) and employees alike (Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Grandey, 2003), but although service organizations strive to "manufacture" authenticity (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000), they simultaneously prevent it by staging service

interaction contexts to ensure standardized and pleasant service. This may be based on the assumption that, in the absence of organizational rules prescribing positive behavior, employees' behavior is unlikely to be positive. Nonetheless, imposed display rules may carry an implicit message to employees that one cannot feel positively toward customers, and therefore positive behavior cannot come naturally and must be ensured through regulations. Even when organizations attempt to encourage employees to think of customers in ways that would generate positive emotions (Hochschild, 1983), the subtext might be that positive emotions toward customers are not natural experiences. Hochschild (1983) maintained that emotional labor creates self-alienation because it makes employees lose touch with their real emotions. Teaching employees to express positive emotions toward customers might result in loss of touch with the genuine emotions and replacing them with manufactured positive emotions. In addition, when employees behave positively toward customers in order to be rewarded for obeying rules, they might interpret their behavior as being externally motivated rather than genuine (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999).

Our data indicate that employees' authentic behavior may in fact be positive. Obviously the findings partially reflect the effect of display rules that are the probable reason for the paucity of negative authentic behaviors, but indications that authenticity may be positive are relevant to managerial considerations of the role of display rules. The findings show that the advantages of authenticity include dedication, positive emotions, and good interaction with customers. Given the characteristics of service contexts, organizations cannot control all aspects of service interactions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), but creating an authentically positive disposition will increase the likelihood that, in unpredictable situations, employees will behave positively. Paradoxically, although the advantages offer highly desirable outcomes for organizations, they cannot be controlled (e.g., true caring cannot be achieved by rewarding employees for showing it), yet lack of control involves the disadvantages of lack of standardization, violation of rules, confusion, and being hurt. Management may consider strategies that will provide the advantages and reduce the costs of authenticity, such as "bounded authenticity"—that is, setting rules that are universally considered important in interpersonal interactions (e.g., politeness, being helpful) as well as rules that are impor-

tant for a particular organization (e.g., not disclosing certain information to customers), without prescribing absolute formulas for employee interpersonal behavior.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

1. Describe your job—Where do you work? What do you do? Who are your customers?
2. Describe, with as many details as possible, a recent incident in which you provided service and felt that your behavior was completely genuine.
3. How did you feel?
4. How did the customer react?
5. How often do you behave like that in service?
6. What are the advantages, for you, of a genuine behavior in your service role?
7. What are the disadvantages, for you, of a genuine behavior in your service role?
8. Describe an incident when you regretted being genuine.
9. With what type of customers do you feel able to be genuine?
10. Describe in as much detail as possible a recent incident when you provided service and felt that your behavior was completely false, that you were pretending or faking.
11. How often do you behave like that?
12. Why do you behave falsely in service?
13. How do you feel when you behave like that?
14. With what type of customers do you feel the need to behave falsely?
15. Describe an incident when you regretted behaving falsely.
16. How is your personality reflected in your service job?
17. How do you decide whether to be genuine or false in a service encounter?
18. What kind of behavior (genuine or false) does the organization expect? How are such expectations conveyed to you?

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