

# Sadness Is Believed to Signal Competence When Displayed With Passionate Restraint

Matthew J. Zawadzki<sup>1</sup>, Leah R. Warner<sup>2</sup>, and Stephanie A. Shields<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA

<sup>2</sup>Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, NJ, USA

**Abstract.** A longstanding Western belief is that emotionality, such as sadness, is the antithesis to rational thinking and leads to ineffective behavior. We propose that people believe that sadness can actually signal competence when it is expressed in a way that demonstrates control and awareness of one's authentic emotion, which we label passionate restraint (PR). In two studies, participants rated protagonists displaying sadness either openly or suppressed, or using PR, on their competence, authenticity, and emotional control. We find that PR is rated as more competent than open displays of emotion because of perceived control, and more competent than suppressed emotion displays because of emotional authenticity. Results demonstrate the importance that beliefs about emotions have on how others are perceived and judged.

**Keywords:** authenticity, competence, emotional expression, emotion regulation, sincerity

People have strong beliefs about emotions and what the displaying of emotion means. These beliefs form the foundation of inferences that people make about others' emotions (Shields, 2002), personality (Knudson, 1996), and behavior (Gasper & Clore, 1998). For example, people infer honesty and genuineness based on how a person displays emotions (e.g., Hess & Kleck, 1990) and believe these displays indicate how dominant or affiliative a person will act (Hess, Blairy, & Kleck, 2000). One important, yet under-investigated, feature of these judgments is the perception of how competent an emotional individual is.

Whether an expression of emotion can be perceived as signaling competence reflects a dilemma. Sometimes emotion is believed to enhance performance (e.g., Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992), whereas there is a longstanding Western belief that emotion is the antithesis of rational thinking and is associated rather with ineffective behavior (Averill, 1980; Frijda, 1986; Shields, 2005; Solomon, 2008). Competence may be shown in the regulation of emotion itself, as reflected in the adherence to display rules (Ekman, 1993; Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005). A larger question, however, is how emotion is related to competence in the performance of subsequent tasks. People often believe that emotions interfere with their ability to complete everyday tasks (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994), such as when an argument at home interferes with one's ability to complete tasks at work. This paper focuses on whether emotion can be believed to enhance competence

in performing these subsequent actions unrelated to the emotion-evoking event.

We examine whether a particular form of communicating emotion, which we identify as passionate restraint (PR), expresses not only emotional control, but also competence in situations unrelated to the emotion-evoking event. A classic example of PR is the single tear running down a person's cheek in response to a sad stimulus. The tear signals genuine emotion, and the limited flow indicates a control over those emotions (Vingerhoets, Cornelius, Van Heck, & Brecht, 2000). We propose that by demonstrating awareness of one's own genuine emotion – and control of that emotion (i.e., PR) – observers believe that a person will not be overwhelmed and also can handle other situations they face without interference from the sadness. Put succinctly, PR is believed to signal competence.

In this paper we focus specifically on the emotion of sadness because it represents a strong challenge to the idea of emotion conveying competence. Sadness has been described as a “powerless” emotion signaling dependence on others (Fischer, 1993). People believe that sadness conveys less competence than anger (Tiedens, 2001) and perceive people displaying sadness as having less agency in situations than people displaying anger (Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000). Thus, it is a particularly strong test of our hypothesis that PR conveys competence if we examine it in the context of an emotion typically seen as signaling incompetence. By using sadness, we are able to test wheth-

er an expression is able to convey competence independent of the emotion that elicited it.

## Emotions and Competence

Competence, along with warmth, is one of two key dimensions that describe group stereotypes and predict how observers perceive, evaluate, and react to others (e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005).<sup>1</sup> Competence is defined by traits such as intelligence and efficacy, and reflects the estimation of a person's capacity to act constructively in a situation (Abele et al., 2008). Judgments of competence have wide reaching consequences for individuals' lives, including their perceived status (Fiske et al., 2002) and ability to obtain employment (Howard & Ferris, 2006).

It is possible that general competence is signaled by expressed emotion that conforms to socially sanctioned expectations of emotional displays. For example, display rules, the often tacit social rules regarding how one ought to show emotion in a particular situation (Ekman, 1993; Matsumoto et al., 2005), are based on situationally defined emotional appropriateness. Adherence to display rules shows that a person understands and has internalized the expressive norms attached to the demands of an emotional situation. The competence demonstrated by following a display rule, however, does not necessarily generalize to other situations. For example, hearing bad news might suggest that more sadness would be appropriate to display, yet displaying sadness would not necessarily lead an observer to believe that the person can competently run a meeting at work.

## Passionate Restraint: Emotion Signaling Competence

We propose that people believe emotion can signal competence in a subsequent task, so long as the emotion is displayed with PR, that is, the emotion display demonstrates both control and recognition of one's own authentic emotion. This proposal draws from theoretical work by Shields (2002) that suggests that one form of emotional expression, namely the appearance of strongly felt emotion under control, is a valued "standard" for emotional expression across a variety of situations in the contemporary United States, particularly situations in which the individual is expected to exercise judgment or perform with competence. PR is valued because it conveys both the capacity for self-regulation and authentic experience. Below, we describe why

control and awareness of authentic emotion are the critical ingredients of PR.

## Control

A mainstream North American cultural message is that people should exert control over their emotions (Parrott, 1993; Spackman & Parrott, 2001), and in fact they are seen as more competent when they do (Warner & Shields, 2007). Emotion can be controlled in many ways, however, and how people control their emotions produce different outcomes (Ekman, 1977; Gross, 1998; Malatesta & Izard, 1984). For example, emotional suppression that aims to inhibit one's own behavior while emotionally aroused (Gross & Levenson, 1993) could be predicted as the best way to deal with sadness because it removes any sign of emotion that is believed to impair competence. Yet, college students and mental health professionals endorse the belief that when men are inexpressive, they are seen as not expressive enough (Heesacker et al., 1999). In addition, faces designed to have neutral expression (i.e., what could be interpreted as suppressed expression) are perceived as indicating negative emotions (Lee, Kang, Park, Kim, & An, 2008). Finally, controlled or dampened emotion is often perceived negatively and can hurt social interactions (Butler et al., 2003; Matsumoto et al., 2005; Warner & Shields, 2009a).

Thus, an ideal form of control is not one that limits all display of emotion, but rather one that signals that felt emotion is present but being managed (Shields, 2002). Control can be signaled through attenuating the magnitude of one's emotional display (Ekman, 1977; Malatesta & Izard, 1984). Other ways control can be signaled is through suppression in which some emotion still "leaks" through an expression mask, or through employing facial controls, such as clenching one's jaw, in order to inhibit facial muscles typically used to express emotion (e.g., Butler et al., 2003; Butler & Gross, 2004; Gross, 1998). In sum, PR does not eliminate all signs of emotion, but rather shows that emotion will not overwhelm the individual. Evidence of control, however, is only one facet of PR; control is valued when it shows that authentic emotionality is being controlled.

## Authenticity

Emotional authenticity is defined as the congruity of felt emotion with one's core values, beliefs, and expression (Salmela, 2005). Emotions are perceived as authentically felt when the observer believes the emotional individual is not being intentionally deceptive or simply displaying emotion for appearance's sake (Sebe et al., 2007). For

<sup>1</sup> Warmth is related to traits such as friendliness and honesty, and is indicative of being perceived as approachable and likeable (Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008). As such, perceptions of warmth do not run counter to perceptions of emotion and competence.

example, actors who portray emotions that draw from their own life are seen as more authentic than actors simulating an emotion (Gosselin, Kirouac, & Dore, 1995). Importantly, authenticity is not simply an open display of emotion, but one that shows the observer that the individual has insight into her or his own emotion condition (*sincerity* in Salmela's, 2005, terms). A 2-year-old's tantrum, for example, may be an honest, unfiltered emotional display, but the 2-year-old does not have the capacity for insight, a self-aware appraisal of one's own emotion and its relation to core values, beliefs, and expression. Behavior that reflects insight into one's own emotion signals that the person's actions can be accepted at face value (Warner & Shields, 2009b). When a social group is believed to be insincere emotionally, it is distrusted (Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske, 2005), something we would expect for individuals as well. Finally, proponents of emotional intelligence suggest emotions link to competence when the individual draws on emotion for constructive purposes (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). In order to draw on one's emotions, one must first know one's own feelings (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

## The Present Research

In two vignette studies, we test the prediction that sadness displays described as following a PR display style will be perceived as demonstrating competence relative to other descriptions of emotion displays. We approach this question from the perspective of the observer and investigate whether people perceive the presence of sadness enhances or inhibits perceptions of competence. In other words, we examine people's beliefs about sadness and competence – and not whether sadness itself contributes to competence. It is true that sadness influences preferences and decisions (Small & Lerner, 2008; Winterich, Han, & Lerner, 2010), and that sad moods contribute to competence in certain problem-solving situations (e.g., Gasper & Bramesfeld, 2006). Yet, sadness is believed to be a powerless emotion (Fischer, 1993) associated with low status (Tiedens, 2001). Thus, beliefs about sadness run counter to research on the possible positive effects of being in a sad mood.

We operationalize PR as visible emotion subtly expressed, that is, emotion expressed in muted or abbreviated form. We compare descriptions of PR to descriptions of emotion expressions that are either open (expression is not obviously controlled) or closed (visible expression of felt emotion is absent, or complete suppression). We use written vignettes that describe a protagonist's expressive response to an emotion-evoking situation. We chose vignettes as the best way to portray the three contrasting expressive styles in a clear social context. Using vignettes enabled us to tap people's beliefs about emotion expression (Parkinson & Manstead, 1993) by focusing

participants' attention to the features of emotion most relevant to the belief. In addition, vignettes allow us to fully describe situations in which protagonists can display competence.

In sum, we predict that beliefs about sadness displays do not always run counter to perceptions of competence, so long as the emotion displayed is believed to be authentic and controlled. We propose that both perceived authenticity and control predict competence. Perceived authenticity, or the sense that a person's actions can be accepted at face value (Warner & Shields, 2009b), signals that a person has awareness of his or her own emotions so as to be able to use them constructively to achieve one's goals. Furthermore, perceived control over emotion (Salovey & Grewal, 2005), or the belief that the person will not be overwhelmed by her or his emotions, signals that the person is of clear mind to act effectively. Therefore, we predict that displays that lack either control (an open expression) or authenticity (a closed expression) will be rated as less competent than PR displays, which contain both. Specific hypotheses are as follows:

- *Hypothesis 1:* Protagonists described as displaying PR are perceived as more competent than protagonists described as displaying open and closed displays.
- *Hypothesis 2:* Protagonists described as displaying PR are perceived as more controlled than protagonists described as displaying open displays. Perceptions of control explain why protagonists described as displaying PR are rated more competent than protagonists described as displaying open sadness.
- *Hypothesis 3:* Protagonists described as displaying PR are perceived as more authentic than protagonists described as displaying closed displays. Perceptions of authenticity explain why protagonists described as displaying PR are rated more competent than protagonists described as displaying closed sadness.

In addition to these hypotheses, we examine whether the sex of the protagonist moderates any of the observed effects (tested in Study 2). Protagonist sex was treated as an exploratory variable. While men's emotion is often seen as more legitimate (and therefore more competent) relative to women's emotions (Timmers, Fischer, & Manstead, 2003; Warner, 2007), this is not always the case (e.g., Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). For example, Lewis (2000) found no difference in performance ratings of female and male leaders displaying sadness. Furthermore, PR is proposed as an ideal standard for expressing emotion for both men and women (Shields, 2002). Thus, while it is possible that male protagonists will be rated more competent than female protagonists when displaying PR, it is also possible that participants will see both female and male protagonists as similarly competent.

## Study 1

### Methods

#### Participants

In exchange for course credit, 210 undergraduates (115 women, 95 men) completed the study. The majority of participants self-identified as White/Caucasian (82.4%), followed by Asian American (6.2%), African American (3.3%), and Latina/o (2.4%).

#### Procedure and Materials

Participants read one of two vignettes relevant to college life that described an individual's display of sadness with an open, PR, or closed display. One vignette described a student who heard a song that reminded him of friends from home just before he was to make a speech encouraging other students to join a peer counseling group. The second described a student who received a call that his dog was gravely ill just before giving a speech on childhood poverty.

The protagonist's emotional display was described, rather than simply named, in order to test how the protagonist's expressive behavior was perceived. The sad expressions were described in ways congruent with the Facial Action Coding System (FACS; Ekman & Friesen, 1978), but expressed in nontechnical language. Facial actions described in the vignettes were as follows: eyebrows pulling together and raising to form wrinkles in the middle of the forehead; sides of lips turned downward; eyes watering. In the PR condition, in order to emphasize the importance of both authenticity and control, all of the facial actions occurred in response to the emotion-provoking event thus showing authenticity in the protagonist's reaction, but began returning to neutral when the subsequent task began thus demonstrating control. In the open condition, all of the facial actions occurred in response to the emotion-provoking event and continued through the subsequent task. In the closed condition, no change from neutral expression occurred. The following describes the protagonist's reaction in the open condition after hearing the bad news about his dog:

As Dan talked to his mom, his eyebrows pulled together and raised, forming wrinkles in the middle of his forehead. The sides of his lips turned downward and his eyes watered. When the conversation was finished, he closed his phone. As he entered the classroom, he continued to display that expression. He then went up to the podium, and once class started, began his speech about children in poverty.

In the PR condition, the vignette read:

As Dan talked to his mom, his eyebrows pulled together and raised, forming wrinkles in the middle of his forehead. The sides of his lips turned downward and his eyes watered briefly.

When the conversation finished he closed his phone. As he entered the classroom, his face became more neutral.

In the closed condition, the vignette read:

As Dan talked to his mom, his face made little movement and he stared ahead blankly. When the conversation finished he closed his phone. As he entered the classroom, his face remained neutral, completely without expression.

All three vignettes then finished with the same sentence: "He then went up to the podium, and once class started, began his speech about children in poverty."

Participants completed the survey packet in small groups of up to 20 persons. They were asked to imagine the protagonist's expression in the vignette, and then to rate the protagonist based on his expression during the task on:

1. *competence in the delivery of the speech* (using 8 items proposed by Fiske et al., 2002): capable, competent, confident, independent, intelligent, skillful, competitive, and efficient;  $\alpha = .88$ );
2. *emotional control* (3 items: self-control, feelings kept "in check," and composure;  $\alpha = .88$ ); and
3. *emotional authenticity* (4 items: authentic, deep feelings, genuine, and honest feelings;  $\alpha = .80$ ).

Participants responded to all questions using a 1 (= *not at all present*) to 7 (= *very present*) scale. In addition, two manipulation checks were included:

1. Participants rated on a 1 (= *not at all*) to 7 (= *very much*) scale, how much the protagonist displayed sadness, happiness, fear, and anger in response to the situation.
2. Participants responded to two items assessing the extent to which the emotional display of the protagonist was open vs. closed or unrestricted vs. restricted using 1 (= *closed or restricted*) to 7 (= *open or unrestricted*) scales ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

### Results

The two vignettes did not differ on the critical dependent variable of competence ( $F(1, 208) < 1, p > .90$ ). Data were therefore combined for all further analyses. All analyses were conducted with one-way (display type: open vs. PR vs. closed) between-subjects ANOVAs unless otherwise noted. Participant sex was treated as an exploratory variable for all analyses; unless otherwise noted, there were no differences between female and male participants.

#### Manipulation Checks

All manipulation checks showed that independent variables were understood as presented. First, sadness was rated as strongly present in the protagonist's response to the situation for open ( $M = 6.19, SD = 1.02$ ), PR ( $M = 5.89, SD = 1.17$ ) and closed ( $M = 4.94, SD = 1.86$ ) conditions. While open and PR did not differ ( $p > .20$ ), both PR ( $p <$

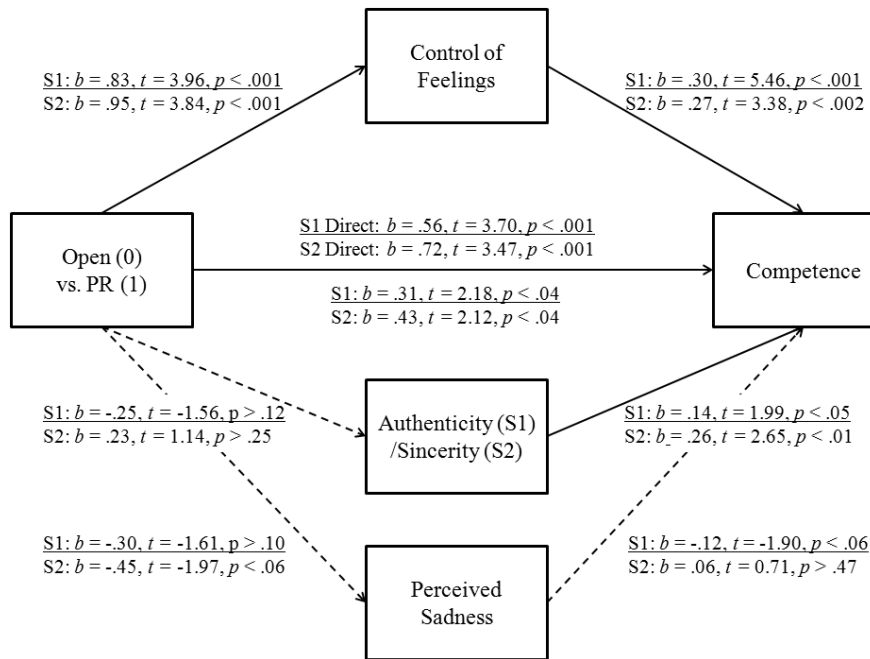


Figure 2. Control of feelings mediates the relationship between open vs. PR expressions and perceived competence in Studies 1 and 2. Lines marked as S1 correspond to Study 1, while lines marked as S2 correspond to Study 2.

.001,  $d = .61$ ) and open ( $p < .001, d = .83$ ) were rated as having more sadness than closed,  $F(2, 207) = 15.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ . In contrast, ratings of happiness, fear, and anger did not differ across display type ( $F_s < 1, p_s > .64$ ) and were low in all cases (all  $M_s < 3$ ). Thus, all protagonists were perceived as experiencing only the manipulated emotion of sadness.

Second, the open display condition ( $M = 4.91, SD = 1.05$ ) was rated as more unrestricted than PR ( $M = 4.25, SD = 1.07, p < .01, d = .62$ ) and closed ( $M = 2.92, SD = 1.50, p < .001, d = 1.54$ ); in turn, PR was rated as more unrestricted than closed ( $p < .001, d = 1.02$ ),  $F(2, 206) = 46.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$ .

### Hypothesis 1: PR Perceived as Most Competent

Participants rated protagonists described as displaying PR ( $M = 4.62, SD = 0.88$ ) as more competent than protagonists described as displaying open ( $M = 4.07, SD = 0.92; p < .001, d = .61$ ) and closed ( $M = 4.11, SD = 1.16; p < .003, d = .50$ ),  $F(2, 207) = 7.05, p < .002, \eta_p^2 = .06$  (Figure 1). There was no difference between open and closed ( $p > .80$ ).

### Hypothesis 2: Perceived Control as a Mediator

As predicted, PR ( $M = 4.58, SD = 1.35$ ) was rated as more controlled than open ( $M = 3.74, SD = 1.14; p < .001, d =$

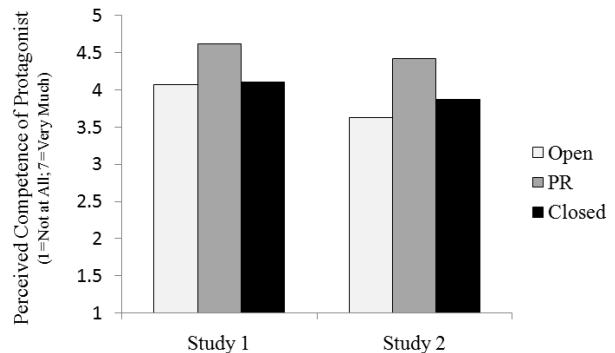


Figure 1. Mean ratings of the perceived competence of the protagonist by expression type across Studies 1 and 2. Within each study, the PR condition was rated as more competent than the open and closed display conditions.

.67), but not closed ( $M = 4.78, SD = 1.60; p > .37$ ),  $F(2, 207) = 11.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ .

We used the bootstrapping procedure to test for multiple mediation, which is recommended for small samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We set 95% confidence intervals using 5,000 resamples. Display type (0 = Open, 1 = PR) was entered as the predictor, perceived control and emotional authenticity as mediators, and perceived competence was the outcome variable (sections marked S1 in Figure 2). In addition, perceived sadness of the protagonist

<sup>2</sup> Female participants ( $M = 4.54, SD = 1.39$ ) rated the protagonist as more controlled than did male participants ( $M = 4.16, SD = 1.47$ ),  $F(1, 204) = 3.89, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .02$ .

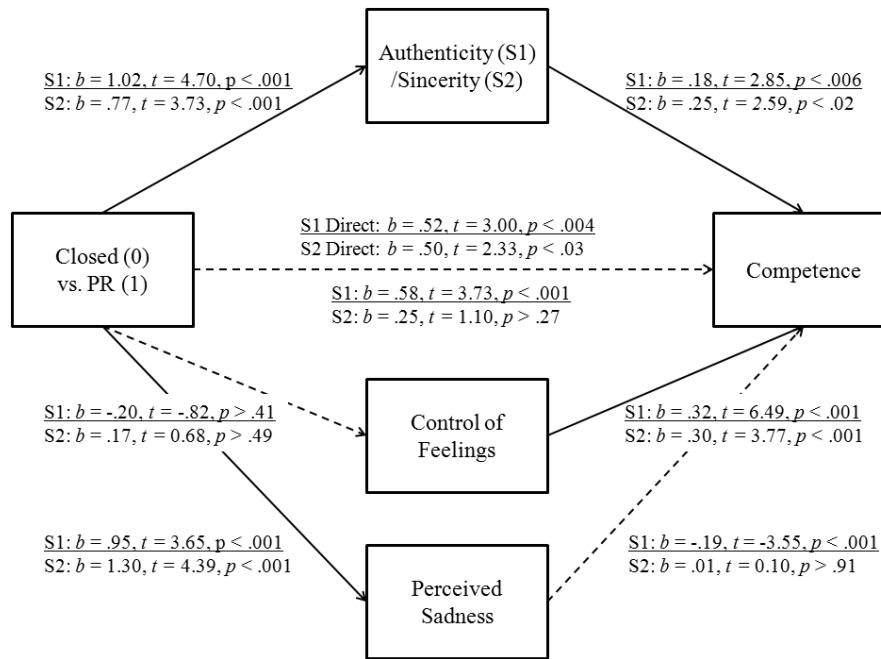


Figure 3. Authenticity/sincerity mediates the relationship between closed vs. PR expressions and perceived competence in Study 2. Lines marked as S1 correspond to Study 1, while lines marked as 2 correspond to Study 2.

was entered as an additional mediator for this and all subsequent like analyses to rule out that differences in perceived emotionality could explain the observed effects on competence. The overall model was significant,  $F(4, 137) = 14.66, p < .001, r^2 = .30$ . Display type significantly predicted perceived control, but not authenticity or perceived sadness. In turn, control and authenticity predicted competence, while perceived sadness was marginally related. The 95% confidence interval for control did not include zero [.11, .42], but did for authenticity [-.12, .01] and sadness [-.01, .10], indicating that only perceived control mediated the relationship between display type (open vs. PR) and competence.

### Hypothesis 3: Perceived Authenticity as a Mediator

As predicted, PR ( $M = 5.58, SD = 0.94$ ) was rated as having more authentic feelings than closed expressions ( $M = 4.55, SD = 1.59; p < .001, d = .79$ ), but not open ( $M = 5.82, SD = 0.96; p > .21$ ),  $F(2, 207) = 21.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$ .

We then used the same bootstrapping procedure to test for mediation as Hypothesis 2. Display type (0 = Closed, 1 = PR) was entered as the predictor, emotional authenticity, perceived control, and sadness as mediators, and perceived competence as the outcome variable (sections marked S1 in Figure 3). The overall model was significant,  $F(4, 136) = 19.73, p < .001, r^2 = .37$ . Display type significantly predicted perceived authenticity and perceived sadness, but not control. In turn, control, authenticity, and sadness predicted competence. The 95% confidence interval for authenticity [.05, .34] and sadness [-.34, -.05] did not include

zero, but it did for control [-.21, .10]. Although these variables were significant, the direct relationship between display type (open vs. PR) and competence was not reduced, suggesting that while authenticity was related to competence, it did not serve in a mediating function.

## Discussion

Supporting Hypothesis 1, descriptions of PR displays were perceived as more competent than descriptions of both open and closed displays. We can rule out an alternative explanation in that the greater competence rating of PR compared to open and closed conditions cannot be attributed to PR being rated as having less emotionality than the other two expression conditions; PR was rated as having just as much sadness as the open expression, and more sadness than closed. Furthermore, the greater competence ratings of PR cannot be attributed solely to emotion control, as both PR and the closed condition were rated as experiencing sadness and demonstrating similar amounts of control, yet PR was rated more competent than closed. Finally, the vignettes provided the potential for the protagonist to demonstrate competence across all the display types. Thus, the differences in perceived competence can be attributed to display type.

Hypothesis 2 was supported inasmuch as the perceived amount of control explained why protagonists described as displaying PR were rated as more competent than protagonists described as displaying open. While there was clear evidence that control mediated the relationship between display type and competence, the results for Hypothesis 3 were less clear. The results suggest that authenticity is important in

distinguishing between PR and closed and was related to competence, but authenticity did not mediate the relationship between display type and competence. Our measure of authenticity was likely too general, as we measured authenticity exclusively in terms of the extent to which participants judged the protagonist as expressing genuine feelings and did not include a specific measure of insight into one's experienced emotion (Salmela, 2005). Thus, in the next study we assessed whether the sincerity component of authenticity (i.e., recognition of one's own emotions) is how authenticity leads to greater perceived competence.

We made one additional change in Study 2 in that participants also rated female protagonists. This allowed us to test whether, as proposed by Shields (2002), PR is believed to be an ideal standard for expressing emotion for both men and women, or whether men's emotions would be perceived as more competent as sadness displays in men are rated as more positive than those in women (Warner & Shields, 2007).

## Study 2

### Methods

#### Participants

In exchange for course credit, 162 undergraduates (105 women, 57 men) completed the study. The majority of participants self-identified as White/Caucasian (82.7%), followed by Asian American (8.6%), Latina/o (2.5%), and African American (1.2%). Twelve additional participants (8 women, 4 men), equally distributed across conditions, were recruited but excluded from data analysis because they failed to follow directions or failed to answer a majority of the questions.

#### Procedure and Materials

Competence ( $\alpha = .90$ ), control of feelings ( $\alpha = .80$ ), and the manipulation checks (i.e., ratings of sadness, happiness, fear and anger, and the extent to which the emotion expression was unrestricted ( $\alpha = .79$ )) were identical to Study 1. Study 2 differed in the following respects:

1. Participants completed the study online.
2. We adapted four items from Schutte et al. (1998) to measure the sincerity component of authenticity (i.e., the extent to which participants perceived the protagonist as recognizing his or her own emotions) ( $\alpha = .81$ ): "[Protagonist's Name] is aware of her/his emotions as s/he experiences them."; "[Protagonist's Name] is aware of the nonverbal messages s/he sends to others."; "When [Protagonist's Name]'s emotions change, s/he understands why."; "[Protagonist's Name] easily recognizes her/his own emotions as s/he experiences them." Participants

responded using a 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 7 (= *strongly agree*) scale.

3. Half of participants read a vignette of a protagonist whose name indicated she was female, the other half male.

## Results

The two vignettes did not differ on the critical dependent variable of competence ( $F(1, 155) < 1, p > .46$ ). Data for the two vignettes were combined for all further analyses. All analyses were conducted with 2 (Sex of protagonist: male, female)  $\times$  3 (Display type: open, PR, closed) between-subjects ANOVAs unless otherwise noted. Participant sex was treated as an exploratory variable for all analyses; there were no main effects of participant sex or interaction effects of participant sex with the other variables.

### Manipulation Checks

All manipulation checks showed that independent variables were understood as presented. First, sadness was rated as strongly present in the protagonist's response to the situation for open ( $M = 6.37, SD = 0.84$ ), PR ( $M = 5.92, SD = 1.40$ ), and closed ( $M = 4.62, SD = 1.67$ ) conditions. Open and PR differed marginally ( $p < .09, d = .39$ ), while both PR ( $p < .001, d = .84$ ) and open ( $p < .001, d = 1.32$ ) were rated as having more sadness than closed,  $F(2, 151) = 25.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .25$ . In contrasts, ratings of happiness, fear, and anger did not differ across display type ( $F_s < 2.06, p_s > .13$ ) and were low in all cases (all  $M_s < 3$ ). There was one main effect of protagonist sex such that female protagonists ( $M = 2.83, SD = 1.67$ ) were rated as happier than male protagonists ( $M = 2.14, SD = 1.49$ ),  $F(2, 140) = 5.95, p < .02, \eta_p^2 = .04$ . There were no differences by protagonist sex for fear and anger ( $F_s < 1, p_s > .52$ ); protagonist sex did not interact with display type for any emotion ( $F_s < 1.85, p_s > .16$ ). Thus, as with Study 1, all protagonists were perceived as experiencing only the manipulated emotion of sadness.

Second, looking at the extent to which the emotion expression was rated as unrestricted, the open display condition ( $M = 4.53, SD = 1.31$ ) was rated as marginally more unrestricted than PR ( $M = 4.17, SD = 1.29, p < .08, d = .28$ ) and more unrestricted than closed ( $M = 2.66, SD = 1.08, p < .001, d = 1.56$ ). PR was rated as more unrestricted than closed ( $p < .001, d = 1.27$ ),  $F(2, 155) = 35.74, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$ . There were no main or interaction effects for protagonist sex ( $F_s < 2.08, p_s > .12$ ).

### Hypothesis 1: PR Perceived as Most Competent

Replicating Study 1, participants rated protagonists described as displaying PR ( $M = 4.42, SD = 1.07$ ) as more competent than protagonists described as displaying open

( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .75$ ) and closed ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ;  $p < .008$ ,  $d = .51$ ),  $F(2, 155) = 8.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$  (Figure 1). Open and closed did not differ ( $p > .15$ ). There were no main or interaction effects for protagonist sex ( $F_s < 2.24$ ,  $p_s > .13$ ).

### Hypothesis 2: Perceived Control as a Mediator

Replicating Study 1, PR ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) was rated as more controlled than open ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .79$ ), but not closed ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ;  $p > .38$ ),  $F(2, 156) = 10.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .11$ . There were no main or interaction effects for protagonist sex ( $F_s < 1.84$ ,  $p_s > .17$ ), and as a result, we collapsed across protagonist sex for the subsequent mediation analysis.

We then used the bootstrapping procedure described in Study 1 to test for mediation. Display type (0 = Open, 1 = PR) was entered as the predictor, perceived control, sincerity, and sadness as mediators, and perceived competence as the outcome variable (sections marked S2 in Figure 2). The overall model was significant,  $F(4, 95) = 10.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r^2 = .30$ . Display type significantly predicted perceived control, marginally predicted perceived sadness, and did not predict perceived sincerity. In turn, control and sincerity predicted competence, while perceived sadness was not related. The 95% confidence interval for control did not include zero [.08, .48], but did for sincerity [−.04, .20] and sadness [−.13, .05], indicating that only perceived control mediated the relationship between display type (open vs. PR) and competence.

### Hypothesis 3: Perceived Sincerity as a Mediator

As predicted, PR ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) was rated as more sincere than closed ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .75$ ), but did not differ from open ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $p > .27$ ),  $F(2, 156) = 7.08$ ,  $p < .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ . There were no main or interaction effects for protagonist sex ( $F_s < 1.37$ ,  $p_s > .25$ ), so we collapsed across protagonist sex for the mediation analysis.

We used the same bootstrapping procedure to test for mediation as described in Study 1. Display type (0 = Closed, 1 = PR) was entered as the predictor, perceived control, sincerity, and sadness as mediators, and perceived competence as the outcome variable (sections marked S2 in Figure 3). The overall model was significant,  $F(4, 97) = 8.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r^2 = .25$ . Display type significantly predicted sincerity and sadness, but was not related to control. In turn, sincerity and control predicted competence, while perceived sadness was not related. The 95% confidence interval for sincerity did not include zero [.03, .42], but it did for control [−.10, .23] and sadness [−.18, .18], indicating that only perceived sincerity mediated the relationship between display type (closed vs. PR) and competence.

## Discussion

In Study 2, we replicated the findings from Study 1 supporting Hypothesis 1 in that protagonists described as displaying PR were perceived as more competent than protagonists described as displaying open or closed sadness. As in Study 1, PR was rated as having more sadness than closed, ruling out the possibility that PR is perceived as more competent because the protagonist is perceived as having less emotion. Unlike Study 1, we found that open was rated as marginally more sad than PR. However, as the mediation analyses demonstrate, perceived level of sadness does not explain how display type is related to competence.

Supporting Hypothesis 2, we replicated the results of Study 1's mediation analysis demonstrating that perceived control explains why PR was rated as more competent than open. Furthermore, Hypothesis 3 was supported in that sincerity explained why PR was rated as more competent than closed. Thus, being perceived as having an honest display of emotion is not enough to signal the capacity for competence. The observer must also be able to infer that authentically felt emotion includes the individual's acknowledgment of that emotion (the sincerity component of authenticity; Salmela, 2005).

## General Discussion

Two studies demonstrate that people believe that expressing sadness enhances competence in performing actions unrelated to the emotion-evoking event if the emotion is expressed in a way that conveys that it is both genuinely experienced and acknowledged, and clearly under control. Compared to open and closed expressions of sadness, PR displays were consistently rated as reflecting the most competence. High ratings of competence occurred for PR even though PR was rated as displaying as much sadness as the open expression and more sadness as the closed expression. Our results are consistent with other work that shows emotion control by itself does not lead to perceived competence (Butler et al., 2003; Matsumoto et al., 2005; Warner & Shields, 2009b). Observers must believe that the protagonist's emotion is both present and acknowledged by the protagonist to contribute to perceived competence. Mediation analyses revealed that PR was rated more competent than open expressions because protagonists described as displaying PR were perceived as more controlled. At the same time, PR was rated as more competent than closed expression because protagonists described as displaying PR were perceived as more cognizant of their own authentic emotions. Last, we found that PR was assessed similarly for both female and male protagonists.

Overall these results provide evidence challenging the long-standing view that Westerners simply perceive emotions as interfering with competence. Rather, the results



suggest that North Americans view emotions as a natural and necessary part of life (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994) and support Shields' (2002) assertions that a valued method for expressing emotions entails displaying authentically felt emotion in a controlled manner. The findings linking authenticity with competence suggest that people recognize the positive value of emotions, even for sadness, an emotion typically associated with incompetence (Tiedens, 2001).

Importantly, these findings also extend work on display rules (e.g., Ekman, 1993; Matsumoto et al., 2005) and emotion intelligence (e.g., Salovey & Grewal, 2005), that associate control with competence in handling the emotion-evoking event. Our results suggest that emotions, additionally, can signal competence in performing subsequent actions unrelated to the emotion-evoking event. In other words, emotions are believed able to positively affect competence in domains beyond the immediate emotion-eliciting situation.

One alternative explanation for our findings is that recognizing one's own emotion is functionally equivalent to exercising expressive control. The correlation between recognizing one's own emotion and controlling that emotion, however, is small ( $r(161) = .22, p < .01$ ). This suggests that people believe that PR is not simply about expression management, but instead conveys that the individual's expression and felt emotion are working in harmony.

The absence of gender differences in the association between PR and competence makes sense if PR, as the present studies suggest, is regarded as a generally desirable emotional display (Shields, 2002). Furthermore, this absence supports other research revealing no gender differences in ratings of the protagonist (Brescoll & Uhlman, 2008; Lewis, 2000). One reason that we did not find differences is that the emotion display was unambiguous, allowing participants to judge the protagonist based mostly on the emotion display. Shields (2002) argues that, when a situation is clearly unambiguous, gendered beliefs about emotion, like other gendered beliefs, are less likely to inform perceptions than when the situation is ambiguous. Another explanation is that gender or other group differences might occur, but they would be expected largely in beliefs about who is more likely to display PR within particular contexts (Warner & Shields, 2007) or beliefs about certain protagonists' capacity to achieve PR for certain emotions. For example, would participants believe that ingroup and outgroup members are equally likely to display PR in an anger-evoking situation? Or would a process akin to *infrahumanization* occur (Leyens et al., 2003), where outgroup members are perceived as only able to display emotions in a basic way, such as an open display, and not be ascribed a more complex display, such as PR?

While we demonstrate that PR is believed to signal competence for sadness, an emotion associated with incompetence, future work should examine whether PR similarly signals competence for a broader set of emotions. For example, anger is often perceived as an emotion that demon-

strates competence, especially relative to sadness (Tiedens, 2001; Timmers et al., 2003). Thus, it would be useful to examine whether an open display of anger is as or more related to competence than PR in situations unrelated to the emotion-evoking event. We do not propose that PR is the only valued expressive form, but one relevant to situations in which self-control and control of the situation are valued features. Shields (2002) proposed that open expressions of prosocial emotions would be the valued form of display of felt emotions, especially in situations of nurturance and caring (e.g., expressing positive emotions to a child; expressing love to a romantic partner). In these arenas, the goal of the expression is to create an emotional connection, and thus the recipient may respond more positively to open displays of emotion than PR displays. In arenas such as the workplace (Kramer & Hess, 2002), where competence, rather than emotional connection, is a priority, joy and love emotions may be more positively evaluated if expressed as PR. Further research is needed to identify the boundary conditions when open expression (or closed expression) is more valued than PR.

We used vignettes as stimulus materials as they are useful when measuring how people view and understand emotions (Parkinson & Manstead, 1993). The written vignettes enabled us to control presentation of the expressive styles in a social context. Having established that PR is valued for its representation of the individual's experience as both genuine and controlled, it will be useful for future research to explore PR employing other methods, because in some ways vignettes deviate from the typical way that individuals encounter emotions in everyday life. Visual displays of PR via a movie of an individual's expressions would be more representative of the cues that perceivers encode and would enable us to capture the temporal relation of expression with ratings of competence. Also, in the instructions we asked participants to pay attention to the protagonist's expression, something that a person would likely do naturally if encountering a person displaying emotions in real life. Furthermore, the vignettes provided the perceiver with background knowledge of the antecedents of the protagonist's emotional state, to which perceivers often do not have access. Thus, with a vignette, the perceiver has more information from which to draw conclusions of competence than simply the PR display itself. Katz (1999) suggests that sadness is viewed more positively when the expression occurs in reaction to a situation that is out of one's control, such as the death of the family dog in our vignettes, more so than situations that are in one's control, such as a personal failure. It is possible that knowledge of the antecedent information may have enhanced the perception of competence in the present study. However, we would propose that it is the PR display itself that dictates competence by demonstrating one's skill at managing the emotion, and will explore this in future research.

Finally, one reason for the belief in emotion's capacity to contribute to competence is the belief that one can draw on the emotion itself for constructive purposes (Shields,

2002; Shields & Warner, 2008). For example, interviews with Olympic wrestlers showed that they believe that the energy of intense emotions before matches can be drawn on to perform better (Gould et al., 1992). There is a sense that sincere emotions have a power that can be harnessed, and if controlled correctly, a person can perform more competently than if the emotion had never been present. Participants in our studies may have perceived the vignette protagonists in this way, believing that the emotional experience would serve as motivation for future actions the protagonist was to undertake. In current work, we are examining the extent to which people perceive that emotions' energy can be channeled to aid in goal achievement, and whether it is this channeling that leads to greater perceived competence (Warner, Zawadzki, & Shields, 2012).

In sum, we find that people believe that sad protagonists are more competent in a situation unrelated to the sadness-evoking situation when sadness is described as present and acknowledged yet controlled, than if the sadness is displayed openly or completely suppressed. We show that PR combines felt emotion, expressive control, and insight into emotion as a template for the "right" way to show genuine feelings. Thus, while a common belief in Western society is that emotion is a threat to competence, especially sadness, we demonstrate that this is not always the case.

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Matthew J. Zawadzki

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Department of Psychology  
115c Moore Building  
University Park, PA 16803  
USA  
E-mail mjz172@psu.edu