Fitness is a battle: Examining how standardized Les Mills Choreographies are transmitted and localized in the Philippine Setting

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Abstract

Health and fitness activities have become increasingly popular ways to spend leisure time in the Philippines. This is seen in the increasing popularity of outdoor running and the proliferation of international fitness chains, or gyms, throughout the country. This paper focuses on a particular set of activities that gym members partake in, which are the group exercise programs licensed by the international fitness brand Les Mills International (LMI). Attendees of LMI group exercise programs burn calories by imitating choreographed moves produced in the LMI headquarters in New Zealand, which are performed by an instructor in the Philippines. Choreographies are transmitted from one part of the global economy to another through technological mediation as well as through a network of individuals who ensure that choreographies are transmitted as uniformly as possible. Instructors, however, are not only responsible for delivering choreography, they are also tasked to create an atmosphere designed to excite participants into joining in the movements. Instructors are thus placed in a dual role of presenting a uniform choreography, which cannot be changed, while creating a fitness atmosphere that appeals to their local attendees. Using qualitative research methods, such as content analysis, participant observation and key informant interviews, this paper examines the two aspects of the fitness experience that instructors are meant to deliver, and discusses how they negotiate between having to present a strictly defined choreography, while creating a fitness atmosphere that is appealing to local attendees.

Keywords: Les Mills; globalization; group exercise; choreography; organization.

Introduction

In late October and early November of 2011, fitness instructors of Les Mills International (LMI) group exercise classes congregated in Auckland, New Zealand for the filming of a DVD (NZ Glen, 2011) containing the new choreographies for the various exercise programs offered by the organization. About five months later, group exercise instructors in the Philippines were going through the process of studying a patterned set of movements, referred to as choreography, for the classes that they teach. This involved repeatedly viewing copies of the videos of the choreographies that were filmed five months earlier, as well as a group exercise session where they got to experience the routines as their attendees would, a workshop where new techniques

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and particular movements were discussed. The instructors’ preparation work is done to ensure
that they can present the choreography to clients of the widely proliferating health club chains, or
gyms, throughout the Philippines.

The growth of fitness chains throughout the Philippines comes together with a larger
trend in the country for using leisure time for health and fitness activities (Enverga 2011). In the
past five years, outdoor running has become a popular trend among Filipinos, with running
events occurring every weekend of the year now. The most widely attended running events are
participated in by thousands of people. With regard to health clubs, the two most popular health
club chains in the country are Fitness First, which originated in the United Kingdom, and Gold’s
Gym, which comes from the United States. Both chains offer group exercise classes licensed
from LMI, but the former has had them for longer than the latter.

LMI, a fitness organization, which has existed since 1997, offers a total of ten group
exercise programs, which are based on different types of movements. These programs are:
BODYATTACK, BODYCOMBAT, BODYJAM, BODYPUMP, BODYSTEP, BODYVIVE,
RPM, SH’BAM, BODYFLOW or BODYBALANCE, and CXWORX. LMI is said to be in
14,000 fitness clubs in 80 countries. It is thus recognized as the “world’s biggest producer of
branded fitness classes” (Parviainen, 2011). Its success relies on its ability to McDonaldize
group exercises. That is, LMI has developed a way to transmit its choreographies to its licensed

1 According to the LMI website, the descriptions for the group exercise programs are as follows: BODYATTACK is
“sports inspired interval training”; BODYCOMBAT is a martial arts inspired workout; BODYJAM is an exercise
that uses the latest dance styles; BODYPUMP, the original LMI workout, is a barbell class that sculpts and tones the
body; BODYSTEP is a step cardio workout; BODYVIVE is a low-impact whole body workout that uses balls, tubes
and body weight to boost fitness and core strength; RPM is an indoor cycling workout; SH’BAM is another dance-
based workout, which uses shorter routines than BODYJAM; BODYBALANCE, also known as BODYFLOW, is a
Yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates based workout; and CXWORX is a short workout for strengthening and toning the body.
2 McDonaldization is a term formulated by Ritzer (1993) to discuss how societies have become increasingly rational,
whereby efficiency, calculability, predictability and control are valued. Consequently, cultural products by
mcdonaldized institutions are standardized, replicable and are presented in almost the same way despite local
context.
instructors in a uniform manner. Parviainen (2011) discussed that this is done through vertical and horizontal duplication. The former refers to the organization’s ability to transmit choreography from one individual body to another through imitation. The latter refers to LMI’s “delivery model that can be used across countries and ethnic differences”. As such, the fitness organization’s success relies on its ability to transmit choreography and its use of choreographies that are easily imitated despite differences in cultural background.

**Problem Statement**

In the Philippines, all of the LMI programs are offered except for CXWORX. Each program releases a new set of choreography and music four times a year, which instructors have to learn and present to attendees of their classes. Apart from learning and demonstrating movements from LMI, group exercise instructors are also tasked with creating an atmosphere that would excite participants into doing the routines. This often requires them to make use of more specific knowledge, which manifests in their speech, personality and demeanour in class. As such, instructors serve as the locus in which choreography and presentation exist. On the one hand, they are tasked with studying an unchangeable set of movements that their attendees imitate, while on the other hand, they have to cultivate personalities that would induce their clients to participate actively. Both factors affect the way that participants experience the group exercise classes they attend. This paper, which is about the creation of an LMI fitness experience in the Philippines, focuses on two aspects of the creation of an LMI class. First, it examines LMI’s organizational structure and discusses the ways that training and directives are used to regulate the way that instructors teach in class. Second, the paper focuses on the ways that the
two facets of the instructor’s role are carried out and negotiated by individuals. As such, it has the following research questions:

1. As an organization, how does LMI regulate its instructors through standardized rules and training?
2. How are LMI choreographies transmitted from the headquarters in Auckland, New Zealand to the individual instructors in Manila, the Philippines?
3. How do LMI instructors in the Philippines apply the concept of fitness magic to create an atmosphere in their classes that would energize attendees into actively participating?

Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

The arguments made in this paper are rooted in literature on globalization and organizations, and the production of culture. This section is divided into three parts. It begins with an examination of the role of globalization in allowing for the transmission of ideas across physical territories, and its consequences on organizations. The second part of this section focuses on organizations and how they are influenced by globalization. The following section discusses culture and the utility of studying how cultural products are produced. Apart from discussing pertinent works, this section also relates the literature to the transmission of LMI choreography, which is this paper’s main empirical issue.

Globalization and Localization

Globalization is a force that has characterized and shaped social interactions at present. It has led to the blurring of conceptual boundaries that were, hitherto, considered fixed, such as the boundary between local and global. In the present social milieu, the global has clearly penetrated
the local, but at the same time, the local has attempted to reassert itself in the face of large global forces. Globalization has thus led to the adoption of cultural practices that are no longer localized (Giddens, 2000). Appadurai (1996), states that, “the global condition interposes localities and identities...leading to the deterritorialization of cultures”. In other words, the coming of globalization has led to the breakdown of geographically-bounded cultural practices, with such trends as transnationalism and postnationalism becoming increasingly prevalent as the idea of an essential culture contained in a nation breaks down.

Globalization, which entails the rapid movement of goods, people, ideas and capital across territorial boundaries, has led some scholars to claim that the world is moving towards a homogenized culture where brand names of multinational corporations are omnipresent, and people are forced to consume similar items regardless of preference or cultural affinity (Barber, 1997). At the same time, Kloos (2000) has argued that globalization is matched by a process of localization. That is, as globalization induces the similarities to form among people, it also leads to assertions of local specificity. A similar argument was made by Miller (2010) who discussed how material culture products gain different meanings in different localities, though they may be homogeneous throughout the world.

Cultural products are thus affected by forces of globalization and localization, and Les Mills choreographies are no exception. The organization achieved its large-scale reach by taking advantage of the communications technologies and trade networks that have engendered global interconnectivity. At the same time, however, this paper discusses how local specificities are reasserted in the process of presenting the LMI choreographies to participants of group exercise classes. Part of the role of a group exercise instructor in the Philippines is to create an atmosphere that would excite local attendees into carrying out the choreography that was
produced elsewhere. Thus, like other cultural products, LMI choreographies are influenced by both globalization and localization.

Organizations

Earlier literature on organizations focused on increasing worker productivity\(^3\) and rationality\(^4\) in organizations. The approaches used in such works were critiqued in recent years for being too focused on increasing outputs and efficiency. Whereas organizations in the past were characterized as hierarchical, where a single agent commands subordinates, it is argued that this model is no longer applicable since “the capacity of central authority to maintain intelligibility, command authority, act rationally, possess superior knowledge and make autonomous decisions [are] all diminishing” (Gergen 2001, p.143) due to global expansion and the spread of information and communications technologies. As an alternative, scholars began studying the cultures of organizations, focusing on the symbols and meanings that are commonly used therein (Thatchenkery 2001).

This paper is rooted in both traditions of studying organizations. On the one hand, it examines LMI as an organization, and focuses on the bureaucratic structures that allow it to

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\(^3\) One starting point in discussions on organizations is the scientific management perspective of Taylor (1964) whose preoccupation was with raising productivity of organizations. His belief was that optimum productivity could be achieved by focusing on the individual worker. Another element of scientific management includes “inducing and then training and helping the workman work according to the scientific method” (Taylor 1964), which entailed providing the proper incentives and the proper type of working environment so that the worker would be able to work at optimum efficiency.

\(^4\) Rationality in organizations is seen in the work of Weber (1978) who argued that organizations are most efficient when they are rational bureaucracies. For him, rational bureaucracies are characterized by seven characteristics: a continuous rule-bound conduct of business, a specific sphere of competence, a hierarchy of offices, the use of technical rules or norms to regulate conduct, a separation between administrative staff and ownership of the means of production and administration, an absence of appropriation of his official position by the incumbent, and the use of writing to communicate administrative acts, rules and decisions. He argues that the “rational...is capable of application in all kinds of situations and contexts. It is the most important mechanism for the administration of everyday affairs” (Weber 1978, p.220). The advantage of rational authority, compared to traditional and charismatic authority is its consistency, which is due to its reliance on abstract rules.
standardize its instructors. On the other hand, local specificity is seen in the ways that instructors apply the knowledge and information that is transmitted to them from LMI headquarters.

*Cultural Production*

The production of culture paradigm is one of the significant sociological approaches to the study of culture. To use the production of culture perspective entails examining the processes and structural factors that shape cultural products (Peterson and Berger, 1971). Peterson (1990), for example, discussed how the advent of rock music came about not as a result of changes in the *zeitgeist*. Rather, it was influenced by changes in “law, technology, industry structure, organisation structure, occupational career and market”. To put it another way, the popularity of such artists as Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Little Richard was more a result of changes in the way the music industry functioned than to factors that are endogenous the music genre itself.

This paper has its roots in the production of culture paradigm because it examines the process by which LMI group exercise classes are delivered in the Philippines. Two aspects of the production process are investigated here. First, the paper examines the organizational structure and networks of individuals that are responsible for the “vertical transmission” (Parviainen 2011) of LMI choreography. That is, the technologies and techniques employed to pass on the choreography prescribed by LMI for its instructors throughout the world. The second aspect of the paper examines individual instructors’ experiences in creating an atmosphere that is conducive to active participation in their classes. Unlike LMI choreography transmission, this aspect is much more individually-based, and far less rigid in terms of execution. It may be thought of as the ways that group exercise instructors localize the choreographies for their own attendees, of which, there are many strategies. This paper thus examines the production of an
LMI class from two perspectives. First, it is seen as a product that is driven by globalization through an organization and its agents. Second, it is localized by an instructor who is charged with presenting the choreography in a way that is appealing to class participants.

**Methodology**

This paper makes use of a qualitative methodology, using the techniques of content analysis, participant observation and key informant interviews. The varied methods are employed to provide different views on the production of an LMI class in the Philippines. The data collected from each of the methods were triangulated to increase the validity of the observations. In this paper, content analysis was done by examining documents produced by LMI, such as training manuals and the company website. Information related to organizational structure, culture and training of instructors was noted down and analyzed.

Participant observation of LMI group exercise classes took place in four health clubs in the city of Manila. The writer is experienced in doing LMI classes, thus having some exposure to the format and patterns inherent in the different programs. Observation notes were taken down during attendance of classes in five programs: RPM, BODYPUMP, BODYCOMBAT, BODYATTACK and BODYJAM. Of particular interest to the researcher were the behaviour and attitude of the instructor and whether or not this stimulated excitement for performing the movements. In addition, the cues that the instructor made and the things that they said were recorded for later cross-referencing with content analysis data and key informant interview data.

Six key informants were interviewed for this paper, and the basic selection criteria in having them participate was that they be trained in presenting at least one LMI program, and that they teach at least one class a week. In this study, the instructors varied in terms of the number of
years they have been teaching, and in terms of the number of LMI programs that they teach. The profiles of the key informants are below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Name</th>
<th>Year Trained as LMI Instructor</th>
<th>Programs Trained In</th>
<th>Number of LMI Classes Taught per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 1</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>BODYCOMBAT, BODYPUMP, BODYSTEP, BODYATTACK</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 2</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>BODYJAM, BODYPUMP, BODYVIVE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 3</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>BODYCOMBAT, BODYPUMP, BODYSTEP</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 4</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>RPM, BODYPUMP</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 5</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>BODYATTACK</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 6</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>RPM, BODYPUMP, BODYBALANCE</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions mainly focused two topics: first, on the manner by which choreography was transmitted to them; and second, on the way that they try to create an exciting class atmosphere. The interviews made use of open-ended questions, thereby allowing the informants freedom to lead the discussions, and they lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half.

**Findings**

**LMI as a Group Fitness Organization**

Les Mills International may technically be defined as an organization, because it possesses many of the characteristics of an organization, including a hierarchy of offices, the use
of technical rules or norms to regulate conduct, the use of writing to communicate administrative acts, rules and decisions\textsuperscript{5} (Weber 1978) and an organizational culture (Hofstede et al. 2010). LMI makes use of both aspects to regulate the performance of its instructors. It creates standards and regulations that instructors must abide by. LMI mcdonaldizes (Ritzer, 1993) its group fitness classes to make them consistent and predictable to consumers. Control over instructors is exercised in three ways: uniform training modules, a centralized system for certification, and the imposition of rules that instructors must abide by.

One of the first ways that LMI standardizes its instructors is through the uniform training modules that all of them undergo. The training is handled by people who have been certified by LMI to teach new instructors, thereby ensuring that the organization controls much of what is initially taught. As one key informant related, his module training was run by an Australian instructor sent by Les Mills to train them\textsuperscript{6}. It is during such occasions that new potential instructors learn how to properly execute the movements specific to their LMI program, and are briefed on the “personality” of their program, which refers to traits that instructors have to embody while teaching. So, if an instructor is teaching BODYPUMP, they must exhibit strength and tone by “looking fit and looking like someone who lifts weights”. While if they teach BODYCOMBAT, they must appear empowered and unleash the inner warrior, which means demonstrating martial arts moves with precision and power\textsuperscript{7}.

Apart from program-specific information, however, new instructors are oriented on the criteria for having an effective class, as well as the culture that Les Mills tries to instil in the people who deliver its programs. A set of ideas that is central to LMI instructors are the “five key elements”. One key informant discussed that in his training, he was told that to be an effective

\textsuperscript{5} For a brief description on the organizational structure of LMI, refer to Education for Enterprise (2012).
\textsuperscript{6} Key Informant 6.
\textsuperscript{7} Key Informant 2.
LMI instructor is to be “guided by: Choreography, Technique, Coaching, Connection and Fitness magic”\textsuperscript{8}. The informant added that the five elements are what characterize the experience of an LMI class. Thus, it is not enough to know the choreography and how to execute them, it is also necessary to be able to explain, or coach, the movements, connect to the audience, and ensure that attendees see the class as more than just exercise, which LMI refers to as fitness magic. The significance of the elements is seen in that they serve as the structure for instructor training modules. When asked about his experience training to be a BODYJAM instructor, one key informant summarized it as “Three days, explaining the concept of the program and the five key elements. One day was devoted to the first two elements, the second day, the next two elements, and the fifth element was referred to the third day”\textsuperscript{9}. Thus, the five key elements serve as the basic ideas that all LMI instructors must learn.

In addition to learning the essentials of an LMI class, instructors were also familiarized with the LMI culture, which, according to one key informant, is loosely based on the culture of New Zealand. At the end of training, she said, “we would rub our noses against each other’s, we had a secret handshake, and we had a greeting that all Les Mills instructors know”\textsuperscript{10}. Undergoing the training module was also a way that instructors were integrated with the larger LMI community. Thus, the standardization of the training module ensures that all instructors are aware of the organization’s criteria for a successful class, and they are indoctrinated into the culture that all members of LMI share.

Apart from initial training modules, the standardization in LMI is also seen in the way that it allows instructors to advance in the organization. In LMI, there are levels that an instructor can go through in order to advance in the LMI hierarchy, these are: LMI Certified Instructor,

\textsuperscript{8} Key Informant 1. 
\textsuperscript{9} Key Informant 2. 
\textsuperscript{10} Key Informant 3.
LMI Advanced Instructor and LMI Elite Instructor (Les Mills International 2011). Each stage in the process requires training modules and assessments by LMI itself. In the Philippines, instructors are encouraged to be at least LMI Certified Instructor level. When asked about his experience getting certification, one key informant, a BODYATTACK instructor for 2 years, related:

“I asked one of my co-instructors to take a video of me teaching one full class with some of the participants in frame. Les Mills needed to see that I knew the choreography, had the ability to coach and motivate. The video was sent outside the country for assessment by Les Mills who gave my certification”\(^{11}\).

Thus, there is an element of standardization in the process of instructor certification. Instructors are aware of what is expected of them, and LMI assesses to make sure that the person teaching in the video meets the criteria of the organization. In addition, the requirement that the video be sent elsewhere for evaluation suggests that the process of clearing an instructor is a centralized process in LMI. Certification must be granted by LMI agents throughout the world. This ensures that the instructors who deliver the group fitness classes conform to the organization’s acceptable standard.

Gaining higher levels of certification follows just as centralized a process in the sense that instructors aspiring for Advanced Instructor status need to be trained in Advanced Instructor Modules (AIMs). One instructor who was interviewed stated that, “In the Philippines, it is not advantageous to go up in training levels because there aren’t that many opportunities to use it unless you are a program head”\(^{12}\). In the Philippines, national program heads manage the instructors of each LMI program. They usually have AIM training, which they had to fly to other countries for because the training modules could only be offered by high-level LMI agents. Thus, as instructors rise in the LMI ranks, they are more exposed to LMI’s centralized structure. Rising

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\(^{11}\) Key Informant 4.
\(^{12}\) Key Informant 2.
in the ranks of LMI not only requires that instructors comply with the standards and training, they are also compelled to be more deeply integrated into the organization’s structure for instructor training.

Another significant aspect that makes LMI an organization is the use of rules to regulate the behaviour of instructors. This is seen, for example, in the standardization of classes. According to one key informant, “There is a standard, people are encouraged to teach the same”\textsuperscript{13}. When one attends an LMI class, there are characteristics that are similar, regardless of geographic location. In order to achieve this, instructors all undergo almost identical training, and are held to comparable standards with one another. Furthermore, they are bound by similar restrictions that are set by LMI regarding the teaching of classes. One such rule that was mentioned by a key informant, who is a BODYJAM instructor, prevents the use of songs prior to the release of BODYJAM \textsuperscript{39}\textsuperscript{14}. A similar rule is seen in RPM, where instructors are told to avoid doing songs released prior to RPM \textsuperscript{29}\textsuperscript{15}.

LMI may thus be seen as an organization with a structure that regulates the behaviour of its instructors. At the same time, however, it possesses a culture that it tries to instil the people that represent it. The preceding discussion on LMI’s structure and culture serve as starting points on which to launch the subsequent discussions on choreography transmission and the creation of a class.

\textit{Transmitting Choreography from Auckland to the Philippines}

The transmission of choreography from Les Mills headquarters in Auckland to the Philippines is characterized by a structured process of information dissemination that involves

\textsuperscript{13} Key Informant 2.
\textsuperscript{14} Key Informant 2.
\textsuperscript{15} Key Informant 5.
both technologically-mediated as well as physical\footnote{The use of the term physical is akin to the definition employed by Shields (2003) who contrasts the virtual and the physical, as two aspects of reality. The former refers to more ephemeral aspects of reality, such as memory, thought or images, while the latter refers to tangible aspects of reality. In this paper, physical ways of transmitting choreography are differentiated from technologically-mediated forms, which are exemplified in videos.} ways of transmitting choreography. Once a new set of choreography and movements, referred to as a “release”, is made available by Les Mills, instructors are able to order DVDs from the organization. DVDs contain a video of a class taught by the designated Program Head of the LMI program, and serve as instructors’ first exposure to the release. Therein, the National Program Heads demonstrate the movements that correspond to the music selected, and show the recommended ways that movements should be taught to participants in a class.

Apart from learning the movements through a DVD, instructors also attend Quarterly Workshops, also known as master classes. One LMI instructor who has taught programs for five years, and currently teaches BODYPUMP, BODYJAM and BODYVIVE, mentioned that master classes are when instructors experience the new release the way that class attendees would. According to him, Quarterly Workshops are run by “the assigned head teacher of a particular program”\footnote{Key Informant 2.}. Thus, LMI choreographies are also transmitted to instructors through Quarterly Workshops that are taught by agents who occupy higher positions in the LMI organizational hierarchy by virtue of their advanced certifications.

Another key informant, an LMI instructor for seven years, who is currently Philippine head for one program, remarked that watching the Quarterly Workshops are integral to instructors’ education of the release, but these are supplemented by another instrument referred to as tuitions. He says that, “for us to get the ‘feel’ of the program's release, we attend Quarterly Workshops first, then we understand the release more by attending tuitions in which the release
focus and feel are...discussed more”. As such, tuitions are different from master classes because they are occasions in which instructors discuss the specifics about how to deliver the release to participants. Like the Quarterly Workshops, tuitions are run by the Philippine heads for each program. When asked about where the discussion points for the tuitions came from, one key informant stated that, “Usually Les Mills sends in this manual highlighting the innovations, the new moves in the release and the focus of each track.” Thus, the instructors’ learning of choreography is highly structured and entails direct transmission of information from LMI in Auckland to the Philippines.

Making an Exciting Class

Once an instructor has satisfactorily learned the choreography of a new release, the next stage of the process is to teach the choreography in a class. Apart from teaching choreography to attendees, however, LMI instructors are also tasked with creating an environment in their classes that would inspire their participants to perform the movements. This is what LMI instructors refer to as making “fitness magic”. As one key informant put it, it is more than just teaching a class, it is about “creating an experience”. When asked to elaborate, the same informant said,

“Think of the instructor as an alchemist or a wizard or whatever. He has the music, he has the program, he has the choreography, he has training. But it's also his job to pull people in. You know that effect? You get to have fun, it becomes infectious, pretty soon the whole class joins in and everybody's just having fun. So then everything is blown out of proportion. Everything rocks. And that is a magnificent class”.

Thus, an important characteristic of an LMI class is that it leaves participants with a feeling of excitement.

18 Key Informant 1.
19 Key Informant 3.
20 Key Informant 2.
Instructors in the Philippines apply fitness magic in different ways, and it varies depending on the personality of the instructor. As one instructor put it, “I make fitness magic happen by just being myself. Knowing the choreography and having confidence are also important”\(^{21}\). Thus, there is no set formula for how to make an exciting class happen. It is up to individual instructors to adapt.

At times, instructors let the music and choreography create exciting moments for them. As one RPM instructor put it, “If the music is good, you don’t have to say or do that much. Just let them (the attendees) feel the music”\(^{22}\). Fitness magic is also relatively downplayed when the releases are still new. One key informant, a BODYATTACK instructor, stated that right after the release of new choreography and music, he focuses on teaching the movements and having participants familiarize themselves with both. It is only after two weeks that he begins to focus on bringing an atmosphere of excitement to the class\(^{23}\).

Humour or props are used in order to create moments of fitness magic. As one key informant put it:

> “Fitness magic is the instructor's way of interpreting the class without compromising the other four key elements (choreography, technique, coaching and motivation)... [For example] wearing finger lights in a BODYJAM class is fitness magic. Showing extra moves like dancing during transitions in a BODYPUMP class is fitness magic. Making the class more exciting is fitness magic”\(^{24}\).

The statement above indicates that fitness magic is about instructors inserting their own personalities into the classes that they teach. Beyond knowing how to execute and teach movements, instructors are tasked to make their classes special by adding an extra element that would excite participants. The informant cited two examples of fitness magic. First, there was

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\(^{21}\) Key Informant 6.  
\(^{22}\) Key Informant 5.  
\(^{23}\) Key Informant 4.  
\(^{24}\) Key Informant 1.
the use of finger lights\textsuperscript{25} in the LMI dance class known as BODYJAM. During one of the classes where this was used, the instructor turned off the lights in the room eliciting shrieks of excitement from several attendees. After which, he turned his finger lights on, and invited participants to do the same. The lights coming from everyone’s hands in the darkened room created the effect of being in a party, which heightened attendees’ experience with the choreography. The second example cited occurs during BODYPUMP classes in which participants lift barbells and plates in order to tone their muscles. In order to diffuse the seriousness that can build up during such a class, instructors may add small dance moves during the program, which momentarily distracts participants from the difficulty of the task of lifting weights\textsuperscript{26}.

Knowledge of the participants and observation of their reactions is also said to be important to achieving fitness magic. One key informant mentioned that fitness magic is not applied the same way in all of the RPM classes she teaches. According to her:

“It is important to consider the age of the participants. In the morning, when the people are older, I try to be more ‘in the box’, controlled and focused on choreography. At night, when the participants are younger and more aggressive, I do fitness magic at night by being louder and trying to push people more”\textsuperscript{27}.

Another instructor who teaches BODYJAM, BODYPUMP and BODYVIVE classes mentioned that age of participants plays a role in the way he teaches. He mentioned that the jokes he tells, the music he plays and the difficulty of movements vary depending on the age of his attendees\textsuperscript{28}.

Another instructor mentioned that, “Older clients (attendees) are more sensitive than younger

\textsuperscript{25} Finger lights are plastic lights, about the length and width of a person’s thumb, which are secured on a person’s finger via elastic bands. They come in different colours, and in the class discussed above, all attendees had lights attached to at least two of their fingers.

\textsuperscript{26} The researcher was observing during classes where both of the incidents described took place, which is why detail is provided regarding what transpired.

\textsuperscript{27} Key Informant 5.

\textsuperscript{28} Key Informant 2.
ones, so you can be louder when your class has more young people.”

One key informant who teaches both BODYCOMBAT and BODYPUMP classes discussed that fitness level and regularity of attendance of LMI classes is another factor she considers. According to her, “When your class is full of regulars (participants who attend class on a regular basis), you do not have to focus on choreography much, just let them do their thing and try to motivate them to work harder. The opposite is true when there are a lot of newcomers.” Thus, in deciding how to make classes exciting, instructors also consider whether a class is mainly attended by regulars, or beginners. Thus, factors, such as age and regularity of attendance play a role in the way that fitness magic is delivered during a class.

The preceding discussion shows that the creation of an exciting atmosphere in class depends on what LMI instructors refer to as fitness magic. It was also discussed that fitness magic comes in many forms, depending on the personality of the instructor and the composition of the class. This final section explores the intersection between LMI as an organization and the way that instructors manifest fitness magic. The concept itself is one of the five key elements that are discussed during instructor module training. However, when asked about whether or not fitness magic is taught, all of the LMI instructors that were interviewed agreed that it cannot be taught in the same structured manner that choreography and other aspects of instructor training. Instead, fitness magic is learned through experience, through trial and error. As one key informant put it, “You try something. If it doesn’t work, then modify it or do not do it anymore. If it does work, see if it continues to work.” Another key informant also said, “You cannot be taught how to make an exciting class and how to have fitness magic. You have to discover that

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29 Key Informant 6.
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yourself. This indicates that despite the organizational structures of LMI, and their attempts to standardize all aspects of delivering group fitness classes, there is still an element of individuality and specificity in the creation of an LMI group exercise class regardless of local setting.

**Conclusion**

Using the production of culture perspective as a starting point, this paper explored the processes that allowed the leisure activity of LMI group exercise classes to occur in the Philippine setting. Using a variety of methods, it discussed LMI’s organizational structure, and examined how measures are put in place to standardize the teaching of group exercise sessions. The paper then focused on two elements that are integral to making a group fitness class run. The first aspect discussed was choreography, and the way that it is transmitted from program directors in Auckland to the individual instructors in the Philippines using both DVDs and workshops. The subsequent discussion examined how instructors make use of their training and the choreography they learned to make an exciting class for their attendees. It was revealed that the process of making a class exciting is a highly individualistic process that cannot be taught or controlled by the organizational structure of LMI. Ultimately, it is the individual instructor that serves as intersection between choreography and delivery of a class. They are sites in which standards from the organizational structure, and individualistic personality traits interface. They are the ones who make the final decisions about how choreography will be transmitted to the attendees of their class, while working within the constraints and standards set by the organization.

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In examining the way that LMI choreography is transmitted to and executed in the Philippines, this paper also touched on larger theoretical debates in the literature of globalization and organizational studies. The case of the production of LMI classes in the Philippine setting suggests that specificity and the individual are still significant to the way that cultural products are shaped prior to consumption. Much as globalization has led to a homogenization and mcdonaldization of cultural products, and organizations have attempted to centralize decision-making and certifications, the case of the LMI class still shows that instructors still make the final decisions about how to deliver choreography and motivate their classes to carry out the movements. If the leisure activity of fitness is a battle, instructors are at the front line, making tactical decisions and ensuring that people continue carrying out the choreography, and enjoy doing so.

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