

When fellow customers behave badly: Witness reactions to employee mistreatment by customers

M. Sandy Hershcovis

University of Calgary

Namita Bhatnagar

University of Manitoba

#### Author Note

M. Sandy Hershcovis, Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary; Namita Bhatnagar, Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba. This research was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. We thank Steve Granger, Lukas Neville, Valerie Shan, Nick Turner and Justin Weinhardt for providing constructive comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript. We thank Sarah McAmmond for her research assistance on the field experiment. We also thank Dr. Nicolas Roulin for his assistance with data collection and analysis. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sandy Hershcovis at [m.hershcovis@ucalgary.ca](mailto:m.hershcovis@ucalgary.ca).

### **Abstract**

In three experiments, we examined how customers react after witnessing a fellow customer mistreating an employee. In Study 1, we conducted a field experiment that examined real customers' target-focused reactions to witnessed mistreatment in the context of a fast-food restaurant. In Study 2, we replicated Study 1 findings in an on-line vignette experiment, and extended it by examining perpetrator-focused responses, and anger and empathy as parallel mediators of the hypothesized relationships. In Study 3, we examined the extent to which employee reactions to mistreatment influence witness reactions. Drawing on the deontic model of justice, we argued and found that customer mistreatment of employees leads witnesses (i.e., other customers) to leave larger tips, engage in supportive employee-directed behaviors, and evaluate employees more positively (Studies 1 and 2). We also found that witnesses develop negative treatment intentions and retaliatory intentions towards perpetrators, with anger mediating the perpetrator-focused outcomes and empathy mediating the target-focused outcomes (Study 2). In Study 3, we demonstrated that employees who respond to mistreatment uncivilly are significantly less likely to receive the positive outcomes found in Studies 1 and 2 than those who respond neutrally. We discuss the implications of our findings for theory and practice.

*Keywords:* deonance theory, witnesses, workplace aggression, workplace incivility

### **When fellow customers behave badly: Witness reactions to employee mistreatment**

“Customers are always right” is a mantra that many organizations espouse despite the deplorable ways in which some customers treat front-line service workers. Indeed, Grandey, Kern, and Frone (2007) found that mistreatment by customers occurs more often than mistreatment by coworkers/supervisors, and that such mistreatment negatively affects employee well-being above mistreatment by insiders. Moreover, a vast body of research has shown that mistreatment negatively effects target well-being, attitudes, and performance (e.g., Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Porath & Erez, 2007). The service sector accounts for 120.64 million jobs in the U.S. (United States Department of Labor, 2014), which underscores the physiological and psychological damage that such mistreatment can leave in its trail.

Workplace mistreatment, which may include verbal abuse (e.g., Grandey et al., 2007), incivility (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001), or aggression (e.g., Neuman & Baron, 2005) are all negative behaviors that may have an ambiguous (e.g., incivility, Andersson & Pearson) or clear (e.g., aggression, Neuman & Baron, 2005) intent to harm the target. Workplace mistreatment does not go unnoticed. Research has argued and found (Porath, MacInnis, & Folkes, 2010) that witnesses react negatively to the mistreatment of others. Witnessing mistreatment between employees can lead insiders (e.g., other employees) to feel emotionally drained (Totterdell, Hershcovis, Niven, Reich, & Stride, 2012) and outsiders (e.g., customers) to form negative impressions of the firm and its employees (Porath et al., 2010). These reactions may ultimately harm business, which makes witness reactions to employee mistreatment a particularly important line of inquiry.

But, how do customers react upon witnessing *fellow customers* mistreat employees? We contend that customers who witness the mistreatment may act to support and compensate employees, and punish perpetrators. According to deontic theory, people do not like to see others being mistreated, and feel the urge to rectify such an injustice (Folger, 2001). Building on this

theory, we argue that customers who witness fellow customers mistreat employees not only punish the perpetrators, but also support the targets and try to make amends.

Employee mistreatment in the service context is important to consider given the asymmetric constraints imposed by organizational policies and norms. “Service with a smile” is a well-known edict for service employees, and display rules limit the types of emotions that employees are permitted to express during customer interactions. In fact, Grandey, Rafaeli, Ravid, Wirtz, and Steiner (2010) found that while employees may express anger towards co-workers, and to a lesser degree supervisors, they may not display anger toward customers. In contrast, customers that have internalized the “customers are always right” mantra do not face such restraints on their interactions with employees. Moreover, pre-existing relationships (e.g., those rooted in power dynamics or friendships) between insiders may inhibit or encourage interventionist reactions amongst witnesses. Customers that witness other customers mistreat service employees are not bound by pre-existing relationships and have greater freedom to act.

This research makes three key contributions. First, we build on deontic theory (Folger, 2001) by examining a target-focused path to justice restoration. Research to date has focused almost exclusively on perpetrator-directed reactions to witnessed mistreatment (see Reich & Hershcovis, 2015 and Mitchell, Vogel, & Folger, 2015 for exceptions). Deonance theory argues that witnesses of an injustice become angry, and strive to restore justice by punishing perpetrators. We suggest another approach to justice restoration via target-aiding. In particular, we examine three target-directed behaviors – cognitive, affective, and behavioral – to determine whether witnesses, in addition to punishing perpetrators, also help targets (O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011). This is an important avenue of research because, while previous research has examined perpetrator-directed punishment as a method for redressing injustice, target-aiding is a more

constructive approach to justice restoration. Further, we introduce empathy, an other-focused emotion produced when people perceive that others are suffering (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987), as the deontic mechanism underlying target-directed responses. That is, whereas anger is expected to explain perpetrator-directed deontic action consistent with deontic theory, we posit that empathy explains target-directed deontic action. This study thus adds to deontic theory by considering a second – targeted-directed – pathway to justice restoration through empathy.

Second, we make an empirical contribution by examining whether the magnitude of the injustice increases the magnitude of the response. That is, when the injustice is strong, do witnesses engage in stronger target-aiding behaviors and perpetrator-punishing behaviors than when the injustice is weak? Research on workplace mistreatment has argued that different forms of mistreatment (e.g., incivility vs. aggression) are conceptually different. Incivility is lower in intensity and ambiguous in intent (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), whereas aggression is more intense and unambiguous (Neuman & Baron, 2005). However, meta-analytic research (Hershcovis, 2011) has found that regardless of the level of mistreatment, the magnitude of outcomes is the same. In a customer service context, it is important from an employee welfare standpoint to understand whether customer support would originate (at different levels of intensity) in all instances of mistreatment, or whether this support gets dampened in the face of ambiguity (e.g., incivility) or personal safety considerations (e.g., aggressive behavior).

Third, from a practical perspective, we examine whether target responses influence witness reactions. The “customer is always right” mantra assumes that employees must remain pleasant in the face of mistreatment. We test this assumption empirically by comparing witness reactions when employees respond uncivilly versus neutrally to mistreatment from customers.

### **Deonance Theory and Customer Reactions to Mistreatment**

People care about justice not only out of self-interest, but also because it is the “right thing to do” (Folger, 2001). According to deonance theory, people have a morally rooted sense of how others ought to behave; they hold themselves and others accountable for moral behavior. Deontic reactions are morally based reactions, such as righteousness or indignation in response to perceptions of unfair treatment (Folger, 2001). In the present study, we consider workplace mistreatment to be a form of unfair treatment because it violates workplace norms (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and contravenes interpersonal justice, or the degree to which people are treated with respect and dignity at work (Bies & Moag, 1986). We examine two forms of workplace mistreatment: incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and aggression (Neuman & Baron, 2005).

Deonance theory argues that people have bounded autonomy in that moral norms restrict us from acting as we please (e.g., Folger, 2001; Folger, Ganegoda, Rice, Taylor, & Wo, 2013). Folger et al. described such norms as “informal behavioral control mechanisms that dictate the appropriateness of certain types of behavior in organizational settings” (p. 909). A violation of moral norms, as conceptualized here, suggests that someone behaves in a way that they *ought not* to behave (Folger, 2001). Given its nature, workplace mistreatment arguably violates this norm; people ought not to behave in uncivil/aggressive ways towards others. Indeed, the definition of incivility includes that it is a violation of organization norms, and the definition of aggression states that targets are motivated to avoid it. Thus, both behaviors should be constrained by bounded autonomy. Therefore, people that witness customers mistreating service employees are expected to turn into deontic agents, those that act in the name of fairness (Beugré, 2010).

Folger (2001) conceptualized deonance theory as the motivational consequences that are instigated when people observe others who violate moral norms. This theory underpins a growing body of research that shows that third-parties react negatively to injustices, including

workplace mistreatment (e.g., Reich & Hershcovis, 2015; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002). For example, Turillo et al. (2002) found that witnesses engaged in retributive actions against perpetrators, even at personal cost to themselves (i.e., sacrificing their own money). Similarly, Reich and Hershcovis (2015) found that witnesses evaluated mistreatment perpetrators more negatively, and punished them by assigning them more undesirable work than their more civil counterparts. The overall findings from this literature suggest that witnesses are perpetrator-focused and punitive in their responses.

Though research has examined insider (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015) as well as outsider reactions (e.g., Porath et al., 2010) to mistreatment between employees, we know little about how customers react when *other customers* mistreat employees. We know that customers form more negative impressions of the organization when employees mistreat each other because such behavior is unprofessional and reflects badly on the organization (Porath et al., 2010). However, customer reactions to customer mistreatment are likely to be qualitatively different, because when mistreatment originates from the customer, the violation (in the eyes of the customer) is no longer one of professionalism, but one of fair treatment.

Although deontic theory emphasizes perpetrator punishment as the primary deontic reaction, O'Reilly and Aquino (2011) argued that witnesses can also respond by aiding the target. In Study 1, we focus on target-aiding behaviors in customer service settings because customers are less able to punish other customers. Indeed, doing so may itself be a norm violation (i.e., that one should stay out of others' business). Customers interact primarily with service providers, and have greater opportunity to engage in target-directed aiding behaviors.

We examine three types of target aiding: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. In terms of cognitive aiding, we examined customer evaluation of the employee's service. This form of

aiding provides long-term benefits to employees, especially when customer satisfaction driven employee incentive programs are used for employee motivation and advancement decisions (Hauser, Simester, & Wernerfelt, 1994). In terms of our affective measure, we examined customer affective support. Affective support gives recipients the feeling that they are valued and cared for (Ducharme & Martin, 2000), and typically occurs soon after they experience an injustice. Research in the mistreatment literature (e.g., Sakurai & Jex, 2012) has found that support behaviors from others can buffer its negative effects on targets. Finally, we also examine customer tipping as a direct behavioral measure. This form of aiding helps employees from a short-term financial perspective, and serves as a compensatory reward. With this type of aiding behavior, the customer sacrifices his or her own money to offset the bad behavior of a fellow customer. Research (e.g., Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1986; Turillo et al., 2002) has shown that when participants perceive an injustice, they are willing to sacrifice some of their own financial gain to punish the perpetrator and support the victim. In these studies, witnesses of an injustice gave up money that they would have otherwise earned, to take money away from a perpetrator and reallocate it to the target. In the present study, we build on this work to consider whether witnesses are willing to compensate the victim without the chance to simultaneously punish the perpetrator. That is, do witnesses try to restore justice through compensatory tipping?

Based on the deonance arguments above, we expect that:

*H1: Customers who witness another customer mistreat a service provider will be more likely to: support the target (H1a), evaluate the target positively (H1b), and leave higher tips (H1c) than customers who do not.*

## Study 1

### Method



**Design and participants.** We carried out a field experiment involving customer reactions to observing the purported neutral versus uncivil mistreatment<sup>1</sup> of a service employee by another customer (both confederates). Participants were 85 actual customers (42% female, *M* age = 31.59 years, *SD* = 9.1, age range = 19-65) of a local fast food restaurant in a mid-sized North American city. We obtained access to this research site through a graduate student who worked at the restaurant. We discussed the details and rationale for the study, our expected findings, and any potential risks with the owner, who provided written consent to conduct the study. The participants were not initially aware that they were part of a study, but were informed at the end when we thoroughly debriefed them, obtained consent, and thanked them with a \$10 gift certificate to the restaurant. This procedure is consistent with institutional review board ethics guidelines that allow researchers to obtain consent after-the-fact under special circumstances. Obtaining consent prior to the study would have primed participants that the interaction they observed was false, and we would not have been able to test our research questions. We stopped one experiment as the participant began to yell at our confederate actor<sup>2</sup>, and we removed a second case because the participant expressed suspicion that the interaction was contrived.

**Procedure and manipulations.** In this experiment, real customers (i.e., the participants) at a fast food restaurant witnessed a fellow customer (who was a confederate actor) behave either neutrally towards an employee (who was also a confederate) or mistreat the employee. We also placed a coder (blind to hypotheses) at a table near the front counter. The coder recorded the number of times the participant said “please” and “thank you”, and subjectively evaluated the

---

<sup>1</sup> Our control condition may be interpreted as civil rather than neutral because the customer used pleasantries such as “please” when addressing the server. We therefore conducted a post-hoc script comparison between a potential neutral and civil script, by removing the civil language. For example, instead of “no thanks” in response to whether the customer would like guacamole, the customer replies “No.” In a sample of undergraduate students, we assessed participants’ (*n* = 101) perceptions of incivility  $F(1, 99) = .75, p = .39$  and injustice  $F(1, 99) = .53, p = .47$  using the manipulation checks used in Study 2. There were no significant differences between the civil and neutral conditions.

<sup>2</sup> We thoroughly debriefed the customer to his satisfaction and gave him a gift certificate.

support shown by the participant towards the target following the confederate interaction. The coder also recorded all verbal statements related to the confederate interaction. The perpetrator and target remained the same throughout the study and both were female to control for possible gender effects (a cross-gender interaction might induce a power dimension)<sup>3</sup>.

We conducted the experiment during non-peak restaurant hours because we wanted to ensure that only one customer witnessed the interaction at a time. We were concerned that multiple customers might lead to diffusion of responsibility on the part of the customer (Darley & Latane, 1968). A large window allowed the confederates to see when a customer was approaching. At this point, the actor playing the customer positioned herself in front of the counter, and pretended to read the menu until the real customer (hereafter the participant) stood behind her. The actor (hereafter the perpetrator) then began either a neutral or uncivil interaction with the confederate employee (hereafter the target). The condition was determined randomly before the participant entered the restaurant, by drawing either a “neutral” or “mistreatment” slip of paper. The target responded in the same neutral way regardless of condition.

The script remained largely the same across each of the neutral and mistreatment oriented interactions (see Appendix 1), with minor verbal, intonation, and nonverbal changes (e.g., arms crossed) in the mistreatment condition. We drew on existing mistreatment scales (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Baron & Neuman, 1996; Bennett & Robinson, 2000) to develop our script for the mistreatment interaction. Our script reflects mistreatment in several ways. For instance, the perpetrator ignores the target several times, is on her iPhone through most of the interaction, and

---

<sup>3</sup> Coders and actors were trained for 15 hours prior to conducting the experiment. Two coders traded off shifts, but were trained together. After each practice experiment, we examined coder agreement, which was 100% for objective support (counting “please” and “thank you”) and about 80% for the subjective friendliness measure. In our analyses, there were no significant differences on the friendliness measure between coders. We also trained the server to react in the same neutral manner towards both the actor, and the real customer, regardless of condition.

walks out of the restaurant without saying thank you. Further, she is condescending (e.g., “this is a pretty simple order”) and sarcastic (e.g., “I said ‘to go’, so *obviously*”) to the target. These examples map onto items such as “giving someone the silent treatment”, (Baron & Neuman, 1996), “acted rudely towards someone”, (Bennett & Robinson, 2000), and “put you down or was condescending to you,” (Cortina et al., 2001). In the neutral interaction, the perpetrator uses a similar general script, but does not look at her iPhone, does not use the sarcastic tone, and responds to inquiries in a polite neutral manner.

Following the interaction, the perpetrator leaves the restaurant and the target (i.e., employee) moves on to take the order of the participant (i.e., the real customer). After the participant pays, the target asks the customer whether he/she is willing to complete a short customer service survey while waiting for the order. All participants agreed to complete the survey, which they do privately at another counter, and then place it into a locked survey box. On the survey, we assessed participant evaluations of the employee’s deservingness for an employee of the month award (see below) in addition to demographics and open-ended comments.

## Measures

***Target support.*** We assessed target support using three measures (two quantitative and one qualitative). First, the coder counted the number of times the participant used the words “please” and “thank you” during each service interaction. Second, the coder evaluated the participant’s friendliness (1 = *not at all friendly*, 5 = *extremely friendly*) towards the target. Finally, the coder recorded all comments that the participant made to the target. These responses were coded for target support and we report the qualitative findings.

**Target evaluation.** We assessed participants' evaluation of the target's service on the customer service survey by asking: "Does your server today deserve the employee of the month award?" (1 = *definitely not*, 10 = *definitely*).

**Tip percentage.** We assessed tips by leaving a tip jar with pre-counted change at the front counter<sup>4</sup>. After each condition, we emptied the tip jar and recorded the difference between the pre-counted cash and any additional tip. Similarly, when customers paid by debit/credit card, we recorded the tip amount. Tips were calculated as a percentage as tips vary based on the total bill.

**Manipulation check.** Due to the nature of the study, we could not conduct a direct manipulation check during the experiment because it would have primed participants that they were involved in a study (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 2000). However, coders recorded the participants' comments to the target following the interaction – these comments were indicative of perceived target mistreatment (reported below).

We also conducted a manipulation check on the scripts used in our experiment (see Appendix 1). We randomly assigned undergraduate participants at a midsize North American university situated in the same city ( $N = 98$ ) to read either the neutral or the mistreatment script. We then asked participants, on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) the extent to which they agreed with five items (i.e., "the customer insulted the employee", "the customer belittled the employee", "the customer made the employee feel incompetent," "the customer talked down to the employee" and "the customer was rude to the employee", Cronbach's  $\alpha = .98$ ). These items are adapted from Cortina et al.'s (2001, 2013) measures, which include for example: "made insulting or disrespectful remarks about you," "accused you of incompetence", and a range of items capturing rudeness (e.g., "interrupted or spoke over you",

---

<sup>4</sup> Change was consistent across all participants and the confederate customer did not leave a tip.

“doubted your judgement...”). Responses to the five items were averaged to form a customer mistreatment index. Results of an analysis of variance with the incivility condition as the independent variable and the mistreatment manipulation check as the dependent variable showed that participants in the mistreatment condition ( $n = 49$ ) were significantly more likely to rate the customer as rude ( $M = 5.95$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) than those in the neutral condition ( $n = 49$ ,  $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ,  $F(1, 96) = 128.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .57$ ).

## Results

**Test of hypotheses.** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations appear in Table 1. To investigate our hypotheses, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) using mistreatment condition (mistreatment vs. neutral) as our independent variable and target support, (please and thank you counts, friendliness), tip percent, and target evaluations as our dependent variables. The overall test was significant,  $F(5, 79) = 4.82$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .24$  and we proceeded to examine the between-subject effects. Given that our hypotheses are theory-driven and directional, we conducted one-tailed tests (Jones, 1954). In support of H1a, participants were more supportive of targets of mistreatment ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 2.50$ ) than non-targets ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 2.55$ ), using the “please and thank you” count,  $F(1, 83) = 3.07$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ , Cohen’s  $d = .38$ . Similarly, using the coder’s evaluation of target support (friendliness), we found the same pattern of results,  $F(1, 83) = 14.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .14$ , Cohen’s  $d = .83$ , in the mistreatment ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) and neutral ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) conditions. In support of H1b, we found a significant effect of mistreatment condition on target evaluation  $F(1, 83) = 8.51$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ , Cohen’s  $d = .63$  such that customers gave higher evaluations to targets in the mistreatment condition ( $M = 9.42$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) than the neutral condition ( $M = 8.40$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ). We also found a significant effect of mistreatment condition on tip percent,  $F(1, 83) = 3.21$ ,  $p =$

.039,  $\eta^2 = .04$ , Cohen's  $d = .40$ . In support of H1c, customers gave a higher percentage of tips to targets in the mistreatment ( $M = 11\%$ ,  $SD = 14\%$ ) than the neutral ( $M = 6\%$ ,  $SD = 7\%$ ) condition.

In terms of our qualitative results, the coder took notes on all participant interactions with the perpetrator and the target. The participant intervened in only five of the 45 mistreatment interactions (11%, 3 males and 2 females). In three instances, the participant spoke directly to the actor by stating, for example "that was very rude." In two of the instances, the participant confronted the perpetrator using body language. For example, in one instance the participant stared at the perpetrator and got into her personal space to intimidate her into stopping.

Although most of the participants failed to intervene, in 33 of the 45 uncivil interactions, the participant expressed support towards the target. These expressions of support took three forms: (1) empathy for the target, (2) anger at the perpetrator, and (3) mocking the perpetrator; these were sometimes expressed simultaneously (e.g., "some people should be embarrassed of themselves [anger]! I am very sorry [empathy]"). In 14 instances (41%), the participant expressed empathy with comments such as "sorry, that was terrible! I wanted to stop her." In 10 instances (30%), the participant mocked the perpetrator, for example by joking "don't worry, I'm not in a hurry", referencing the perpetrator's snide opening comment (see script). Finally, participants expressed overt anger in ten instances (30%; e.g., "what a bitch!").

## **Discussion**

Study 1 demonstrates that employees benefit both relationally and financially when customers are uncivil to them. Consistent with deonance theory, we found that when employees were mistreated, customers who witnessed the mistreatment provided verbal and non-verbal support, were friendlier, evaluated them more positively, and left them 83% higher tips than when employees were treated neutrally. Customers exhibited enhanced manners in the form of

verbalized “please and thank you” and other supportive comments to the mistreated employee (e.g., expressions of empathy for the employee, and anger and mockery directed toward the misbehaving customer). Despite the unpleasant experience of being mistreated by customers, employees may take some comfort from the explicit and implicit support offered by other customers. That is, witnessing customers appear to compensate for the bad behavior of other customers. It is particularly interesting that employees did nothing, except maintain the often prescribed “the customer is always right” stance (Grandey et al., 2004), to gain these benefits. That is, by virtue of using the same neutral demeanor used within neutral interactions with customers, witnesses rewarded employees who were mistreated.

Study 1 has a number of strengths. It is a naturalistic field experiment, with concomitant strong external validity, in which we observed how real customers responded after witnessing other customers mistreat employees. Moreover, we collected objective dependent variables (number of times customers said “please” and “thank you”, tip percentage, target evaluations) and qualitative customer statements to assess our hypotheses.

Despite these strengths, a number of questions remain from Study 1. First, we could not assess mediating mechanisms without revealing to customers that they were participating in an experiment. Second, in Study 1, we examined low-intensity mistreatment (i.e., incivility) in comparison to a neutral condition, but due to ethical constraints, could not determine whether higher intensity, less ambiguous mistreatment yielded stronger effects. Third, we focused only on target-directed outcomes to the exclusion of perpetrator-directed outcomes. Fourth, because we used one actor to play the perpetrator and another to play the target, there is a risk that our effects are based on actor idiosyncrasies. Finally, we held gender constant due to the potential power differences implied by gender. That is, women are historically seen as less powerful than

men due in part to stereotypes and the fact that men have historically held higher positions than women across most occupations (Cortina, 2008). Given this view, it is possible that participants perceive mistreatment directed from a male towards a female as more negative than the reverse.

To address the first four limitations, we conducted a second study aimed at replicating Study 1 findings, and extending them by: (1) examining affective mechanisms that explain witness reactions, (2) comparing neutral, uncivil, and aggressive conditions to determine whether the magnitude of mistreatment influences outcomes, and (3) introducing perpetrator- (customer-) directed outcomes. Moreover, the use of a vignette prevents any actor idiosyncrasies from influencing the outcomes. To address the gender limitation, we conducted a pilot test to assess whether gender influences customer perceptions of injustice and incivility, and found that it does not;<sup>5</sup> therefore, our vignette descriptions omit gender in Study 2.

## Study 2

### **Moral Anger and Perpetrator-Directed Action**

As described earlier, deontic theory argues that certain actions violate moral norms, and that such violations are perceived to be unjust (Folger, 2001). Folger and colleagues (e.g., Folger, 2001; Folger et al., 2013) theorized that perceived injustice drives witnesses' subsequent emotions and actions. The primary deontic emotion proposed by deontic theory is moral anger (Folger, 2001) – a temporary discrete negative emotion that arises in response to a perceived injustice (O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011). When people witness an injustice, such as workplace

---

<sup>5</sup> We conducted a 2 (customer gender: male vs. female) by 2 (employee gender: male vs. female) between subjects experiment using the same aggression vignette in Study 2, except with gender pronouns throughout. 97% of participants (n = 203) correctly recalled the gender of both the perpetrator and target. There were no significant main or interaction effects for perceived injustice or mistreatment  $F(2, 198) = .18, p = .84$ . There were also no significant effects for any of the mediations or dependent variables.



mistreatment, they intuit that something is wrong, and moral anger is roused. Anger is the driver of the deontic agents' desire to act to restore justice.

Thus, the focus of justice restoration in deontic theory is on the perpetrator. Folger (2001) argued that witnesses do not want violators to get away with unjust behaviors, and hold violators accountable by punishing them. Thus, this theory predicts that moral anger explains the relationship between witnessed mistreatment, and perpetrator-targeted punitive outcomes. Research has found that moral anger mediates the relationship between witnessed mistreatment and perpetrator outcomes when perpetrators are employees (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; Porath et al., 2010; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015; Turillo et al., 2002). However, in a service environment, perpetrator-directed action may be less straightforward because customers have little occasion to interact with other customers. Understanding whether employee mistreatment influences intentions to punish offending customers is important as such reactions may adversely affect business. That is, both customers may leave the service interaction with a negative experience.

In the present study, we examine two perpetrator-directed outcomes: perpetrator treatment and retaliatory intentions. Deontic action can take one of several forms (do nothing, aid the target, or directly/indirectly punish the perpetrator; O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011). We examine perpetrator treatment intentions as a form of indirect punishment because it involves a withdrawal of behavior (i.e., the choice to refrain from engaging in friendly and respectful interaction). Second, we examine retaliatory intentions as a more direct form of punishment, which corresponds with the notion of retributive justice. In deontic theory, retributive justice is a way to restore justice by punishing the perpetrator in a fair or symmetrical way (Folger, 2001). Given that witnesses in the present study observe mistreatment of the server, customers may think that retaliatory mistreatment of the perpetrator is a fair punishment. Thus we predict that:

*H2: Customers who witness customer mistreatment towards a service provider are less likely to hold positive treatment intentions (H2a) and more likely to hold retaliatory behavioral intentions (H2b) towards the perpetrator than customers who witness neutral treatment.*

*H3: Moral anger will mediate the relationship between witnessed mistreatment and perpetrator-directed positive treatment intentions (H3a), and retaliatory intentions (H3b).*

### **Empathy and Target-Directed Action**

The crux of deontic theory is about witness reactions to a perceived injustice, and in particular, the altruistic desire to restore justice. Although the theory focuses on perpetrator-targeted emotion and punishment, researchers have suggested that witnesses may also (or instead) aid the target (Mitchell et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011). Indeed, O'Reilly and Aquino argue that one way to aid a victim is to lend him or her a sympathetic ear, which implies that witnesses may not only experience anger for the perpetrator, but also empathy for the target. Similarly, Mitchell et al. posited that "it may also be possible for third parties to experience sympathy, compassion, or empathy for the abused [target]," and they suggest that future research should explore such target-directed emotions. Furthermore, our own qualitative findings from Study 1 showed that witnesses experienced empathy (42%) more often than anger (30%).

Empathy is defined as an other-focused emotion produced by witnessing another person's suffering (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987). Batson and colleagues (Batson et al., 1987; Batson et al., 1988) found that witnesses, upon perceiving others' distress, experience vicarious emotional arousal in the form of empathy. This empathy motivates them to altruistically reduce this distress by helping the distressed individual. In other words, Batson et al. argued that, consistent with deonance theory, a key motivational rationale for witness intervention following an empathic reaction is altruism rather than self-interest.

Integrating deonance theory, which argues that witnessing an injustice will evoke an angry response, with Batson et al.'s (1987) theory that witnessing another's distress will evoke an empathetic response, we argue that witnesses are likely to experience empathy towards the *target* in addition to anger towards the perpetrator. As noted above, perpetrator-directed anger is likely to drive perpetrator-directed action; whereas, we expect target-directed empathy to drive target-directed action. Although customers may possess negative behavioral intentions towards perpetrators, this alone may not restore justice. Short of intervention (which is rare as evidenced in Study 1 and in the literature on bystander intervention; Darley & Latane, 1968), witnesses of mistreatment in a service context can do little more than support targets. Unlike internal mistreatment between coworkers where employees have the means to punish perpetrators, customers exit the service interaction at the end of the transaction, and are unlikely to see fellow customers again. Therefore, to restore justice, they are likely to also turn their attention to the target. Thus, we hypothesize the following.

*H4: Empathy will mediate the relationship between witnessed mistreatment and target-directed support (H4a), target evaluations (H4b), and tips (H4c).*

### **Severity of the Mistreatment**

Although mistreatment in general is rare, it can range in severity, especially in the service industry where customers are not governed by organizational policies and reprimands in the same way employees would be. That is, whereas most organizations have policies regarding respectful workplace treatment that might help to curb internal employee aggression, customers do not face the same constraints. Therefore, employees may be victim to minor forms of mistreatment, such as incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), or more intense forms of mistreatment such as workplace aggression (Neuman & Baron, 2005).

Researchers have argued for the conceptual differences between incivility and more severe forms of workplace mistreatment. Incivility, unlike other forms of mistreatment, is low in intensity and ambiguous in intent (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). In contrast, workplace aggression has clear intent and is more severe. However, in a meta-analysis comparing workplace incivility to workplace bullying, Hershcovis (2011) found that the magnitude of outcomes are the same. Hershcovis argued that more severe forms of workplace mistreatment may have more severe outcomes than workplace incivility, but due to overlap in measurement between these two constructs, the data do not reflect these differences.

Given that incivility is comparatively more frequent than more severe forms of workplace aggression, we were interested in whether the magnitude of witness reactions differed depending on the nature of the mistreatment. Based on the conceptualization of incivility as a less intense and more ambiguous form of mistreatment, we expect that witnesses will be less likely to engage in positive perpetrator-directed action, and more likely to engage in positive target-directed action, when they witness incivility versus workplace aggression, respectively.

*H5: Customers who witness workplace aggression will be significantly less likely to hold positive treatment intentions (H5a) and more likely to hold retaliatory behavioral intentions (H5b) towards the perpetrator than customers who witness incivility.*

*H6: Customers who witness workplace aggression will be significantly more likely to support the target (H6a), more likely to evaluate the target positively (H6b), and leave higher tips (H6c) than customers who witness incivility.*

## **Method**

**Participants.** Participants were 183 people (50% female,  $M$  age = 34.87 years,  $SD$  = 10.92, age range = 18-68) recruited through an on-line panel provider (MTurk). Online panels

have been described as reliable sources for access to diverse types of samples (e.g., Landers & Behrend, 2015; Roulin, 2015). Participants that resided in North America were invited to take part in a 15 minute study in exchange for US\$2.

**Materials and procedure.** We conducted an on-line vignette experiment in which we manipulated the neutral, uncivil, and aggressive treatment of an employee by a customer. Participants read a vignette in which they were asked to assume the role of a customer in a fictional coffee shop called Java Time. In this vignette, participants read about a neutral, uncivil or aggressive interaction that they witnessed between the customer in front of them and the server, and then they answered questions aimed to assess the mediators (i.e., anger and empathy), the perpetrator-directed dependent variables (i.e., customer treatment and customer retaliation), and targeted-directed dependent variables (i.e., target support, target evaluation, and tip percent). See Appendix 2 for the vignette scripts.

**Perpetrator positive treatment intentions.** We assessed perpetrator positive treatment intentions with three items: “I would treat the customer kindly”, “I would treat the customer respectfully”, “I would treat the customer in a friendly manner” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha was .97.

**Perpetrator retaliatory intentions.** We assessed perpetrator retaliatory intentions with three items based on constructs from the broad aggression literature (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Neuman & Baron, 2005): “I would talk loudly about the customer”, “I would be rude to the customer”, “I would scowl at the customer” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha was .93.

**Target support.** We assessed target support using four items adapted from Ducharme and Martin (2000). The items were: “I would make the employee feel appreciated”, “I would let the

employee know they are doing a good job,” “I would be friendly towards the employee”, and I would take a personal interest in the employee” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

***Target evaluation.*** We used the same measured used in Study 1.

***Tip percent.*** Following Study 1, we assessed tips by asking what percentage tip the employee would leave (from zero to 50% in 5% increments). Tipping norms in North American coffee shops suggest that this range would adequately capture the possible range of tipping percentages plus allow the witness the opportunity to compensate.

***Anger.*** We asked participants three items used by O’Reilly, Aquino, and Skarlicki (2016) following the stem: “To what extent did the interaction between the customer and the employee make you feel the following ...” The response items were “angry at the customer,” “upset with the customer,” “and “irritated with the customer” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .96$ ).

***Empathy.*** We measured empathy using five items adapted from Batson et al. (1988). Participants were asked: “To what extent did the interaction between the customer and the employee make you feel the following towards the employee...” (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very*): “empathy for the employee”, pity for the employee,” “concern for the employee,” “protective towards the employee,” and “sorry for the employee”. Cronbach’s alpha is .96.

## **Results**

***Manipulation checks.*** We conducted two manipulations checks in Study 2. First, we used the same 5-item mistreatment manipulation check as we used in Study 1 (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .97$ ). Second, given that we base our hypotheses on deontic theory, we also checked the extent to which participants perceived the mistreatment interactions to be unjust. We measured interpersonal injustice (Bies & Moag, 1986) using Colquitt’s (2001) interpersonal justice

measure. Participants were presented with the stem: “In this scenario, the customer...” followed by four items: “treated the employee in a polite manner”, “treated the employee with dignity”, “was disrespectful towards the employee”, and “made inappropriate remarks/comments to the employee” (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha is .90.

Consistent with our manipulation, participants in the uncivil condition ( $n = 62$ ,  $M = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) and aggression condition ( $n = 61$ ,  $M = 6.47$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) were significantly more likely than those in the neutral condition ( $n = 60$ ,  $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) to perceive the offending customer as rude,  $F(2, 180) = 271.87$ ,  $p < .001$ . Further, those in the uncivil condition ( $n = 62$ ,  $M = 5.44$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) and aggression condition ( $n = 61$ ,  $M = 6.17$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) were significantly more likely than those in the neutral condition ( $n = 60$ ,  $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) to perceive the offending customer as unjust,  $F(2, 180) = 156.42$ ,  $p < .001$ . Moreover, those in the aggression condition thought that the customer was more uncivil ( $M = 6.47$ ,  $SD = .88$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and more unjust ( $M = 6.17$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ,  $p = .001$ ) than in the uncivil condition.

**Test of hypotheses.** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations appear in Table 2. As with Study 1, all main effect analyses were conducted using one-tailed tests. Further, indirect effects were requested with 90% confidence intervals to account for one-tailed testing. To investigate H1a to H1c, we conducted a MANOVA using mistreatment conditions (neutral, uncivil, aggressive) as our independent variable and target support, target evaluation, and tip percentage as our dependent variables. The overall test was significant,  $F(3, 179) = 9.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ ; therefore, we proceeded to examine the between-subject effects for the various dependent measures. In support of H1a, participants were more likely to support the target in the uncivil ( $M = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) and aggression ( $M = 6.05$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) conditions than the neutral condition ( $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ),  $F(2, 180) = 12.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ , Cohen’s  $d = .88$  and  $.55$  for

the difference between the aggression and neutral mistreatment conditions and the uncivil and neutral conditions respectively. Moreover, in support of H6a, the difference between the aggression and uncivil condition was significant ( $p = .01$ ), Cohen's  $d = .34$ .

In support of H1b, participants were more likely to positively evaluate the target in the aggression ( $M = 6.92$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ) and in the uncivil ( $M = 6.32$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ), than in the neutral ( $M = 5.62$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ ) condition,  $F(2, 180) = 6.52$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ , Cohen's  $d = .66$  and  $.34$  for the difference between aggression and neutral and uncivil and neutral conditions, respectively. Moreover, in support of H6b, the difference between the aggression and uncivil condition was significant ( $p = .04$ ), Cohen's  $d = .31$ . Finally, we found a significant effect of mistreatment condition on tip percentage,  $F(2, 180) = 5.98$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ . Participants were more likely to endorse a higher tip percentage for employees in the aggression ( $M = 25.16\%$ ,  $SD = 12.04$ ) than in the neutral ( $M = 17.58\%$ ,  $SD = 12.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ) condition, but there was no significant difference between the neutral and uncivil ( $M = 20.40\%$ ,  $SD = 11.68$ ,  $p = .10$ ) condition. Cohen's  $d = .61$  and  $.23$  for the difference between aggression and neutral and uncivil and neutral conditions, respectively. Thus, H1c was supported. Further, in support of H6c, the difference between the aggression and uncivil condition was significant ( $p = .02$ ), Cohen's  $d = .40$ .

To investigate H2a and H2b, we conducted a MANOVA using mistreatment conditions (neutral, uncivil, aggressive) as our independent variable and perpetrator positive treatment and retaliation intentions as our dependent variables. The overall test was significant,  $F(2, 180) = 21.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$ ; therefore, we proceeded to examine the between-subject effects. In support of H2a, we found that participants were less likely to endorse positive perpetrator treatment in the aggression ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ) and uncivil ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) conditions than in the neutral ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) condition,  $F(2, 180) = 16.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .15$ , Cohen's



$d = 1.05$  and  $.78$  for the difference between the aggression and neutral and uncivil and neutral conditions, respectively. Moreover, in support of H5a, there was a significant difference between the aggressive and uncivil condition ( $p = .03$ ), Cohen's  $d = .33$ . In support of H2b, we found that participants were more likely to endorse perpetrator retaliation intentions in the aggression ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ) and uncivil ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) conditions than in the neutral ( $M = 1.87$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) condition,  $F(2, 180) = 16.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.04$  and  $.65$  for the difference between the aggression and neutral and uncivil and neutral conditions respectively. Moreover, in support of H5b, the difference between the aggressive and uncivil condition was significant ( $p = .001$ ), Cohen's  $d = .43$ .

To investigate the indirect effect of witnessing mistreatment on perpetrator-directed outcomes through anger, we conducted mediation analyses using SPSS macros for bootstrapping serial indirect effects (Hayes, 2013). The macro uses ordinary least squares regression to estimate model paths. We used model 4 with target mistreatment as a multi-categorical independent variable which resulted in 2 dummy variables that assessed effects when incivility and aggression occurred. We used 5000 boot-strapped samples to calculate the point estimates of the indirect effects as well as 90% bias-corrected confidence intervals to account for one-tailed testing. In support of H3a, anger mediated the relationship between witnessing *uncivil* mistreatment and perpetrator-directed positive treatment intentions (point estimate =  $-.94$ ,  $SE = .28$ , 90%  $CI$   $-1.42$ ,  $-.51$ ). Witnessed uncivil mistreatment was positively related to anger ( $b = 2.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and anger was negatively related to perpetrator positive treatment intentions ( $b = -0.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, anger also mediated the relationship between witnessing *aggressive* mistreatment and perpetrator-directed positive treatment intentions (point estimate =  $-1.39$ ,  $SE = .40$ , 90%  $CI$   $-2.06$ ,  $-.74$ ). Witnessed aggressive mistreatment was positively related to anger ( $b =$

4.24,  $p < .001$ ), and anger was negatively related to perpetrator positive treatment intentions ( $b = -0.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In support of H3b, anger mediated the relationship between witnessing *uncivil* mistreatment and perpetrator-directed retaliatory intentions (point estimate = 0.89,  $SE = .27$ , 90%  $CI .47, 1.35$ ). Witnessed uncivil mistreatment was positively related to anger ( $b = 2.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and anger was positively related to perpetrator retaliation intentions ( $b = 0.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, anger also mediated the relationship between witnessing *aggressive* mistreatment and perpetrator-directed retaliation intentions (point estimate = 1.32,  $SE = .38$ , 90%  $CI .71, 1.96$ ). Witnessed aggressive mistreatment was positively related to anger ( $b = 4.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and anger was positively related to perpetrator-directed retaliation intentions ( $b = 0.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Similarly, to investigate the indirect effect of witnessing mistreatment on target-directed outcomes through empathy, we conducted the mediation analyses described above. In support of H4a, empathy for the target mediated the relationship between witnessing *uncivil* mistreatment and target support (point estimate = 1.05,  $SE = .25$ , 90%  $CI .71, 1.54$ ). Witnessed uncivil mistreatment was positively related to empathy ( $b = 3.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ), empathy was positively related to target support ( $b = 0.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, empathy also mediated the relationship between witnessing *aggressive* mistreatment and target support (point estimate = 1.35,  $SE = .29$ , 90%  $CI .92, 1.89$ ). Witnessed aggressive mistreatment was positively related to empathy ( $b = 3.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ), empathy was positively related to target support ( $b = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In support of H4b, empathy for the target mediated the relationship between witnessing *uncivil* mistreatment and target evaluation (point estimate = 1.85,  $SE = .46$ , 90%  $CI 1.16, 2.69$ ). Witnessed uncivil mistreatment was positively related to empathy ( $b = 3.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ), empathy was positively related to target evaluation ( $b = .59$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, empathy also mediated the relationship between witnessing aggression and target evaluation (point estimate = 2.35,  $SE =$

.55, 90% *CI* 1.47, 3.31). Witnessed aggressive mistreatment was positively related to empathy ( $b = 3.96, p < .001$ ), empathy was positively related to target evaluation ( $b = .59, p < .001$ ).

In support of H4c, empathy for the target mediated the relationship between witnessing *uncivil* mistreatment and tip percent (point estimate = 8.12,  $SE = 2.60$ , 90% *CI* 4.04, 12.48). Witnessed uncivil mistreatment was positively related to empathy ( $b = 3.11, p < .001$ ), empathy was positively related to tip percent ( $b = 2.61, p < .001$ ). Further, empathy also mediated the relationship between witnessing *aggressive* mistreatment and tip percent (point estimate = 10.33,  $SE = 3.22$ , 90% *CI* 5.19, 15.74). Witnessed aggressive mistreatment was positively related to empathy ( $b = 3.96, p < .001$ ), empathy was positively related to tip percent ( $b = 2.61, p < .001$ ).

## Discussion

Study 2 replicated Study 1 by demonstrating that customers who witness employee-directed mistreatment from other customers, were more likely to compensate for their fellow customers' bad behavior by being more supportive towards the employee, rating them higher on customer service, and leaving higher tips. Study 2 also extended Study 1 in a number of ways. First, we found that witnesses develop negative behavioral intentions towards perpetrators, consistent with research on witness reactions to insider workplace mistreatment (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). Specifically, witnesses were less likely to endorse positive treatment and more likely to endorse retaliatory intentions against perpetrators. Second, we found that anger mediated this relationship. That is, consistent with deontic theory, witnessing another customer mistreat a server gave rise to anger in response to the moral violation, and led witnesses to develop negative behavioral intentions towards the perpetrator. This extends prior research that has found that anger mediates the relationship between insider mistreatment and perpetrator-directed outcomes (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015), by

showing that unfair interactions anger other organizational patrons, and this anger could translate to negative reactions by customers towards other customers. This finding is important because it has negative implications for the service experience of both customers.

Third, we examined a new deontic mediator, target-directed empathy, and found that it mediated the relationship between witnessing mistreatment and target-directed outcomes. Research to date has largely focused on both consequences and emotions directed at the perpetrator. This study extends the deontic relationship to the target, and acknowledges that benevolent affect directed at the target yields positive target-directed outcomes. That is, there are two possible means of redressing unfair treatment, one can punish the perpetrator or one can aid the target, and different affective mechanisms explain each of these outcomes.

Finally, we found that an increase in magnitude of the injustice generally corresponds to an increase in the magnitude of the outcome. That is, witnesses of both incivility and aggression were more likely than witnesses of a neutral situation to develop negative behavioral intentions towards the perpetrator and positive intentions towards the target (except for the case of tipping where a significantly higher tip percentage resulted from aggressive but not uncivil misbehavior). Moreover, there were also significant differences between the aggression and uncivil conditions such that aggression yielded stronger negative responses toward perpetrators and supportive responses toward targets amongst witnesses. Research has argued that there are conceptual differences between incivility and aggression, but that these differences do not bear out in the current measurement (Hershcovis, 2011). The present study shows that with an increase in the intensity and intent of mistreatment, and a decrease in ambiguity, witness reactions are stronger. However, it is important to note that even minor forms of mistreatment

yielded significant negative consequences for perpetrators and positive outcomes for targets (in the form of supportive behavioral intentions and target evaluations).

Although Studies 1 and 2 collectively demonstrate that customers punish perpetrators and compensate targets on behalf of badly behaved fellow customers, a key limitation of both studies is that we do not vary the response of the server. Companies often espouse the mantra: “the customer is always right” (Grandey et al., 2004). This is reflected in our prior studies, where targets are neutral regardless of customer treatment. Our results thus assume that employees must maintain “service with a smile” to accrue the “benefits” from customer mistreatment. In our final study, we test this assumption by examining whether these benefits dissipate for targets who reciprocate uncivil treatment.

Reciprocity is a universally held social norm (Gouldner, 1960), and negative reciprocal notions of “tit for tat” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) or an “eye for an eye” personify many social exchanges. In the domain of customer service interactions, van Jaarsveld, Walker, and Skarlicki (2010) argue that mistreatment from customers can beget mistreatment from employees. Perceptions of unfairness can instigate targets to respond by also treating perpetrators disrespectfully. Customer-directed mistreatment can harm service provision and outcomes such as customer retention (e.g., Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005). It is possible then that such harmful outcomes also extend to and mitigate the support that witness customers offer to employees mistreated at the hands of other customers found in the previous studies. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

*H7: Customers who witness customer mistreatment towards a service provider will: be more likely to support the target (H7a), be more likely to evaluate the target positively (H7b), and leave higher tips (H7c) when employees respond neutrally than when they respond uncivilly.*

Moreover, we also expect that when employees fail to maintain the “customer is always right” mantra, and instead behave uncivilly back to the customer, the employee has effectively punished the perpetrator him- or herself. Therefore, deontic desire to hold the perpetrator accountable for his or her misdeeds is likely to diminish, and we should see a reduction in the witness’s negative behavioral intentions towards the perpetrator.

*H8: Customers who witness customer mistreatment towards a service provider will: be more likely to develop positive treatment intentions (H8a), and less likely to develop retaliatory intentions towards the perpetrator (H8b) when employees respond uncivilly than when they respond neutrally.*

### Study 3

**Participants.** Following Study 2, participants were 119 people residing in North America (51.4% female,  $M$  age = 34.7 years,  $SD$  = 11.97, age range = 18-73) recruited through the same on-line panel provider (MTurk) in exchange for US \$2. Participants who completed Study 2 were excluded from also being allowed to complete Study 3.

**Materials and procedure.** We conducted an on-line vignette experiment in which we held the mistreatment condition constant, and manipulated the employee response to be neutral versus uncivil. Participants read a similar vignette as the vignette used in Study 2, except we manipulated the server’s response. In this vignette, participants read about a customer’s aggressive treatment of a server at a coffee shop, and either a neutral or uncivil response to this treatment by the employee. We chose the aggressive condition because it was the most conservative test of our hypothesis. Employees who respond uncivilly to an aggressive condition may be more understandable than employees who respond uncivilly to a more minor form of mistreatment. Participants then answered a series of questions aimed to assess our dependent

variables. See Appendix 3 for the vignette scripts. We assessed perpetrator-directed positive treatment intentions, perpetrator-directed retaliatory intentions, target-directed support, target evaluation, and tip percent using the same measures as those used in Study 2.

## Results

**Manipulation check.** To test whether our manipulations worked, we used the same two checks used in Study 2, except the referent was the employee instead of the customer. We also had to eliminate one item from the incivility manipulation check (i.e., “the employee made the customer feel incompetent”), because this item did not make sense with the customer as the frame of reference ( $\alpha = .95$  for incivility and  $.89$  for injustice). We conducted a MANOVA with employee incivility as our independent variable and both manipulation checks as our dependent variable. The overall test was significant,  $F(2, 116) = 60.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .51$ ; therefore, we proceeded to examine the between-subject effects. Consistent with our manipulation, participants in the employee incivility condition ( $n = 60, M = 2.98, SD = 1.49$ ) were significantly more likely than those in the neutral condition ( $n = 59, M = 1.22, SD = 0.63$ ) to perceive the employee’s reaction as uncivil  $F(1,118) = 69.76, p < .001$ . Furthermore, participants in the employee incivility condition ( $n = 60, M = 3.74, SD = 1.27$ ) were significantly more likely than those in the neutral condition ( $n = 59, M = 1.60, SD = 0.82$ ) to perceive the employee’s reaction as unjust  $F(1,118) = 119.68, p < .001$ . We therefore successfully manipulated employee response.

**Test of hypotheses.** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations appear in Table 3. To investigate hypotheses 7a-7c, we conducted a MANOVA using employee response condition (uncivil vs. neutral) as our independent variable and tip percentage, target support, and target evaluation as our dependent variables. The overall test was significant,  $F(3, 115) = 11.01, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$ ; therefore, we proceeded to examine the between-subject effects. As in Studies 1

and 2, we conducted one-tail tests. In support of H7a-7c, we found significant effects of the employee response condition on target support  $F(1,118) = 12.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$ , Cohen's  $d = .65$ , target evaluation  $F(1, 118) = 30.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.01$ , and tip percent,  $F(1, 118) = 10.24, p = .001, \eta^2 = .08$ , Cohen's  $d = .59$ . In support of H7a, participants indicated that they would offer the target less support when they were uncivil ( $M = 5.10, SD = 1.29$ ) than when they remained neutral ( $M = 5.84, SD = .98$ ) in response to mistreatment. Similarly, in support of H7b, we found that participants evaluated targets less positively when targets were uncivil ( $M = 4.20, SD = 2.31$ ) than when they remained neutral ( $M = 6.34, SD = 1.90$ ). In support of H7c, participants reported that they would leave a lower tip percentage when employees were uncivil ( $M = 17.42\%, SD = 13.70$ ) than when they were neutral ( $M = 25.51\%, SD = 13.89$ ).

Finally, to investigate H8a and H8b, we conducted a MANOVA using employee response condition (uncivil vs. neutral) as our independent variable and perpetrator positive treatment and retaliatory intentions as our dependent variables. Contrary to our hypotheses, the overall test was non-significant  $F(2, 116) = 0.52, p = .60$ . Further, perpetrator directed outcome mean values ( $M_{positive\ treatment} = 4.47, SD = 1.75; M_{retaliatory\ intent} = 3.16, SD = 1.55$ ) are aligned with those found in Study 2 where the employee remains neutral in response to customer aggression ( $M_{positive\ treatment} = 4.44, SD = 1.91; M_{retaliatory\ intent} = 3.39, SD = 1.67$ ). It therefore appears that even when the employee reacts to customer aggression uncivilly, other customers that witness this interaction, despite tempering the support they express to the targeted employee, retain their treatment and retaliatory intentions toward the perpetrator.

## Discussion

While Study 1 and Study 2 demonstrated that customers engage in compensatory reactions to targets, and hold punishment intentions towards perpetrators, Study 3 examined the



added effects of employee reactions to the mistreatment. It is human nature to reciprocate negative treatment in kind (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Results of this study demonstrate that when targets are rude in response to rude customers, witnessing customers are less willing to support targets. These results suggest that people do not feel empathy and engage in support behaviors just because someone has been mistreated. They are more likely to do so when the target is unable/unwilling to defend themselves. This finding is consistent with prior research which shows that witnesses are more likely to act on vicarious injustice (e.g., help the target) when the target is helpful/likeable (De Cremer & Van Hiel, 2006). Thus, the behaviors and reactions of a target appears to influence whether or not a witness will offer support.

Interestingly however, the server's uncivil response did not affect witness negative reactions towards the misbehaving customer. That is, although the target's uncivil reaction was enough to reduce target-directed supporting behaviors, it was not enough to reduce perpetrator-directed punishing behaviors. These combined findings suggest that target compensation is not sufficient to restore justice. That is, while customers may have felt less of a need to support and compensate targets for their mistreatment when targets punished perpetrators directly, the target's reactions were not enough to diminish their desire to punish the perpetrator.

### **General Discussion**

Previous research has focused on mistreatment between employees and found that witnesses tend to punish perpetrators (Mitchell et al., 2015; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010; Turillo et al., 2002). Research in the service domain has also examined mistreatment between employees and found that when customers witness such mistreatment, they evaluate the organization and its employees negatively. The present research is the first to

examine how customers react towards targeted employees when they witness other customers mistreat these employees. This research significantly contributes to the literature in several ways.

First, we make a theoretical contribution to the literature by examining a target-directed pathway to justice restoration. Deonance theory argues that people *ought* to behave in certain ways, and when they do not follow prescribed norms, witnesses will become morally affronted (angry) and want to take action in the form of perpetrator punishment. Thus, research on witnessing mistreatment has focused on witness reactions towards *perpetrators*; and the few studies that have examined witness reactions towards targets (Mitchell et al., 2015, Reich & Hershcovis, 2015) have found mixed results. Mitchell et al. (2015) found that witnesses sometimes supported targets of supervisor mistreatment, but only if they felt the mistreatment was unjustified. Reich and Hershcovis (2015) found that witnesses did not support targets, but instead punished perpetrators. Our study considered not only the wrong-doer, but also the target of the injustice. However, Reich and Hershcovis examined only anger as an explanatory mechanism. Consistent with deontic arguments, we show that witnesses do indeed experience anger in response to transgressions and this anger translates into perpetrator-directed reactions (e.g., less positive and more retaliatory treatment). However, we also introduce a second deontic emotion: target empathy. This emotion is consistent with deontic reasoning because it is an other-focused emotion produced when one person witnesses the distress of another, and it motivates altruistic action to reduce the distress. Thus, whereas moral anger yields punitive perpetrator-directed action, moral empathy yields target-directed action in the form of affective, cognitive, and behavioral support aimed to redress injustice. We contribute to deonance theory by showing that deontic action may also take a positive form (i.e., target support), and that empathy plays a role in explaining the relationship between an injustice and target-aiding.

Second, our results contribute empirically by showing that even minor forms of mistreatment such as incivility trigger witness reactions. That is, even when mistreatment was low in intensity and ambiguous in nature, witnesses supported targets, and evaluated them more positively. These findings were even stronger when targets experienced aggression. Targets in the aggressive group received more affective support, higher evaluations, and higher tips than those in the neutral or uncivil group. This finding contributes to the debate in the literature that questions whether different forms of mistreatment yield different outcomes. Hershcovis (2011) argued that although mistreatment constructs are conceptually different, they are operationally similar, yielding the same outcomes. The present study shows that when we operationalize the differences such that conceptual definitions match operationalizations, the outcomes do indeed differ. This finding suggests that researchers need to pay more attention to how workplace mistreatment is being operationalized. Distinctions between different forms of mistreatment are not being captured in existing measurement, which has led to potentially inaccurate results.

Third, our research makes a practical contribution by demonstrating that targets may unwittingly benefit from being victims of mistreatment, but only if they maintain a polite demeanor. Organizations reinforce the message that “customers are always right”, which requires employees faced with rude customers to plaster a smile on their face and take the abuse. Service sector organizations often regulate employees’ externalized emotions via “display rules” to enhance the customer experience (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), which can lead to employee burnout (Grandey, 2003). The present research shows that, if employees are able to engage in emotional labor by being polite to uncivil customers, they may be rewarded by other customers who witness the mistreatment; however, these rewards disappear if they fail to regulate their emotions and respond to rude customers in kind. It is possible that the knowledge of these

benefits (disseminated through training) may make it easier for employees to endure unpleasant interactions – future research is needed to assess this possibility.

In addition, our research contributes by examining our questions in the customer service context. Few studies have examined *customer* reactions to mistreatment, and those that have, considered reactions to ostensibly justifiable employee-on-employee incivility (e.g., delayed service, Porath et al., 2010) and found that customers evaluate the organization and its employees negatively. Others such as Mattila, Hanks, and Wang (2013) examined the impact of observing other customers' service failure on witnessing customers' reactions and found that customer return intentions were lower when they witnessed other customers' poor past service experience and recovery. Fairness and justice perceptions (Porath et al., 2010) as well as co-customers' demonstrated behaviors (e.g., Bitner, Booms, & Tetrault, 1990; Kim & Lee, 2012) are key in customer service evaluations. Miao and Mattila (2013) show that negative customer behaviors (e.g., not keeping kids in line) negatively impacts other customers' emotional responses. Building on this research, we contribute to this conversation by showing that customers punish fellow customers who mistreat service employees, and compensate mistreated employees to make up for the injustice. That is, the negative behaviors of fellow customers impact the customer's experience enough that they are willing to take action.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There are a number of strengths to the study, the most important being the use of a field experiment that enabled us to examine behavioral reactions of customers following a witnessed uncivil interaction. To our knowledge, this is the first field experiment that studies workplace mistreatment. This design allows us to draw strong inferences about causality, and is likely to be generalizable to most service interactions. Our findings with respect to tips were particularly

interesting because the service interaction occurred in a fast-food restaurant where tipping is not the norm. These results may underestimate the tipping behaviors that would occur in a full service restaurant. Moreover, the results may extend to other service environments (e.g., retail), albeit such environments do not yield the same financial rewards (i.e., tips). It would be interesting to investigate whether – in non-tip environments – customers are more likely to make purchases from employees who are mistreated by other customers. In addition, we replicated our findings in a vignette design, and extended them by examining affective mechanisms. Finally, we showed a boundary condition to our effects; that is, customers only reward targets if they maintain the “customer is always right” mantra. Regardless of employee reaction however, customers maintained their lowered positive treatment intentions and heightened retaliatory intentions toward the aggressing customer.

These results are not without limitations, most of which we discussed previously. In general, we restricted our examination to interactions where one customer was present (to minimize diffusion of responsibility); however, this choice might affect generalizability since other customers are often present and may influence each other’s responses either positively or negatively. Future research needs to test whether witnesses would react the same way when other customers are present, or whether diffusion of responsibility extends to tipping. Further, these studies examined only two possible employee reaction, civil or uncivil. However, the server might instead call a supervisor for help, refuse service, or apologize to the customer to appease him/her. Future research should examine how different reactions influence witness responses.

Previous research has focused largely on how witnesses react to mistreatment between employees (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015), and in all except one study (Porath et al., 2010), the witnesses were organizational insiders. This is the first study to present

evidence linking customer mistreatment of employees with witnessing customers' supportive behavioral reactions towards victimized employees. Customers support mistreated employees both socially and financially, suggesting that although customers are *not* always right, treating them as if they are seems to have some hidden benefits.

## References

- Andersson, L. M., & Pearson, C. M. (1999). Tit for tat? The spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace. *The Academy of Management Review*, *24*(3), 452-471. DOI: 10.5465/AMR.1999.2202131
- Baron, R. A. & Neuman, J. H. (1996). Workplace violence and workplace aggression: Evidence of their relative frequency and potential causes. *Aggressive Behavior*, *22*, 161-173. DOI: 10.1002/(SICI)1098-2337
- Batson, C. D., Dyck, J. L., Brandt, R., Batson, J. G., Powell, A. L., McMaster, M. R., & Griffitt, C. (1988). Five studies testing two new egoistic alternatives to the empathy-altruism hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *55*, 52-77. doi.10.1037/0022-3514.55.1.52
- Batson, C. D., Fultz, J. & Schoenrade, P. A. (1987). Distress and empathy: Two qualitatively distinct vicarious emotions with different motivational consequences. *Journal of Personality*, *55*, 19-39. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.1987.tb00426.x
- Bies, R. J., & Moag, J. S. (1986). Interactional justice: Communication criteria of fairness. *Research on negotiation in organizations*, *1*(1), 43-55.
- Bitner, M. J., Booms, B. H., Tetrault, M. S. (1990). The service encounter: Diagnosing favorable and unfavorable incidents. *Journal of Marketing*, *54*, 71-84. DOI: 10.2307/1252174
- Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: a construct validation of a measure. *Journal of applied psychology*, *86*(3), 386. DOI: 10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.386
- Cortina, L. M. (2008). Unseen injustice: Incivility as modern discrimination in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, *33*(1), 55-75.  
DOI:10.5465/AMR.2008.27745097

- Cortina, L. M., Kabat-Farr, D., Leskinen, E. A., Huerta, M., & Magley, V. J. (2013). Selective incivility as modern discrimination in organizations: evidence and impact. *Journal of Management*, *39*(6), 1579-1605.
- Cortina, L. M., Magley, V. J., Williams, J. H., & Langhout, R. D. (2001). Incivility in the workplace: Incidence and impact. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* *6*(1), 64-80.  
DOI:10.1037/1076-8998.6.1.64
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, *31*, 874 –900.
- Darley, J. M. & Latane, J. M. (1968). Bystander intervention in emergencies: diffusion of responsibility, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *8*, 377-383.  
DOI:10.1037/h0025589
- De Cremer, D. & Van Hiel, A. (2006). Effects of another person's fair treatment on one's own emotions and behaviors: The moderating role of how much the other cares for you. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *100*, 231-249. DOI: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.10.002
- Ducharme, L. J. & Martin, J. K. (2000). Unrewarding work, coworker support, and job satisfaction. *Work and Occupations*, *27*, 223-243.
- Folger, R. (2001). Fairness as deonance. In S. W. Gilliland, D. D. Steiner, & D. P. Skarlicki (Eds.), *Research in social issues in management* (pp. 3–31). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Folger, R., Ganegoda, D. B., Rice, D. B., Taylor, R., & Wo, D. X. H. (2013). Bounded autonomy and behavioral ethics: Deonance and reactance as competing motives. *Human Relations*, *66*, 905-924. DOI: 10.1177/0018726713482013



- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25, 161-178.
- Grandey, A. A. (2003). When “the show must go on”: Surface acting and deep acting as determinants of emotional exhaustion and peer-rated service delivery. *Academy of Management Journal*, 46, 86-96. DOI: 10.2307/30040678
- Grandey, A. A., Dickter, D. N., & Sin, H. P. (2004). The customer is not always right: Customer aggression and emotion regulation of service employees. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25, 397-418. DOI: 10.1002/job.252
- Grandey, A. A., Kern, J. H., & Frone, M. R. (2007). Verbal abuse from outsiders versus insiders: Comparing frequency, impact, on emotional exhaustion, and the role of emotional labor. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 12, 63-79. DOI: 10.1037/1076-8998.12.1.63
- Grandey, A. A., Rafaeli, A., Ravid, S., Wirtz, J., & Steiner, D. D. (2010). Emotion display rules at work in the global service economy: The special case of the customer. *Journal of Service Management*, 21 (3), 388-412. DOI: 10.1108/09564231011050805
- Hauser, J. R., Simester, D. J., & Wernerfelt, B. (1994). Customer satisfaction incentives. *Marketing Science*, 13 (4), 327-350.
- Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Hershcovis, M. S. (2011). “Incivility, social undermining, bullying...oh my!”: A call to reconcile constructs within workplace aggression research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32(1), 499-519. DOI: 10.1002/job.689
- Jones, L. V. (1954). A rejoinder on one-tailed tests. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51, 585–586.  
doi:10.1037/h0055313

- Kahneman, D., Knetsch, J. L., & Thaler, R. H. (1986). Fairness and the assumptions of economics. *Journal of Business*, *59*, s285–s300.
- Kim, N., & Lee, M. (2012). Other customers in a service encounter: examining the effect in a restaurant setting. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *26*(1), 27-40. DOI: 10.1108/08876041211199706
- Landers, R. N., & Behrend, T. S. (2015). An inconvenient truth: Arbitrary distinctions between organizational, Mechanical Turk, and other convenience samples. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, *8* (2), 142-164. DOI: 10.1017/iop.2015.13
- Mattila, A., Hanks, L., & Wang, C. (2014). Others service experiences: emotions, perceived justice, and behavior. *European Journal of Marketing*, *48*(3/4), 552-571. DOI: 10.1108/EJM-04-2012-0201
- Miao, L., & Mattila, A. (2013). The impact of other customers on customer experiences: A psychological distance perspective. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, *37*(1), 77-99.
- Mitchell, M. S., Vogel, R. M., & Folger, R. (2015). Third parties' reactions to abusive supervision of coworkers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *100*, 140-156. DOI: 10.1037/apl0000002
- Neuman, J.H., & Baron, R.A. (2005). Aggression in the workplace: A social-psychological perspective. In S. Fox & P.E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets*, (pp. 13–40). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- O'Reilly, J., & Aquino, K. (2011). A model of third-parties' morally motivated responses to mistreatment in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*, 526-543. DOI: 10.1177/2041386611434655
- O'Reilly, J., Aquino, K. & Skarlicki, D. (2016). The lives of others: Third parties' responses to others' injustice. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *101*, 171-189.  
DOI.org/10.1037/apl0000040
- Porath, C., & Erez, A. (2007). Does rudeness matter? The effects of rude behavior on task performance and helpfulness. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(5), 1181–97. DOI: 10.2307/20159919
- Porath, C., MacInnis, D., & Folkes, V. (2010). Witnessing incivility among employees: Effects on consumer anger and negative inferences about companies. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *37*, 292-303. DOI: 10.1086/651565
- Rafaeli, A., & Sutton, R. I. (1987). Expression of emotion as part of the work role. *The Academy of Management Review*, *12*, 23-37.
- Reich, T. C., & Hershcovis, M. S. (2015). Observing workplace incivility. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *100*, 203-215. DOI: 10.1037/a0036464
- Roulin, N. (2015). Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater: Comparing data quality of crowdsourcing, online panels, and student samples. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, *8*, 190-196. DOI: 10.1017/iop.2015.24
- Sakurai, K. & Jex, S. M. (2012). Coworker incivility and incivility targets' work effort and counterproductive work behaviors: The moderating role of supervisor support. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *17*, 150-161.

- Schneider, B., Ehrhart, M. G., Mayer, D. M., Saltz, J. L., & Niles-Jolly, K. (2005). Understanding organization-customer links in service settings. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48, 1017-1032. DOI: 10.5465/AMJ.2005.19573107
- Skarlicki, D. P., & Rupp, D. E. (2010). Dual processing and organizational justice: The role of rational versus experiential processing in third-party reactions to workplace mistreatment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95, 944–952. doi:10.1037/a0020468
- Totterdell, P., Hershcovis, M. S., Niven, K., Reich, T. C. & Stride, C. (2012). Can employees be emotionally drained by witnessing unpleasant interactions between coworkers? A diary study of induced emotion regulation. *Work & Stress*, 26, 112-129.
- Turillo, C. J., Folger, R., Lavelle, J. J., Umphress, E. E., & Gee, J. O. (2002). Is virtue its own reward? Self-sacrificial decisions for the sake of fairness. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 89, 839-865. DOI: 10.1016/S0749-5978(02)00032-8
- United States Department of Labor (2014). Employment projections. Retrieved on February 22, 2016 from [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_201.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_201.htm)
- van Jaarsveld, D. D., Walker, D. D., & Skarlicki, D. P. (2010). The role of job demands and emotional exhaustion in the relationship between customer and employee incivility. *Journal of Management*, 36, 1486-1504. DOI: 10.1177/0149206310368998
- Wang, M., Liu, S., Liao, H., Gong, Y., Kammeyer-Mueller, J., & Shi, J. (2013). Can't get it out of my mind: Employee rumination after customer mistreatment and negative mood in the next morning. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98 (3), 989-1004. DOI: 10.1037a0033656
- Webb, E. J., Campbell, D. T. Schwartz, R. D., & Sechrest, L. (2000). *Unobtrusive Measures*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.

## Appendix 1 – Study 1 Scripts

### Script A – Customer Mistreatment, Employee Neutral:

[Throughout this interaction customer is on smart phone and not paying attention to server.]

Customer: [Looks up from smart phone annoyed that server hasn't turned around.] *I'm in a hurry.*

Employee: *Oh, I'm sorry, what can I get for you?*

Customer: [Curtly] *Chips to go. Add sour cream, medium salsa, no guac. And a coke.*

Employee: *Sounds good.* [Goes to get the chips and starts to gather sides.] *Did you say you wanted guacamole?*

Customer: [Annoyed and sarcastic]. *No. This is a pretty simple order.*

Employee: [Nicely] *Would you like a takeout bag?*

Customer: [Rudely] *I said to go, so obviously.*

Employee: [Finishes gathering order. Hands chips and coke to customer]. *That will be 7.85, please.*

Customer: [Slaps down money and waits for change.]

Employee: [Gives back change] *Have a nice day.*

Customer: [Grabs food. Leaves without saying anything.]

### Script B – Customer Neutral, Employee Neutral:

[Throughout this interaction customer is natural like a regular customer would be.]

[Customer clears throat to get attention of server.]

Employee: *Oh, I'm sorry, what can I get for you?*

Customer: *Can I please have chips to go? I'd like sour cream, medium salsa, but no guacamole. And can I please have a coke?*

Employee. *Sounds good.* [Goes to get chips and starts to gather sides.] *Did you say you wanted guacamole?*

Customer: *No thanks.*

Employee: [Nicely] *Would you like a takeout bag?*

Customer: *Yes please.*

Employee: [Finishes gathering order. Hands chips and coke to customer.] *That will be 7.85 please.*

Customer: [Gives employee money, waits for change.]

Employee: *Have a nice day.*

Customer: *You too, thanks.*

## Appendix 2 – Study 2 Vignette Scripts

### Script A – Customer Neutral

Imagine that a new coffee shop called Java Time has recently opened. You decide to go to Java Time for a coffee. You find that there is a line-up.

The customer in front of you looks at the menu.

The customer gets to the front of the line, places change onto the counter and says: “Can I have a tall coffee?”

The employee politely picks up the money, and asks the customer: "Would you like some room for cream?"

The customer says: "Yes."

The employee hands the customer the coffee with room for cream, and thanks the customer in a well-mannered fashion.

When the customer is done, you order your coffee from the same employee, and head out.

### Script B – Customer Uncivil

Imagine that a new coffee shop called Java Time has recently opened. You decide to go to Java Time for a coffee. You find that there is a line-up.

The customer in front of you keeps looking at the time and frowning.

The customer gets to the front of the line, scowls, puts some change onto the counter and says: “I think these lines could go a lot faster! Give me a tall coffee. I’m in a hurry!”

The employee politely picks up the money, and asks the customer: "would you like some room for cream?"

The customer frowns and impatiently says: "Yes!"

The employee hands the customer the coffee with room for cream, and thanks the customer in a well-mannered fashion.

When the customer is done, you order your coffee from the same employee, and head out.

### **Script C – Customer Aggressive**

Imagine that a new coffee shop called Java Time has recently opened. You decide to go to Java Time for a coffee. You find that there is a line-up.

The customer in front of you keeps looking at the time and frowning.

The customer gets to the front of the line, scowls, slaps some change onto the counter and rudely says: “For such an easy job you’d think you could get through these line-ups a lot faster! No wonder this is the best job you could get. Give me a tall coffee. I’m in a hurry!”

The employee politely picks up the money, and asks the customer: "would like some room for cream?"

The customer frowns and impatiently says: "Yes, obviously!"

The employee hands the customer the coffee with room for cream, and thanks the customer in a well-mannered fashion.

When the customer is done, you order your coffee from the same employee, and head out.

### Appendix 3 – Study 3 Vignette Scripts

#### Script A – Customer Aggressive, Employee Neutral:

Imagine that a new coffee shop called Java Time has recently opened. You decide to go to Java Time for a coffee. You find that there is a line-up.

The customer in front of you keeps looking at the time and frowning.

The customer gets to the front of the line, scowls, slaps some change onto the counter and rudely says: “For such an easy job you’d think you could get through these line-ups a lot faster! No wonder this is the best job you could get. Give me a tall coffee. I’m in a hurry!”

The employee politely picks up the money, and asks the customer: "Would you like some room for cream?"

The customer frowns and impatiently says: "Yes, obviously!"

The employee hands the customer the coffee and politely says thank you.

When the customer is done, you order your coffee from the same employee, and head out.

#### Script B – Customer Aggressive, Employee Uncivil:

Imagine that a new coffee shop called Java Time has recently opened. You decide to go to Java Time for a coffee. You find that there is a line-up.

The customer in front of you keeps looking at the time and frowning.

The customer gets to the front of the line, scowls, slaps some change onto the counter and rudely says: “For such an easy job you’d think you could get through these line-ups a lot faster! No wonder this is the best job you could get. Give me a tall coffee. I’m in a hurry!”

The employee snatches up the money, sighs loudly, and abruptly asks the customer: "Would you like some room for cream?"

The customer frowns and impatiently says: "Yes, obviously!"

The employee thrusts the coffee at the customer and sarcastically says thank you.

When the customer is done, you order your coffee from the same employee, and head out.



**Table 1 – Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations (Study 1)**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Mistreatment condition	-	-	-			
2. Target support: Friendliness	2.65	.96	.42**			
3. Tgt support: Please/Thank you	4.24	2.56	.21*	.44**		
4. Target evaluation	8.95	1.65	.30*	.15	-.01	
5. Tip percent	8.00	11.00	.19†	.18†	-.08	.09

*Note.* \*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , †  $p < .10$ .  $N = 85$

**Table 2 – Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations (Study 2)**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11
1. Mistreatment condition	-	-	-									
2. Anger	3.91	2.19	.79**									
3. Empathy	4.40	2.11	.76**	.87**								
4. Perpetrator positive treatment intent	5.15	1.63	-.39**	-.47**	-.36**							
5. Perpetrator retaliation intent	2.66	1.56	.40**	.47**	.34**	-.58**						
6. Target evaluation	6.29	2.04	.26**	.35**	.42**	-.06	.16*					
7. Target support	5.64	1.09	.34**	.44**	.51**	-.06	.16*	.50**				
8. Tip percent	21.07	12.53	.25**	.34**	.33**	-.23**	.17*	.47**	.43**			
9. Gender	-	-	.03	-.01	-.02	.01	.01	-.07	.06	-.02		
10. Age	35.87	10.92	.04	-.04	.02	.09	-.15*	-.11	.07	.00	.06	

Note. \*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ ,  $N = 182$

**Table 3 – Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations (Study 3)**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Mistreatment condition	-	-	-							
2. Perpetrator positive treatment intent	4.47	1.75	.09							
3. Perpetrator retaliation intent	3.16	1.55	-.04	-.60**						
4. Target evaluation	5.26	2.36	-.45**	-.13	.20*					
5. Target support	5.47	1.20	-.31**	-.20*	.28**	.45**				
6. Tip percent	21.43	14.32	-.28**	-.21*	.35**	.46**	.49**			
7. Gender	-	-	-.06	-.09	-.06	.05	.17	.002		
8. Age	33.30	9.59	-.03	.13	-.17	-.06	-.07	-.09	.14	

*Note.* \*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ ,  $N = 119$