A Self-Esteem Threat Perspective on the Downstream Customer Consequences of Customer Mistreatment

by

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Signed Statement of Originality

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge, my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, either in whole, or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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Rajiv K. Amarnani
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father

*Kishore “Pirkash” T. Amarnani*

My hero.
Abstract

A Self-Esteem Threat Perspective on the Downstream Customer Consequences of Customer Mistreatment

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Committee Co-chairs: Professor Prashant Bordia and Professor Simon Lloyd D. Restubog

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Customer mistreatment encompasses a broad range of poor interpersonal treatment that employees receive from customers such as verbal abuse and rudeness (Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011). Subjected to customer mistreatment, employees perform poorly, feel angry and psychologically distressed, and withdraw from their work (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008; Baranik, Wang, Gong, & Shi, in press; Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012). While much is known about the psychological experience of customer mistreatment of the employee—fairness and resource loss—less is known about the implications of customer mistreatment for the employee’s sense of self. Customer mistreatment conveys contempt and disregard for employees, that they are unworthy of respect and dignified treatment in the eyes of the customer. In this way, customer mistreatment may serve as a self-esteem threat, or a challenge to employees’ positive views of their worth (vanDellen, Campbell, Hoyle, & Bradfield, 2011). High self-esteem employees may compensate for the blow to their ego during subsequent customer encounters in ways that are detrimental to service delivery. While the possibility of a “spiral out” effect of customer mistreatment to subsequent customers has been raised (Groth & Grandey, 2012), little is known
about its behavioral mechanisms and boundary conditions. In the customer mistreatment literature, outcomes for customers have received little attention.

This project comprises a programmatic series of three multiwave, multisource studies investigating the role of employee self-esteem threat in the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer outcomes. Study 1 demonstrates that the consequences of customer mistreatment for downstream customer satisfaction are amplified by employee high self-esteem. This study was conducted in a sample of food service employees and customers. Study 2 replicates the base moderation model from Study 1 in a retail sample and extends the model by examining the employee behavioral mechanisms that mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer dissatisfaction. Consistent with theory, employee self-esteem amplifies the indirect effect of customer mistreatment on downstream customer satisfaction through supervisor-reported customer-directed organizational citizenship behaviors. Lastly, Study 3 unpacks the employee self-concept mechanisms by which customer mistreatment elicits self-esteem threat through the role of an approval-contingency of self-worth (CSW-Approval). Consistent with theory, the negative relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction is evinced only among employees with both high self-esteem and high CSW-Approval. Each study successively addresses limitations to and alternative explanations of preceding studies.

This series of studies contributes to the literature in four significant ways. First, these studies test a novel account of the psychological experience of customer mistreatment: self-esteem threat. The self-esteem perspective sheds light on how the consequences of customer mistreatment follow not just from employees’ perceptions
of external events but also from their internal judgements of the self (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). Second, these studies advance our understanding of customer mistreatment by bringing the customer into the picture. Looking merely at employee outcomes of customer mistreatment belies the full scope of the phenomenon. Third, these studies examine the mechanisms and boundary conditions of a little-studied organizational phenomenon: the spiral-out effect of customer mistreatment (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Fourth and lastly, these studies introduce others’ approval as a source of contingent self-esteem at work. The burgeoning literature on contingent self-esteem at work has so far only examined performance as a source of esteem (Ferris, Lian, Brown, Pang, & Keeping, 2010); Study 3 departs from the existing literature by introducing another source of self-esteem—other’s approval—involving in how employees’ manage self-esteem threat from customer mistreatment.
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CHAPTER 1

A Self-Esteem Threat Perspective on the Downstream Customer Consequences of Customer Mistreatment

Working in customer service, employees are often subjected to yelling, swearing, disdainful looks, and unreasonable demands at the hands of their customers. Customer mistreatment encompasses a broad range of poor interpersonal treatment that employees receive from customers (Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011). These employees perform poorly, feel angry and psychologically distressed, and withdraw from their work (Baranik, Wang, Gong, & Shi, in press; Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008; Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012). Unlike other forms of interpersonal mistreatment at work, customer mistreatment necessarily comes from an organizational outsider. The employee typically has little recourse within the organization for dealing with customer mistreatment; furthermore, the employee is tasked specifically to please the customer, even when the customer is irate and unreasonable. Customer mistreatment may have dire consequences for the employee and for the organization.

Extant research has shed light on the hallmarks of customer mistreatment as experienced by the employee: moral indignation and resource loss (Skarlicki et al., 2008; Sliter et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2011). While these perspectives have advanced our understanding of the psychological consequences of customer mistreatment, the role of the self has received little examination (vanDellen, Campbell, Hoyle, & Bradfield, 2011). Customer mistreatment signals that the employee is disliked, incompetent, and unworthy of respect—thus challenging positive views of their own worth. Employees’ sense of self is especially important to understanding the impact of customer mistreatment because customer service is seen as undignified, “dirty” work (Shantz & Booth, 2014). Service connotes servility—subjugating oneself to meet customer needs (Shamir, 1980). Customer mistreatment emphatically underscores this sense of servility
when customers tacitly convey their contempt and disregard for the employee, essentially signaling that the employee is “beneath them.” The self-perspective emphasizes the contextual servility and indignity surrounding the customer mistreatment phenomenon, bridging it with the growing literature on “dirty work” and its implications for the self (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The self-perspective indicates that the consequences of customer mistreatment for employee behaviors are amplified among employees with a strong sense of their own worth. Furthermore, these employee behaviors may then have downstream consequences for customers. Since existing research on customer mistreatment has focused on consequences for the employees (Groth & Grandey, 2012), much less is known about the implications of customer mistreatment for the mistreated employee’s subsequent customers.

This project investigates the role of employee self-esteem threat in the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer outcomes in a programmatic series of multisource and multiwave studies. Guided by self-esteem threat theory (vanDellen et al., 2011), I propose that the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer outcomes is stronger among employees with high self-esteem. This premise serves as the base model which is tested in Study 1. Study 2 then extends the base model tested in Study 1 by introducing employees’ extra-role service behaviors as the behavioral mechanism of the base model. Lastly, Study 3 further unpacks the model by introducing approval-contingent self-esteem as a theoretically prescribed boundary condition of the base model. All three studies capitalize on design strengths, such as informant-reports and time lags that mitigate common method bias to improve causal inference. Furthermore, each study programatically builds off the preceding study and addresses alternative explanations and limitations in the preceding study.
This series of studies contributes to the literature in four important ways. First, these studies test a novel account of the psychological experience of customer mistreatment: self-esteem threat. Our study departs from existing accounts of customer mistreatment by highlighting its implications for the self. In this account, reactions to customer mistreatment are not motivated merely by perceptions of external events, but also by internal judgments of the self. In this way, I link the customer mistreatment literature to the body of work on the stigmatized and degrading nature of service work (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). The self-perspective emphasizes issues of status and dignity inherent to customer service, but that have received minimal attention in customer mistreatment research. Service work is widely viewed as a low-status, stigmatized occupation which have major esteem implications (Shantz & Booth, 2014). Customer mistreatment pours salt in the wound by confirming the employees’ low value. The self-perspective highlights an unexplored facet of customer mistreatment and bridges the gap between customer mistreatment and its stigmatized context.

Second, these studies expand the scope of customer mistreatment research by bringing the customer into the picture. Though there is a considerable body of literature looking at employee consequences of customer mistreatment, little is yet known about the impact of customer mistreatment on downstream customers (Groth & Grandey, 2012). These studies bring the customer into the picture by assessing service delivery through the eyes of subsequent customers. By examining customer-reported service delivery, I (1) respond to the call for more informant-reports in customer mistreatment research (Koopmann et al., 2015); (2) expand our scope of the consequences of customer mistreatment beyond just the employee; and (3) highlight important managerial implications of customer mistreatment for customer service experience, which are consequences valued by the organization because of their role in firm
profitability and survival (Taylor and Baker, 1994; Hallowell, 1996; Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994).

Third, these studies examine the mechanisms and boundary conditions of an overlooked organizational phenomenon: the spiral-out effect of customer mistreatment (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Customer mistreatment ought to have clear implications for downstream customers through subsequent service delivery, but empirical testing has thus far been limited to qualitative interviews (e.g. Harris & Ogbonna, 2002). Furthermore, little is known about the mechanism and boundary conditions of the mistreatment-service relationship. This project develops and tests theory surrounding the conditions linking customer mistreatment to service delivery. Studies 2 and 3 take apart the black box of employees’ psychological experience and behavioral reactions that allow customer mistreatment experiences to transmit their effects downstream to subsequent customers.

Fourth, this project contributes to the burgeoning literature on contingent self-esteem at work (Ferris, Brown, Lian, & Keeping, 2009; Ferris, Lian, Brown, Pang, & Keeping, 2010; Ferris, 2014; Ferris et al., 2015). Contingent self-esteem refers to the aspects of work and life that confer feelings of worth and value to an employee. Existing work in this research program has focused exclusively on performance as a source of self-esteem (Ferris, 2014). Work performance is an internally situated and controllable source of self-esteem. Hence, the focus on performance as a source of self-esteem only presents one side of the picture. Study 3 advances this literature by drawing attention to an externally situated source of self-esteem at work—others’ approval—thus introducing diversity into the literature on contingent self-esteem at work.
Review of Literature

The Phenomenon of Customer Mistreatment

Customer mistreatment is an umbrella construct encompassing the broad range of “low-quality interpersonal treatment that employees receive from their customers during service interactions” (Koopmann, Wang, Liu, & Song, 2015, p. 34). Examples of customer mistreatment include customers yelling angrily at employees, speaking rudely to employees, interrupting employees, and making excessive demands of employees. Customer mistreatment occurs far more frequently than abuse from insiders (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007; Sliter, Pui, Sliter, & Jex, 2011). While insider mistreatment (e.g. abusive supervision, ostracism) tends to occur at a low base rate (Bennett & Robinson, 2000), customer mistreatment can be ubiquitous (van Jaarsveld, Restubog, Walker, & Amarnani, 2015; Yagil, 2008). For instance, 74% of flight attendants and 92% of hospitality workers in studies report some recent experience of customer mistreatment (Boyd, 2002; Harris and Reynolds, 2004). In the call center industry, multiple verbally abusive calls per day are par for the course (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Since employment in service industries is growing rapidly all over the world (Soubbotina & Sheram, 2000), more and more employees may be subjected to these low-quality interpersonal encounters. Furthermore, as employees increasingly adopt boundary-spanning roles where they need to maintain relationships with organizational outsiders and interact with the public (Grandey & Diamond, 2010; Grant & Parker, 2009), customer mistreatment may grow more prevalent even in jobs not traditionally associated with customer service (Grandey et al., 2007). In summary, customer mistreatment is one of the most frequently occurring forms of mistreatment at work, and is liable to grow even further in prevalence over time.

One contributing factor to the prevalence of customer mistreatment is the fact that—in contrast to organizational insiders—customers tend to interact with employees
in one-off encounters. Since future encounters with the same employee are unlikely, customers may feel emboldened to treat employees poorly (van Jaarsveld et al., 2015), especially in light of the everyday aphorism that “the customer is always right” (Yagil, 2008). Strong interpersonal relationships may form between long-time clients and employees (for instance, consider the relationship between a family and their regular physician), building a high-quality social exchange that could deter mistreatment (Scott, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013). However, these relationships are unlikely to form in the brief, one-off encounters associated with a great deal of customer service interactions (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). In contrast, mistreatment from coworkers and supervisors occurs in the context of complex working relationships between the perpetrator and the target. Targets and perpetrators must continually navigate around one another in the organization and face the risk of retribution in some form (Scott et al., 2013). Indeed, supervisors and coworkers wield instrumental and social power over the employee (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). Abusive supervision may leave employees wondering if their jobs are at risk, but customer mistreatment elicits no such risk. Furthermore, insider mistreatment occurs within the auspices of the organization. Hence, targets of mistreatment may have recourse to file grievances against abusive supervisor or coworker (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2004), which is not an option when the perpetrator is an outsider. Similarly, insiders may be perceived as agents or embodiments of the organization, so targets may blame the organization for insider mistreatment (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013). Hence, customer mistreatment is further distinguished from insider mistreatment in its emphasis on one-off interactions rather than complex, protracted exchange relationships.

Customer mistreatment is also unique in that it necessarily occurs during performance events (Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005). Employees are expected to deliver high-quality service despite just experiencing customer mistreatment
Employees subjected to customer mistreatment show subsequent dips in attention and cognitive processing, which has implications for service performance (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Rafaeli et al., 2012). Employees are also expected to manage their emotions to meet organization-mandated display rules during service encounters (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; Grandey, 2000) which can be especially challenging after experiencing customer mistreatment (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). To summarize, employees experience frequent customer mistreatment, which is continually perpetrated by many dispersed outsiders in one-off encounters rather than frequently by the same insider/s, and is tightly coupled to service delivery.

**Consequences of Customer Mistreatment for the Employee**

Continual customer mistreatment has clear consequences for the employee. Employees subjected to customer mistreatment on a regular basis perform worse (Skarlicki et al., 2008; Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012), treat customers poorly (van Jaarsveld, Skarlicki, & Walker, 2010; Wang et al., 2011), feel burned out (Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInerney, 2010), and withdraw from their work (Grandey et al., 2004; van Jaarsveld et al., 2015). Customer mistreatment harms employees in this way because of its psychological consequences for employees. The current body of research has focused on the following psychological consequences: perceptions of unfairness (Colquitt, 2001; Cropanzano, Goldman & Folger, 2003) and stress (Hobfoll, 1989). These psychological consequences of customer mistreatment are discussed in this section.

**Customer mistreatment as injustice.** Employees may perceive poor treatment from customers as unfair and morally inappropriate. The multifoci approach to justice posits that the source of injustice determines employees’ reactions to injustice (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). Injustice arouses feelings of anger and indignation (Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993; Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano,
1999) as well as a strong desire to address or correct the injustice, often through retaliation (Jones, 2009; Jones, 2013; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Tripp & Bies, 2009; van Jaarsveld et al., 2015). While most justice research has focused on sources of injustice within the organization (e.g. coworker, supervisor, and the organization itself; Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007), scholars have begun to direct their attention towards the customer as a source of injustice (Rupp & Spencer, 2006; Skarlicki et al., 2008). Employees may view the poor treatment they receive from customers as an injustice.

Customer injustice occurs when customers are impolite and disrespectful to employees (interpersonal injustice; Colquitt, 2001), when customers withhold information or are disingenuous with employee (informational injustice; Colquitt, 2001), and when customers behave in morally inappropriate ways (deontic injustice; Cropanzano et al., 2003). These forms of injustice are not mutually exclusive; a customer mistreatment incident may simultaneously violate the employee’s standards of interpersonal justice, informational justice, and deontic justice. In the customer mistreatment literature, one stream of research has focused on customer mistreatment as a violation of interpersonal and informational justice, while another stream of research has focused on customer mistreatment as a violation of deontic justice and moral standards. In this section, I discuss and summarize each of these research streams in turn.

The experience of interpersonal and informational injustice (collectively referred to as interactional injustice) can arouse intense emotions. Unjust experiences are affective events that elicit negative emotions like anger (Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005; Weiss et al., 1999). When employees feel angry, they have a harder time keeping their emotions in check during customer encounters (i.e. emotional labor; Grandey, 2000). In a call center simulation experiment, participants who experienced customer injustice reported having a harder time keeping their emotions in check (i.e. higher
levels of emotional labor), but even unbiased observers were able to tell that the participants were engaging in emotional labor (Rupp & Spencer, 2006). Hence, perceptions of customer mistreatment may lead to higher levels of emotional labor. A subsequent study examined a specific, maladaptive form of emotional labor: surface acting, or faking one’s emotional expression (as opposed to deep acting, or modifying one’s felt emotion to match emotional expression). Employees experiencing customer mistreatment are indeed more likely to manage their emotions through surface acting (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002; Grandey et al., 2004; Totterdell & Holman, 2003), but only if they lacked the ability to take the customers’ perspective (Rupp et al., 2008). In summary, the psychological experience of injustice from customer mistreatment often arouses anger in employees, which they may then have to manage through emotional labor.

The negative emotions elicited by the injustice of customer mistreatment may be psychologically harmful, but these negative emotions can also determine how employees treat customers. Indicative support for this link comes from research on customer-directed sabotage (Wang et al., 2011). Employees who are dispositionally sensitive to negative emotions (i.e. trait negative affectivity) were more likely to react to customer mistreatment with customer-directed sabotage on a daily basis. However, employees who felt more confident in their ability to regulate their emotions (i.e. self-efficacy for emotion regulation) showed less customer-directed sabotage despite experiencing customer mistreatment. These emotional experiences can feel draining and depleting; one study showed that employees who were dispositionally prone to anger felt more burned out after experiencing customer mistreatment (Sliter et al., 2011). Employee attributes that amplify or minify negative emotional experiences can determine when customer mistreatment has adverse consequences for service delivery.
Customer mistreatment is not only affectively laden but also morally loaded. The deontic justice perspective frames unjust events from a moral perspective—justice as doing the right thing (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Customer mistreatment may not only violate personal standards for treatment but also violate moral standards for how a person ought to behave. From this perspective, employees may react to customer mistreatment in order to fulfill a moral obligation to dispense punishment upon a perceived wrongdoer. Support for this idea comes from research on moral identity and customer mistreatment. Employees who felt compelled to express their morality (especially when it isn’t central to their identity) were more likely to respond to customer mistreatment with customer-directed sabotage (Skarlicki et al., 2008). The deontic justice perspective highlights the innately moral aspects of the experience of customer mistreatment.

In summary, customer mistreatment may feel unjust by violating both interpersonal and moral standards of behavior. These perceptions of injustice arouse anger as well as moral indignation, which can lead to emotional labor as well as customer-directed aggression. Injustice is one of the central psychological consequences of customer mistreatment. These justice perspectives explain what customer mistreatment feels like, as well as when, why, and how employees might react to customer mistreatment.

Customer mistreatment as stress. Interacting with irate, outraged customers can be a stressful experience. These abusive customers may be social stressors for employees (Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Lilius, 2012). Conservation of resources theory posits that employees experience stress when they anticipate or experience loss of resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Following this logic, customer mistreatment interactions are stressful because they deplete valued resources such as feelings of competence, self-efficacy, cognitive focus, and appreciation. Conservation of resources...
theory prescribes that people strive to obtain and protect their resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Upon experiencing resource loss at work, employees invest fewer resources into their work in order to prevent a spiral of accelerating resource loss. In this section, I discuss studies that examine stress as a psychological consequence of customer mistreatment and their implications for employees.

Upon experiencing continual stress, employees may start to feel burned out. Burnout is the result of losing one’s psychosocial resources at work (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). True enough, customer mistreatment has clear links to employee burnout. The emotional labor elicited by customer mistreatment can be emotionally exhausting. A study of bank tellers showed that emotional labor mediates the relationship between customer mistreatment and emotional exhaustion, a central facet of burnout (Sliter et al., 2010). However, emotional labor is not the only draining element of customer mistreatment; another study showed that customer mistreatment predicts employee burnout over and above other job and emotional stressors in service work (Dormann & Zapf, 2004). Two studies looked at both customer mistreatment and mistreatment from organizational insiders. Both studies found that customer mistreatment predicts employee burnout over and above the effects of coworker mistreatment; indeed, the relationship between customer mistreatment and burnout were stronger than that of coworker mistreatment and burnout across both studies (Grandey et al., 2007; Sliter, Pui, Sliter, & Jex, 2011). However, employee burnout was worst of all when both customer and coworkers mistreated employees (Sliter et al., 2011). Hence, the stress of customer mistreatment may lead to burnout in employees.

The stressfulness of customer mistreatment also influences how employees perform and treat their customers. Several studies have shown that employees’ performance suffers as a result of the stress of customer mistreatment. For instance,
participants in a call center simulation experiment made more mistakes when they received verbally aggressive calls from customers, especially when these employees had to obey strict emotion display rules (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). Goldberg and Grandey reasoned that these performance decrements occur because employees’ complex stress appraisal and sensemaking processes draw cognitive resources away from the task at hand. Consistent with this reasoning, people who imagined experiencing customer mistreatment performed more poorly on tests of attention, working memory, and general mental ability (Rafaeli et al., 2012). These studies suggest that customer mistreatment can be cognitively taxing for employees.

Employees also repay customer mistreatment with bad behavior towards customers because they are stressed out. Stress can lead employees to treat their customers poorly because it diminishes employees’ ability to self-regulate (Diestel & Schmidt, 2011) or because it motivates employees to recoup lost resources in antisocial, unethical ways (Bobocel & Zdaniuk, 2010). One field study showed that the relationship between customer mistreatment and employee rudeness towards customers was mediated by job demands and emotional exhaustion in sequence (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). Since resource depletion plays a central role in stress, employees with large resource caches may be immune to the stressfulness of customer mistreatment. Indeed, employees with higher levels of cognitive resources (tenure and experience) and motivational resources (service rule commitment) were less likely to sabotage their customers on days when they experienced customer mistreatment (Wang et al., 2011). Withdrawn performance and customer-directed aggression are both outcomes of the stressful experience of customer mistreatment; these two outcomes represent two different ways of coping with customer mistreatment. Employees may try to protect their few remaining resources by diminishing performance, or may attempt to regain lost resources through customer-directed aggression. Indeed, one study linked these
coping strategies to cultural differences, showing that customer mistreatment led to
customer-directed sabotage among service workers in individualist cultures (e.g.
Canada), but led to fewer extra-role behaviors in collectivist cultures (e.g. China) (Shao
& Skarlicki, 2014). Customer mistreatment may lead to employees treating their
customers poorly as a way of coping with their stress.

Withdrawal is another way employees cope with the stress of customer
mistreatment. Framing customer mistreatment as a daily hassle that drains resources,
one field study showed that customer mistreatment predicted employee absences,
tardiness, and poor sales performance more strongly than coworker mistreatment (Sliter
et al., 2012). Another field study explicitly demonstrated that stress appraisals mediate
the relationship between customer mistreatment and employee absences (Grandey et al.,
2004). Since customer mistreatment entails resource loss, employees may feel
motivated to shield their resources by withdrawing from their work.

In summary, a substantial body of work has linked customer mistreatment to the
psychological experience of stress. Employees feel stressed out because customer
mistreatment threatens valued resources such as appreciation, self-efficacy, and
competence. Conservation of resources theory suggests that the prospect of resource
loss (as well as resource loss itself) is experienced as stressful (Hobfoll, 1989). This
experience of resource loss explains why, when, where, and how employees react to
customer mistreatment whether through poor performance, treating customers badly, or
withdrawing from work. These employees also feel more burned out as a result of the
stressfulness of customer mistreatment. In the few studies that examined both customer
mistreatment and insider mistreatment in tandem, customer mistreatment trumped
insider mistreatment as the more potent predictor of burnout, poor performance, and
withdrawal. Therefore, customer mistreatment may be a formidable stressor for service
workers.
Towards unexplored frontiers in customer mistreatment. The previous sections covered the two predominantly studied psychological consequences of customer mistreatment for employees: injustice and stress. This body of research has enriched our understanding of the hallmarks of customer mistreatment and its impact on employees. My dissertation advances this line of research in two ways: (1) developing and testing arguments for a neglected-but-essential employee psychological consequence of customer mistreatment: self-esteem threat; and (2) examining consequences of customer mistreatment for an unexamined party: subsequent customers of mistreated employees.

These two departures from the extant body of work are motivated by milieu in which customer mistreatment is situated: customer service, a phrase with two important parts. First, customer service connotes that employees are in a position of servility and subordination vis-à-vis their customers. This servility has implications for the employees’ sense of self, highlighting the intrinsically derogatory nature of customer mistreatment. In this way, I link customer mistreatment to the growing body of work on customer service as dirty, stigmatized, and degrading work (Shantz & Booth, 2014). Second, customer service indicates that employees are beholden to deliver high-quality service to their customers, continual mistreatment notwithstanding. Hence, customer mistreatment may have implications not just for employees but also for their subsequent customers. The predominating emphasis on employee consequences of customer mistreatment belies the full scope of the phenomenon. In this way, customer mistreatment comes full circle—or, rather, full spiral—to downstream customers of the customer-mistreated service worker. By highlighting the role of the self in customer mistreatment and its implications for subsequent customers, this project advances our understanding of customer mistreatment by grounding the phenomenon in its peculiar context.
These ideas are developed further in the next sections. First, I propose that customer mistreatment has implications for the sense of self. Next, I discuss the possibility of consequences of customer mistreatment for subsequent customers. Lastly, I introduce self-esteem threat as a theoretical framework to bind these two ideas together and develop hypotheses accordingly.

Implications of Customer Mistreatment for Employees’ Sense of Self

Service workers may construe customer mistreatment as a challenge to the sense of self. Self-esteem refers to one’s overall positive or negative orientation towards the self (Rosenberg, 1979). A positive sense of self is widely considered an asset at work (Kuster, Orth & Meier, 2013; Johnson, Rosen, & Levy, 2008; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Employees with a positive sense of self tend to be thoroughly convinced of their positive attributes and capabilities (Campbell, 1990; Coopersmith, 1967; Johnson et al., 2008), which explains why these employees generally expect good things to happen to them (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994; Wood, Heimpel, Newby-Clark, & Ross, 2005), persist in times of difficulty (Di Paula & Campbell, 2002), and are more motivated in their goal pursuit at work (Erez & Judge, 2001). Self-esteem has important consequences for people at work.

Like any individual difference, self-esteem has both stable and malleable components. This project focuses on the stable component of self-esteem, which tends to remain invariant over time and unchanged across life circumstances and events (Kuster & Orth, 2013). Though self-esteem does have some within-person variance (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), over 70% of the variance of self-esteem is stable (Orth & Robins, 2014). This point is emphasized in a recent review of the self-esteem literature, “…taken together, these new findings suggest that self-esteem should be thought of as a relatively stable, but by no means immutable, trait, with a level of stability that is
comparable to that of basic personality characteristics such as neuroticism and extraversion” (Orth & Robins, 2014, p. 384).

Various workplace events, such as customer mistreatment, can challenge the sense of self, serving as a self-esteem threat. Self-esteem threat refers to events “when favorable views about oneself are questioned, contradicted, impugned, mocked, challenged, or otherwise put in jeopardy” (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996, p. 8). Self-esteem threats conflict with employees’ positive self-views, leading them to behave in ways that verify their overall sense of self (vanDellen et al., 2011; Swann et al., 1992; Swann, 2011). In this way, self-esteem threat offers a framework for the consequences of experiences that challenge employee sense of self.

Customer mistreatment threatens self-esteem in a number of ways. First, customer mistreatment offers negative signals about the employee’s competence. People derive worth from a sense of self-competence (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001). If the goal of customer service is to satisfy the customer and maintain positive customer emotions (Mattila & Enz, 2000), then mistreatment necessarily indicates failure to fulfil that goal (Koopmann et al., 2015) which has implications for the sense of self. Second, customer mistreatment signals that the employee is disliked. People have an intrinsic need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000. Feeling disliked by someone challenges people’s sense that they are affable and liked (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001), which has implications for the sense of self. Third, customer mistreatment conveys the customer’s disrespect, indicating that the service worker is contemptible, or “beneath” the customer. People care a great deal about their standing relative to others (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015; Tesser, 1988). Customer mistreatment may be construed as an intimation from the customer that the service worker is on a lower rung in the ladder of society. In these ways, customer mistreatment poses multiple simultaneous challenges to employees’ positive views of themselves.
The notion that customer mistreatment may be harmful to the self-concept is not totally new. In their germinal work, Dormann and Zapf pointed out various mechanisms by which customer mistreatment can be psychologically harmful to employees, one of which is that customer mistreatment may have implications for service workers’ self-image (Dormann & Zapf, 2004). Similarly, Shao and Skarlicki framed self-worth as a resource that is potentially depleted over multiple negative customer encounters (2014). This dissertation departs from earlier work by providing the first systematic test of the role of self-esteem in consequences of customer mistreatment, and by developing predictions in line with self-esteem threat, the dominant theoretical account of devaluation of self-worth (Baumeister et al., 1996; vanDellen et al., 2011), rather than treating self-esteem as just another valued resource to be conserved. Nevertheless, these germinal writings confirm that devaluation of self-worth is one of the central hallmarks of customer mistreatment.

The self-esteem threat perspective is especially important in customer mistreatment research because it forges a link between the customer mistreatment literature and the venerable corpus of research on the sociology of service work as inherently demeaning (du Gay & Salaman, 1992). Service work is a stigmatized, low-status, “dirty” line of work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Shantz & Booth, 2014). This notion is captured in the very root of service: servility, placing the customer on a higher rung in the ladder of society than the servile employee (Kraus, Tan, & Tannenbaum, 2013; Shamir, 1980). In support of this claim, there is empirical evidence that call center workers do report some agreement that their occupation is stigmatized (Shantz & Booth, 2014). Some have argued that service work is inherently structured to create a ‘myth’ of hierarchy and sovereignty of the customer over the service worker; these structures include (1) display rules that require the service worker to empathize with customers; (2) aesthetic requirements that certain front-line service workers (such as
receptionists) be attractively in dress and make-up; and (3) requirements that service workers refer to customers as ‘sir’ or ‘madam’ (Korczynski & Ott, 2004). The “humiliating interpersonal subordination of service work” (Bourgois, 1995, p. 710) is emphatically conveyed by customers’ poor treatment of employees.

The self-perspective does bear similarities to the justice perspective and the stress perspective. Injustice can convey that the person is unworthy or has low value in the group because just treatment can often serve as a proxy indicator for the person’s status and value in the group (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Restubog, Hornsey, Bordia, & Esposo, 2008; Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007). In a similar vein, self-esteem accounts resemble stress in that both accounts involve resource loss; self-esteem threat diminishes momentary feelings of worth, which can be construed as a valued resource lost in dealing with abusive customers (Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). The stress and justice accounts also resemble one another. Injustice fosters uncertainty (van den Bos & Lind, 2002) which employees can experience as stressful (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). Furthermore, injustice is parsed through the same cognitively demanding appraisal processes associated with stress (Tepper, 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). I concede that these psychological experiences of customer mistreatment—justice, stress, and self—have some overlap. However, the self-perspective is unique in its emphasis on consequences of customer mistreatment as guided by employees’ internal judgements of the self rather than their perceptions of external events. Furthermore, reactions from a self-perspective strive to verify the sense of self (Swann et al., 1992) rather than exert punitive judgement (justice; Cropanzano et al., 2003) or accrue resources/forestall resource loss (stress; Hobfoll, 1989). Nevertheless, the studies presented in this dissertation draw on design strengths, theoretically-prescribed moderators, and statistical controls to rule out stress and justice
as sole alternative explanations for the role of self-esteem in the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service.

In summary, self-esteem threat poses another psychological consequence of employees’ experience of customer mistreatment. Customer mistreatment demeans and devalues service workers in many ways. While relational devaluation has been presented as a hallmark of customer mistreatment in germinal work, self-esteem threat in the employee psychological experience of customer mistreatment has so far eluded systematic examination. Nevertheless, self-esteem issues are especially important in customer mistreatment because of its inherently stigmatized context. Customer mistreatment may further underscore the indignity associated with service work, which may have implications for employees’ sense of self.

Customer mistreatment may challenge and impugn the employees’ sense of self, but the buck does not stop there. These employees must interact with subsequent customers, carrying their negative experiences with them in subsequent encounters. In this way, customer mistreatment may also have consequences for downstream customers of mistreated service workers. This premise is elaborated in the following section.

**Negative Exchange Model of Customer Mistreatment and Downstream Customer Perceptions**

In addition to its consequences for employees, customer mistreatment should also have significant consequences for downstream customers of affected employees. While most research examines the immediate impact of customer mistreatment (e.g. Skarlicki et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2011), researchers have observed delayed reactions to customer mistreatment that were displaced to subsequent customers (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002). Groth and Grandey have posited such a phenomenon in their negative exchange model of customer mistreatment (2012). The negative exchange model
postulates the tendency for bad customer behavior to trigger bad employee behavior—and vice versa—leading to escalation of tensions and conflict in a tit-for-tat process (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). However, employees’ low-quality service behaviors can also spiral out to downstream customers in what Groth and Grandey refer to as an “open loop spiral” (2012, p, 218). In the open loop spiral, customer mistreatment leads to diminished employee service behaviors, but these behaviors may carry over in employees’ subsequent service encounters. In this way, customer mistreatment may spiral out to subsequent, otherwise innocent customers.

The negative exchange model suggests that customer mistreatment diminishes the quality of employee service delivery, which is reflected in customers’ perception of service delivered (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Following Groth and Grandey, I use the phrase ‘customer perceptions’ to refer to customers’ experience, evaluation, and construal of service such as customer satisfaction and repatronage intentions (Bitner, 1990). Customers assess the service they received in light of their expectations of service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). By exceeding customers’ expectations, employees effectively deliver higher-quality service. Customers parse this service delivery in terms of their perceptions of service (i.e. customer satisfaction) and their intentions to repatronize the shop (i.e. customer loyalty) (Bitner, 1990). The negative exchange model postulates that employees’ experience of customer mistreatment is linked to subsequent customers’ perceptions of service delivery (in the form of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty). Empirical support for the open loop spiral process proposed by Groth and Grandey is thus far limited to qualitative work on service sabotage in the hospitality industry (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002). Furthermore, the mechanisms and boundary conditions of the open loop spiral remain yet unknown.

Self-esteem threat may be a prime candidate mechanism for the open loop spiral of customer mistreatment, flowing from customers through employees to their
downstream customers. Employee self-esteem threat may have spiral-out consequences for subsequent service delivery through self-symbolization processes (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Symbolic self-completion theory posits that people enact behaviors not just for instrumental reasons but because these behaviors have symbolic import for the self (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Indeed, employees’ service delivery should have significant symbolic implications for their sense of self. Service is—by its servile and stigmatized nature—concordant and consistent with a subservient sense of self (Shantz & Booth, 2014). Delivering high-quality service symbolically represents subordinating oneself beneath the sovereign customer (du Gay, 1996; du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Korczynski & Ott, 2004). Hence, self-esteem mechanisms play a role not just in employees’ psychological experience of customer mistreatment, but in employees’ subsequent willingness to enact subservient service behaviors that are essential to downstream customer service quality.

Bringing the downstream customer into the picture is important because customer service has important implications for firm profitability. Satisfied customers keep coming back, offer positive word-of-mouth, and engage in customer-citizenship behaviors that are all highly beneficial to the firm (Taylor and Baker, 1994; Hallowell, 1996; Anderson, 1998; Groth, 2005). Neglecting the customer’s side of the story shows an incomplete view of the impact of customer mistreatment on organizations. These consequences of customer mistreatment for downstream customers should have especially valuable managerial implications because customer service plays such a big role in firm profitability and survival.

In this section, I presented the negative exchange model of customer mistreatment and customer service proposed by Groth and Grandey (2012), specifically highlighting the open-loop spiral process by which employees’ experience of customer mistreatment may spiral-out to subsequent customers’ perceptions of customer service.
The spiral-out process has received scant empirical testing, and little is known about the mechanisms and boundary conditions that govern the open-loop spiral. Nevertheless, the proposed self-esteem mechanisms may explain the spiral-out process by framing service delivery as an act of self-symbolization. Customer service is inherently servile and demeaning work situated in an implicit hierarchy where the customer is on top and the service worker is at the bottom. Hence, the self-perspective forges a link between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service through employees’ experience of self-esteem threat and their subsequent (un)willingness to enact servile behaviors. These mechanisms are codified in self-esteem threat theory (vanDellen et al., 2011). The next section discusses the theoretical prescriptions of self-esteem threat theory in the open-loop spiral process of customer mistreatment and downstream customer service.

**Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development**

**Self-Esteem Threat as Theoretical Framework**

This programmatic series of studies tests the self-esteem threat mechanism of the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service (i.e. the open-loop spiral process of the negative exchange model of customer mistreatment; Groth & Grandey, 2012). The full theoretical model is presented in Figure 1. Following self-esteem threat theory, the base model presents employee self-esteem as a moderator of the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction. This base model is tested in Study 1. Study 2 expands the base model by testing the behavioral mechanisms of the link between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction. Employee service behaviors mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction. Self-esteem threat processes (i.e. self-esteem as mediator) determine when employees respond to customer mistreatment by withholding service behaviors. Study 3 further expands the
base model by introducing a self-concept boundary condition—contingency of self-worth—providing converging support for the self-esteem threat account presented here. Each study progressively rules out alternative explanations such as stress, punitive justice processes, and training effects, strengthening the causal inference proposed here (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). The underlying theoretical mechanisms are presented in this section.
Figure 1. Theoretical Model of Self-Esteem Threat in the Customer Mistreatment – Downstream Customer Service Relationship.

*Note.* Study 1 tests base model presented in unbroken circles and arrows. Study 2 introduces employee behavioral mechanism in dotted circle (employee service behavior). Study 3 introduces self-concept boundary condition in broken circle and arrow (employee CSW).
Self-esteem threat presents a challenge to employees’ positive views of themselves. Though there are some individual differences, people universally prefer to feel good about themselves (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; Yamaguchi et al., 2007). The experience of self-esteem threat signals a discrepancy between one’s desired self-feelings and one’s actual momentary self-feelings (vanDellen et al., 2011). This discrepancy is experienced as aversive (Carver & Scheier, 1998)—people are motivated to self-regulate the discrepancy elicited by self-esteem threat. Self-esteem threat theory encompasses the broad range of strategies by which people regulate their feelings of self-worth to reduce the discrepancy posed by self-esteem threat (vanDellen et al., 2011). These feelings of self-worth fluctuate from time-to-time and across experiences, as opposed to global self-esteem which has a strong stable component that remains unchanged despite life experiences that may threaten self-esteem (Kuster & Orth, 2013). A broad range of self-esteem regulation processes have been proposed—broad enough that Tesser refers to these processes as a veritable “self-zoo” (Tesser, 2000). Recently, scholars have aimed to classify these self-esteem regulation processes into self-esteem threat response styles (vanDellen et al., 2011). The self-esteem threat response style most relevant to employees’ experience of customer mistreatment is the compensating style.

Employees whose self-esteem is continually challenged by customers may find themselves trying to compensate for the self-esteem threat. Compensation refers to a response style that rejects self-esteem threat (vanDellen et al., 2011). Compensating employees act on the environment in ways that confirm their positive self-worth, thus reducing the discrepancy posed by self-esteem threat. Upon experiencing customer mistreatment, compensating employees reject the devaluing signals conveyed by abusive customers who implicitly signify that service workers are beneath them. These employees may be subsequently motivated to compensate by enacting behaviors that
affirm a positive sense of worth and eschewing behaviors that confirm low feelings of worth such as service behaviors.

Compensating styles are enacted by people with high self-esteem (vanDellen et al., 2011). High self-esteem is a positive overall view of one’s own worth (Coopersmith, 1967). Employees who strongly believe that they deserve respect and are entitled to high-quality treatment will see customer mistreatment as a blow to the ego, engaging a compensating style accordingly. Compensating styles are favored by high self-esteem employees for self-verification purposes. Self-verification theory suggests that—when experience a challenge to the self—people opt for responses that provide psychological coherence by verifying their overall sense of worth (Swann et al., 1992). This theory explains why people with high self-esteem anticipate successes and seek out positive feelings, while those with low self-esteem anticipate failure and prefer to wallow in negative feelings because it “makes sense” to them (Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003; Wood et al., 2005). Self-verification leads people to behave in ways that maintain and regulate their self-esteem levels (Swann, 2011). Meta-analytic evidence suggests strong support for the link between compensating styles and high self-esteem (vanDellen et al., 2011). Following this logic, high employee self-esteem may motivate a compensating behavioral style following customer mistreatment.

High self-esteem employees subjected to customer mistreatment can compensate by eschewing or withholding service delivery. Service is often regarded as undignified, low-status, “dirty work” which has important esteem implications (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Shantz & Booth, 2014). In this way, service behaviors are concordant with servility and subservience (du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Shamir, 1980). These high self-esteem employees may thus withhold service behaviors from downstream customers intentionally or unintentionally. Intentionally withholding service behaviors may be considered a form of production deviance or sabotage (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).
These deviant behaviors promote feelings of worth and ascendancy (Bobocel & Zdaniuk, 2010), symbolically compensating for abusive customers’ intimations that service workers are beneath them. Deviant intentions notwithstanding, high self-esteem employees may be driven to withhold or diminish service behaviors from downstream customers insomuch as service entails a subjugation of the self (i.e. servility) to the customer. High self-esteem employees can reject this subjugation by refusing to kowtow to customer demands.

There is an accumulation of evidence that people with high self-esteem respond to threat in negative, often deviant ways (Baumeister et al., 1996). In observational studies, people with high self-esteem react to threat in ways that seemed antagonistic and unlikable to others (Vohs and Heatherton, 2003, 2004). In the workplace, employees with high self-esteem were more likely to respond to threat with counterproductive workplace behaviors (Ferris et al., 2012). In contrast, low self-esteem promote reactions that affiliate and forge social connection (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; vanDellen et al., 2011). Hence, poor service delivery as an outcome of customer mistreatment may be linked primarily to employees with high self-esteem rather than those with low self-esteem.

In summary, customer mistreatment serves as a self-esteem threat to employees by conveying negative information about the self. Self-esteem threat theory suggests that employees react to self-esteem threat through esteem regulation strategies such as compensating styles (vanDellen et al., 2011). Employees with high self-esteem enact compensating response styles in order to self-verify their positive sense of worth (Swann et al., 1992; Swann, 2011). These compensating response styles have important implications for these employees’ downstream service delivery because service behaviors have self-symbolical import (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Since service delivery is discordant with high self-esteem, customer-mistreated employees with high
self-esteem may strive to reaffirm their positive sense of self by withholding service
delivery from subsequent customers. Hence, the negative relationship between customer
mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions of service only occurs for
employees with high self-esteem. This base model is presented in the following
hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Customer mistreatment is negatively associated with downstream
customer perceptions of service.

Hypothesis 2: Self-esteem moderates the relationship between customer
mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions. Specifically, self-esteem
amplifies the negative relationship between customer mistreatment and
downstream customer perceptions of service.

OCB-Customer as Employee Behavioral Mechanism

The open-loop spiral process by which customer mistreatment has spiral-out
consequences for downstream customer perceptions ought to be mediated by
diminished employee service behaviors. The most likely candidate here is customer-
directed organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB-Cs). OCB-Cs are discretionary
service behaviors outside employees’ ordinary job description that exceed the minimum
level of service (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). OCB-Cs are particularly crucial for
customer satisfaction because they exceed customer expectations (Schneider, Ehrhart,
Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005) which drive perceptions of service quality
(Parasuraman et al., 1988). Hence, OCB-Cs matter a great deal for customer service
experiences.

Withholding OCB-Cs may be the primary means by which service workers
compensate for self-esteem threat. Going the extra mile in service constitutes a personal
surrender to the subjugation of one’s own worth in the service of the customer (du Gay
& Salaman, 1992). In this way, continued delivery of OCB-C despite customer
mistreatment may be construed as an acceptance of low worth. On the other hand, employees with high self-esteem may withhold OCB-Cs as a rejection of the derogation of their worth. Withholding OCB-Cs may be classified as an interpersonal form of production deviance by reducing the quality of service delivered (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). These simple acts of resistance have symbolic import to the self, validating one’s self-esteem (Miller, 2001; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Indeed, evidence suggests that deviant behaviors can boost self-esteem (Harris & Ogbonna, 2006). Furthermore, since OCBs serve a self-presentation purpose in addition to their instrumental purpose (Rioux & Penner, 2001), the absence of OCB may also have self-presentation implications: constructing and reasserting the employee’s positive self-image in line with high self-esteem (Baumeister, 1982). Since OCB-Cs have self-symbolical import and are crucial to high-quality service delivery, withdrawn or withheld OCB-Cs are the primary candidate employee behavioral mechanisms of the self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment and downstream customer service.

Employees may plausibly influence service delivery through other means, such as neglecting in-role performance or customer-directed sabotage. However, these antiservice behaviors are especially high-risk because they directly flout organizational mandates for service delivery. Service employees tend to be closely monitored by supervisors and the firm (Harris & Ogbonna, 2006; Holman, Chissick, & Totterdell, 2002), which renders more overt antiservice behaviors such as sabotage and neglecting in-role performance far more risky. In contrast, eschewing OCB-Cs is relatively safe because the employee retains plausible deniability.

Diminished OCB-Cs may have significant impact on downstream customer service perceptions. SERVQUAL theory posits that customers evaluate their service delivery in light of their service expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Thus, exceeding customers’ expectations is the key to customer satisfaction (Schneider et al.,
While the role of employee behaviors in customer satisfaction is widely recognized (Bitner, 1990), OCB-Cs are crucial because they go above and beyond to exceed the customer’s expectations (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). Indeed, employees who react to workplace events by withholding OCB-Cs diminish their customers’ satisfaction (Bordia, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2010). In this way, the consequences of customer mistreatment may spiral out to subsequent customers (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Hence, withheld OCB-Cs are a blemish upon subsequent customer experience. Hypothesis 3 follows from this logic.

**Hypothesis 3:** The relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions of service is mediated by OCB-C. The conditional indirect effect of customer mistreatment on downstream customer perceptions of service through OCB-C should be stronger when employee self-esteem is high as opposed to when it is low.

**Contingency of Self-Worth as Boundary Condition**

There’s more to the self than just high or low self-esteem. In addition to the valence of self-esteem, the source of self-esteem also matters a great deal (Swann et al., 2005). The notion that individuals differ in where they stake their self-esteem harkens back to the writings of philosopher-psychologist William James (1890). Contingencies of self-worth (CSWs) are facets of the self upon which one’s value and worth are contingent or dependent (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). CSWs are people’s most crucial and prized sources of worth, such as others’ approval (feeling worthy when one is appreciated by others), performance (feeling worthy when one performs well), and virtue (feeling worthy when one performs virtuous acts), among others (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper & Bouvrette, 2003). Contingencies of self-worth theory posits that the source of self-worth determines which events are important to people and how people react to these self-relevant events (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). These CSWs are
parts of the self-concept that may serve as crucial boundary conditions that determine when employees experience customer mistreatment as a self-esteem threat.

Contingencies of self-worth determine the experiences and behaviors from which a person draws a sense of worth. For example, graduate school applicants felt happier and more worthy on days when they received acceptance letters from graduate schools, but only among applicants who based their self-worth on academic competence (Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen, 2002). Similarly, self-esteem predicted higher job performance, but only among employees who draw their self-worth from performance (Ferris et al., 2010). Lastly, CSWs determine how people react to self-threatening events. Employees were less likely to react to role stressors with deviant, rule breaking behaviors when they staked their CSW on their performance (Ferris et al., 2009). In summary, CSWs are domains that determine which events most strongly influence people’s self-views, feelings, and behaviors.

Contingencies of self-worth theory (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Crocker & Knight, 2005) posits that CSWs modulates the extent to which self-worth is bolstered or threatened in response to life or work events. Customer mistreatment may be one such event. Customer mistreatment threatens self-esteem by signaling three different types of negative information about the service worker—that the service worker is incompetent, disliked, and disrespected. Employees’ CSWs should determine to which aspect of customer mistreatment the employee is sensitive. Feelings of incompetence should be especially painful for employees who draw self-esteem from their performance (CSW-Performance). Feeling disliked and unappreciated should strike a nerve among employees who draw self-esteem from others’ approval (CSW-Approval). Feeling disrespected should especially rankle employees who draw self-esteem from being better than others (CSW-Status). Following contingencies of self-worth theory (Crocker
& Wolfe, 2001), these CSWs serve as boundary conditions that determine for whom customer mistreatment is self-threatening.

Though all of the aforementioned CSWs should plausibly increase self-esteem threat upon experiencing customer mistreatment, this project examines CSW-Approval in particular. Employees with approval-contingent self-worth (CSW-Approval) feel that they have value and worth when they perceive that they are well-liked by others. Approval-CSW is one of the original contingencies of self-worth identified and investigated in college students (Crocker et al., 2003). The core premise is that some individuals are more likely than others to have their sense of self-worth tied to how well-liked and valued they are by other people. Some theorists regard this sense of being-liked as the prime mover of self-worth (sociometer theory; Leary, 1999; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Indeed, self-liking is a critical dimension of self-esteem (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). CSW-Approval is particularly apt as a boundary condition of the self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment because it is the most externally situated CSW identified in the literature (Crocker & Knight, 2005). CSW-Approval is externally situated because these individuals stake their value on the actions of others rather than on their own actions (Crocker et al., 2002; Park, Crocker, & Mickelson, 2004). Because it is externally situated, CSW-Approval is associated with a more vulnerable and fragile sense of self because these people are more sensitive to external events and more prone to depression (Sargent, Crocker, & Luhtanen, 2006; Sanchez & Crocker, 2005). Hence, CSW-Approval ought to be an especially potent trigger for the self-esteem threat reactions that may be associated with customer mistreatment.

Customer mistreatment conveys to service workers that they are disliked by the customer. Verbal abuse and rude language are displays of the customer’s contempt towards and disregard for service workers, which in turn makes them feel disliked and unappreciated by the customer. For service workers with high approval-CSW, it may be
especially important to them that they are well-liked by everyone, by the “generalized other” as it were (Crocker et al., 2003). Customer mistreatment may lead to self-esteem threat among these service workers because it reveals how little the service worker may be valued or approved of by others. Hence, CSW-Approval should serve as a boundary condition of the self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment and downstream customer service. This logic leads to Hypothesis 4.

*Hypothesis 4: CSW-Approval interacts with customer mistreatment and self-esteem in a three-way interaction to predict downstream customer perceptions of service. Specifically, self-esteem amplifies the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions of service only when CSW-Approval is high.*

**Summary of Studies**

This dissertation presents a programmatic series of multisource, time-lagged field survey studies testing the self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment and downstream customer service. Study 1 tests the base model (Hypotheses 1 and 2) in a dyadic sample of food service workers and their downstream customers. In this study, customer satisfaction was examined as the indicator of downstream customer service perceptions. The results of the study showed full support for the self-esteem threat model: customer mistreatment was related to higher levels of downstream customer satisfaction, but only among employees with high self-esteem. The pattern of results was inconsistent with resource loss as an alternative explanation for the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions of service. However, inference from Study 1 is limited because it does not specify the behavioral mechanisms by which the open-loop spiral is transmitted to downstream customers. Furthermore, Study 1 failed to rule out punitive tendencies (justice) and endogenous training effects as alternative explanations for the pattern of results observed. Another
limitation is that customer perceptions of service were collected from only one
downstream customer for each employee, so results may have merely reflected
idiosyncratic features of those service encounters. These limitations were addressed in
Study 2.

Study 2 constructively replicates and expands the base model in Study 1 by
introducing the employee behavioral mechanism—specifically customer-directed OCBs
(OCB-Cs)—to the self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment and downstream
customer perceptions (Hypothesis 3). The study was conducted in a tetradic sample of
retail service workers, their supervisors, and two of their downstream customers. The
results showed full support for the self-esteem threat model. OCB-C mediated the
relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction as
reported by two subsequent customers; this indirect effect was conditional on employee
high self-esteem just as specified by theory.

Study 2 replicates the result in Study 1 while addressing several of its
limitations. First, the study identified and confirmed the employee behavioral
mechanism through which the spiral-out process takes place, thus expanding the base
model tested in Study 1. Second, this study statistically controlled for disposition
towards punitive behavior (i.e. negative reciprocity) which rules out moral judgement as
an alternative explanation for the findings. Third, supplementary analysis showed
moderation by self-esteem only at the first stage of the mediation model, which is
inconsistent with a training-based alternative explanation of the results (i.e.
endogeneity). Fourth, the results were consistent across customer satisfaction ratings of
two independent customers at different times of day, ruling out the possibility that the
results were specific to idiosyncratic features of individual downstream customer
encounters. However, inference from the first two studies are limited because one other
alternative explanation dominant in the customer mistreatment literature remains

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untested: justice sensitivity. Self-esteem may have served as a proxy for justice sensitivity (Brockner et al., 1998). Furthermore, only customer satisfaction has been tested as a customer outcome. Perhaps the pattern of results is specific to customer satisfaction rather than to broader customer perceptions and intentions. Lastly, the model assumes that all employees with high self-esteem will experience self-esteem threat from customer mistreatment. This premise positions high self-esteem as necessarily a liability when experiencing customer mistreatment. There may be individual differences that determine when customer mistreatment leads to self-esteem threat among high self-esteem employees. These limitations were addressed in Study 3.

Study 3 constructively replicates and programmatically extends the base model by examining CSW-Approval as a self-concept boundary condition of the self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment and downstream customer service (Hypothesis 4). The study was conducted in a dyadic sample of food service workers and their downstream customers. Both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty were examined as customer outcomes in this study. The results showed full support for the self-esteem threat model for customer satisfaction as an outcome. Customer mistreatment was associated with poorer downstream customer satisfaction but only for employees who have both high self-esteem and high CSW-Approval. The same pattern was observed for customer loyalty as an outcome, but the slopes were only marginally significant. These studies address the limitations posed by Studies 1 and 2. First, the studies show that not all employees with high self-esteem will respond to customer mistreatment by reducing downstream customer service. The moderating role of self-esteem was conditional on employees drawing their self-esteem from others’ approval. This study also contributes to the CSW at work literature by testing a novel source of self-esteem at work: others’ approval. Previous research on CSW at work has focused exclusively on performance as a source of self-esteem (Ferris et al., 2009, 2010). Second, the three-way
interactions observed are incommensurate with justice sensitivity as an alternative explanation for the results since CSW-Approval is a boundary condition specifically associated with the self-concept. By ruling out various alternative explanations and by introducing theoretically prescribed mediators and boundary conditions, this programmatic series of studies offers enhanced causal inference in favor of the self-esteem threat model proposed in this dissertation (Shadish et al., 2002). Lastly, this study showed modest support for the self-esteem threat model generalizing beyond downstream customer satisfaction as an outcome. Results for downstream customer loyalty were not statistically significant, but were marginally significant and in the predicted direction. Customer loyalty is a more distal outcome of service delivery, so this outcome posed an especially conservative test of the open-loop spiral model. Nevertheless, the pattern for customer loyalty as an outcome resembled that of customer satisfaction as an outcome.

These studies are presented in sequence in the succeeding chapters. Chapter 2 presents the methods and results of Study 1 testing the base model. Chapter 3 presents the methods and results of Study 2 testing the employee behavioral mechanism of the base model. Chapter 4 presents the methods and results of Study 3 testing the self-concept boundary conditions of the base model. Finally, the general discussion of the programmatic series of studies is presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2

Study 1: Testing the Base Model of Self-Esteem Threat in the Relationship between Customer Mistreatment and Downstream Customer Perceptions

Introduction and Hypotheses

Study 1 tests the two basic premises of the model. Hypothesis 1 follows immediately from open-loop spiral process in the negative exchange model of customer mistreatment (Groth & Grandey, 2012), which is that employee reports of customer mistreatment are negatively associated with subsequent customer outcomes (e.g. customer satisfaction). While customer mistreatment typically triggers employee reactions directed at the offending customer, the spiral model invites the possibility of reaction beyond the context of the dyad where mistreatment originally occurred. The self-esteem threat framework (vanDellen et al., 2011) is invoked as an explanation of how customer mistreatment may lead employees to compensate for their poor treatment in ways that mar the service experience of subsequent customers. These compensating reactions occur specifically among employees with high self-esteem. Self-verification theory (Swann et al., 1992) suggests that people with high self-esteem react to esteem-threatening events by reassuring themselves of their superior worth through compensating reactions. These compensating reactions conflict with the core mandate of customer service—servility and subjugation of the self to meet the customer’s needs (Shamir, 1980; du Gay & Salaman, 1992)—leading these employees to render lower quality service to their customers. Following this logic is Hypothesis 2, which is that employee self-esteem moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and the three customer outcomes. The model is presented in Figure 2.

Hypothesis 1: Customer mistreatment is negatively associated with downstream customer satisfaction.
Hypothesis 2: Self-esteem moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction. Specifically, self-esteem amplifies the negative relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction.
Figure 2. Model Diagram of Study 1
Participants and Procedure

The study presents field surveys collected at 49 food service establishments in the Philippines. A total of 143 employee-customer dyads participated in the study (i.e. 286 observations). Approximately 57% of the employees were female with an average age of 25. The majority of employee participants were permanent staff members of their restaurants (61%), while about a quarter were contractual service staff (29%). Less than 10% of the employees were contractual (9%) and casual staff (2%) respectively. The average organizational tenure among the employees was 1.6 years. On average, about 4 customer-employee dyads were surveyed across each restaurant.

Participating restaurants were members of a restaurant management association. Service workers were recruited from 53 small restaurants. At Time 1, questionnaires were disseminated to 329 food service workers. These employees reported the level of customer mistreatment experienced over the previous month, as well as their level of self-esteem. Surveys were returned by 209 food service workers yielding a response rate of 63.53%. At Time 2, three and a half months later, a customer of each target retail worker filled out questionnaires on their customer satisfaction (total of 173 customers participated). With the approval of the section heads, administrative staff, and participating employees, research assistants administered a brief customer survey form to a customer who had been served by the focal employees. Retrieved were 166 matched surveys; 23 surveys were excluded for missing responses, inaccurate/wrong anonymous codes, and unanswered surveys.

Measures

Questionnaires were prepared in the English language because the vast majority of the Filipino population is fluent in English (Bernardo, 2004). The response format for all items was a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) with items coded so that higher scores reflect higher levels of the focal construct.
Customer mistreatment. Employees accomplished an 8-item measure of customer mistreatment (Skarlicki et al., 2008). Employees were instructed to report how often customers engaged in certain mistreatment behaviors over the preceding month. Sample items are, “interrupted you; cut you off mid-sentence” and “yelled at you.” The measure showed a reliability of .86.

Self-esteem. Employees’ levels of self-esteem were assessed using the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) which is commonly used in self-esteem research. I used overall self-esteem instead of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) because mistreatment from organizational outsiders may threaten employees’ overall self-esteem rather than the employees’ within-organization self-esteem. OBSE more closely reflects belonging and competency within a workgroup (Pierce et al., 1989). Example items are, “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I take a positive attitude towards myself.” This scale yielded a reliability coefficient of .77.

Customer satisfaction. Customers accomplished a brief 3-item measure of customer satisfaction (Tsiros, Mittal, and Ross, 2004). This customer satisfaction measure is particularly apt for this study because it specifically refers to satisfaction with service from the employee rather than satisfaction with the overall service experience, following recommendations for customer-employee research (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Sample items are, “I feel satisfied with the service I have received from this employee” and “I am happy with the service extended to me by this employee.” The customer satisfaction measure was reliable at .92.

Control variables. Demographic contributors to service delivery were controlled for, specifically employees’ gender, age, organizational tenure, and employment status. Gender was coded as 0 for male and 1 for female. For employment status, employees were asked to respond as follows (1 = permanent/regular, 2 = probationary, 3 = contractual, 4 = casual). I controlled for gender in keeping with
gender schema theory, which suggests that cultural assumptions about gender
determine people’s expectations and evaluations towards males and females (Bem,
1981). Female employees’ service may be evaluated more positively because of
stereotyped expectations for women to be better at delivering service and to go the
extra mile (Mattila, Grandey, & Fisk, 2003). Stereotyped gender roles may have self-
fulfilling properties for women (Eagly & Wood, 1991). Furthermore, studies have
shown systematic gender differences in self-esteem (Orth & Robins, 2014); hence, it is
important to partial out any shared variance between gender and self-esteem in the
model. I controlled for age on the basis of socioemotional selectivity theory, which
suggests that older workers’ enhanced skill with handling their emotions (Carstensen,
Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Gross et al., 1997) may lead them to deliver superior
customer service. Lastly, I controlled for tenure on the basis of information processing
theory, which suggests that repeated practice is essential for skill development and
motivation (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Indeed, retail workers’ customer service skills
(e.g. salesmanship, interpersonal relations) may improve over their tenure and with
more regular employment status.

Results

Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and variable intercorrelations are
presented in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative relationship between customer
mistreatment and customer satisfaction. Zero-order correlations were evinced in the
predicted direction ($r = -.29, p < .01$). The relationship remained even after inclusion of
control variables in a regression model ($B = -.26, SE = .09, p < .01, 95\% \text{CI} [-.41, -
.11]$). These results support Hypothesis 1.

Since employee-customer dyads were nested within restaurants, the moderation
analyses were conducted using Mplus (Muthen & Muthen, 2012). All the variables of
interest were measured at the employee level. Hence, sandwich estimators were used to
account for non-independence of residuals due to nesting (White, 1980; Muthen & Muthen, 2012). Predictors were mean-centered (Aiken & West, 1991). Following common practice (Aiken & West, 1991), we specified high and low levels of the moderator at +1 and -1 standard deviations from the mean, respectively.
Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Coefficient Alpha, and Intercorrelations of Variables in Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gender</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tenure</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employment status</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.34**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Customer mistreatment</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-esteem</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.30**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Reliability coefficients are displayed in the diagonal.

*p<.05, **p<.01
Hypothesis 2 predicted that employee self-esteem moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer satisfaction. The regression estimates are presented in Table 2. The interaction term for customer mistreatment and employee self-esteem was a significant predictor of customer satisfaction ($B = -0.18, SE = 0.07, p < 0.01$). As hypothesized, customer mistreatment was negatively associated with customer satisfaction only among employees with high self-esteem ($B = -0.49, SE = 0.08, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.63, -0.35]$) but not those with low self-esteem ($B = -0.14, SE = 0.11, ns, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.31, 0.04]$). These findings fully support Hypothesis 2. Simple slopes of the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer satisfaction was plotted in Figure 3 to aid interpretation.
Table 2. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Results for the Moderation of Customer Mistreatment on Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty by Employee Self-Esteem in Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>-0.31**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM*Self-esteem</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R²                   | 0.13** |
Change in R²         | 0.03*  |

Note. CM = customer mistreatment

*p < .05, **p < .01
Figure 3. Interactive Relationship between Customer Mistreatment and Employee Self-Esteem in Predicting Subsequent Customer Satisfaction in Study 1.
Discussion

Following prescriptions from self-esteem threat theory, Study 1 provides the first empirical test of the customer mistreatment spiral-out phenomenon postulated by Groth and Grandey (2012) showing the impact of customer mistreatment to downstream customers of the targeted employee. Furthermore, this spiral-out phenomenon occurred only for employees with high self-esteem, who would have experienced self-esteem threat that led them to withhold service from subsequent customers. Hence, Study 1 sheds light on the role of employee self-esteem in customer outcomes of customer mistreatment.

This investigation contributes to the literature by introducing a novel lens for the consequences of customer mistreatment: self-esteem (vanDellen et al., 2011). Customer mistreatment may serve as a “blow to the ego” that leads high self-esteem employees to compensate by withholding high-quality service from customers. Bringing the self into the picture enables us to link customer mistreatment to the growing literature on issues of worth and dignity in the service context (Shantz and Booth, 2014). Service often entails a level of subjugation, servility, and stigma (du Gay and Salaman, 1992), which can be underscored by bad customer behavior. Bearing the context in mind, customer mistreatment can certainly crush an employee’s ego, moreso when they have high self-esteem. Hence, employee self-esteem may operate as a boundary condition of the link between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions.

The self-esteem threat approach presented here offers a counterpoint to the predominant resource loss explanation of the consequences of customer mistreatment. Previous research has drawn on conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to explain employee reactions to customer mistreatment. The premise is that the experience of customer mistreatment depletes valued employee resources such as self-
worth, self-confidence, and willpower, diminishing employees’ willingness to invest their resources in high-quality service delivery (Lilius, 2012; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014; Wang et al., 2011). Self-esteem threat implies a threat to the valued resource of employee self-worth, so self-esteem threat seems to be confounded with resource loss as an explanation of the results presented in this study. However, COR theory and self-esteem threat make conflicting prescriptions on the role of trait self-esteem. Following from COR theory, employees with large resource caches can invest resources in order to shield themselves from resource loss or recoup lost resources quickly (Hobfoll, 2001). From a COR theory perspective, high self-esteem increases the pool of self-esteem resources available to the employee, thus it should diminish the negative impact of customer mistreatment on downstream customer outcomes. In contrast, self-esteem threat indicates that high self-esteem facilitates a compensating reaction style (vanDellen et al., 2011), amplifying adverse outcomes of customer mistreatment.

Indeed, our study shows support for the self-esteem threat account instead of the resource loss account. Hence, a self-esteem threat account departs from COR theory prescriptions in showing that high “resource” levels may have ironic consequences for employees and customers. This pattern of findings is incommensurate with a resource loss / stress based alternative explanation of the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions.

These results further contribute to the customer mistreatment literature by extending the impact of customer mistreatment to downstream customer perceptions. While this process has been proposed and postulated in previous work (Groth & Grandey, 2012), little empirical testing of the idea has been conducted. Furthermore, the explanations and boundary conditions of the spiral out process were yet unknown. While earlier studies have shown the consequences of customer mistreatment for the employee (Skarlicki et al., 2008; Sliter et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2011), scant research
has systematically explored the consequences for downstream customers. This study extends these findings by bringing the customer into the picture. The results of this study show full support for the spiral-out main effect prediction specified in the negative exchange model of customer mistreatment (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Furthermore, this study introduces a self-esteem threat perspective on the spiral-out process, specifying how high self-esteem may serve as a boundary condition that amplifies the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions. Given the importance of customer satisfaction to firm profitability and survival (Anderson et al., 1994; Hallowell, 1996), the consequences of customer mistreatment may go far beyond just the employee.

Study 1 has several important strengths. First, common method bias is diminished by assessing customer mistreatment through employee-reports and service perceptions through customer-reports, answering the call to increase the use of informant-reports in customer mistreatment research (Koopmann et al., 2015). Second, the time-lagged field study further diminished common method bias, improving construct validity and the fidelity of the causal inference (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Shadish et al., 2002). Future studies may opt to use longitudinal or experimental designs to more fully rule out reverse causality or endogeneity. Third, the moderation design pits self-esteem threat predictions against resource loss predictions in order to distinguish the self-esteem threat account from the other predominant psychological consequence of customer mistreatment: stress / resource loss. This design feature strengthens fidelity that the proposed self-esteem threat effects are veridical and independent from established resource loss accounts. While stress may nevertheless contribute to employee reactions to customer mistreatment, the observed moderating relationship of self-esteem is inconsistent with predictions from conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989)—the predominant account of stress used to explain
employee reactions to customer mistreatment (e.g. Shao & Skarlicki, 2014; Sliter et al., 2012).

One major limitation of Study 1 was that the employees’ experience and behaviors that mediate the open-loop spiral process were not laid out. While the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions was clearly demonstrated in Study 1, it remains unclear whether employee service behaviors mediate this relationship as specified by the self-esteem threat model. So far, the employee remains a black box in the spiral out process. Testing the employee behavioral mechanism is important because the proposed causal link between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perception may be spurious. For instance, undertrained employees may attract customer mistreatment as well as deliver lower-quality service. The relationship may be caused by a third, endogenous variable rather than because of a causal relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). In this alternative account, the moderating role of self-esteem in the mistreatment-service relationship occurs not because of self-esteem threat processes but merely because self-esteem amplifies the benefits of training and learning (Trautwein, Ludtke, Koller, & Baumert, 2006). Hence, Study 1 suffers from two related and significant limitations: (1) employee behavioral mechanism remains unclear; and (2) training-based endogeneity is a plausible alternative explanation for the results of Study 1.

A third limitation concerns another plausible alternative explanation: punitive tendencies. The fairness account of justice—a predominant account of the employee consequences of customer mistreatment—suggests that employee reactions to customer mistreatment may be driven by punitive judgements motivated by moral indignation (Croppanzano et al., 2003; Skarlicki et al., 2008). In keeping with this theoretical account, employee self-esteem may be operating as a proxy for individual dispositions.
towards exacting punitive judgement. Employees may be inclined to view customers as one coherent whole—“us versus the public”—mentally rendering the customer base as a homogenous, monolithic entity rather than individual people in separate encounters (Quattrone & Jones, 1980). Taking such a view, employees may withdraw downstream customer service as a displaced punitive judgement (Miller et al., 2003; Sjostrom & Gollwitzer, 2015). In this alternative account, the moderating role of self-esteem may be explained in light of self-esteem as a correlate of personal tendencies to moralize and inflict punishment on others (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Jordan & Monin, 2008). Hence, the results evinced in Study 1 may plausibly be explained by fairness theory rather than self-esteem threat theory.

A fourth limitation of Study 1 concerns the number of customer perceptions obtained. Only one downstream customer for each participant was recruited to report on their customer perceptions. Hence, the results obtained in Study 1 may plausibly be due to idiosyncratic features of the singular downstream customer encounter that was assayed for each employee rather than being reflective of a broader compensating style enacted by employees. Perhaps the same result would not be evinced across a larger number of downstream customer encounters. These four limitations were each addressed in Study 2, which replicates and extends the base model tested in Study 1. The methods and results of Study 2 are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

Study 2: Behavioral Mechanisms of the Base Model of Self-Esteem Threat in the Relationship of Customer Mistreatment with Customer Satisfaction

Introduction and Hypotheses

Study 2 replicates and extends Study 1 by investigating the employee behavioral mechanism—extra-role service behaviors or OCB-Cs—that mediate the spiral out effect of customer mistreatment on downstream customer satisfaction. OCB-Cs are employee service deliver behaviors that go the extra mile to exceed the expectations of customers (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). Hypothesis 1 states that customer mistreatment should be associated with few extra-role service behaviors because mistreated employees are motivated to diminish service towards downstream customers. The motive for employee diminished service behaviors originates in self-esteem threat. High self-esteem employees may engage in compensating reactions to customer mistreatment (Swann et al., 1992; vanDellen et al., 2011), leading them to withhold extra-role service behaviors as an act of resistance and a symbolic demonstration of personal worth (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982; Miller, 2001). Thus, Hypothesis 2 proposes that the relationship between customer mistreatment and employee OCB-Cs is moderated by employee self-esteem. Since OCB-Cs are essential to customer satisfaction because these behaviors exceed customer expectations (following SERVQUAL theory; Parasuraman et al., 1988), Hypothesis 3 states that the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer satisfaction is mediated by employee OCB-Cs, but that this mediation is conditional on employee self-esteem at the first stage. The full model is depicted in Figure 4.

Hypothesis 1: Customer mistreatment is negatively associated with employee OCB-C behaviors.
Hypothesis 2: Employee self-esteem moderates the negative association between customer mistreatment and employee OCB-C behaviors. The negative association between customer mistreatment and employee OCB-C behaviors is stronger when employee self-esteem is high as opposed to when it is low.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between customer mistreatment and customer satisfaction is mediated by OCB-C. The conditional indirect effect of customer mistreatment on customer satisfaction through OCB-C should be stronger when employee self-esteem is high as opposed to when it is low.
Figure 4. Model Diagram of Study 2
Participants and Procedures

Service workers from a large retail organization in the Philippines were recruited for this study. Data were collected from three sources: (1) survey data from retail worker; (2) survey data from retail workers’ supervisors; and (3) customer satisfaction data from two customers of the retail workers. A total of 168 tetrads (i.e. 722 observations) participated in the study. Approximately 56% of the retail worker sample was female, with an average age of 28. All retail employees were permanent staff members of the firm, with the majority having 1-5 years of organizational tenure (77.4%). Employee self-reports and multiple informant reports were collected over a three wave measurement period. At Time 1, questionnaires were disseminated to 311 full-time retail workers who were undertaking a training course unrelated to the study. Participants reported the customer mistreatment experienced over the previous month as well as their overall self-esteem. Two-hundred twenty one returned the surveys, yielding a response rate of 71.06%.

At Time 2 (three months after Time 1), each of the 221 participants received a behavioral rating form to be completed by their immediate supervisor to assess the employees’ OCB-Cs. Supervisor-reports were obtained this way for ethical reasons—to ensure that participants uncomfortable participating in the research were not coerced to do so. Two strategies were utilized to ensure the integrity of the completed supervisor forms. First, supervisors were instructed to sign across the flap of the sealed reply envelope containing the completed form. Second, a research assistant randomly contacted 10% of the participating supervisors using the optional contact number included in the supervisor form. Questions pertaining to the content of the survey were asked to determine whether the supervisor had actually completed the survey. All contacted supervisors provided accurate information supporting the integrity of the data. Retrieved were 198 surveys with a response rate of 89.59%; 15 surveys were
excluded for missing responses, inaccurate/wrong anonymous codes, and unanswered surveys.

At Time 3, two weeks after Time 2 data collection, two customers of each target retail worker reported their customer satisfaction. With the approval of the section heads, administrative staff, and participating employees, research assistants administered a brief customer survey form to two randomly selected customers who had been served by the focal employees. Because the employees were aware that customer satisfaction ratings were being collected, research assistants randomly selected two customers. The random selection involved randomly selecting one customer each during the morning and afternoon shifts. Data were matched via an anonymous code that each participant had included on both the employee survey and the supervisor survey. After the removal of unanswered or incomplete customer survey forms, 168 independent employee – supervisor – customer surveys were matched over the three stages of data collection.

**Measures**

Questionnaires were prepared in the English language because the vast majority of the Filipino population is fluent in English (Bernardo, 2004). The response format for all items was a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) with items coded so that higher scores reflect higher levels of the focal construct.

**Customer mistreatment.** Employees’ self-reports of customer mistreatment were assessed using a measure of customer mistreatment developed by Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker (2008) to assess customer mistreatment in call center workers. This measure has been used in other customer mistreatment studies as well (Wang et al., 2011). The relevance of this measure for retail setting was assessed through a focus group discussion (FGD). On the basis of the FGD, I dropped an item from the measure, “raised irrelevant discussion,” which was deemed irrelevant to the retail context. In the
final measure, seven items were retained. Employees were instructed to report how often customers engaged in certain mistreatment behaviors over the preceding month. Sample items are, “interrupted you; cut you off mid-sentence” and “yelled at you.” The measure showed a reliability of .93.

**Self-esteem.** Employees’ levels of self-esteem were assessed using the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) which is commonly used in self-esteem research. I used overall self-esteem instead of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) because mistreatment from organizational outsiders may threaten employees’ overall self-esteem rather than the employees’ within-organization self-esteem and social ranking. OBSE more closely reflects belonging and competency within a workgroup (Pierce et al., 1989). Example items are, “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I take a positive attitude towards myself.” This scale yielded a reliability coefficient of .72.

**OCBs towards customers.** OCB-Cs are service behaviors that go beyond in-role service delivery requirements for the role (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). A 5-item measure of OCB-C was developed by Bettencourt and Brown (1997). Supervisors were asked to report on their subordinate retail workers’ OCB-Cs. This measure is particularly appropriate for supervisors to complete because the measure construes extra-role service behaviors broadly (e.g. “Often goes above and beyond the call of duty when serving customers”) instead of specific service behaviors that supervisors may not have had opportunity to observe. This measure evinced an alpha coefficient of .97.

**Customer satisfaction.** Two customers were asked to report their satisfaction with the service delivered by the target retail worker. A brief two-item measure of customer satisfaction was adapted from a measure by Tsiros, Mittal, and Ross (2004). This customer satisfaction measure is particularly apt for this study because it
specifically refers to satisfaction with service from the employee rather than satisfaction with the overall service experience, following recommendations for customer-employee research (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Since the satisfaction ratings of both customers were highly correlated ($r = .89$), I used the average of both customers’ satisfaction ratings as an indicator of overall customer satisfaction with the target employee. The two items are, “I feel satisfied with the service I have received from this employee” and “I am happy with the service extended to me by this employee.” The customer satisfaction measure was reliable at .94.

**Control variables.** Demographic contributors to service delivery were controlled for, specifically employees’ gender, age, and organizational tenure. Furthermore, also controlled for was negative reciprocity, a dispositional tendency to respond negatively to interpersonal mistreatment (Biron, 2010), assessed using a 14-item measure (alpha = .87; Eisenberger et al., 2004). Gender was coded as 0 for male and 1 for female. Tenure was coded ordinally in 5-year bands (1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1-5 years, 3 = 6-10 years, 4 = 11-15 years, 5 = 16-20 years, 6 = 21-25 years, 7 = 26-30 years, 8 = over 30 years). I controlled for gender in keeping with gender schema theory, which suggests that cultural assumptions about gender determine people’s expectations and evaluations towards males and females (Bem, 1981). Female employees’ service may be evaluated more positively because of stereotyped expectations for women to be better at delivering service and to go the extra mile (Mattila, Grandey, & Fisk, 2003). Stereotyped gender roles may have self-fulfilling properties for women (Eagly & Wood, 1991). Furthermore, studies have shown systematic gender differences in self-esteem (Orth & Robins, 2014); hence, it is important to partial out any shared variance between gender and self-esteem in the model. I controlled for age on the basis of socioemotional selectivity theory, which suggests that older workers’ enhanced skill with handling their emotions (Carstensen,
Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Gross et al., 1997) may lead them to deliver superior
customer service. Lastly, I controlled for tenure on the basis of information processing
theory, which suggests that repeated practice is essential for skill development and
motivation (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Indeed, retail workers’ customer service skills
(e.g. salesmanship, interpersonal relations) may improve over their tenure. Lastly,
controlling for negative reciprocity confirms that any negative impact of customer
mistreatment did not occur to merely redress mistreatment from customers in a
triggered, displaced reaction (Miller et al., 2003).

Results

Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and variable intercorrelations are
presented in Table 3. Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative relationship between customer
mistreatment and supervisor-rated OCB-C. Zero-order correlations were evinced in the
predicted direction ($r = -0.22, p < 0.01$). The relationship remained statistically
significant in regression analysis including control variables ($B = -0.32, SE = 0.17, p <
0.05$, 95% CI [-0.61, -0.05]). These results support Hypothesis 1.

Among the 168 employees in the sample, 10 pairs of employees shared a
supervisor. I assessed the possibility of nesting in these 20 employees through a one-
way ANOVA to determine variations in OCB-C ratings across supervisors (Bliese,
2000). The results showed no significant differences across supervisor groups, $F(9,10)
= 1.47, ns.$
Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, Coefficient Alpha, and Intercorrelations of Variables in Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>1. Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Tenure</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.80**</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Negative reciprocity</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>0.90</td>
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<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
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<td>(0.87)</td>
</tr>
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<td>5. Customer mistreatment</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>-0.38**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-esteem</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>-0.41**</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
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<td>(0.72)</td>
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<td>7. OCB-customer</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>-0.28**</td>
<td>-0.22**</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>(0.94)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Reliability coefficients are displayed in the diagonal. OCB-Customer = customer-directed organizational citizenship behaviors.

*p<.05, **p<.01
The PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2012) was used to conduct moderation and moderated mediation analyses. The hypothesized full model is a first-stage moderated mediation model (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). The PROCESS macro was used to generate regression estimates of the moderation effect (Hypothesis 2) and 5000 bias-corrected bootstrapped estimates of and confidence intervals for the conditional indirect effect (Hypothesis 3) of self-esteem. Predictors were mean-centered (Aiken & West, 1991). Following common practice (Aiken & West, 1991), we specified high and low levels of the moderator at +1 and -1 standard deviations from the mean, respectively.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that self-esteem moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and supervisor-rated OCB-C. The regression estimates are presented in Table 4. The interaction term for customer mistreatment and self-esteem was a significant predictor of supervisor-rated OCB-C ($B = -0.32, SE = 0.13, p < 0.05$). As expected, customer mistreatment was negatively related to supervisor-rated OCB-C for employees with high self-esteem ($B = -0.56, SE = 0.17, p < 0.01, 95\% CI [-0.89, -0.23]$), but not low self-esteem ($B = 0.14, SE = 0.23, ns, 95\% CI [-0.27, 0.64]$). To aid interpretation, slopes were plotted depicting the association between customer mistreatment and supervisor-rated OCB-C for employees with high and low levels of self-esteem, respectively. These slopes are depicted in Figure 5. As hypothesized, the slope for high self-esteem was significant, $t(159) = -3.33, p < 0.05$, whereas the slope for low self-esteem was not, $t(159) = 0.60, ns$. Hypothesis 2 was supported.
Table 4. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Results for the Moderated Mediation of Customer Mistreatment to Customer Satisfaction via OCB-Customer Conditional on Employee Self-Esteem in Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>OCB</th>
<th>Customer Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative reciprocity</td>
<td>-0.34*</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM*Self-esteem</td>
<td>-0.32*</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCB-Customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$                      | 0.19**    | 0.21**                |

Note. CM = customer mistreatment; OCB-Customer = customer-directed organizational citizenship behaviors.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
Hypothesis 3 predicted that the indirect effect of customer mistreatment on customer satisfaction through supervisor-rated OCB-C was conditional on self-esteem. As expected, customer mistreatment had an indirect effect on customer satisfaction through supervisor-rated OCB-C for employees with high self-esteem (\textit{indirect effect} = -0.17, \textit{SE} = 0.07, \textit{z} = 2.43, \textit{p} < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.35, -0.05]), not for employees with low self-esteem (\textit{indirect effect} = 0.04, \textit{SE} = 0.06, \textit{z} = 0.67, \textit{ns}, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.07, 0.17]) as shown in Table 5. The results indicate partial mediation because customer mistreatment continued to predict customer satisfaction after partialing out OCB-C (\textit{B} = -0.22, \textit{SE} = 0.10, \textit{p} < 0.05). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.
Figure 5. Interactive Relationship between Customer Mistreatment and Employee Self-Esteem in Predicting Supervisor-Rated Customer-Directed Organizational Citizenship Behaviors in Study 2
Table 5. Estimates and Bias-Corrected Bootstrapped 95% Confidence Intervals for the Conditional Indirect Effect of Customer Mistreatment on Customer Satisfaction at ± 1 Standard Deviation of Employee Self-Esteem in Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Esteem Level</th>
<th>Estimate (SE)</th>
<th>CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-1 SD Self-Esteem</td>
<td>.04 (.06)</td>
<td>[-.06, .17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1 SD Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-.17 (.07)</td>
<td>[-.35, -.05]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval

a Bootstrapped estimates for the standard error (SE) are presented in parentheses.
The conditional indirect effect is plotted and visualized following prescriptions by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) in Figure 6. The figure plots the indirect effect size of customer mistreatment on customer satisfaction through OCB-customer (vertical axis) against the employee’s self-esteem level (horizontal axis). As self-esteem level increases, the size of the indirect effect becomes increasingly strong and negative. The indirect effect approaches statistical significance when employee self-esteem level is near the mean of 3.7 (as indicated by the confidence bands), and continues to get stronger as self-esteem level rises.
Figure 6. The Conditional Indirect Effect of Customer Mistreatment on Customer Satisfaction via Customer-Directed Organizational Citizenship Behaviors Conditional on Employee Self-Esteem as a First-Stage Moderator in Study 2

Note. Dashed lines indicate confidence bands for the indirect effect size (95% bootstrap CIs).
Supplementary Analyses

Four alternative models were also tested: (1) conditional indirect effect of self-esteem as second-stage moderator; (2) conditional direct effect of self-esteem; (3) hypothesized model without control variables; and (4) conditional indirect effect of negative reciprocity as first-stage moderator. For alternative models 1 and 2, the interaction terms were not significant ($B = 0.10, SE = 0.07, ns$) and ($B = -0.11, SE = 0.10, ns$) respectively. For alternative model 3, removing control variables did not appreciably change the result. For alternative model 4, the interaction term was not significant ($B = -0.05, SE = 0.12, ns$).

Discussion

Drawing on prescriptions from self-esteem threat theory (vanDellen et al., 2011), Study 2 tested hypothesized links from customer mistreatment of service workers to diminished OCB-Cs, which in turn is linked to reduced downstream customer satisfaction, and that these effects are strongest for employees with high self-esteem. The findings supported all three predictions. After experiencing customer mistreatment, employees with high self-esteem withheld OCBs from subsequent customers, who in turn reported lower levels of customer satisfaction. However, this trend was not evinced among employees with low self-esteem; these employees delivered just as much OCB-C regardless of their experience of customer mistreatment. These findings demonstrate the spiral out consequences of customer mistreatment for downstream customer satisfaction, as well as its underlying behavioral mechanisms.

This study constructively replicates the self-esteem threat model developed and tested in Study 1, while extending the model by introducing OCB-C as the employee behavioral mechanism of the model. This result provides further empirical support for the open-loop spiral model proposed by Groth and Grandey (2012) and extends the
model by specifying and testing an employee behavioral mechanism through which the consequences of customer mistreatment are transmitted to downstream customer service. Furthermore, demonstrating the employee behavioral mechanism in this model rules out the possibility that the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction is solely due to omitted third variables that are not associated with employee service delivery. This result strengthens causal inference for the relationship of customer mistreatment with downstream customer service perceptions.

Notably, the findings show partial mediation of the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer satisfaction through OCB-C. While OCB-C is crucial for customer satisfaction (Schneider et al., 2005), other employee service behaviors like overt sabotage may also link customer mistreatment to downstream customer perceptions. Customer mistreatment may also contribute to downstream customer satisfaction through employee affective delivery due to emotional labor (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009; Rupp & Spencer, 2006). Negative emotions may seep into employees’ affective delivery during an encounter (Beal, Trougakos, Weiss, & Green, 2006) which may in turn influence customers’ experience of service and behavioral intentions (Tsai and Huang, 2002). More research is needed to further delineate the behavioral mechanisms that link customer mistreatment to downstream customer satisfaction.

In addition to introducing and testing employee behavioral mechanisms, Study 2 addresses several other important limitations of Study 1. First of these is the alternative explanation that the causal relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service is spurious, merely reflecting endogeneity from unmeasured training effects. Undertrained employees may attract higher levels of customer mistreatment as well as deliver poorer quality service. By this alternative
account, self-esteem merely served as an amplifier of training effects because people with high self-esteem exert more effort towards learning (Trautwein et al., 2006). However, if this account were true, self-esteem would inflate all the substantive relationships, thus also moderating the relationship between OCB-C and customer satisfaction, as well as the direct effect of customer mistreatment to customer satisfaction. These patterns were not evinced in the supplementary analyses. Instead, self-esteem only moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and OCB-Customer, exactly as prescribed by self-esteem threat theory. Hence, it is unlikely that a training-based endogeneity effect solely explains the pattern of results. While a reasonable effort was made to consider endogenous confounds in the model, the use of instrumental variables and randomized experiments may further diminish the influence of endogeneity bias in future studies (Antonakis et al., 2012).

Another limitation of Study 1 that was addressed was the possibility that self-esteem served as proxy for punitive tendencies (Campbell et al., 2002; Jordan & Monin, 2008) which fits the incumbent moral fairness account of customer mistreatment (Cropanzano et al., 2003) rather than the proposed self-esteem threat mechanism. Study 2 addressed this concern through statistically controlling for negative reciprocity, a dispositional tendency towards punitive reactions to mistreatment (Biron, 2010). Hence, it is unlikely that these patterns of results can be explained solely by moral punitive judgements. Lastly, Study 1 presented customer ratings in only one customer encounter for each employee. This result does not demonstrate a systematic tendency towards enacting a compensating style in response to customer mistreatment because the pattern of results may merely reflect idiosyncratic or peculiar features of the service encounter in which the customer was assayed. Study 2 remedies this limitation by presenting customer outcomes from two different customers of the same employee at different times of day. The consistency of
the pattern here provides stronger evidence that the service delivery outcomes reflect employee service behaviors rather than idiosyncratic features of the service setting or encounter. In summary, Study 2 strengthens the inferences made in Study 1 by addressing many of its alternative explanations.

In summary, Study 2 replicates and extends the model tested in Study 1, showing that the impact of self-esteem threat from customer mistreatment is transmitted through employee extra-role service behaviors to subsequent customer satisfaction. This result clarifies the behavioral mechanism by which customer mistreatment spirals out to impact downstream customers. One limitation of both Studies 1 and 2 is that employee experience of self-esteem threat was inferred only through moderation with employee self-esteem. High self-esteem is not the only precondition for parsing customer mistreatment as a self-esteem threat; other individual differences may play a crucial role in determining when and for whom customer mistreatment is self-threatening. A second limitation is that self-esteem may serve as a proxy for justice sensitivity—an alternative explanation for these findings. Since high self-esteem employees may plausibly expect to be treated with a higher level of justice, the results may merely indicate a reaction motivated by unfairness rather than by a threat to self-worth (Brockner et al., 1998; De Cremer, van Knippenberg, van Dijke, & Bos, 2004). A third limitation concerns the use of only one customer outcome: customer satisfaction. The results may not generalize to subsequent customer repatronage intentions, which have more direct implications for customer retention and firm revenue. All three limitations are addressed in Study 3, which tests a theoretically prescribed self-concept boundary condition to the base model and assesses customer loyalty as a customer service outcome.
CHAPTER 4

Study 3: Contingency of Self-Worth-Approval as a Boundary Condition of the Base Model of Self-Esteem Threat in the Relationship of Customer Mistreatment with Customer Satisfaction

Introduction and Hypotheses

Study 3 continues to unpack the employee mechanisms of the customer mistreatment spiral-out effect (Groth & Grandey, 2012). However, where Study 2 focused on employee behavioral mechanisms of the process, Study 3 focused on the employee psychological experience of self-esteem threat by specifying a self-concept boundary condition. In order for customer mistreatment to elicit self-esteem threat in employees, it must threaten employees at a particularly delicate part of their self-concept—their contingency of self-worth. Contingency of self-worth (CSW) refers to the individual’s source of self-esteem, the unique aspect of their life experience from which they draw their value and worth as human beings (Crocker & Knight, 2005). One such CSW is others’ approval (CSW-Approval). Employees may infer their worth and value by observing signals of how much they are valued or approved of by people around them, or the generalized other (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Customer mistreatment conveys a signal that the employee is not valued or regarded well by the customer. After all, the customer wouldn’t treat the employee so poorly if the customer liked the employee. CSWs determine which events involve or threaten the ego. Thus, customer mistreatment may only elicit self-esteem threat among high self-esteem employees in the presence of a relevant CSW—a hypothesized three-way interaction leading to negative downstream customer outcomes (customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, perceived customer support). The model is depicted in Figure 7.

Hypothesis 3a: CSW-Approval interacts with customer mistreatment and self-esteem to predict customer satisfaction. Specifically, self-
esteem amplifies the mistreatment-satisfaction relationship when CSW-Approval is high.

Hypothesis 3b: CSW-Approval interacts with customer mistreatment and self-esteem to predict customer loyalty. Specifically, self-esteem amplifies the mistreatment-loyalty relationship when CSW-Approval is high.
Figure 7. Model Diagram of Study 3

*Note.* CSW-Approval = Approval-contingency of self-worth
Participants and Procedure

The study presents field surveys collected at 14 food service establishments in the Philippines. A total of 154 employee-customer dyads participated in the study (i.e. 308 observations). Approximately 54% of the employees were female, with an average age of 25. The majority of employee participants were permanent staff members of their restaurants (62%), while about a quarter were contractual service staff (29%). Less than 10% of the employees were contractual (5%) and casual staff (4%) respectively. The average organizational tenure among the employees was 2.1 years. On average, about 13 customer-employee dyads were surveyed across each restaurant.

Participating restaurants were members of a restaurant management association. Service workers were recruited from 20 large restaurants. At Time 1, questionnaires were disseminated to 295 food service workers. These employees reported the level of customer mistreatment experienced over the previous month, their self-esteem, and their CSW-Approval. Surveys were returned by 182 food service workers, yielding a response rate of 61.69%. At Time 2, three and a half months later, a customer of each target retail worker filled out questionnaires on their customer satisfaction (total of 168 customers participated). With the approval of the section heads, administrative staff, and participating employees, research assistants administered a brief customer survey form to a customer who had been served by the focal employees. Retrieved were 165 matched surveys; 11 surveys were excluded because of missing responses.

Measures

Questionnaires were prepared in the English language because the vast majority of the Filipino population is fluent in English (Bernardo, 2004). The response format for all items was a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) with items coded so that higher scores reflect higher levels of the focal construct.
**Customer mistreatment.** Employees accomplished an 8-item measure of customer mistreatment (Skarlicki et al., 2008). Employees were instructed to report how often customers engaged in certain mistreatment behaviors over the preceding month. Sample items are, “interrupted you; cut you off mid-sentence” and “yelled at you.” The measure showed a reliability of .86.

**Self-esteem.** Employees’ levels of self-esteem were assessed using the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) which is commonly used in self-esteem research. I used overall self-esteem instead of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) because mistreatment from organizational outsiders may threaten employees’ overall self-esteem rather than the employees’ within-organization self-esteem. OBSE more closely reflects belonging and competency within a workgroup (Pierce et al., 1989). Example items are, “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I take a positive attitude towards myself.” This scale yielded a reliability coefficient of .66.

**CSW-Approval.** Employees’ approval-contingency of self-worth were assessed using a 3-item measure drawn on the basis of factor loadings from the Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette (2002) 5-item measure. This measure has been used in other research on contingent self-worth (Park & Crocker, 2008; Sowislo, Orth, & Meier, 2014). Example items are, “I don’t care what other people think of me (REV)” and “What others think of me has no effect on what I think about myself (REV).” This measure was reliable with an alpha of .84.

**Customer satisfaction.** Customers accomplished a brief 3-item measure of customer satisfaction (Tsiros et al., 2004). This customer satisfaction measure is particularly apt for this study because it specifically refers to satisfaction with service from the employee rather than satisfaction with the overall service experience, following recommendations for customer-employee research (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Sample items are, “I feel satisfied with the service I have received from this
employee” and “I am happy with the service extended to me by this employee.” The customer satisfaction measure was reliable at .95.

**Customer loyalty.** Customers also reported on their loyalty intentions in a 3-item measure adapted from the Webster & Sundaram 5-item measure (1998), which has been used in research on customer perceptions and intentions (Liao & Chuang, 2004). From the original 5-item measure, the 3 items specifically relating to repatronage intentions were selected for this study. The measure assesses the extent to which the customer is willing to return to the restaurant in the future. Sample items are, “I am sure that I will not visit this restaurant again (REV)” and “I will dine at another similar restaurant instead of this particular one (REV).” The customer loyalty measure was reliable at .93.

**Control variables.** Demographic contributors to service delivery were controlled for, specifically employees’ gender, age, organizational tenure, and employment status. Gender was coded as 0 for male and 1 for female. For employment status, employees were asked to respond as follows (1 = permanent/regular, 2 = probationary, 3 = contractual, 4 = casual). I controlled for gender in keeping with gender schema theory, which suggests that cultural assumptions about gender determine people’s expectations and evaluations towards males and females (Bem, 1981). Female employees’ service may be evaluated more positively because of stereotyped expectations for women to be better at delivering service and to go the extra mile (Mattila, Grandey, & Fisk, 2003). Stereotyped gender roles may have self-fulfilling properties for women (Eagly & Wood, 1991). Furthermore, studies have shown systematic gender differences in self-esteem (Orth & Robins, 2014); hence, it is important to partial out any shared variance between gender and self-esteem in the model. I controlled for age on the basis of socioemotional selectivity theory, which suggests that older workers’ enhanced skill with handling their emotions (Carstensen,
Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Gross et al., 1997) may lead them to deliver superior customer service. Lastly, I controlled for tenure on the basis of information processing theory, which suggests that repeated practice is essential for skill development and motivation (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Indeed, retail workers’ customer service skills (e.g. salesmanship, interpersonal relations) may improve over their tenure and with more regular employment status.

Results

Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and variable intercorrelations are presented in Table 6. All variable intercorrelations are in the predicted directions.
Table 6. Means, Standard Deviations, Coefficient Alpha, and Intercorrelations of Variables in Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<td>6.01</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gender</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tenure</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.09</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employment status</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Customer mistreatment</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-esteem</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. CSW-Approval</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<td>(.84)</td>
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<td>8. Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Customer loyalty</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Reliability coefficients are displayed in the diagonal. CSW-Approval = Approval-contingency of self-worth

*p<.05, **p<.01
Since employee-customer dyads were nested within restaurants, the three-way interaction analyses were conducted using Mplus (Muthen & Muthen, 2012). Sandwich estimators were used to account for non-independence of residuals due to nesting (White, 1980; Muthen & Muthen, 2012). Following prescriptions by Aiken and West (1991), all predictors were mean-centered. Following common practice (Aiken & West, 1991), we specified high and low levels of the moderator at +1 and -1 standard deviations from the mean, respectively.

For Hypothesis 1, I predicted that the negative relationship between customer mistreatment and customer outcomes is moderated by self-esteem level and CSW-Approval. The hypothesis states that customer mistreatment ought to be associated with subsequent customer satisfaction (Hypothesis 1a) and customer loyalty (Hypothesis 1b) only among customers served by employees with both high self-esteem and high CSW-Approval. The control variables, main effects, two-way interaction terms, and three-way interaction terms were entered into the regression model as shown in Table 7. Since zero-order correlations and lower-order interaction terms reflect average effects that are unstable (Aiken & West, 1991), only the three-way interactions were interpreted.
Table 7. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Results for the Three-Way Interaction of Customer Mistreatment x Employee Self-Esteem x Employee CSW-Approval on Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Loyalty in Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Customer Satisfaction</th>
<th>Customer Loyalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSW-Approval</td>
<td>-0.22*</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM*CSW-Approval</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM*Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem*CSW-Approval</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM<em>Self-Esteem</em>CSW-Approval</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ 0.18* 0.15
Change in $R^2$ 0.04* 0.01
Note. CM = customer mistreatment. CSW-Approval = Approval-contingency of self-worth.

*p < .05, **p < .01
Consistent with hypotheses, the three-way interaction terms of customer mistreatment by self-esteem by CSW-Approval was a statistically significant predictor of both customer satisfaction ($B = -.23$, $SE = .06$, $p < .01$) and customer loyalty ($B = -.15$, $SE = .07$, $p < .05$). Customer mistreatment was significantly associated with lower levels of customer satisfaction only among employees with both high self-esteem and high CSW-Approval ($B = -.61$, $SE = .27$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [-1.06, -.16]). The relationship was not significant among employees with high self-esteem but low CSW-Approval ($B = -.12$, $SE = .13$, ns, 95% CI [-.33, .10]), among employees with low self-esteem but high CSW-Approval ($B = .23$, $SE = .18$, ns, 95% CI [-.06, .51]), nor among employees with low self-esteem and low CSW-Approval ($B = -.21$, $SE = .17$, ns, 95% CI [-.49, -.07]). These results show full support for Hypothesis 1a. The simple slopes for the three-way interactions are plotted in Figure 8.
Figure 8. Interactive Relationship between Customer Mistreatment, Employee Self-Esteem, and Employee CSW-Approval in Predicting Subsequent Customer Satisfaction in Study 3.
The same trend was observed for customer loyalty. The association between customer mistreatment and customer loyalty among employees with high self-esteem and high CSW-Approval was marginally significant ($B = -.45$, $SE = .25$, $p = .07$, 95% CI [-.86, -.04]). However, no nearly significant relationships were observed among employees with high self-esteem but low CSW-Approval ($B = -.10$, $SE = .12$, $ns$, 95% CI [-.30, .10]), among employees with low self-esteem but high CSW-Approval ($B = .15$, $SE = .15$, $ns$, 95% CI [-.10, .41]), nor among employees with low self-esteem and low CSW-Approval ($B = -.11$, $SE = .15$, $ns$, 95% CI [-.36, .13]). These results partially support Hypothesis 1b. The simple slopes for the three-way interactions are depicted in Figure 9.
Figure 9. Interactive Relationship between Customer Mistreatment, Employee Self-Esteem, and Employee CSW-Approval in Predicting Subsequent Customer Loyalty in Study 3.
The three-way interactions were further probed following prescriptions by Dawson and Richter (2006). Slope difference tests were conducted to assess whether the slopes at high self-esteem differed across high and low levels of CSW-Approval. The results for these slope differences for both outcomes (customer satisfaction and customer loyalty) are presented in Table 8. As expected, the slope of the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer satisfaction for high self-esteem employees (i.e. the base model) was significantly stronger among employees with high CSW-Approval than those with low CSW-Approval. The same pattern was observed for customer loyalty as an outcome, but the equivalent slope difference test was only marginally significant.
Table 8. Slope Difference Tests in Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slope comparison for employees with high self-esteem</th>
<th>Customer Satisfaction</th>
<th>Customer Loyalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$T$</td>
<td>$p$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High vs. Low</td>
<td>-2.229</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSW-Approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. CI = confidence interval. $df = 143$ for all tests.*
Discussion

In summary, Study 3 unpacks the self-esteem threat mechanism by examining the self-concept boundary conditions in the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer outcomes. Employees subjected to customer mistreatment only dissatisfy customers when they have both high self-esteem and high CSW-Approval. CSW-Approval indicates when the employee’s ego is on the line—when their sense of others’ approval is threatened. Under these conditions, high levels of self-esteem predispose the employees to self-esteem threat, which has implications for subsequent customers’ perceptions of service.

In addition to replicating and extending the base model, Study 3 addresses limitations in Study 1 and Study 2 by examining the self-esteem threat mechanisms with greater granularity, as well as by introducing a self-concept boundary condition that rules out justice sensitivity as the sole alternative explanation for these findings. While justice sensitivity could plausibly account for the results in Study 1 and 2 because of its relationship with self-esteem (Brockner et al., 1998), it is unlikely to explain why the relationship is contingent on approval as a source of self-esteem. Hence, the introduction of a theoretically prescribed self-concept boundary conditions strengthens inference in favor of the proposed theoretical model, showing that the justice sensitivity is not a likely sole explanation for these observed patterns of results.

Customer loyalty was introduced as another downstream customer outcome in the theoretical model. Compared to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty served as a more stringent and conservative test because of its broader referent—the restaurant as a whole rather than the service worker in a particular service encounter. Nevertheless, the hypothesized pattern of results was observed, albeit marginally statistically significant. The marginal significance likely reflects a true result insomuch as interaction effect sizes are generally underestimated; indeed, systematic and random measurement error
tend to consistently attenuate—rather than inflate—interaction effect sizes (Aiken & West, 1991). Hence, more sophisticated measurement and greater power may increase the likelihood of observing a statistically significant effect as hypothesized here.
CHAPTER 5
General Discussion and Conclusions

Summary of Studies

Guided by self-esteem threat theory (vanDellen et al., 2011), this dissertation presents a programmatic series of studies developing and testing a self-esteem threat model of the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service. This project departs from earlier work in the customer mistreatment literature by (1) identifying a novel, unexamined psychological consequence of customer mistreatment: self-esteem threat; and (2) introducing the downstream customer into the picture thereby expanding the scope of consequences of customer mistreatment beyond just the employee. The studies are positioned in the negative exchange model of customer mistreatment and customer service proposed by Groth and Grandey (2012), specifically examining the postulated open-loop spiral effect by which the consequences of customer mistreatment spiral out to mar the service experience of otherwise innocent downstream customers. Evidence for the open-loop spiral effect has thus far been scant (e.g. qualitative work by Harris & Ogbonna, 2002), with little known about the mechanisms and boundary conditions that respectively transmit and constrain the open-loop spiral. This project aimed to systematically examine the role of employee self-esteem in the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service.

The studies presented are multisource, multiwave field survey studies of self-esteem threat in the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service. Study 1 tested the base model in which employee self-esteem moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction. Studies 2 and 3 progressively constructively replicate the base model, expand the model by introducing theoretically prescribed mechanisms and boundary
conditions, and address limitations of and rule out alternative explanations for earlier results. Study 2 introduced the employee behavioral mechanisms linking customer mistreatment to downstream customer perceptions, while Study 3 introduced a self-concept boundary condition of the self-esteem threat model. Taken together, these studies programmatically develop and test the proposed theoretical model of self-esteem threat in the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions.

Study 1 examined dyads of food service workers and their subsequent customers in time-lagged survey design. Service workers reported their experience of customer mistreatment over the past month as well as their overall self-esteem. Downstream customers reported their satisfaction with service delivered by the focal service worker. The results support the hypothesized model, showing that self-esteem threat moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction. Specifically, customer mistreatment was associated with diminished downstream customer satisfaction, but only for employees with high self-esteem. These results jibe with predictions made from self-esteem threat theory that high self-esteem employees who experience continual customer mistreatment would enact compensating styles (vanDellen et al., 2011) that are incommensurate with high-quality service delivery (Swann et al., 1992; Shantz & Booth, 2014). Furthermore, the results tested and confirmed the open-loop spiral of customer mistreatment to downstream customer outcomes while introducing employee self-esteem as a theoretically prescribed boundary condition of the spiral-out process (Groth & Grandey, 2012). The base model was fully supported.

One significant strength of Study 1 is that it pit predictions from self-esteem threat against predictions from another dominant theory in the customer mistreatment literature—resource loss / stress (Hobfoll, 1989). The conservation of resources account
share a surface resemblance with the self-esteem threat account (e.g. Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014), so distinguishing self-esteem threat from resource loss makes an important contribution to the claim that self-esteem threat is a veridical effect, independent from extant dominant accounts of the consequences of customer mistreatment. Conservation of resources theory predicts that resource caches (such as self-esteem) reduce the likelihood of resource loss and facilitate processes of resource gain and recovery (Hobfoll, 2011); hence, COR theory would prescribe that higher self-esteem *buffers* the negative relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction. Instead, the opposite pattern was observed; high self-esteem *amplified* the negative relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service. This pattern fits predictions from self-esteem threat theory (vanDellen et al., 2011) and provides compelling evidence that the results are not explainable solely as the result of resource loss / stress. I acknowledge that other stress theories (e.g. effort-reward imbalance; Siegrist, 1996) may also account for employee reactions to customer mistreatment; however, among alternative models of stress, only conservation of resources theory makes a substantive claim regarding the role of self-esteem. Hence, I limit my discussion solely to conservation of resources theory here.

However, Study 1 had important limitations. First, the employee behavioral mechanism that linked customer mistreatment to downstream customer service was not examined. The employee remained a black box in the open-loop spiral process. This limitation severely constrained the causal claims that employees’ self-esteem threat played a pivotal role in behaviorally transmitting the consequences of customer mistreatment to downstream customers. A second and related limitation is that—since behavioral mechanisms were unexamined—an omitted third variable could have caused both customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction independently (i.e. endogeneity; Antonakis et al., 2010). One plausible candidate for this third variable is
training. Undertrained employees would have attracted higher levels of customer mistreatment while delivering lower-quality service. The moderating role of self-esteem is accounted for when considering that self-esteem amplifies the effects of learning and training (Trautwein et al., 2006). A third limitation concerns the possibility that employee self-esteem masks a different mechanism—a tendency towards punitive moral judgements as suggested in fairness theory (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Skarlicki et al., 2008). The moderating role of self-esteem may reflect individual dispositions towards displaced punishment of the customer—broadly construed—rather than compensating styles that are incompatible with service a subservient behavior. Fourth and lastly, only one downstream customer of each employee reported satisfaction. Hence, the pattern of results may be constrained to idiosyncratic attributes of those one-off service encounters rather than an overarching systematic pattern of subsequent service delivery. These limitations were addressed in Study 2.

Study 2 replicated the base model tested in Study 1 and expanded that base model by introduced an employee behavioral mechanism: customer-directed organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB-C). OCB-C was hypothesized to mediate the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer satisfaction, but this indirect effect was conditional on employee self-esteem at the first-stage (i.e. self-esteem moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and OCB-C). The model was tested in a tetradic, multiwave design in a sample of retail workers, their supervisors, and two of their customers. Employees reported their experience of customer mistreatment over the past month and their global self-esteem level at Time 1. Supervisors of the focal employee reported on that employees’ OCB-C at Time 2. Two customers at different times of day reported on their satisfaction with service delivered by the focal employee at Time 3. The results fully supported the hypothesized model, showing that supervisor-rated OCB-C mediates the relationship between employee-
rated customer mistreatment and customer-rated satisfaction with service. Just as predicted by self-esteem threat theory, this mediation pattern was only observed among focal employees with high self-esteem. Study 2 constructively replicated the moderating role of employee self-esteem in Study 1 and introduced OCB-C as a behavioral mechanism in the open-loop spiral process proposed by Groth and Grandey (2012).

Study 2 addressed several important limitations of Study 1. First, Study 2 programmatically extends Study 1 by testing the behavioral mechanism of the base model, providing stronger inference in favor of employee service behavior as the mechanism in the self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment and downstream customer service. Second, supplementary analysis showed that employee self-esteem only moderates at the first-stage of the indirect effect; second-stage moderation and moderation of the direct effect were both not significant. These supplementary analyses shed light on the possibility that the causal relationships posed in Study 1 could be spurious artifacts of training, which is plausible because self-esteem amplifies training effects. However, if this alternative explanation were correct, then self-esteem would moderate both indirect effects as well as the direct effect. This pattern was not observed; self-esteem only moderated the relationships specified in self-esteem threat theory (vanDellen et al., 2011). Hence, this result rules out the possibility that the pattern of results in both studies can be explained solely by training endogeneity effects. Third, Study 2 results were significant despite controlling for negative reciprocity as a dispositional tendency towards punitive exchange. This result increases fidelity that the self-esteem threat findings are veridical and independent from the predominant fairness and moral justice accounts in the customer mistreatment literature (Skarlicki et al., 2008). Lastly, customer ratings were obtained from two customers of each focal employee, reducing the likelihood that the results reflect broader compensating styles rather than idiosyncrasies specific to a service encounter.
However, both studies still had important limitations. First, both studies assumed that high self-esteem was a sufficient condition for experiencing self-esteem threat as a result of customer mistreatment. Other individual differences may also play a role in determining when and for whom customer mistreatment poses self-esteem threat. Second, self-esteem may have masked one more indicator associated with justice theories—justice sensitivity. Third, only customer satisfaction was examined as a downstream outcome in the model. The results may not generalize beyond customer satisfaction. These limitations were addressed in Study 3.

Study 3 constructively replicated the base model and extended the model by introducing a boundary condition: CSW-Approval. Following predictions from contingencies of self-worth theory (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), employees should only experience self-esteem threat when it impinges on a valued source of self-esteem such as feeling liked and appreciated. The model tests a three-way interaction between customer mistreatment, employee self-esteem, and CSW-Approval to predict downstream customer satisfaction as well as customer loyalty. Data were collected over a time lag from a dyadic sample of food service workers and their customers. Service workers reported their experience of customer mistreatment over the past month, their self-esteem, and their CSW-Approval. Downstream customers rated their customer satisfaction with service from the focal employee as well as their loyalty intentions towards that restaurant in the future. The hypothesized model was fully supported for customer satisfaction. Customer mistreatment was associated with lower levels of downstream customer satisfaction only for focal employees with both high self-esteem and high CSW-Approval. The same pattern of results was observed for customer loyalty, but the slope parameter estimates were marginally statistically significant. These results confirm that CSW-Approval serves as a boundary condition in the self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment and downstream customer service.
Study 3 addressed some additional limitations of the first two studies. First, Study 3 introduced a theoretically prescribed boundary condition of the model, strengthening the theoretical inference in favor of the self-esteem threat model, while also presenting a more complete look at the forces that play a role in the experience of self-esteem threat from customer mistreatment. A second strength follows from the first in that the moderating role of CSW-Approval rules out the possibility that the pattern of results in all three studies can be explained by justice sensitivity because CSW-Approval is a boundary condition specific to the self-concept. Third, customer loyalty was introduced as another downstream customer outcome in Study 3. The results for customer loyalty were only marginally significant, possibly because customer loyalty had a broader referent (the entire restaurant) as well as because loyalty may be a more distal outcome of service than satisfaction. Nevertheless, the pattern of results for customer loyalty matched predictions made from the theoretical model.

In summary, the proposed self-esteem threat model of customer mistreatment and downstream customer service received full empirical support across a series of three multisource, multiwave, field survey studies. Mechanisms and boundary conditions were programmatically introduced in line with theoretical prescriptions. Contributions, implications, and future directions of this research are presented in the succeeding section.

**Theoretical Contributions and Future Directions**

This project contributes to the customer mistreatment literature by introducing a new lens for the employee psychological consequences of customer mistreatment: self-esteem threat. While the self-esteem perspective relates to extant, predominant justice and stress theories, this project presents results that cannot be fully explained by justice and stress alone. The self-esteem perspective departs from stress and justice accounts in its emphasis on employees’ internal judgement of the self (as opposed to employee...
perceptions of external events, encounters, and people). Importantly, the self-esteem perspective links the customer mistreatment literature to the growing body of work on issues of dignity and subservience inherent to customer service work (du Gay & Salaman, 1996). Customer service is dirty, stigmatized work (Shantz & Booth, 2014). The self-esteem threat perspective considers how customer mistreatment emphasizes and underscores the indignity of service work that customers see service workers as “beneath” them, unworthy of dignity, respect, and polite treatment. Customer mistreatment may well be the crucial reason service work is experienced as “humiliating interpersonal subordination” (Bourgois, 1995, p. 710). This project presents an initial foray into examining customer mistreatment through this important lens.

Support for the self-esteem threat model proposed in this dissertation is strengthened by the programmatic development of studies. Each study conceptually replicates the model but also develops it by testing mechanisms and boundary conditions. Through design strengths and statistical controls, the studies progressively discount various alternative explanations for the findings. Alternative explanations for the moderating role of self-esteem in the mistreatment-service relationship include resource loss, training effects, punitive tendencies, and justice perceptions. I concede that these processes may have indeed played a role in generating these findings. However, through the use of statistical controls, supplementary analyses, design strengths, and boundary conditions, these studies evince results that cannot be fully explained by stress, training, or justice as alternative explanations. Ruling out alternative explanations is a crucial step in evaluating causal claims (Shadish et al., 2002). These studies support the claim that the proposed self-esteem threat process is independent from other dominant accounts of customer mistreatment, and that the proposed self-esteem threat model is veridical in its own right.
Having positioned self-esteem threat alongside injustice and stress/resource loss as aspects of the psychological experience of customer mistreatment, the next step to advance the literature is to theorize around how all three mechanisms come together. One approach for doing so, following Koopmann and collaborators (2015), is to examine how the psychological consequences of customer mistreatment lead to self-regulation impairment through ego depletion. Ego depletion theory posits that acts of self-regulation deplete regulatory resources—analagous to energy—which replenish slowly over time (Baumeister, Bratslavski, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). Reasoning within the framework of ego depletion theory, injustice, stress, and self-esteem threat can deplete employees’ regulatory resources needed for them to self-regulate (i.e. circumscribe their behavior in line with organizationally mandated standards). True enough, justice (Johnson, Lanaj, & Barnes, 2014), stress (Diestel & Schmidt, 2012), and self-esteem threat (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1993) have been linked to self-regulation impairment in the rubric of ego depletion theory. Thus, one may reasonably propose that injustice, stress, and self-esteem threat each contribute individually to depleting regulatory resources, thus impairing the service worker’s capacity to self-regulate and deliver high-quality service. However, ego depletion theory has come under fire recently on theoretical and empirical grounds. Mounting evidence suggests that the crux of ego depletion theory—the notion of limited, depletable regulatory resources as causal antecedents of self-regulation—is untenable (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012). Ego depletion theory may not be the right overarching theoretical framework within which to integrate justice, stress, and self-esteem contributions to the psychological experience of customer mistreatment.

Control theory may offer an integrative framework for bringing together justice, stress/resource loss, and self-esteem (Carver & Scheier, 1998). The control theory perspective suggests that people perform actions in service of important goals, such as
performing one’s job or protecting the self (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003). Doing one’s work and protecting oneself are often compatible goal structures in that performing one’s work tasks helps one earn money and other resources for one’s survival and success. However, customer mistreatment may position these goal structures as incompatible or competing (Kruglanski et al., 2002; Unsworth, Yeo, & Beck, 2014). Doing one’s service job may often be incompatible with verifying one’s self-worth. Hence, we might illuminate the roles of justice, stress/resource loss, and self-esteem threat by considering how these psychological experiences divert attention and information processing towards the pursuit of self-goals vs. service goals. For instance, resource loss due to customer mistreatment may debilitate service goals by divesting employees of the task-based and interpersonal affordances (Feldman & Worline, 2011) that enable them to carry out service work effectively; hence, competing self-relevant goals may be prioritized over difficult, inaccessible work goals. On the other side of the coin, self-esteem threat may render self-relevant and self-protective goals more salient (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995; Tesser, 2000), drawing attention and information processing away from the competing goal of service. Lastly, unfairness may promote self-relevant moral concerns (e.g. Skarlicki et al., 2008) that render self-relevant goals more salient; alternatively, injustice may elicit a sense of uncertainty (van den Bos & Lind, 2002) surrounding customers and service delivery, which may weaken the expectancies that drive the pursuit of service goals. When self-relevant goals are prioritized over service goals, diminished or counterproductive service delivery may ensue. Future research may test these propositions with the aim of illuminating how organizations might foster work conditions that keep self- and service goal structures aligned despite experiencing self-threatening events such as customer mistreatment.

Another significant contribution of this project to the customer mistreatment literature is in bringing the customer into the picture. A considerable body of work has
shown that customer mistreatment has clear adverse consequences for employees’ performance and well-being (Grandey et al., 2004; Rafaeli et al., 2012; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014; Skarlicki et al., 2008; Skarlicki et al., 2015; Sliter et al., 2011; Sliter et al., 2012; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2014). However, scant attention has been paid to how these employee consequences traverse downstream to mar subsequent customers’ service perceptions and intentions. The emphasis in the literature on employee outcomes belies the full scope of customer mistreatment’s insidious, widespread effects in organizations and beyond. Downstream customers do also feel the impact of customer mistreatment. This result has profound managerial implications in these increasingly service-driven industries because firms live or die by their ability to satisfy and retain customers (Anderson, 1998; Hallowell, 1996).

One more significant contribution of this project is in laying out the mechanisms and boundary conditions of the open-loop spiral process of customer mistreatment to customer service (Groth & Grandey, 2012). The possibility of open-loop spirals has been examined in previous qualitatively work (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002) and propositions were developed in postulated in later theoretical work (Groth & Grandey, 2012). In their negative exchange model, Groth and Grandey propose that customer mistreatment and low-quality employee service have a reciprocal relationship, which can culminate in a spiral of escalating incivility between customer and service worker. The open-loop spiral process refers to the specific possibility that the spiral can ricochet beyond the focal encounter in which customer mistreatment transpires. Customer mistreatment can have consequences for downstream customers as well. However, the mechanisms and boundary conditions that govern this spiral-out process were unknown and subject to speculation. This series of studies systematically examines the theoretical perspective of self-esteem threat in the open-loop spiral. Self-esteem threat theory
(vanDellen et al., 2011) and contingencies of self-worth theory (Crocker & Wolfe, 2011) prescribe boundary conditions and behavioral mechanisms of the open-loop spiral; these boundary conditions and mechanisms received full empirical support. These studies advance research on the negative exchange model of customer mistreatment by integrating it with the self-esteem threat literature in order to provide systematic empirical tests of the open-loop spiral and its mechanisms and boundary conditions.

Lastly, the project contributes to the literature on contingent self-esteem at work. The existing literature on contingent self-esteem at work has focused exclusively on performance, an internal source of self-esteem (Ferris et al., 2009, 2010, 2015). Study 3 advances the literature by examining CSW-Approval, an external source of self-esteem. Bringing externally sourced self-esteem into the picture broadens and balances the literature on CSW at work. For example, the extant literature shows that self-esteem has weaker effects on important outcomes for employees with contingent self-esteem (Ferris et al., 2009, 2010, 2015). However, results of Study 3 show the opposite pattern—CSW-Approval amplifies the impact of self-esteem. The discrepancy between our findings and earlier research on contingent self-esteem can be explained in light of internally situated vs externally situated contingencies of self-worth (Crocker & Knight, 2005). Externally contingent self-esteem tends to be more fragile and vulnerable than internally contingent self-esteem (Sanchez & Crocker, 2005). Hence, internally contingent self-esteem may buffer the role of self-esteem, while externally contingent self-esteem amplifies it instead. These findings indicate that more attention should be drawn to internal vs external sources of self-esteem at work.

This project points to various future directions for research in customer mistreatment, customer service, and self-esteem at work. First, while this study forges initial links between the customer mistreatment literature and the corpus of work on
service as “dirty work” (Shantz & Booth, 2014), the notion that customer mistreatment makes service work “dirtier” can be fleshed out and systematically tested. Perhaps customer mistreatment may be tested as an antecedent of occupational stigma associated with service work, which may in turn lead to disidentification with the customer service job. Organizations and coworkers may likewise play a role in further stigmatizing the service job depending on how supportive they are to service workers (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). When employees perceive that they devalued by their customers as well as by the organization, stigma may be amplified further. Friends, family, and relationship partners may also contribute to the stigmatized experience of service work through their comments insinuating that the focal employee has a low-status job. Customer mistreatment may interact with these other sources of information about the employees’ job to influence the extent to which they experience service work as undignified, humiliating, and stigmatized.

The stigmatized nature of customer service may also be an antecedent of customer mistreatment. Very little work currently exists on antecedents of customer mistreatment (cf Sliter & Jones, in press; Zhan, Wang, & Shi, in press), though service failure and customer entitlement are likely to play a role (Yagil, 2008). Employees may attract customer mistreatment to the extent that they behave in line with the low-status, stigmatized nature of their work. Customer mistreatment encounters may be enacted as a sort of script (Tomkins, 1978) carried out between customers and service workers. The script likely captures important social features of the encounters, such as the implicit social hierarchy and the assumption that the “customer is always right.” Service workers who play to this script may attract higher levels of customer mistreatment than those who flout the script and behave in a high-status way. Indeed, occupational stigma may serve as a stereotype threat (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008) that leads employees to emit low-status signals, which might in turn attract mistreatment from
customers. People are able to detect the status and social ranking of others in brief encounters (Kraus & Keltner, 2009). Perhaps these social ranking processes may offer a glimpse into the antecedents of customer mistreatment.

Future research may also examine the self-esteem threat model in further detail by looking at momentary dips in state self-esteem after experiencing customer mistreatment. Self-esteem threat theory suggests that the threat is subjective experienced as a dip in state self-esteem, which is distinct from the stable trait self-esteem discussed and tested in the dissertation (vanDellen et al., 2011). This project does not directly test the momentary drops in state self-esteem after customer mistreatment; threat processes are instead inferred through interactions with trait self-esteem levels (Baumeister et al., 1996) as is common in the self-esteem threat literature (vanDellen et al., 2011). Indeed, testing the state self-esteem mechanism would require data collection at the encounter-level, assaying state self-esteem after each customer mistreatment encounter. Very little research on customer mistreatment is conducted at the encounter level (cf Walker et al., 2014), but such research may further elucidate the underlying esteem-regulation processes that take place after customer mistreatment.

This dissertation project examined the role of self-esteem and CSW-Approval in the self-esteem threat process pursuant to customer mistreatment. However, the stable of the self-concept is large, encompassing a broad range of possible contributors to the experience of self-esteem threat. For example, employees may hold CSWs specific to customer service; these service workers would feel worthy specifically when customers treat them well. This CSW-Customer, as it were, would more specifically predict self-esteem threat reactions to customer mistreatment. The centrality of one’s occupational identity (Ashcraft, 2012) may also play a role in the salience and potency of self-esteem threat from customer mistreatment. On the flipside, other aspects of the self may disarm customer mistreatment, rendering it inert with regards to the self. For instance, self-
compassionate individuals may not react adversely to customer mistreatment. Self-compassion refers to the individual tendency to engage in non-evaluative judgements of themselves (Neff, 2003). High self-esteem may feel good, but it is nevertheless a value judgement exacted upon the self. Self-compassionate individuals engage in no such judgement—effectively a non-esteem rather than high or low self-esteem. These people may feel no self-esteem threat after customer mistreatment, thus nipping the spiral of negative exchange in the bud.

Another future direction concerns an underexamined phenomenon: the tendency of service workers to progressively deal with customer mistreatment better over time. Anecdotally, service workers often report feeling less bothered by customer mistreatment as they accrue tenure in their role. Perhaps these grizzled, high-tenure employees experience less self-esteem threat because they learn to dissociate their selves from their work, effectively divesting themselves of any occupational identity. Alternatively, the predominant justice perspective would suggest that these employees eventually perceive abusive customers as less unjust, perhaps because their standards for just behavior have changed (akin to moving the goal posts) or because they learn to respond to customer mistreatment with forgiveness instead of with punitive reactions (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2012). Another explanation would be developing greater self-efficacy for dealing with difficult customers; this self-efficacy may serve as a valued resource that diminishes resource loss from customer mistreatment (Hobfoll, 2001). Lastly, mere attrition may also explain the phenomenon (Schneider, 1987); only the toughest and hardiest employees stick around long enough to get better at dealing with customer mistreatment. Initial research on this phenomenon is needed.

This project illuminated the consequences of customer mistreatment for downstream customer satisfaction (and, to a lesser extent, customer loyalty). However, other customer outcomes may also be important. Future research may extend this work
to damaging customer behaviors. For instance, these downstream customers may also engage in negative word-of-mouth practices that effectively disparage the firm and its employees in the eyes of other current and/or prospective customers (Richins, 1983; Singh, 1990). While Study 3 examined customer loyalty intentions, future research may go further to examine actual repatronage behavior to see whether the consequences of customer mistreatment redound to downstream customer value as well (Woodruff, 1997). These repatronage behaviors have significant implications for customer turnover and retention. Perhaps studies at the macro level may examine how organizations that attract more customer mistreatment may lead to poorer customer retention rates. The next logical step would then be to systematically demonstrate that these phenomena ultimately result in poorer firm revenues and survivability. Future research on customer outcomes of customer mistreatment can go farther than this initial project.

The negative exchange model examines the reciprocal relationships between customer mistreatment and customer service. While these relationships can be examined through aggregate research, the dynamics of the process unfold at the dyadic- and encounter-levels. Scant research has looked at dyads of abusive customers and their service workers. This project advances this literature by examining employee-customer dyads, but nevertheless has many shortcomings: (1) only dyads with downstream customers were examined, not dyads that include abusive customers and service workers; (2) aggregates of customer mistreatment and OCB-C were examined at the individual-level rather than employee experiences and behaviors at the dyadic-level; (3) attributes at the dyadic-level and at the encounter-level were not included in the analyses; and (4) spiral-out effects were not tested in the customer encounters that specifically follow from customer mistreatment, so the temporal dynamics of employee reactions to customer mistreatment remain largely a mystery. Indeed, other research have called for more work on encounter-level and dyadic-level research (Beal & Weiss,
2003; Tse & Ashkanasy, 2015) because these investigations are able to reveal much more nuanced detail on how, when, and where processes of negative exchange might unfold. This work will significantly advance the knowledge base on the antecedents, consequences, and boundary conditions of customer mistreatment and customer service.

Study 2 showed that employee OCB-C serves as the behavioral mechanism that links customer mistreatment to downstream customer satisfaction; however, only partial mediation was observed. Hence, employees may be enacting their threat reactions to customer mistreatment in other ways. For instance, threat experiences may influence nonverbal aspects of service performance such as employees’ affective delivery of service, which has implications for customer service experiences (Groth et al., 2008). Employees may also enact more overt anticustomer behaviors such as incivility towards customers (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2014) as well as customer-directed sabotage (Skarlicki et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2011). These anticustomer behaviors are higher risk behaviors because they attract scrutiny from coworkers and supervisors, which is especially problematic in service work because customer service workers are subject to close monitoring (Holman et al., 2002). Nevertheless, employees may enact their rejection of and resistance to the social devaluation of customer mistreatment in variety of ways. Research in this area may be advanced were a systematic taxonomy of service-relevant behaviors to be developed.

Lastly, future research may elaborate on the role of CSWs in the self-esteem threat model. Study 3 underscores the importance of CSWs in the model by presenting CSW-Approval as a condition that determines when high self-esteem might actually buffer against the negative consequences of customer mistreatment and operate as a resource (Hobfoll, 1989). Study 3 only examined CSW-Approval as a boundary condition. CSW-Approval was selected because it is especially externally situated with regard to the self, and thus more likely render self-esteem vulnerable and fragile.
(Crocker & Knight, 2005). However, other CSWs may also serve as boundary conditions of the self-esteem threat model. For instance, CSW-Performance may also play a role insomuch as customer mistreatment indicates to service workers that they are incompetent, unable to fulfil the customer’s needs, and unable to make the customer happy (Ferris et al., 2009). Similarly, a CSW-Status or CSW-Competition may render employees especially sensitive to customer mistreatment when it insinuates that service workers are low-status and disrespected. Furthermore, the specific form of abuse hurled by customers at service workers may elicit self-esteem threat depending on employees’ CSW. For instance, being called “stupid” may hurt especially for employees with CSW-Performance, whereas disdainful looks and upturned noses may particularly rankle employees with CSW-Status. On the flipside, CSWs may also drive non-aggressive reactions to customer mistreatment. For instance, employees who hold a CSW-Performance may respond to customer mistreatment by bolstering their idiosyncratic wellspring of esteem—their performance. The boundary condition of CSWs in employee reactions to customer mistreatment can be examined in further research.

These studies offer clear implications for managers and practitioners. First, these studies show a clear link between customer mistreatment and downstream customer perceptions, a trickle down effect with potentially widespread consequences for the firm and its customers (Groth & Grandey, 2012). Second, these studies add a caveat to proclamations in the popular management press that self-esteem is the key to sales and service success (e.g. Frankel, 2014). Self-esteem can potentially become a liability in combination with CSW-Approval, diminishing employees’ ability to weather the storm and stress of mistreatment and other challenges to the sense of self that are inherent to the job. The solution may not be to recruit and select service workers with low self-esteem, but rather to foster lower CSW-Approval among service workers with high self-esteem. For instance, mindfulness training interventions may help employees develop
greater compassion for themselves and for others, diminishing the impact of external experiences on their sense of self (Heppner & Kernis, 2007). Alternatively, high CSW-Approval employees may be trained to seek their externally oriented self-esteem from other aspects of their work, such as their coworkers or their organization. In this way, perceived organizational support (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002) and perceived coworker support (Grandey, Foo, Groth, & Goodwin, 2012) may help these vulnerable employees persist despite continual customer mistreatment.

**Strengths and Limitations**

This programmatic series of studies has several significant strengths. First, data were collected from multiple informants: employees, their supervisors, and their customers. The multisource data presented here improve the quality of and fidelity in the inference because multisource data reduce the likelihood that the results are solely due to common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Since ruling out alternative explanations is essential to high-fidelity causal claims, this design strength improves the construct validity of the respective studies (Shadish et al., 2002).

A second strength of the studies was the time-lagged design. Time lags serve the dual purpose of (1) diminishing common method bias, often a potent alternative explanation for observed relationships; and (2) showing the causal order of hypothesized relations. These time lags enable testing of two of the three criteria for causal claims: (1) demonstrating a correlation between cause and effect; (2) demonstrating a time lag between cause and effect; and (3) ruling out plausible alternative explanations for the relationship between cause and effect—within reason (Shadish et al., 2002). Hence, the time lags increase fidelity in the hypothesized causal order and direction of events. However, randomized experiments remain the gold standard for evaluating causal claims; future research may test this model through controlled laboratory experiments.
A third strength of the dissertation was the programmatic development of the studies to rule out alternative explanations inherent to earlier studies. Design strengths, statistical controls, supplementary analyses, and boundary conditions were utilized to that end. The programmatic development of studies also introduced theoretically prescribed behavioral mechanisms and boundary conditions that not only constructively replicate but also expand the base model to offer a more nuanced account of the proposed self-esteem threat mechanism in the spiral-out process.

Lastly, the premises of the model were tested in both food service samples (Study 1 and Study 3) and a retail sample (Study 2). Existing research on customer mistreatment has been conducted in call centers, banks, and hotels (e.g. Skarlicki et al., 2008; Sliter et al., 2012; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). These studies contribute to the diversity of customer mistreatment research by examining this phenomenon in retail and food service settings. Constructively replicating the model across both retail and food service settings shows evidence that the model is robust to customer service setting, though future research may examine how the same phenomena may unfold differently in customer service settings that do not involve face-to-face encounters (e.g. call center work).

Though each study aimed to progressively address limitations in the previous studies, there remain some limitations to the dissertation project. First, reverse causality was not completely ruled out. For instance, employees who deliver fewer OCB-Cs may attract more customer mistreatment instead of the other way around. However, reverse causality may not fully explain the findings for two reasons: (1) time lags across employee ratings of customer mistreatment, supervisor ratings of service behaviors, and customer ratings of satisfaction and loyalty; and (2) the moderation effects—especially the three-way interactions—are especially difficult to explain in the reverse causal order. Similarly, other omitted third variables may also explain the relationship.
observed across the three studies (Antonakis et al., 2010). For instance, prior levels of employee service delivery may potentially explain the relationships among customer mistreatment, OCB-C, and customer satisfaction—particularly if prior service delivery correlates with trait self-esteem. This interpretation of the results is rendered less likely by supplementary analyses in Study 2 suggesting that self-esteem only moderates the first-stage of mediation model. If the observed pattern of relationships were due to a shared common cause correlated with self-esteem, then second-stage and direct effects moderation ought to have been observed as well; they weren’t. Nevertheless, future research may further mitigate this possibility by statistically controlling for prior service delivery. In summary, a reasonable effort was exerted to rule out plausible confounds and sources of endogeneity across the three studies, though of course more can always be done. Perhaps future studies may avert these concerns by conducting randomized experiments to test this model.

A second limitation concerns the indirect assessment of self-esteem threat. In this project, self-esteem threat was inferred through interactions between ego-threatening experiences (customer mistreatment) and high self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 1996). However, self-esteem threat was not directly observed. Nevertheless, the base model following from self-esteem threat theory was constructively replicated across all three studies, and various alternative explanations were also ruled out as sole explanations of the pattern of the results. Future research may provide more stringent tests of the self-esteem threat model by examining drops in state self-esteem immediately following customer mistreatment encounters, then observing how self-esteem threat redounds to service behavior and downstream customer satisfaction over successive service encounters. Taking a dyadic- and encounter-level approach to customer mistreatment may address these concerns and advance the literature toward wild and untamed frontiers.
Overall Conclusion

Service workers may experience customer mistreatment as devaluing, demeaning, and degrading. Customer mistreatment has implications for the employees’ sense of self. Indeed, the consequences of customer mistreatment may spiral out beyond the employee to the subsequent customer. Guided by self-esteem threat theory (vanDellen et al., 2011), this dissertation presents a programmatic series of field survey studies using multisource, multiwave designs to reveal the role of the employee self-concept in the relationship between customer mistreatment and downstream customer service outcomes. Taken together, these studies proffer full support for the proposed theoretical model. These results have clear implications for the role of the self in the psychological experience of customer mistreatment, for the downstream impact of customer mistreatment on subsequent customers, for the mechanisms and boundary conditions of the spiral-out process of customer mistreatment (Groth & Grandey, 2012), and for expanding the suite of sources of self-esteem at work in the contingent self-esteem literature. These theoretical implications illuminate paths towards a more fresh and rich understanding of customer mistreatment and attendant workplace phenomena.
References


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Appendix A

Participant Information Sheets and Consent Form

Appendix A.1: Information Sheet (Study 1)
Appendix A.2: Information Sheet (Study 2)
Appendix A.3: Information Sheet (Study 3)
Appendix A.4: Consent Form (Studies 1, 2, and 3)
Appendix A.1: Information Sheet (Study 1)

Participant Information Sheet

Good day! We are a team of researchers based at the Research School of Management at The Australian National University (ANU), and the School of Management and Information Technology at De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde (DLS-CSB), examining service workers’ experiences with different types of customers. We would like to seek your participation in this research project.

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Manila, Philippines

Project Title: Customer service workers’ experiences with different types of customers

General Outline of the Project:

- **Description and Methodology:** The survey asks questions about your behaviors and experiences with different types of customers, as well as your feelings about yourself and others. The survey will take about 5-10 minutes to complete. Please address each item carefully, but do not spend considerable time on any particular question.

- **Participants:** We are inviting 200 service workers in the food service industry to participate in this study.

- **Use of Data and Feedback:** The results of this survey will be used for research presentations and manuscripts. A summary of findings can be made available upon emailing the principal investigator at rajiv.amarnani@anu.edu.au.

Participant Involvement:

- **Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal:** This survey is anonymous and voluntary. Please do not write your name on it. You may withdraw from this study at any point in time. Responses to the survey are strictly confidential and will only be seen by the Research Team. You will receive a Service Experiences Questionnaire which you have to complete. Please note that these ratings will only be used for research purposes only. We will also ask your customers for their feedback on your service.

- **Participants’ Role:** For this project to be successful, it is necessary for you to respond to the survey as honestly as possible, even if the information that you provide is not favorable. Unfortunately, the world of customer service is not always a pleasant place. Hence, some of the issues that we seek to address here reflect both good and bad elements of your work experience.

- **Location and Duration:** You may answer this survey during your break at your workplace. The survey should only take 5-10 minutes to complete.

- **Incentives:** As a token of our gratitude, you will be given a chocolate bar for your participation in this research project.

- **Risks:** The researchers acknowledge that our study may potentially uncover psychological distress due to the sensitive nature of the study variables. If you experience any feelings of distress while answering the survey, you may get in touch with the principal investigator at rajiv.amarnani@anu.edu.au, or contact PsychConsult at 632-3576427 or at psychconsult@gmail.com
• **Implications of Participation:** Participation will not impact your work status in any way. No identifying information from this survey will be made available to your supervisors or to your organization.

**Confidentiality:**

• **Confidentiality:** Your survey responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. To ensure anonymity, we have designed a non-identifying coding system. That way, we do not have to know your name in order to match this survey with supervisor and customer surveys. Please note that we will never share the code with anybody else. All survey responses will be stored securely electronically. Only the project investigators will have access to the data. Your survey responses will be presented in aggregate—without identifying information—in research presentations and manuscripts. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may freely withdraw your participation at any time.

**Queries and Concerns:**

• **Contact Details for More Information:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact the principal investigator, Rajiv Amarnani, in the Research School of Management at The Australian National University (Tel: +61 2 612 57353; Email: rajiv.amarnani@anu.edu.au).

• **Local Contacts:** If you have questions, you may also contact Prof Robert L. Tang in the School of Management and Information Technology at De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde (Tel: 230-5100; Email: robert.tang@benilde.edu.ph)

• **Contact Details if in Distress:** If any of the questions that you are asking could be seen as stressful, you may contact PsychConsult, a local counselling service, at 632-3576427 or at psychconsult@gmail.com
Appendix A.2: Information Sheet (Study 2)

Participant Information Sheet

Good day! We are a team of researchers based at the Research School of Management at The Australian National University (ANU), and the School of Management and Information Technology at De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde (DLS-CSB), examining service workers’ experiences with different types of customers. We would like to seek your participation in this research project.

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- **Participants:** We are inviting 200 service workers in the retail industry to participate in this study.
- **Use of Data and Feedback:** The results of this survey will be used for research presentations and manuscripts. A summary of findings can be made available upon emailing the principal investigator at rajiv.amarnani@anu.edu.au.

Participant Involvement:

- **Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal:** This survey is anonymous and voluntary. Please do not write your name on it. You may withdraw from this study at any point in time. Responses to the survey are strictly confidential and will only be seen by the Research Team. You will receive a Service Experiences Questionnaire which you have to complete. Please note that these ratings will only be used for research purposes only. We will also ask your supervisors and customers for their feedback on your service.

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- **Incentives:** As a token of our gratitude, you will be given a chocolate bar for your participation in this research project.

- **Risks:** The researchers acknowledge that our study may potentially uncover psychological distress due to the sensitive nature of the study variables. If you experience any feelings of distress while answering the survey, you may get in touch with the principal investigator at rajiv.amarnani@anu.edu.au, or contact PsychConsult at 632-3576427 or at psychconsult@gmail.com
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- **Participants’ Role:** For this project to be successful, it is necessary for you to respond to the survey as honestly as possible, even if the information that you provide is not favorable. Unfortunately, the world of customer service is not always a pleasant place. Hence, some of the issues that we seek to address here reflect both good and bad elements of your work experience.
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- **Incentives:** As a token of our gratitude, you will be given a chocolate bar for your participation in this research project.
- **Risks:** The researchers acknowledge that our study may potentially uncover psychological distress due to the sensitive nature of the study variables. If you experience any feelings of distress while answering the survey, you may get in touch with the principal investigator at rajiv.amarnani@anu.edu.au, or contact PsychConsult at 632-3576427 or at psychconsult@gmail.com
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- **Contact Details if in Distress:** If any of the questions that you are asking could be seen as stressful, you may contact PsychConsult, a local counselling service, at 632-3576427 or at psychconsult@gmail.com
Appendix A.4: Consent Form (Studies 1, 2, and 3)

Participant Consent Form

1. I have read the Information Page and am aware of the nature of the research project. My instructions as a participant have been satisfactorily explain to me and I freely consent to participate in this project.

2. I understand that all responses to the survey will be kept confidential to the fullest extent of the law and may be presented or published in aggregate, without any individual identifying information.

3. I understand that all data from the survey will be stored securely electronically and only the Research Investigators will have access to the data.

4. I understand that I may contact the principal investigator or the local investigator for assistance should I have any questions, comments, or concerns about this project.

5. I understand that my participation in this survey is voluntary and that I may freely withdraw from the survey at any stage by emailing a request to withdraw along with my self-generated code to rajiv.amarnani@anu.edu.au.

If you agree with the above statements, please sign below.

Signature:………………………………………………
Appendix B

Materials for Study 1

Appendix B.1: Demographic Questions
Appendix B.2: Customer Mistreatment
Appendix B.3: Self-Esteem
Appendix B.4: Customer Satisfaction
Appendix B.1: Demographic Questions

01. Gender (please encircle): 1 Male 2 Female
02. Age (as of last birthday): __________
03. How long have you been working with your current organization? ___ Years _____ Months
04. Please indicate your current employment status (please encircle):
   1 permanent/regular 2 probationary 3 contractual 4 casual
Appendix B.2: Customer Mistreatment

Item 1: Refused to listen to me
Item 2: Interrupted me: Cut me off mid-sentence
Item 3 Made demands that I could not deliver
Item 4: Raised irrelevant discussion
Item 5: doubted my ability
Item 6: Yelled at me
Item 7: Used condescending language (e.g., “you are an idiot”)  
Item 8: Spoke aggressively to me
Appendix B.3: Self-Esteem

Item 1: On the whole, I am satisfied with myself

Item 2: At times, I think I am NO good at all

Item 3: I feel that I have a number of good qualities

Item 4: I am able to do things as well as most other people

Item 5: I feel I NOT have much to be proud of

Item 6: I certainly feel useless at times

Item 7: I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane/status with other people

Item 8: I wish I could have more respect for myself

Item 9: All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure

Item 10: I take a positive attitude toward myself
Appendix B.4: Customer Satisfaction

Item 1: I feel satisfied with the service I have received from this employee
Item 2: I am happy with the service extended to me by this employee
Item 3: I am pleased with the service I have received from this employee
Appendix C

Materials for Study 2

Appendix C.1: Demographic Questions
Appendix C.2: Customer Mistreatment
Appendix C.3: Self-Esteem
Appendix C.4: OCB-Customer
Appendix C.5: Customer Satisfaction
Appendix C.1: Demographic Questions

01. Gender (please encircle): 1 Male  2 Female

02. Age (as of last birthday): 

03. How long have you been working with your current organization? ___ Years  ____ Months

04. Please indicate your current employment status (please encircle):
   1 permanent/regular  2 probationary  3 contractual  4 casual
Appendix C.2: Customer Mistreatment

Item 1: Refused to listen to me
Item 2: Interrupted me: Cut me off mid-sentence
Item 3 Made demands that I could not deliver
Item 4: Doubted my ability
Item 5: Yelled at me
Item 6: Used condescending language (e.g., “you are an idiot”)  
Item 7: Spoke aggressively to me
Appendix C.3: Self-Esteem

Item 1: On the whole, I am satisfied with myself
Item 2: At times, I think I am NO good at all
Item 3: I feel that I have a number of good qualities
Item 4: I am able to do things as well as most other people
Item 5: I feel I NOT have much to be proud of
Item 6: I certainly feel useless at times
Item 7: I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane/status with other people
Item 8: I wish I could have more respect for myself
Item 9: All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure
Item 10: I take a positive attitude toward myself
Appendix C.4: OCB-Customer

Item 1: Voluntarily assists customers even if it means going beyond job requirements
Item 2: Helps customers with problems beyond what is expected or required
Item 3: Often goes above and beyond the call of duty when serving customers
Item 4: Willingly goes out of his/her way to make a customer satisfied
Item 5: Frequently goes out the way to help a customer
Appendix C.5: Customer Satisfaction

Item 1: I feel satisfied with the service I have received from this employee

Item 2: I am happy with the service extended to me by this employee
Appendix D

Materials for Study 3

Appendix D.1: Demographic Questions
Appendix D.2: Customer Mistreatment
Appendix D.3: Self-Esteem
Appendix D.4: CSW-Approval
Appendix D.5: Customer Satisfaction
Appendix D.6: Customer Loyalty
Appendix D.1: Demographic Questions

01. Gender (please encircle): 1 Male  2 Female
02. Age (as of last birthday): 
03. How long have you been working with your current organization? ___ Years  ____ Months
04. Please indicate your current employment status (please encircle):
   1 permanent/regular  2 probationary  3 contractual  4 casual
Appendix D.2: Customer Mistreatment

Item 1: Refused to listen to me
Item 2: Interrupted me: Cut me off mid-sentence
Item 3: Made demands that I could not deliver
Item 4: Raised irrelevant discussion
Item 5: Doubted my ability
Item 6: Yelled at me
Item 7: Used condescending language (e.g., “you are an idiot”)
Item 8: Spoke aggressively to me
Appendix D.3: Self-Esteem

Item 1: On the whole, I am satisfied with myself
Item 2: At times, I think I am NO good at all
Item 3: I feel that I have a number of good qualities
Item 4: I am able to do things as well as most other people
Item 5: I feel I NOT have much to be proud of
Item 6: I certainly feel useless at times
Item 7: I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane/status with other people
Item 8: I wish I could have more respect for myself
Item 9: All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure
Item 10: I take a positive attitude toward myself
Appendix D.4: CSW-Approval

Item 1: I don’t care if other people have a negative opinion of me
Item 2: I don’t care what other people think of me
Item 3: What others think of me has no effect on what I think about myself
Appendix D.5: Customer Satisfaction

Item 1: I feel satisfied with the service I have received from this employee

Item 2: I am happy with the service extended to me by this employee

Item 3: I am pleased with the service I have received from this employee
Appendix D.6: Customer Loyalty

Item 1: I am sure that I will not visit this restaurant again

Item 2: I will dine at another similar restaurant instead of this particular one

Item 3: I definitely will not come to this restaurant again