Getting Even for Customer Mistreatment: The Role of Moral Identity in the Relationship Between Customer Interpersonal Injustice and Employee Sabotage

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Research on the “dark side” of organizational behavior has determined that employee sabotage is most often a reaction by disgruntled employees to perceived mistreatment. To date, however, most studies on employee retaliation have focused on intra-organizational sources of (in)justice. Results from this field study of customer service representatives (N = 358) showed that interpersonal injustice from customers relates positively to customer-directed sabotage over and above intra-organizational sources of fairness. Moreover, the association between unjust treatment and sabotage was moderated by 2 dimensions of moral identity (symbolization and internalization) in the form of a 3-way interaction. The relationship between injustice and sabotage was more pronounced for employees high (vs. low) in symbolization, but this moderation effect was weaker among employees who were high (vs. low) in internalization. Last, employee sabotage was negatively related to job performance ratings.

Keywords: sabotage, unfair treatment by customers, moral identity

His last words were “If everybody working for this organization is as incompetent as you, no wonder your airline loses money.” He then stormed off. I wished him a good flight as if nothing happened.

The little old lady behind him in line had heard everything, of course, and she sweetly asked how I managed to stay so polite and cheerful in the face of his behavior. I told her the truth. “He’s going to Kansas City,” I explained, “and his bags are going to Tokyo.” She laughed and told me that I’d done the right thing.

—R. Barreca, Sweet Revenge: The Wicked Delights of Getting Even

Employee sabotage refers to behavior that can “damage or disrupt the organization’s operations by creating delays in production, damaging property, the destruction of relationships, or the harming of employees or customers” (Crino, 1994, p. 312). Although the costs are difficult to estimate (Keeney et al., 2005), in the current high-technology workplace, the opportunity, frequency, and impact of employee sabotage is expected to increase, making the need to understand sabotage increasingly important to an organization’s success (Giacalone, Riordan, & Rosenfeld, 1997). Empirical research on the antecedents of employee sabotage, however, lags behind managers’ concerns about sabotage (Jermier, 1988).

Previous research shows that employee sabotage is most often an act of retaliation motivated by perceptions of injustice (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002). To date, studies of workplace retaliation have focused primarily on intra-organizational sources of (un)fairness, consisting of the outcomes one receives (distributive justice; Adams, 1965), a company’s procedures (procedural justice; Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and the treatment received from authority figures (interactional justice; Bies & Moag, 1986), including treatment reflecting dignity, respect, and sensitivity (interpersonal justice) and providing an adequate explanation for the company’s decisions (informational justice; Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1993). As the story above suggests, employees can also retaliate and engage in sabotage when treated unfairly by the company’s customers.

Our objectives in the present research were threefold. First, we investigated the relationship between perceived mistreatment by customers and employee sabotage. Although sabotage can have numerous targets (Giacalone et al., 1997), we focused on sabotage directed toward customers (e.g., purposefully disrupting the customer’s service) because theory suggests that victims of mistreatment tend to direct their retaliation efforts toward the transgressor (Homans, 1961), a proposition that has been supported by empirical research on sabotage (Ambrose et al., 2002). Moreover, we focused specifically on employees’ perceptions of violations of interpersonal injustice by the customer (treatment demonstrating a lack of respect, dignity, or social sensitivity) because such treatment tends to motivate retaliation behavior (Bies, 2001; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Studies also show that interpersonal mistreatment by customers is “endemic” in many service organizations (Harris & Reynolds, 2003; K. L. Reynolds & Harris, 2006).

Second, we tested whether moral identity moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and sabotage. Moral identity refers to the degree that the moral self is important to one’s identity and self-concept (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Few studies,
Interpersonal Mistreatment From Customers

We view customer mistreatment by employees as a form of interactional justice, which reflects the quality of interpersonal treatment employees experience at work (Bies, 2001). Interactions are deemed interpersonal fair when “an employee is treated with dignity and respect, and personal attacks are refrained from” (Rupp & Spencer, 2006, p. 971). Examples of customer interpersonal fairness violations include treating the employee in a disrespectful or demeaning way. This definition emphasizes that unfairness is as perceived by the employee. That is, treatment perceived as unfair by one employee might not be viewed as unfair by another employee (Greenberg, 1988).

Customers represent a source of (un)fairness that is distinct from intra-organizational sources, in particular treatment by authority figures (e.g., supervisors), in at least three respects. Whereas authority figures have legitimate power to manage employees (via rewards and sanctions), employees often question, despite the mantra “the customer is always right,” the legitimacy of customers to impose direction and authority over them and resent being told by the customer that they are the “subordinate” in customer–employee interactions (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002). Second, supervisor–subordinate relationships typically involve long-term social exchanges. Most customer–employee relationships, in contrast, consist of episodic and often short-term exchanges. Relative to longer term relationships, one-time social interactions tend to focus on meeting one’s short-term needs and involve less trust, higher levels of positional bargaining, and more deceptive behavior (Duck, 1998). Third, customer service employees are required...
on an ongoing basis to adhere to *display rules*, defined as expression norms that dictate the emotions that are to be expressed in attaining their work goals (Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005). While relationships with an authority figure can involve a certain level of impression management on the part of the employee, maintaining display rules in interactions with customers can be an ongoing stressor (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) and source of emotional labor for customer service employees (Rupp & Spencer, 2006). In summary, customers provide unique challenges to employees’ experience of workplace fairness.

Although few empirical studies on the effects of customer injustice exist in the organizational behavior literature, marketing researchers have explored the impact of negative customer behaviors on the effectiveness of marketing efforts, using labels such as deviant, aberrant, abusive, dishonest, dysfunctional, thoughtless, and outraged consumers (Caruana, Ramaseshan, & Ewing, 2001; Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Harris & Reynolds, 2003). Lovelock (1994), for instance, coined the term *jaycustomers* (an analogy to jay walkers, who ignore the rules) in reference to customers who deliberately or unintentionally disrupt service in a manner that negatively affects the organization or other customers. K. L. Reynolds and Harris (2006) found that despite receiving training in how to deal with negative customers (typically involving sympathizing with the customer), all of their study informants discarded the sympathetic approach and developed their own informal tactics to cope with negative customers, often without the consent of their supervisor. Examples included spitting on the customers’ food before delivering it to them and providing the customer poor service in subsequent interactions. Although marketing research on sabotage is limited, injustice perceptions are theorized to underlie these reactions (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002).

As noted above, studies on customer injustice in the management sciences are sparse. In one exception, Rupp and Spencer (2006) conducted a laboratory simulation in which participants were asked to role-play a customer service representative who was treated either fairly or unfairly by a customer. In the unfair treatment condition, confederates spoke politely, accused the participant of being lazy and slow, and threatened to boycott the company’s product. Relative to a control group, participants in the treatment condition reported higher levels of emotional labor and greater difficulties in complying with display rules. In the following section, we provide the theory for why customer interpersonal injustice relates to employee sabotage.

**Theory and Hypotheses**

A growing body of justice research suggests that people can engage in retaliation because unfair treatment violates moral and social norms. Rawls (1971) argued that human beings have the right to be treated in ways that foster dignity and positive self-regard. Folger (2001) coined the term *deontic justice* to describe reactions to events seen as violating or infringing on moral norms of social conduct. The Greek term *deon* refers to one’s obligation or duty, as expressed by terms such as should, must, or ought not do in response to violations of how human beings should be treated.

Folger and Cropanzano (1998) proposed that when determining moral and social violations, individuals compare what occurred with what should have happened, had appropriate norms been followed. Responses to moral violations, however, tend to occur less as a rational or conscious comparison of actual versus expected behaviors and more as an automatic and subconscious reaction (Folger et al., 2005). Research shows, for instance, that humans subconsciously evaluate all stimuli regardless of an intention to do so (Bargh, Chaiken, Raymon, & Hymes, 1996). From a moral perspective, justice judgments often arise from intuitive feelings about what is right and wrong, and reasoning pertaining to morality and justice is usually constructed post hoc, after justice judgments have been reached on the basis of gut feelings (Van den Bos, 2007).

Another aspect of the moral perspective of justice is that the motivation to react to a moral violation is often independent of the consequences (Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003). That is, individuals can react to moral violations in ways that are not in their own best economic and psychological interest. Studies show, for instance, that individuals will take reduced earnings in order to punish a transgressor (Nowak, Page, & Sigmund, 2000; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002). Even the act of ruminating over a transgression long after the event occurred can be counterproductive to one’s well-being (Folger et al., 2005).

The moral basis for justice is a particularly interesting perspective considering that retaliation behaviors such as sabotage can contradict requirements to comply with a company’s display rules (e.g., “serve the customer with a smile”). This tension between being guided by display rules and the moral imperative to punish wrongdoing for mistreatment is likely to motivate the employee to punish the transgressor in clandestine ways. Some acts of sabotage (e.g., inadvertently hanging up on a customer) provide opportunities for covert retaliation because they can be explained by “human error.” Thus, “getting even” might not necessarily violate display rules to regulate one’s emotions if the behavior is effectively disguised. The opening story regarding the airline’s check-in agent who smiles while sending the luggage to a wrong destination provides such an example.

We predicted that, on the basis of the moral perspective of justice, customer interpersonal injustice is positively associated with employee sabotage because (a) employees are likely to view interpersonal mistreatment by customers as violating moral norms of conduct and (b) violations of social and moral norms motivate individuals to find ways to punish the individual deemed blameworthy for the transgression. Skarlicki and Folger (2004) argued that violations of interpersonal dignity and sensitivity are particularly likely to lead to retaliation behavior because it is relatively easy for individuals to assign blame and intentionality for transgressions perpetrated by another person (more so than by organizations or other group-level entities; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001).

Previous research shows that intra-organizational sources of fairness predict various forms of retaliation (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). To determine whether customer injustice explains sabotage incremental to intra-organizational sources of fairness, we controlled for the effects on sabotage explained by perceptions of distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice.

**Hypothesis 1:** Customer interpersonal injustice is positively associated with employee sabotage over and above (i.e., controlling for) intra-organizational forms of organizational justice.
Moral Identity as a Moderator in the Relationship Between Customer Interpersonal Injustice and Employee Sabotage

As described above, a potential contradiction emerges because on the one hand, moral individuals are likely highly sensitized to occasions of moral violations and thereby are motivated by a sense of duty or obligation to redress the injustice. Alternatively, highly moral individuals might be expected to “turn the other cheek” to unfair treatment. Greenberg (2002), for instance, found in a laboratory study that participants higher in moral development stole less money when treated unfairly than did participants who were lower on moral development.

One way of addressing this potential contradiction is to view this issue through theory on moral identity. Aquino and Reed (2002) defined moral identity as the chronic accessibility of the moral self. Moral identity research draws upon social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which proposes that an individual’s self-concept can have multiple identities, including one’s gender, ethnic background (e.g., visible minority), occupation (e.g., professor or lawyer), and marital and family status (e.g., single mother or father of two children). According to Lapsley and Lasky (2001, p. 347), a high moral identity person is someone “for whom moral schemas are chronically available, readily primed, and easily activated for information processing.” To the extent an individual’s moral identity is strong, it can serve as a self-regulatory mechanism that motivates behavior (Erikson, 1964; Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998). One reason for its motivational properties is that the social self-schema organizes one’s social identities and directs attention to self-relevant information. Individuals who have a high level of moral identity salience are especially likely to recognize occasions that violate their moral and social values. Damon and Hart (1992) argued that the centrality of morality to the self is among the single most powerful mechanisms in the linkage between one’s moral judgment and behavior.

Aquino and Reed (2002) proposed that moral identity consists of two dimensions: internalization (the degree to which a set of moral traits is central to one’s self-concept) and symbolization (the degree to which reactions to moral issues are expressed publicly through an individual’s actions). These dimensions are consistent with previous theorizing that self-awareness can be characterized by an internal, introspective awareness of one’s inner thoughts and feelings and an external, active self as a social object that impacts others (Fenigstein, 1975).

The internalization dimension of moral identity reflects the self-determined importance of moral characteristics to one’s identity. Internalization has been found to be positively related to moral reasoning and concern for others (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Reed and Aquino (2003) found that individuals having higher (vs. lower) internalization scores reported higher perceived obligations toward outgroup members (Study 1), more favorable evaluations of a relief effort provided toward outgroups (Study 2), a lower inclination to endorse inflicting harm on harmdoers (Study 3), and a higher willingness to forgive transgressors (Study 4).

Symbolization, in contrast, reflects the degree to which one’s moral concerns, in particular threats to one’s moral identity, are expressed through his or her behavior. Aquino and Reed (2002) reported, for instance, that symbolization was positively related to the tendency to engage in self-presentation behaviors. Symbolization can be understood in light of theory on symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982), which proposes that individuals are motivated to make their self-identity a social reality. Threats to self-completion, defined as events that can prevent one’s self-identity from being socially affirmed, can result in increased efforts to self-symbolize (i.e., reinforce one’s identity). Insofar as moral concerns are salient to one’s self-identity, if a person’s identity-relevant goals are threatened, he or she will seek out ways to self-symbolize. On these occasions, others’ needs and wants become secondary. From this perspective, retaliation serves as a counterattack mechanism for individuals who experience mistreatment and for whom moral goals are important.

Although the discriminant and construct validity of the two dimensions has been well established (Aquino & Reed, 2002), in studies to date either of these two dimensions have been combined (i.e., averaged) into one measure of moral identity (e.g., Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007) or evidence of moral identity effects have been derived from considering one dimension alone. Research has yet to consider how internalization and symbolization might combine to moderate reactions to injustice.

In the present study, we theorized that internalization and symbolization combine to moderate the relationship between customer mistreatment and sabotage in the form of a three-way interaction. First, we predicted that employees high in symbolization would react more strongly to customer mistreatment than would employees low on symbolization. This is because high symbolization reflects an orientation to react more (vs. less) strongly to mistreatment, in particular concerning events that threaten one’s moral self-identity. Mistreatment from customers is likely to pose a threat to an individual’s identity-relevant goals. Sabotage represents a form of counterattack for the employee in response to the customer’s mistreatment.

Our theory also considered that internalization serves as a countervailing force to symbolization and that the two-way moderation effect for symbolization would be suppressed (i.e., less pronounced) for employees high (vs. low) in internalization. As discussed above, internalization is associated with a lower tendency to punish transgressors and a higher tendency to forgive and show concern for others. Moreover, high (vs. low) internalizers show greater compassion toward outgroup members who have the potential to inflict harm. We considered that high internalizers are less likely to engage in sabotage in response to customer mistreatment and instead demonstrate display rules such as “treat the customer as you would want to be treated.” Moreover, high internalization is likely to reflect a concern about whether engaging in sabotage behaviors is the right thing to do. Thus, individuals high (vs. low) in internalization are more likely to view sabotage as an unethical act in itself.

Hypothesis 2: A three-way interaction between customer interpersonal injustice, symbolization, and internalization predicts employee sabotage directed toward the customer. The relationship between injustice and sabotage is more pronounced for individuals high versus low in symbolization. The moderation effects of symbolization are weaker for individuals high versus low in internalization.

Last, we explored the relationship between employee sabotage and performance. We expected that engaging in sabotage relates negatively with employee performance for at least three reasons. First, (in)justice reactions include the tendency to ruminate about
mistreatment, preoccupying victims with their perceived injustice. The inability to focus on task performance likely detracts from the ability to function effectively on the job. Second, the motivation to engage in sabotage can divert employees’ attention and energy away from their motivation to engage in task performance. Third, sabotage has been described as the “tip of the iceberg” of other potential manifestations arising from unfair treatment (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997, p. 434), including emotional and physical withdrawal, which can also detract from one’s performance.

**Hypothesis 3:** Employee sabotage is negatively related to job performance.

**Participants**

We conducted a field study of customer service representatives employed in a call center located in western Canada (N = 358). This center provided inbound call center services to four major clients in the following businesses: parcel delivery, credit card services, computer support, and global media. Call center agents responded to between 70 and 100 calls per day, and the average call ranged in length from 2 1/2 to 5 min. This level of activity is consistent with other call centers in Canada (van Jaarsveld, Frost, & Walker, 2007). Three hundred sixty out of a total of 950 (38%) employees responded to the invitation to participate in our survey. Two employees declined to complete the survey, expressing concerns regarding the confidentiality of their responses. Of the 358 respondents, 252 (71%) were women, 105 (29%) were men, and 1 participant failed to identify his or her gender. Their average age was 32.87 years, and average tenure was 1.69 years. The human resource manager confirmed that these demographics were representative of the call center workforce.

We selected a call center as our research setting for three reasons. First, call center employees have frequent contact with customers, giving them ample opportunity to experience customer interpersonal injustice. Grandey, Dickter, and Sin (2004), for example, found that call center employees experience customer mistreatment an average of 10 times per day. Second, the moral perspective of justice proposes to explain why some employees are motivated to engage in highly risky behavior in order to retaliate (Cronanzolo et al., 2003). A call center provides an appropriate setting for our theory because the chances of getting caught and reprimanded for customer-directed sabotage can be high. This is because call centers tend to have electronic performance systems to monitor the employees’ activity and adherence to display rules in their interactions with customers (Holman, Chissick, & Totterdell, 2002). Third, call centers are a fast growing industry, one in which customer service is important to organizational effectiveness (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 2003), making this setting relevant to many organizations.

Customer service representatives received an e-mail invitation from the researchers to participate in our study. We administered a paper survey in the company cafeteria over a period of 3 days. Employees who were interested in participating signed the consent form and completed the survey during their lunch or coffee break. Upon returning the survey, respondents were given a pass to a local movie theater as a token of appreciation. All employees were assured confidentiality and that the information would be used solely for research purposes.

**Measures**

**Customer interpersonal injustice.** We developed a measure of customer interpersonal justice for our research site. This is because existing organizational justice scales reflect intra-organizational sources of (in)justice, and as explained above, customer injustice differs in nontrivial ways from unjust treatment by one’s supervisor. Moreover, justice scholars (e.g., Bies, 2005) have raised concerns that dark side behavior such as derogatory claims could be qualitatively different from the mere absence of dignity and respect (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Scott, 2005).

We used the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) to develop our measure because this approach has been shown to generate content-valid measures of behavior (Levine, Ash, Hall, & Sistrunk, 1983). First, we conducted four focus groups of 5–6 subject matter experts (i.e., customer service representatives from the call center) who were given the following description: “Customer service employees can sometimes view the treatment they receive from customers as unfair. Please provide us with a specific event that you experienced over the past 6–12 months in which you consider that the customer was treating you unfairly.” This process generated 33 incidents.

We eliminated incidents that were duplicates and reduced the list of incidents based on specific exclusion criteria. Our intent was to capture items that conformed to current definitions of fairness of interpersonal interactions (i.e., reflecting dignity and respect, refraining from personal attacks; see Colquitt, 2001; Rupp & Spencer, 2006). For example, some incidents pertained to customers using profane language. Our subject matter experts informed us, however, that while profane language was seen as rude, it was not deemed unfair. For another example, incidents pertaining to customers’ requests to speak to the employee’s supervisor were not seen as unfair because the company had specific protocols for dealing with these requests. This procedure shortened the list to 18 incidents, which were rewritten by the researchers into behavioral scales and were administered to the participants in a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (frequently). Items with nonnormal (skewed or kurtotic) distributions were eliminated, as were items showing less than a full range of responses on a 5-point Likert scale. We analyzed the remaining 12 items with principal axis factor analysis using a varimax rotation. Four items were excluded because they either cross-loaded on more than one factor, created a single-item factor, or did not load on any factors. The remaining eight items are provided in the Appendix. The items were averaged to form the measure such that larger numbers signified higher (vs. lower) levels of the variable. Participants who served as subject matter experts were excluded from the rest of the study.

**Customer-directed sabotage.** In order to develop a content-valid measure of employees’ customer-directed sabotage in a call center context, we followed the critical incident technique described above. We asked our subject matter experts to respond to the following statement: “Research suggests that when employees feel unfairly treated at work, they tend to find ways to ‘strike back’ and somehow even the score. Think back over the past 6–12 months of examples when you or someone with whom you work retaliated for unfair treatment.” This process generated 12 items.

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1 The complete list of items is available from the first author.
pertaining to behavior that was specifically directed toward the customer. The items were rewritten by the researchers into a behavioral scale and administered to the employees. We analyzed the items with principal axis analysis using a varimax rotation. Seven items were excluded because they either (a) cross-loaded on more than one factor, (b) comprised a single-item factor, or (c) did not load on any factors. Our final scale consisted of five items: “Please indicate the frequency over the past month, as a result of dealing with an unfair customer, that you . . .” (a) “Hung up on the customer”; (b) “Intentionally put the customer on hold for a long period of time”; (c) “Purposefully transferred the customer to the wrong department”; (d) “Purposefully disconnected the call”; and (e) “Told the customer that you fixed something but didn’t fix it.” Employees responded to a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (frequently—more than 7 times over the past month). The items were averaged to form the measure such that larger numbers signified higher (vs. lower) levels of the variable.

Performance. The performance measure consisted of ratings of the employees’ quality of customer service, expressed as a percent. The rating focused on a combination of employees’ courtesy, competence, decision quality, and sales skills. Sales skills were part of the performance measure because sales was an integral part of their customer service performance. This is consistent with Batt (1999), who defined quality service as including “the twin demands of maximizing sales and service” (p. 546). The combination of service and sales skills in these jobs reflects the nature of customer service, with firms capitalizing on the customer service interaction as a sales opportunity in call centers (Aksin & Harker, 1999; Batt, 1999, 2002).

In our study, calls were monitored on a random basis by either rater or who were specifically trained to monitor service quality or the employee’s supervisor. Employees were aware that their calls could be monitored; however, they were unaware of which calls were evaluated.

The participants were asked for written permission to access their performance ratings, which were then provided to us by the human resource manager. Where available, the performance score from the 2 months immediately following data collection was averaged. We were able to match performance scores to 276 employees out of the total 358 respondents. Although the four clients were in different businesses (parcel delivery, credit card services, computer support, and global media), they used the same performance quality criterion. Table 1 provides a summary of the raw performance scores for the employees who participated in our study. To increase the comparability in performance ratings among the four different clients within the call center, the ratings were standardized, giving us a measure of the employees’ relative performance within their client group.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>.53</td>
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<td>.87</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.46</td>
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Note. Performance scores are expressed as a percentage (out of 1.00). Min = minimum; Max = maximum.

Moral Identity scale. We used the 10-item Moral Identity scale developed by Aquino and Reed (2002) containing the internalization and symbolization dimensions. This measure has been shown to provide a construct valid measure of individuals’ chronic accessibility of the moral self. The items used a 5-point Likert-type scale, with the response set ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were averaged to form the measure.

Control variables. We controlled for age and gender in our analysis because these variables have been shown to relate positively with moral identity (Reed & Aquino, 2003). Age and gender were self-reported, with gender coded as 0 (males) and 1 (females). We measured distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice using Colquitt’s (2001) validated scales.

Results

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to simultaneously assess the unidimensionality of the four factors representing customer interpersonal injustice, sabotage, and moral identity (internalization and symbolization) because achieving unidimensional measurement is a crucial step in theory testing and development (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). We contrasted the four-factor measurement model against these four competing models: (a) a single common factor model that allowed all indicators to load on a single latent factor, (b) a two-factor model in which we aggregated all moral identity (internalization and symbolization) indicators on a single factor and employees’ injustice and sabotage ratings on a second factor, (c) a three-factor model with the internalization and symbolization indicators loading on separate factors and employee injustice and sabotage ratings on one factor, and (d) a three-factor model with the moral identity indicators loading on one latent factor and customer injustice and sabotage indicators loading on their respective latent factors.

In order to evaluate the fit of the model to the data and to compare the relative fit of the alternative models, we used SAS PROC CALIS (Version 9.1). Following recommendations by Gerbing and Anderson (1984), in all models we correlated the errors (a) for two indicators on the internalization scale that were reverse-coded and (b) for two sabotage indicators because both indicators involved terminating a customer’s call. The results of the analyses are given in Table 2. As shown, the four-factor model was the best fitting of all the models and provided a reasonable fit with the data, supporting the unidimensionality of our measures.

Because many of our measures were derived through self-report, we also assessed the impact of common method variance on the data (for a discussion see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Specifically, common method bias is highly problematic if a single latent factor accounts for all the manifest variables’ variance. As shown in Table 2, the single-factor model was compared with the four-factor model containing one latent factor for each of the four scales used in the study. The fit of the four-factor model significantly improved on the single-factor model (chi-square/df = 1.81 vs. 6.40, respectively), suggesting that common method variance was not a serious problem in the data.

Furthermore, because we had several cases with missing performance data, we tested whether the employees for whom we successfully matched performance ratings against our other variables differed from those employees whose performance data were missing. We created a dummy code to denote that performance data was either matched (1) or missing (0) and conducted a series
of analyses of variance to test for differences between the matched and unmatched groups. No differences were observed for participants’ age, $F(1,353) = 1.87$, ns, or their ratings of sabotage, $F(1,340) = 0.04$, ns; distributive justice, $F(1,355) = 0.78$, ns; procedural justice, $F(1,344) = 0.14$, ns; interpersonal justice, $F(1,351) = 0.0$, ns; informational justice, $F(1,354) = 0.51$, ns; internalization, $F(1,350) = 1.45$, ns; or symbolization, $F(1,351) = 0.57$, ns. Observations were considered for customer injustice, $F(1,340) = 7.65$, $p < .01$, and gender, $F(1,355) = 12.64$, $p < .01$. Participants for whom performance data were matched reported higher levels of customer injustice ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.77$) compared with participants whose performance data were missing ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.74$), and the matched group had more women ($M = 0.76$, $SD = 0.43$) than did the group missing performance data ($M = 0.55$, $SD = 0.50$).

The factor loadings for the organizational justice measures are given in Table 3. The means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates (Cronbach’s alpha) for all the study variables are given in Table 4. Hypothesis 1 stated that customer interpersonal injustice relates positively with employee sabotage after controlling for intra-organizational sources of justice. We used hierarchical regression to test our hypotheses, entering in Step 1 our control variables, including age and distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice. Gender was not included as a control variable because it was found not to be significant in the model. In Step 2, we entered the customer interpersonal injustice measure. As shown in Table 5, customer interpersonal injustice explained significant variance in sabotage incremental to intra-organizational sources of justice, $B = 0.12$, $p < .01$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = 0.06 to 0.18, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 stated that a three-way interaction between customer interpersonal injustice and the internalization and symbolization dimensions of moral identity moderates the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and employee customer-directed sabotage. Following procedures described by Aiken and West (1991), we conducted hierarchical multiple regression analysis to test this hypothesis, and we standardized the predictor variables prior to creating the interaction terms. The results in Table 6 show a significant three-way interaction between customer interpersonal injustice, internalization, and symbolization predicting customer-directed sabotage, $B = -0.05$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = −0.08 to −0.01. We probed the significant interaction with a framework outlined by Dawson and Richter (2006). Figure 1 shows the results from this analysis.

We examined whether pairs of slopes differed significantly at high and low levels of internalization and symbolization by using the slope difference test (Dawson & Richter, 2006; Richter, West, van Dick, & Dawson, 2006). As Table 7 shows, at low levels of internalization, the slope of the relationship between injustice and sabotage was more pronounced for participants high versus low on symbolization. In contrast, when internalization was high there was no significant difference in slopes for high versus low symbolization. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that employee sabotage relates negatively with employee performance. We used multiple regression, controlling for age, to test our hypothesis. The results are given in Table 8. We found that employee sabotage was negatively asso-

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement model</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$\chi^2/df$</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>NFI</th>
<th>RMRSR</th>
<th>RMSEA (90% CI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single factor</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>1460</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.122, .135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two factors</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.067, .081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three factors (1)</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.058, .072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three factors (2)</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.054, .069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four factors</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.042, .058</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 327$. GFI = goodness of fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; NFI = normed fit index; RMRSR = root-mean-square residual; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CI = confidence interval.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributive justice</td>
<td>My reward reflects the effort I have put into my work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My reward is appropriate for the work I have completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My reward reflects my contribution to the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural justice</td>
<td>I am able to express my views at this company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel I have influence over decisions at this company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In general, procedures tend to be applied consistently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisions that are made here are free of bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisions are based on accurate information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities exist to appeal certain decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procedures comply with ethical and moral standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal justice (item stem: “My immediate supervisor . . .”)</td>
<td>Treats me in a polite manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treats me with dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treats me with respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refrains from improper remarks or comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational justice (item stem: “My immediate supervisor . . .”)</td>
<td>Is open and frank in (his/her) communications with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explains the procedures thoroughly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gives me reasonable explanations regarding the procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicates details in a timely manner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 340$. 

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Interpersonal injustice, internalization, and symbolization predict—

Table 6 shows a significant three-way interaction between customer interpersonal injustice and the internalization and symbol-

ization dimensions of moral identity moderates the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and employee customer-

umerous variables prior to creating the interaction terms. The results in Table 6 show a significant three-way interaction between customer interpersonal injustice, internalization, and symbolization predicting customer-directed sabotage, $B = -0.05$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = −0.08 to −0.01. We probed the significant interaction with a framework outlined by Dawson and Richter (2006). Figure 1 shows the results from this analysis.

We examined whether pairs of slopes differed significantly at high and low levels of internalization and symbolization by using the slope difference test (Dawson & Richter, 2006; Richter, West, van Dick, & Dawson, 2006). As Table 7 shows, at low levels of internalization, the slope of the relationship between injustice and sabotage was more pronounced for participants high versus low on symbolization. In contrast, when internalization was high there was no significant difference in slopes for high versus low symbolization. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that employee sabotage relates negatively with employee performance. We used multiple regression, controlling for age, to test our hypothesis. The results are given in Table 8. We found that employee sabotage was negatively asso-
ciated with performance, $B = -0.34$, $p < .01$, 95% CI = −0.57 to −0.11, supporting our hypothesis.²

Discussion

Employees’ negative reactions to unfair treatment in the workplace is a robust finding in the organizational justice literature. Studies on workplace sabotage, however, are relatively scarce. With few exceptions, the focus of justice research has been limited to the perceived fairness of organizational decisions (e.g., hiring decisions, layoffs) and resource allocations (e.g., pay raises). An important research question concerns the applicability of justice effects to other contexts and sources (see Bies, 2001, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2005; Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990, for similar discussions). In the present study, we broaden the understanding of employees’ experience of workplace (un)fairness and its consequences by considering the (mis)treatment that originates from a company’s customers. Without this perspective, organizational scholars and managers are likely to have an incomplete view of the unfairness perceptions that many employees experience.

The significance of the present research is threefold. Although anecdotal evidence exists regarding how customer service employees “get back” at customers for their mistreatment, this is the first study to empirically demonstrate the link between customer interpersonal injustice and employee sabotage directed toward customers. Our research shows that employees retaliate in ways that are unauthorized by management in order to cope with customer mistreatment. Our research is important because, by considering customers as a source of mistreatment, we were able to explain a significant amount of variance in employee sabotage over and above the variance explained by intra-organizational sources of justice. We propose that customers warrant attention in the organizational justice research as a distinct source of workplace unfairness.

Second, we found that reactions to injustice varied as a function of moral identity. Consistent with our theory, the results show that a three-way interaction between customer injustice, internalization, and symbolization predicted sabotage. Specifically, as can be seen in Table 7, when symbolization was high and internalization was low, the slope between injustice and sabotage was significant. The results also show, however, that for individuals high on internalization, there were no significant differences in the slopes between high versus low symbolization.

These findings show that while symbolization can amplify the relationship between mistreatment and sabotage, internalization suppresses sabotage tendencies. We theorized that one reason individuals high on internalization resist engaging in sabotage is because they could view such acts as unethical and immoral. Our results are consistent with S. J. Reynolds and Ceranic (2007), who concluded that internalization and symbolization could moderate the effect of mistreatment on behavior, but in opposite directions. These findings are important because they are the first to demon-

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.15***</td>
<td>−0.19, −0.07</td>
<td>−0.10***</td>
<td>−0.16, −0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive justice</td>
<td>−0.11***</td>
<td>−0.19, −0.03</td>
<td>−0.09*</td>
<td>−0.17, −0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural justice</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>−0.10, 0.06</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>−0.09, −0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational justice</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05, 0.14</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.03, 0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal justice</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>−0.16, 0.03</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>−0.15, −0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer injustice</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td>0.06, 0.18</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td>0.06, 0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>308</td>
<td></td>
<td>308</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>8.86***</td>
<td>10.39***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$df$</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in $R^2$</td>
<td>0.04***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  CI = confidence interval.
* $p < .05$.  ** $p < .01$.  *** $p < .001$. ²In supplemental analyses, we controlled for employees’ frequency of calls and employee tenure, but they were nonsignificant in all the regression models reported here, and the results did not change when we controlled for these factors.
strate how the two dimensions of moral identity combine to moderate fairness effects. This research is also significant because understanding the factors that moderate fairness reactions, researchers can gain understanding regarding the motives underlying the phenomenon itself (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Thus, the finding that moral identity moderates the relationship between unfairness perceptions and sabotage lends support for the moral perspective of justice.

Table 6
Regression Results for Customer Injustice, Internalization, and Symbolization Predicting Customer-Directed Sabotage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Step 4</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Step 5</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.09***</td>
<td>-0.15, -0.03</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>-0.14, -0.02</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>-0.14, -0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive justice</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.17, -0.02</td>
<td>-0.09*</td>
<td>-0.17, -0.02</td>
<td>-0.09*</td>
<td>-0.17, -0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural justice</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.09, 0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.08, 0.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.08, 0.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational justice</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.04, 0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.04, 0.14</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.04, 0.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal justice</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.15, -0.06</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.14, 0.03</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.14, 0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer injustice</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td>0.06, 0.12</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td>0.06, 0.18</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
<td>0.09, 0.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>-0.15, -0.10</td>
<td>-0.10**</td>
<td>-0.17, -0.03</td>
<td>-0.10**</td>
<td>-0.17, -0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolization</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.01, 0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.01, 0.12</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.02, 0.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Injustice × Internalization</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.12, 0.01</td>
<td>-0.09*</td>
<td>-0.16, -0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Injustice × Symbolization</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.01, 0.11</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.00, 0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization × Symbolization</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.09, 0.01</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.08, 0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Injustice × Internalization × Symbolization</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.05*</td>
<td>-0.08, -0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Steps 1 and 2 are found in Table 5. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 7
Tests of Slope Differences for Customer Injustice Predicting Sabotage Moderated by High and Low Internalization and Symbolization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slope pair</th>
<th>Slope</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low internalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolization$_{\text{high}}$</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolization$_{\text{low}}$</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope difference</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High internalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolization$_{\text{high}}$</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolization$_{\text{low}}$</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope difference</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
critical to ensure the construct validity of our justice measures, in particular the central role of fairness in these effects (Colquitt et al., 2005). We addressed this concern in two ways. From a theoretical perspective, we limited our focus to violations of interpersonal treatment that are known to violate moral and social norms and hence be perceived as unfair (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). From a measurement perspective, we utilized the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) to develop content-valid measures of customer interpersonal mistreatment. We took care to ensure that the company employees who served as subject matter experts utilized “unfair treatment” as the criterion when generating and selecting the incidents for our measures. We believe that the content and construct validity of our injustice measure was enhanced by this approach.

One strength of our study concerns our sabotage measure. Dark side behaviors tend to provide a methodological challenge in terms of measurement strategy. As with our injustice measure, we utilized the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) to generate content-valid items based on input from call center representatives who served as subject matter experts. Second, the questionnaire explicitly asked employees “how often, in response to dealing with a difficult customer you . . . ”Thus, we believe that our sabotage measure represents action “in response to” customer treatment. Third, we utilized self-reports to assess sabotage, because alternative raters (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, and customers) are unlikely to know about the frequency or intention of such behaviors. Although we imply an intention to retaliate, a drawback of any measure involving sabotage is detected, managers are likely to overattribute its causes.

Other potential limitations warrant mention. We were able to match performance data for only 276 out of 358 participants. Our analysis showed that the employees for whom we had matched performance data reported more customer interpersonal injustice and were more likely to be women than employees for whom we did not match performance data, raising concerns about response bias for our third hypothesis. Also, several of the measures are self-reported, raising concerns about the effects of common method variance on some of our findings. Even though our analysis suggests that this is not a serious concern for our data, common method bias cannot be completely ruled out. Furthermore, while a call center setting provides a theoretically relevant context for our research, a potential limitation of this setting is that call centers are restricted to verbal interactions over the telephone. Customers and service employees can behave differently in telephone versus face-to-face interactions (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). Thus, future research needs to investigate whether these results generalize to face-to-face interactions in other service settings such as the health care or hospitality industry.

Because our data are cross-sectional, we cannot make claims about the direction of causality. Although our theory proposes that mistreatment causes sabotage, the opposite direction is also plausible. This possibility, however, does not negate our study’s contribution to the literature. First, in post hoc analysis, we reran the analyses, reversing the dependent and independent variables and the interaction terms. The results were not significant. Second, it is improbable that sabotage could cause a three-way reaction between internalization, symbolization, and customer mistreatment.

### Implications for Future Research

Although we did not provide a hypothesis for the effects of age, the results indicate that age is positively related to moral identity and negatively related to sabotage. We speculate that older employees engage in lower levels of sabotage because their moral identity increases with age. This proposition warrants future study. Moreover, it is possible that customers’ mistreatment of employees in some cases is precipitated by employee incompetence. Thus it would be interesting to investigate whether employees who receive poor performance ratings are targets for customer mistreatment.

Another line of future research concerns behavioral contagion (Kowalski, 1996): Witnessing another customer mistreating an employee can influence how the next customer treats the employee. Also, the presence of a third party can impact the way that customers and employees interact with one another, a context that is not often present in telephone interactions. Finally, although our research interests concerned unfair treatment as the motive underlying sabotage, other motives—including powerlessness, organizational frustration, facilitation of work, boredom, and fun (Graealone & Rosenfeld, 1987)—warrant study. Future research might also explore other individual differences—including self-esteem and belonging needs, as well as needs for control and power (see Cropanzano et al., 2001; and Jones, in press, for a discussion)—as predictors of sabotage.

### Implications for Management Practice

Understanding the factors that underlie sabotage is an important first step in trying to manage sabotage. As noted above, insofar as sabotage is detected, managers are likely to overattribute its causes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regression Results for Customer-Directed Sabotage Predicting Employee Performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer-directed sabotage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. CI = confidence interval. *p < .05. **p < .01.
to the employee’s personality, which can narrow their search for strategies to reduce sabotage. Consistent with Ambrose et al. (2002), our study shows that sabotage is motivated by perceptions of unfairness. Our research shows that sabotage can arise from unfair treatment by customers. A typical managerial response to sabotage involves the use of closer monitoring (DiBattista, 1989), which can often be an impractical and unrealistic solution (Giacalone et al., 1997). For instance, the employees in the present study engaged in sabotage in the presence of electronic performance monitoring. Thus, managers are encouraged to consider alternative strategies to manage employee sabotage.

One strategy is for firms to attempt to manage transgressors by tracking customers who demonstrate interpersonal violations toward employees and take steps to (a) prepare employees for the potentially difficult customer, (b) provide employees with the discretion to terminate the call, and/or (c) have a company representative terminate the customer. A zero tolerance policy for mistreatment by customers is likely to signal to employees that the company cares about employees’ dignity and respect. A second strategy is to provide ongoing training in dealing with customers who might mistreat employees (e.g., problem-solving techniques). Managers could, for instance, conduct debriefing sessions with front-line workers where employees are encouraged to openly share their experiences and their successes and failures with unfair customers they have encountered. While this training is likely relevant to all customer service employees, it might be especially important for employees who are high on the symbolization and low on the internalization dimensions of moral identity.

In summary, our research shows that employees engage in customer-directed sabotage as a reaction to unfair treatment from customers, over and above their fairness perceptions of the company and its agents. The sabotage tendencies arising from injustice, however, are moderated by moral identity. The relationship between injustice and sabotage is stronger for individuals high (vs. low) in symbolization, but these moderating effects of symbolization, however, are moderated by moral identity. The relationship between injustice and sabotage is stronger for individuals high (vs. low) in internalization. Last, customer-directed sabotage relates negatively with customer service employee performance ratings.

References
Folger, R. (2001). Fairness as deontology. In S. W. Gilliland, D. D. Steiner,


The influence of work groups on the antisocial behavior of employees. *Academy of Management Journal, 41,* 658–672.


### Appendix

**Customer Injustice Items**

Items below were completed with the following 5-point scale:

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

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