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Abstract

We extend the *deontic model of justice* (Folger, 1998, 2001) by arguing that not all employees respond to third-party injustices by experiencing an eye-for-an-eye retributive response; rather, some employees respond in ways that are higher in moral acceptance (e.g. increasing turnover intentions, engaging in constructive resistance). We predict that the positive relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and organizational deviance is *weaker* when employees are high in moral identity. In contrast, we hypothesize that the relationships between supervisor abuse of customers and turnover intentions and constructive resistance are more *strongly* positive when employees are high in moral identity. Regression results from two field studies ($N = 222$ and $N = 199$, respectively) provide general support for our theoretical model.

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abusive supervision, customers, deontic model of justice, deviance, moral identity

The old law about 'an eye for an eye' leaves everybody blind. The time is always right to do the right thing. (Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.)

A growing body of research suggests that third-party observers respond unfavorably to the mistreatment of others, even if the observer is not personally affected by the event (Bies and Greenberg, 2002; Houshmand et al., 2012; O'Reilly et al., 2012; Rupp and Bell, 2010; Skarlicki and Rupp, 2010; Skarlicki et al., 1998; Turillo et al., 2002). Extant research demonstrates that third parties often react to the mistreatment of others by engaging in retributive justice that serves to punish the offending party. The implications of studying third-party reactions to the mistreatment of others loom large given that any one victim of mistreatment may be accompanied by a much larger pool of third-party observers who may seek vengeance against the at-fault party (Skarlicki and Kulik, 2005). Although empirical progress has been made in solidifying the notion that third parties do indeed care about the mistreatment of others, little is known about third-party reactions that do not entail an eye-for-an-eye retributive response (Rupp and Bell, 2010; Skarlicki and Rupp, 2010).

The deontic model of justice (Folger, 1998, 2001; Folger et al., 2005) has served as a theoretical lens for understanding why third parties react unfavorably to the mistreatment of others (O'Reilly and Aquino, 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2012; Rupp and Bell, 2010; Skarlicki and Rupp, 2010). People respond unfavorably to third-party injustices because the perpetrator fails to uphold widely held principles of morality that dictate how people should treat one another to maintain a just social order (Folger, 1998, 2001). When a perpetrator infringes on what is rightfully owed to another person, observers experience *deontic reactions* that they are motivated to manage by redressing the wrongdoing. Research on the deontic model of justice has primarily focused on retributive justice in the form of punishment. Retributive justice has traditionally adopted a just desert philosophy, whereby offenders deserve to be punished and punishment serves to restore justice (Darley et al., 2000; Okimoto et al., 2010).

Recently, some researchers have suggested that not all third parties respond to observed injustices by engaging in retribution in the form of punishment (Rupp and Bell, 2010). Yet, extant research on the deontic model of justice provides seemingly conflicting findings, with some studies reporting that people who self-regulate their moral behavior do not respond to observed injustices by punishing the at-fault party (Rupp and Bell, 2010), and other studies suggesting that people who are high in moral identity are more likely to respond to observed injustices by punishing the offending party (O'Reilly et al., 2012). We argue that these conflicting findings are due in part to the fact that people who tend to regulate their moral behavior do indeed have retributive tendencies, but their actual retributive responses are higher in moral acceptance. It could be that O'Reilly et al. found that those high in moral identity were more likely to respond to observed injustices by engaging in punishment because they operationalized punishment as "not

doing business with a company,” which may be construed as a morally acceptable form of retribution.

In line with this notion, Skarlicki and Rupp (2010) argued that multiple forms of retribution should be examined, including forms that move beyond an eye-for-an-eye punishment reaction. Retribution can include behaviors that attempt to restore a moral social order or serve to reduce the misbehavior (Tripp et al., 2002). Furthermore, Turillo et al. (2002) found that reactions to observed injustices may not always include a willingness to punish the wrongdoer. Specifically, the authors found that study participants were unwilling to punish a wrongdoer if it made the participant seem greedy. Accordingly, observers of injustices may find it unacceptable to right a wrong with equally egregious behaviors, such that “two wrongs don’t make a right” (Turillo et al., 2002: 850).

We expand on this line of inquiry by testing the idea that people respond differently to observed injustices based on their level of moral identity. A person’s moral identity is a self-schema that is organized around a set of moral traits (Aquino and Reed, 2002). When people strongly uphold a moral identity, they may have a weaker tendency to respond to observed injustices by engaging in retribution that is equally egregious as the offending behavior (i.e. engaging in organizational deviance), but they may have a stronger tendency to engage in retribution that is construed as morally acceptable (i.e. having higher turnover intentions, constructively resisting their supervisors’ downward influence attempts).

Thus, we attempt to extend the deontic model of justice by demonstrating that moral people do indeed respond to observed injustices; however, their retributive reactions tend to be morally acceptable. Accordingly, we aim to resolve the inconsistencies between prior studies that have questioned whether people who uphold morality are more or less likely to respond to observed injustices by engaging in retribution in the form of punishment. We also contribute to the literature by focusing on customers as third-party victims of mistreatment. We focus on customers as victims of mistreatment because employees, as third-party observers, have more social distance from customers and are perhaps less personally affected by justice violations directed towards customers than if the victim were a coworker. To date, little empirical research has focused on injustices that are directed towards targets who are external to the organization (for an exception, see Dunford et al., 2010). A focus on customer (mis)treatment is worthwhile given that customers are important organizational stakeholders who affect the overall success of organizations (Bowen et al., 1999; Schneider and Bowen, 1995). This is particularly true in a service-based economy that requires frequent interactions between managers, employees, and customers (Grizzle et al., 2009).

Theoretical overview and hypotheses

Deontic model of justice

Deontological ethics (Broad, 1930) largely originated from work by Immanuel Kant (1948), which states that the morality of behavior is based on adherence to rules or duties. Folger (1998, 2001) used deontological ethics as a theoretical basis to bridge organizational justice and morality (Folger et al., 2005). Deontic (i.e. binding or

obligatory) justice arguments contend that upholding fairness is a moral obligation, and thus people care about fairness for its own sake. Accordingly, people hold each other accountable based on normative standards of how people “ought” to behave in terms of fairness.

Deontic justice (Folger, 1998, 2001) arguments further contend that third-party observers may respond unfavorably if another person fails to uphold basic moral tenets that dictate how people should treat one another. To function within society, people constrain their own behavior and live in accordance with widely held principles of morality that serve to create a level playing field for all. Widely held principles of morality are derived from value-based systems that may emanate from societal expectations, religion (Cropanzano et al., 2003), or from evolutionary behaviors for handling problems that occur because people must live among one another (Folger and Skarlicki, 2008; Folger et al., 2005). Because people constrain their own behaviors to live by a set social order, they expect others to abide by the same principles.

When an individual observes another person failing to abide by widely held principles of morality, the observer responds with indignation or moral outrage, even though s/he is not directly affected (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Folger, 1998, 2001; Folger et al., 2005). The observer is aroused by moral considerations because the transgressor’s actions have challenged a just social order (Folger, 2001). The observer’s arousal and subsequent responses are thought of as deontic reactions whereby people experience a sense of tension or discomfort in response to observed injustices, which they are motivated to reduce by restoring justice.

Supervisor abuse of customers and employee organizational deviance

In line with deontic justice arguments, we suggest that employees respond unfavorably to supervisor abuse of customers because supervisors are failing to abide by principles of morality that govern how people should treat one another. We adapt Tepper’s (2000) definition of abusive supervision to define *supervisor abuse of customers* as subordinates’ perceptions that their supervisors engage in hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors towards customers, excluding physical contact. It should be noted that unlike Tepper’s definition of abuse, supervisor abuse of customers does not entail the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior towards a single customer. Rather, supervisor abuse of customers can be directed at any customer.

We argue that when supervisors fail to treat customers with dignity and respect, they are perceived by others as believing they are above social laws that govern appropriate interpersonal conduct. Employees respond to supervisor abuse of customers by experiencing tension or discomfort that they are motivated to reduce (Folger, 1998, 2001). These “deontic” or obligatory responses encourage employees to redress the injustices for which their supervisors are responsible (Folger and Cropanzano, 2001; Folger et al., 2005). O’Reilly and Aquino (2011) argued that employees may be more likely to respond to observed injustices by using indirect forms of retribution. Because employees are typically in lower positions of power compared to supervisors, they may choose to engage in these more covert forms of retribution.

Organizational deviance may serve as an indirect way of getting back at the supervisor for abusing customers. Organizational deviance is defined as “voluntary [employee] behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both” (Robinson and Bennett, 1995: 556). Employees may engage in organizational deviance as a more covert, indirect form of retribution than actually engaging in deviance toward the supervisor, making it less risky in terms of potentially experiencing retaliation from supervisors. Employees may also respond to supervisor abuse of customers by engaging in organizational deviance because they view the supervisor and organization as embodying the same entity (Treviño and Nelson, 2011).

The notion that supervisors serve as the face of the organization is supported by related management literatures whereby supervisors have been construed as organizational “contract makers” (Rousseau, 1989) or as the embodiment of organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Levinson (1965), too, noted that organizations are morally responsible for the actions of their agents. When a supervisor fails to be well-behaved by abusing customers, the organization has also failed to uphold its moral responsibility. In turn, employees may find it reasonable to engage in retribution that indirectly punishes the supervisor (and thereby reduces the potential for supervisor retaliation), but more directly punishes the organization for presumably endorsing immoral conduct on the part of its agents. Indeed, extant research has found that employees respond to abusive supervision by engaging in organizational deviance as an indirect form of retribution (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Tepper et al., 2009). Drawing on these and previous deontic justice arguments, we predict that employees also respond to observed injustices, in the form of supervisor abuse of customers, by engaging in organizational deviance, even when controlling for the employee’s own mistreatment from the supervisor in the form of abusive supervision.

Hypothesis 1: Supervisor abuse of customers is related positively to employee organizational deviance.

Employee moral identity as a moderator

Although a considerable amount of research has demonstrated that people respond to their own mistreatment by engaging in organizational deviance as a form of retribution (e.g. Holtz and Harold, 2013; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Tepper et al., 2009; Thau and Mitchell, 2010), some people may find it immoral to respond to third-party mistreatment by engaging in deviant behaviors. In particular, people who are high in moral identity may have weaker tendencies to respond to observed abuse by engaging in organizational deviance—a behavior that may cause aversive effects that are on par with abusing others. The more a person embraces morality as a central component of their self-conceptions, the easier it is for them to access this part of their identity for the sake of making moral judgments (Aquino and Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1984, 2004; Lapsley and Lasky, 2001). In turn, the strength of a person’s moral identity has been shown to affect the way a person responds to and interprets ethical choices (for a review see Shao et al., 2008), which may have implications for the way s/he responds to observed injustices.

Blasi (1984) argued that people who strongly embrace a moral identity desire to maintain a sense of self-consistency between what they believe to be correct and their own behavior. To engage in behaviors that are equally egregious as an offending behavior would presumably cause a person who is high in moral identity to feel inauthentic. Furthermore, Aquino and colleagues (Aquino and Freeman, 2009; Aquino and Reed, 2002; Aquino et al., 2009) argued that people who are high in moral identity are more likely to utilize self-regulatory mechanisms in guiding moral behavior. These self-regulatory mechanisms prompt people to consider "what is the right thing to do" in response to moral dilemmas and to reason that organizational deviance is an inappropriate form of retribution. Examples of deviant behaviors include spreading rumors about the organization, leaving work for someone else to do, putting little effort into work, and neglecting to follow supervisors' instructions (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). An employee who witnesses supervisor abuse of customers, and who is also high in moral identity, may conclude that organizational deviance is just as offensive as the abusive behavior s/he witnessed.

Employees high in moral identity may be more likely to conclude that organizational deviance is an inappropriate response because it (i) causes harm to another entity, (ii) may cause additional adverse effects that magnify the underlying problem, and (iii) may be construed as equally unfair as the offending act (Rupp and Bell, 2010). Thus, even though someone high in moral identity may have stronger moral reactions to supervisor abuse of customers, their desire to maintain moral self-consistency, and their use of moral self-regulatory mechanisms, is expected to weaken their tendency to engage in organizational deviance as a way of redressing their supervisors' wrongdoing. Accordingly, we hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Employee moral identity moderates the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee organizational deviance such that the positive relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee organizational deviance is weaker among employees higher in moral identity.

Although employees high in moral identity may have weaker tendencies to respond to supervisor abuse of customers by engaging in deviant behavior, we still expect these employees to experience deontic reactions, or strong feelings of tension and discomfort that they are motivated to reduce (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Folger et al., 2005). It could be that these employees respond in ways that allow them to reduce tension and discomfort without causing overt harm to the organization. In particular, employees high in moral identity (as opposed to low) may respond to supervisor abuse of customers by experiencing stronger deontic reactions that are managed by increasing turnover intentions. Indeed, research that examines evolutionary forms of retribution has shown that some people respond to injustices by distancing themselves from the source of mistreatment (Folger and Skarlicki, 2008).

Turnover intentions represent employees' intentional willingness and desire to leave the organization (Tett and Meyer, 1993). Given that employee turnover is an inevitable part of organizational life (Abelson, 1987; Dalton et al., 1981), those high in moral identity may find it morally acceptable to respond to supervisor abuse of customers with intentions to turnover. Remaining with, or intending to leave, an organization represents

employees' freewill in choosing their place of employment. Thus, although employees may eventually cause harm to the organization by intending to leave (e.g. causing the organization to spend time and money to rehire and train new employees; Glebbeek and Bax, 2004; Kacmar et al., 2006; Shaw et al., 2005), these intentions are unlikely to be construed as harmful, or potentially immoral, in the same way that deviant behaviors may cause deliberate and direct harm to the organization.

Extant research suggests that when people associate with morally dissimilar others, it can challenge their understanding of themselves as moral people (Skitka, 2002). These people may distance themselves psychologically from those with opposing moral values to reduce feelings of inauthenticity (Skitka, 2002; Skitka et al., 2005). This may be particularly true of people with high moral identities. To counterbalance their obligatory need to uphold morality (Aquino and Reed, 2002), and to stabilize their desire to see themselves as moral people (Blasi, 1984), employees who are high in moral identity are expected to have stronger responses to supervisor abuse of customers that involves distancing themselves from the source of injustice by intending to leave the organization—a potential form of retribution that may be construed as morally acceptable. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Employee moral identity moderates the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee turnover intentions such that the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee turnover intentions is more strongly positive among employees with higher moral identities.

Employees high in moral identity may also respond to supervisor abuse of customers by constructively resisting the supervisor's downward influence attempts. Downward influence attempts capture the extent to which supervisors try to exercise social control over subordinates, with the goal of shaping subordinate's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Tepper et al., 2006). Tepper et al. (2001) noted that subordinates may respond to supervisors' immoral behaviors (i.e. abusive supervision) by engaging in retribution that involves resisting the supervisor's downward influence tactics or, more specifically, by resisting the supervisor's requests. Subordinates may choose to engage in resistance strategies as a form of retribution because the intent of such resistance is normally unclear to supervisors. Supervisors may find their subordinates' resistance frustrating, but they may be unaware that such resistance stems from the subordinate's desire to redress the supervisor's immoral behavior. Accordingly, the supervisor may be less likely to respond to subordinates' resistance tactics by engaging in retaliation, making this form of retribution more attractive to subordinates.

Tepper et al. (2006) argued that supervisors generally do not like it when subordinates resist their requests, regardless of whether the resistance strategies are dysfunctional (i.e. behaviors that hinder workflow and/or undermine the supervisor) or constructive. Nevertheless, *constructive* resistance strategies may be construed as a morally acceptable form of retribution. Constructive resistance occurs when employees attempt to resist their supervisors' requests in non-hostile ways (Tepper et al., 2001), usually by instigating a meaningful dialogue with the supervisor (Tepper et al., 2006). Employees who engage in constructive resistance send the message that they are unwilling to accept and conform to their supervisors' requests, but they also express genuine interest in

maintaining relational stability with the supervisor. Employees engage in constructive resistance by directly communicating their concerns to supervisors. In doing so, they attempt to resolve disagreements without instigating further harm between parties. They also ask supervisors to clarify their behavior and/or expectations with the goal of helping, rather than hurting, third-parties who may be affected by the supervisor's requests.

Constructive resistance allows employees to respond to the supervisor's misbehavior in both contentious and non-contentious ways (Brett et al., 1998; Tepper et al., 2001). Constructive resistance is contentious in that employees do not simply ignore their supervisor's immoral behaviors; instead, they engage in retribution specifically by sending the message that they are unwilling to conform to the supervisor's expectations and desires. However, in doing so, they are also non-contentious in that they try not to instigate any further harm or conflict between parties. As noted by Tepper et al. (2001), constructive resistance is likely to serve as an effective means of redressing a supervisor's wrongdoing, while maintaining one's self image as being a dependable, responsible, and trustworthy person. In this vein, employees high in moral identity are expected to have stronger tendencies to respond to supervisor abuse of customers by engaging in constructive resistance because it serves as a form of retribution, but also allows them to uphold their identities by not causing further harm and preventing incivility from spiraling out of control (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Tepper et al., 2001). Based on these and preceding arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4: Employee moral identity moderates the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee constructive resistance such that the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee constructive resistance is more strongly positive among employees with higher moral identities.

Overview of studies

Studies 1 and 2 both test Hypotheses 1 and 2. Study 2 extends Study 1 by examining the interactive effect of supervisor abuse of customers and employee moral identity on different employee outcomes (namely, turnover intentions, constructive resistance) (Hypotheses 3 and 4).

Study I

Method

Sample and procedure. We collected data from 222 focal respondents and their immediate supervisors from a variety of organizations in the Midwestern United States. We administered surveys via the internet. Students served as organizational contacts in exchange for extra credit. Students recruited a working adult (working 20 hours per week or more) who was willing to serve as a focal employee. The focal employee then asked his or her supervisor to fill out the supervisor survey. The focal employee created a random eight-digit ID number that was required to submit the survey. The focal employee also gave

this number to his/her supervisor. The purpose of using the ID numbers was to provide a way to link the focal employee and supervisor surveys without using participant names and thus ensuring anonymity.

In line with researchers who have used similar approaches to collecting data (Grant and Mayer, 2009; Judge et al., 2006; Lee and Allen, 2002; Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006; Piccolo et al., 2010; Skarlicki and Folger, 1997), we took a number of steps to ensure that the surveys were completed by the correct sources. In introducing the study, we emphasized the importance of integrity in the scientific process. We told participants that it was essential for the focal and supervisor respondents to fill out the correct surveys. When participants submitted their online surveys, time stamps and IP addresses were recorded to ensure that surveys were submitted at different times, with different IP addresses. We invited 677 students to serve as organizational contacts. We received responses from 263 focal employees and 227 supervisors. These responses created usable data from 222 subordinate–supervisor dyads for a response rate of 32.79 per cent.

Focal employee respondents were 55.2 per cent male and 63 per cent Caucasian. The employees had an average age of 23.86 years and an average of 2.41 years of experience with their organization. The supervisor respondents were 59 per cent male and 74 per cent Caucasian. The supervisors' average age was 37.6 years, with an average of 8.1 years of experience with their organization.

The focal employee survey contained measures of supervisor abuse of customers, employee moral identity, abusive supervision (as a control), and demographics. The supervisor survey contained measures of the focal respondent's deviant behaviors and demographics.

Measures. Responses for all items were made on a seven-point response scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree,” unless otherwise noted.

Supervisor abuse of customers. Subordinates assessed supervisor abuse of customers using an adapted version of Tepper's (2000) abusive supervision scale. We adapted the shortened, five-item version of Tepper's scale that was used by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007). Sample items include “My boss ridicules customers” and “My boss makes negative comments about our customers to others.” Responses for these items were made on a seven-point response scale where 1 = “never” to 7 = “always.” The reliability for the scale was .87.

Moral identity. We used Aquino and Reed's (2002) 10-item scale to assess the moral identity of the employee. The respondents were asked to think about distinct moral characteristics such as care, compassion, and fairness. Employees then rated statements such as “I am actively involved in activities that communicate to others that I have these characteristics,” and “It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics” ($\alpha = .81$).

Organizational deviance. Supervisors assessed employee organizational deviance with 12 items from Bennett and Robinson's (2000) deviance measure. Supervisors were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed that the focal employee engages in deviant behaviors. A sample item includes “[The employee] intentionally worked slower than he/she could have” ($\alpha = .95$).

Control variables. To take into account employees' reactions that may stem from their own mistreatment, we controlled for abuse directed at the subordinate. Subordinates

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations among Study 1 variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Abusive supervision	1.61	.84	(.89)			
2. Supervisor abuse of customers	1.53	.94	.70**	(.87)		
3. Employee moral identity	5.26	1.16	-.40**	-.28**	(.81)	
4. Organizational deviance	1.41	.74	.62**	.52**	-.39**	(.95)

Note: $N = 222$. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed). Coefficient α reliabilities are reported in the diagonal.

Table 2. Study 1 results of regression analysis.

Variables	Organizational deviance		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Abusive supervision	.57**	.39**	.40**
Supervisor abuse of customers (SAC)		.16*	-.03
Moral identity (MI)		-.18**	-.21**
SAC \times MI			-.28**
R^2	.32	.37	.41
ΔR^2		.05**	.05**

Note: $N = 222$. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Standardized regression coefficients (betas) are shown.

assessed abusive supervision with the shortened five-item measure of Tepper's (2000) abusive supervision scale. Sample items include "My boss ridicules me" (1 = "never" to 7 = "always") ($\alpha = .89$).

To examine the distinctiveness of supervisor abuse of customers and abusive supervision (the control variable), we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation in LISREL 8.8 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2006). Results of a two-factor model indicated that the model provided a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(34) = 134.27$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .12; CFI = .97; NNFI = .96; SRMR = .05) (Arbuckle, 1997; Bentler and Bonnett, 1990; Hoyle and Panter, 1995). Although the RMSEA fit statistic was higher than desirable, we did not find this problematic given that Hu and Bentler (1999) found that RMSEA tends to be inaccurate when working with smaller sample sizes. We compared the two-factor model to a single-factor model ($\chi^2(35) = 330.94$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .20; CFI = .92; NNFI = .90; SRMR = .07). A change in χ^2 indicated the two-factor model produced a significant improvement in chi-squares over the one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 196.67$, $p < .001$) (Schumacker and Lomax, 1996).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations. The descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and intercorrelations among the variables are presented in Table 1.

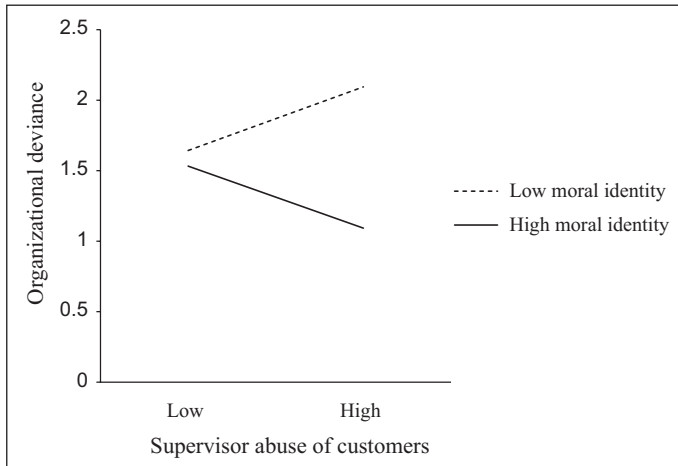


Figure 1. Study 1 interaction between supervisor abuse of customers and moral identity on organizational deviance.

Hypotheses tests. To test the study hypotheses, we used hierarchical regression. We mean-centered our variables to help with the interpretation of our interactive results (Cohen et al., 2003). The results are presented in Table 2.

The results provide support for Hypothesis 1; supervisor abuse of customers is related positively to employee organizational deviance, even when controlling for abusive supervision. We found support for Hypothesis 2; moral identity of the focal employee moderates the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee organizational deviance such that the relationship is weaker when moral identity is high than when it is low. Interestingly, Figure 1 shows that the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee organizational deviance is not only weaker when moral identity is high versus low, but it is also in the negative direction.

To further examine the nature of these interactions, we conducted simple slopes analyses (Aiken and West, 1991). We plotted the interactions with values plus/minus one standard deviation from the mean. The simple slope of organizational deviance onto supervisor abuse of customers with low moral identity is positive and statistically significant ($t = 3.51, p < .01$), whereas the simple slope of organizational deviance onto supervisor abuse of customers with high moral identity is negative and statistically significant ($t = -2.17, p < .05$) (see Figure 1).

Study 2

Method

We collected data from 199 focal respondents and their immediate supervisors from a variety of organizations in the Southeastern United States. We administered surveys in the same manner as described in Study 1. We asked 490 students to serve

as organizational contacts. We received responses from 216 focal employees and 207 supervisors. These responses created usable data from 199 supervisor–subordinate dyads for a response rate of 40.6 per cent.

Focal employee respondents were 48.8 per cent male and 67.1 per cent Caucasian. The employees had an average age of 24.5 years and an average of 2.71 years of experience with their organization. The supervisor respondents were 39.3 per cent male and 65.8 per cent Caucasian. The supervisors' average age was 37.4 years, with an average of 8.0 years of experience with their organization.

The focal survey contained measures of supervisor abuse of customers, moral identity, turnover intentions, abusive supervision, and demographics. The supervisor survey contained measures of the focal respondent's deviant behaviors, constructive resistance, and demographics.

Measures

Supervisor abuse of customers. Subordinates assessed supervisor abuse of customers with the same items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .92$).

Moral identity. We assessed moral identity of employees with the same items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .84$).

Organizational deviance. Supervisors assessed employee organizational deviance with the same items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .95$).

Turnover intentions. Subordinates assessed their turnover intentions with four items that were slightly adapted from Tett and Meyer's (1993) turnover intention scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). A sample item includes "I am thinking about leaving this organization" ($\alpha = .92$).

Constructive resistance. Supervisors assessed the focal employee's engagement in constructive resistance with five items from Tepper et al.'s (1998) constructive resistance scale (also used in Tepper et al., 2001, 2006). Supervisors were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed that the focal employee uses the tactics described in each item when resisting the supervisor's requests (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). A sample item includes "S/he explains that s/he thinks it should be done a different way" ($\alpha = .92$).

Control variables. Abusive supervision served as a control. Subordinates assessed abusive supervision with the same items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .93$).

As with Study 1, we examined the distinctiveness of supervisor abuse of customers and abusive supervision (the control variable) using confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation in LISREL 8.8 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2006). The results indicated that the two-factor model fitted the data well ($\chi^2(34) = 166.75, p < .001$; RMSEA = .14; CFI = .96; NNFI = .95; SRMR = .05) (Arbuckle, 1997; Bentler and Bonnett, 1990; Hoyle and Panter, 1995; Hu and Bentler, 1999). The two-factor model was compared to a one-factor model ($\chi^2(35) = 758.36, p < .001$; RMSEA = .32; CFI = .87; NNFI = .83; SRMR = .10). A change in χ^2 test indicated that the two-factor model produced a significant improvement in chi-squares over the single-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 591.61, p < .001$) (Schumacker and Lomax, 1996).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations among Study 2 variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	5	6	7
1. Abusive supervision	1.72	1.11	(.93)					
2. Supervisor abuse of customers	1.57	1.04	.66**	(.92)				
3. Moral identity	5.54	.85	-.33**	-.31**	(.84)			
5. Turnover intentions	4.09	1.68	.12 [†]	.18**	-.12 [†]	(.92)		
6. Organizational deviance	1.69	.90	.38**	.40**	-.38**	.17*	(.95)	
7. Constructive resistance	3.73	1.55	.07	.09	.04	.05	.18**	(.92)

Note: $N = 199$. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, [†] $p < .10$ (2-tailed). Coefficient α reliabilities are reported in the diagonal.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations. The means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations among the variables are presented in Table 3.

Hypotheses tests. To test the study hypotheses, we used hierarchical regression. We mean-centered our variables to help with the interpretation of our interactive results (Cohen et al., 2003). Table 4 provides a summary of regression results for the test of Hypotheses 1–4 in Study 2.

We found support for Hypothesis 1; supervisor abuse of customers is positively related to employee deviance, even when controlling for abusive supervision. We found support for Hypothesis 2; moral identity moderates the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee deviance, such that the positive relationship is weaker when employees are higher in moral identity. We found support for Hypotheses 3 and 4; moral identity moderates the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and turnover intentions (Hypothesis 3) and constructive resistance (Hypothesis 4) such these relationships are more strongly positive when moral identity is high as opposed to low.

To further examine the nature of these interactions, we conducted simple slopes analyses (Aiken and West, 1991). The analyses showed that the simple slope of deviant behavior onto supervisor abuse of customers with low moral identity was positive and statistically significant ($t = 2.70, p < .01$), whereas the slope with high moral identity was in the negative direction and non-significant ($t = -1.31, ns$) (Hypothesis 2). The analyses also revealed that the simple slope of turnover intentions onto supervisor abuse of customers with high moral identity was positive and statistically significant ($t = 3.05, p < .01$), whereas the slope with low moral identity was non-significant ($t = 1.44, ns$) (Hypothesis 3). The analyses demonstrated that the simple slope of constructive resistance onto supervisor abuse of customers with high moral identity was positive and statistically significant ($t = 2.32, p < .01$), whereas the slope with low moral identity was non-significant ($t = .79, ns$) (Hypothesis 4) (see Figures 2–4).

Table 4. Study 2 results of regression analysis.

Variables	Organizational deviance			Turnover intentions			Constructive resistance		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Abusive supervision	.34**	.13	.13	.12 [†]	-.03	-.02	.07	.02	.02
Supervisor abuse of customers (SAC)		.17*	.00		.19*	.34**		.12	.25*
Moral identity (MI)		-.29**	-.35**		-.07	-.02		.08	.13
SAC × MI			-.24**			.22*			.20*
R ²	.12	.22	.25	.02	.04	.07	.01	.02	.04
ΔR ²		.10**	.03**		.02 [†]	.03*		.01	.02*

Note: N = 199. ** p < .01, * p < .05, † p < .10. Standardized regression coefficients (betas) are shown.



Figure 2. Study 2 interaction between supervisor abuse of customers and moral identity on organizational deviance.

General discussion

Implications for theory

Our results extend the deontic model of justice by suggesting that people have different deontic reactions depending on how strongly they internalize morality as part of their identities. A number of experimental studies have demonstrated that people respond to observed injustices by engaging in retribution that serves to punish the at-fault party (O’Reilly et al., 2012; Turillo et al., 2002; Umphress et al., 2012). Yet, our findings suggest that people high in moral identity may be unwilling to engage in forms of retribution that may be construed as morally unacceptable. Although organizational deviance is

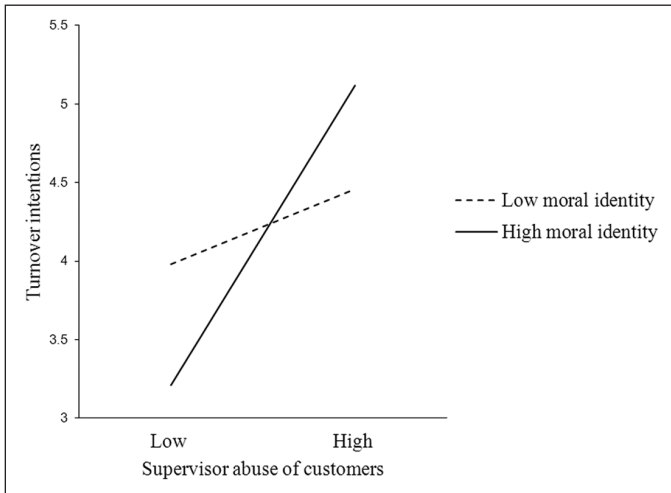


Figure 3. Study 2 interaction between supervisor abuse of customers and moral identity on turnover intentions.

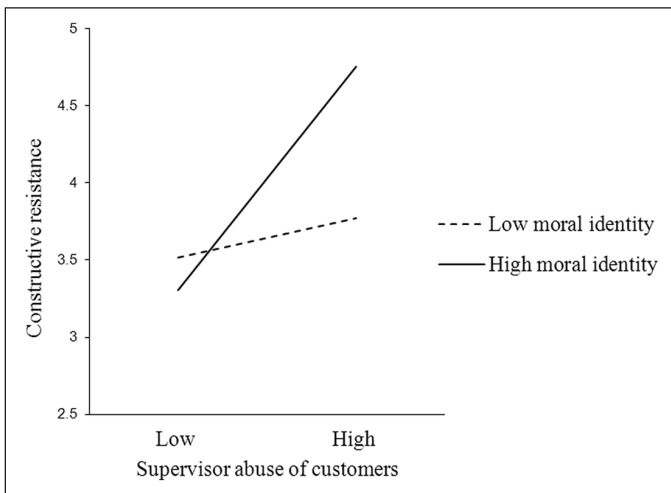


Figure 4. Study 2 interaction between supervisor abuse of customers and moral identity on constructive resistance.

often examined as a form of retaliation (e.g. Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Tepper et al., 2009; Thau and Mitchell, 2010), our results suggest that employees high in moral identity are less inclined to engage in organizational deviance as a way of getting back at supervisors for abusing customers. Presumably, those high in moral identity do not engage in organizational deviance because it may cause harm that is equally egregious as the offending behavior. Our findings align with recent work by Rupp and Bell (2010),

who found that people who are able to self-regulate their moral behavior are less likely to respond to third-party injustices by engaging in retribution that is equally as offensive as the initiating act. Rather, Rupp and Bell's findings suggest that these people respond by doing nothing (i.e. by not punishing the perpetrator).

Notably, our findings extend Rupp and Bell's (2010) work by demonstrating that employees high in moral identity do indeed respond to supervisor abuse of customers; yet, their reactions tend to be more morally acceptable. In particular, our results suggest that employees high in moral identity have stronger reactions to supervisor abuse of customers in the form of higher turnover intentions and increased levels of constructive resistance. Theoretically, it makes sense for employees high in moral identity to respond unfavorably to supervisor abuse of customers because of their commitment to upholding morality as part of their identities. At the same time, employees high in moral identity seek consistency between their moral beliefs and moral actions (Aquino and Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1984); thus, they should find ways to alleviate negative feelings associated with observed injustices by attempting to redress the wrongdoing through less harmful and potentially constructive means. It could be that those high in moral identity do not have an eye-for-an-eye mentality, whereby offended parties restore justice with equitable retribution. Instead, these employees may relieve the tension and discomfort they are experiencing in response to supervisor abuse of customers by having reactions that also serve to maintain their sense of self as moral people.

Recent work by O'Reilly et al. (2012) demonstrated that customers high in moral identity are more likely to respond to observed organizational injustices by engaging in retribution. Yet, O'Reilly et al. operationalized retribution as having intentions of not doing business with an organization that mistreats employees. It could be that refraining from doing business with an unfair organization is considered a morally acceptable form of retribution. Future research would benefit from classifying retributive actions according to those that are equally egregious as the offending behavior, as in an eye-for-an-eye retributive response, to those that are akin to turning the other cheek. As implied by our research, not all reactions to observed injustices entail a retributive response that is parallel to the initiating behavior.

We should also draw attention to an interesting finding of the results for the interactive effects of supervisor abuse of customers and employee moral identity on employee organizational deviance found in Study 1 (see Figure 1). These results indicated that individuals higher in moral identity may engage in higher levels of organizational deviance when supervisor abuse is low. Although this finding was not specifically hypothesized, we believe it is consistent with our theorizing. As we mentioned in our theoretical rationale for the moderating effect of employee moral identity, witnessing supervisor abuse of customers may lead employees high in moral identity to use moral self-regulatory mechanisms, which may reduce the likelihood that the employee will respond to the supervisor's abuse with equally egregious behaviors, such as organizational deviance. Thus, when supervisor abuse of customers is present, employees who are higher on moral identity are less likely to engage in organizational deviance because they are more morally aware and are more likely to use moral self-regulation in guiding their actions. Under conditions of low abuse, it could be that there is not a moral event to prime one's use of moral self-regulation, perhaps making employees less likely to pay attention to the

moral implications of deviant behavior. We offer these suggestions in a speculative manner, with the hope that future research will further investigate these possibilities.

Our study also contributes to the literature by examining supervisor abuse of customers. To date, abusive supervision research has primarily focused on employees' reactions to their own abuse (Tepper, 2007), with little consideration given to how employees respond when their supervisors mistreat third parties. Although organizational justice scholars have examined a number of studies on third-party mistreatment (Ambrose and Kulik, 1989; Ambrose et al., 1991; Colquitt, 2004; De Cremer and Van Hiel, 2006; DeGoey, 2000; Duffy et al., 2006; Jones and Skarlicki, 2005; Lamertz, 2002; Lind et al., 1998; Skarlicki et al., 1998; Umphress et al., 2003), these studies have not taken into account injustices that are directed towards sources that are external to the organization. As noted by Dunford et al. (2010), an organization's (mis)treatment of external parties (e.g. customers) may provide important information that employees use to shape their attitudes and behavior towards the organization; yet, little to no empirical research has explored this possibility. We further contribute to this literature by demonstrating that employees care about the mistreatment of customers and may respond in ways that are unfavorable to the organization.

A focus on customers also contributes to the literature in that customers are important organizational stakeholders that have yet to receive ample attention in the organizational justice literature. Research that has considered the customer has primarily focused on customers mistreating employees (e.g. Rupp et al., 2008; Rupp and Spencer, 2006), with little consideration given to organizational members mistreating customers. As our economy becomes increasingly service-oriented (Grizzle et al., 2009), it becomes more important to consider the (mis)treatment of customers, which likely affects organizational success (Bowen et al., 1999).

Implications for practice

Practically, we find our research to be useful in that organizations and their representatives should not only monitor how they behave towards their employees, but how they behave more generally to other organizational stakeholders. As our results suggest, employees can have unfavorable reactions to observed mistreatment, which could have dire consequences for the organization (Skarlicki and Kulik, 2005). Some managers may disregard what appear to be relatively minor immoral behaviors because the harm associated with them is not obvious. However, these behaviors may generate hidden costs in that subordinates respond unfavorably to them (Cialdini et al., 2004), even if they are not the target of the immoral act.

Additionally, our research is practically important in that people may respond to third-party injustices in a variety of ways. Some people may strive to restore justice by engaging in retribution in the form of organizational deviance, whereas others may respond by intending to leave the organization or by constructively resisting the supervisor's requests. Organizations would benefit from focusing on constructive means of restoring justice (Bradfield and Aquino, 1999; Kidder, 2007). Organizations may offer training and guidance on how to tactfully approach those who engage in immoral behavior (Lieber, 2010). We suggest training should include learning about policies and codes of

conduct that clearly define types of misconduct in organizations. Organizations may also consider providing additional incentives, such as rewards, to encourage constructive responses to others' injustices. These tactics should encourage employees to engage in positive actions after witnessing immoral behavior.

Furthermore, training tactics can help shape a work environment that encourages individuals to confront superiors after observing mistreatment. Scholars studying upward communication tactics agree that training can help create a workplace that encourages and supports approach behaviors to raise organizational concerns (e.g. Dutton and Ashforth, 1993). A work environment that promotes moral standards and norms may raise employees' moral awareness (Graham, 1986). Furthermore, employees who operate in a psychologically safe environment, feeling free to express themselves at work, may be more likely to voice organizational concerns (Detert and Burris, 2007). Both the promotion of moral standards and a sense of psychological safety may contribute to a work environment that encourages employees to engage in constructive behaviors after witnessing immoral behavior.

Finally, organizations should be aware that employees who are high in moral identity may be more likely to respond to supervisor abuse of customers by eventually leaving the organization. At the same time, employees who have lower moral identities may engage in similarly egregious acts, which could cause incivility to spiral and further contaminate the organization (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Thus, it would behoove organizations to monitor immoral behavior to prevent the erosion of moral standards.

Limitations and future directions

As with any research, our studies are not without limitations. We argued that some employees may respond to supervisor abuse of customers by engaging in deviance as a way of redressing their supervisor's immoral behavior. Although deontic justice research (Turillo et al., 2002) and other retributive justice research (Fisher and Baron, 1982; Greenberg, 1990; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Skarlicki and Folger, 1997) contends that deviant or retaliatory behaviors do serve to punish at-fault parties, it is also plausible that some employees engage in these behaviors because they are role-modeling their supervisors' deviant behavior (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). Future research would benefit from examining the mediating roles of intent to punish and/or role modeling to address this limitation.

Another limitation of our research is that we primarily examined forms of retribution that indirectly affect the perpetrator, with a focus on responses that presumably vary in terms of moral acceptance. O'Reilly and Aquino (2011) argue that people are likely to respond to third-party mistreatment by (a) doing nothing, (b) punishing the perpetrator directly, (c) punishing the perpetrator indirectly, or (d) aiding the victim. Our research does not thoroughly explore why employees may be more likely to engage in indirect forms of retribution rather than aiding the victim or directly approaching the supervisor regarding his/her immoral conduct. It could be that employees experience a lack of resource power or time constraints (i.e. owing to short customer interactions) that prevent them from aiding a customer who has been abused by a supervisor. Accordingly, the employee's failure to aid the victim could create a lasting state of dissonance and/or

anger that is eventually resolved through indirect forms of retribution. As our previous theorizing implies, employees may be more apt to engage in indirect forms of retribution, as opposed to direct forms, because of the fear of supervisor retaliation.

Future research would benefit from examining multiple third-party reactions, as suggested by O'Reilly and Aquino (2011), with particular attention given to the mediating processes that explain why one reaction may be chosen over another. In this regard, it would also be interesting to examine whether some reactions are more effective in actually reducing the misbehavior. It could be that under certain conditions (e.g. when the supervisor is accepting of criticism), directly approaching the supervisor is the best way to curb the misbehavior. Alternatively, some supervisors may be more inclined to engage in misbehavior if they suspect that subordinates are trying to punish their misdeeds. This possibility aligns with extant research that suggests that people are actually less cooperative when sanctions are in place to support or prevent certain behaviors (Chen et al., 2009).

Another potential limitation of our research is that we drew primarily on deontic justice arguments to support our hypotheses; however, a central aspect of deontic justice is that people respond to observed injustices by experiencing an uncomfortable psychological state (i.e. dissonance; Festinger, 1957) that they are motivated to reduce by redressing the wrongdoing (Folger, 1998, 2001; Folger et al., 2005). The primary purpose of our research was to test whether some people have different attitudinal and behavioral reactions to observed injustices; thus, we did not measure uncomfortable psychological states in our research. Even so, future research on the deontic model of justice would benefit from examining the mediating role of discrete emotions mentioned by Folger and colleagues (e.g. hostility, resentment), as well as dissonance arousal. Given that deontic emotions and dissonance arousal are construed as automatic and instinctive (Cropanzano et al., 2003), laboratory experiments may be particularly useful for investigating these effects (e.g. O'Reilly et al., 2012; Porath and Erez, 2009). Future research would also benefit from examining whether moral emotions truly exist to support altruistic, unselfish reactions, or whether the root of all reactions, moral or otherwise, emanate from self-serving desires (Folger and Salvador, 2008).

We draw on Aquino and colleagues' moral identity research and theorizing when describing the impact subordinates' moral identities have on retributive behavior after witnessing immoral action. Our study showed that moral identity is an important moderator of the relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and subsequent employee behaviors. However, Hannah et al. (2011) expanded moral identity theorizing by proposing that moral identity is multifaceted in nature, consisting of self-knowledge (what are my core beliefs?) and evaluative components (do I act upon those beliefs?). The authors state that different moral identity facets become salient depending on different situational stimuli or the different social roles people possess. Employees' core beliefs, such as honesty, integrity, or compassion, may be more prominent in certain social roles or positions than others. Hence, the role of moral identity in our and future research may be more complex than depicted in our studies. Employees who have a strong moral identification with their organizations, but find their direct supervisors' behavior morally reprehensible, may be less likely to respond to supervisors' unjust behaviors by engaging in deviance and may be more likely to engage in constructive

resistance. Teasing apart the multi-faceted aspects of moral identity offers rich grounds for future research.

Our data are cross-sectional; therefore, we cannot infer causality. Additionally, our results may be subject to common method variance. It would be beneficial to test our model using multiple methods, such as longitudinal studies, to help provide causal support for our predictions. Although we eliminated some same source bias by having supervisors rate employees' deviant and constructive behaviors (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and same source bias is less of a concern when testing interactions (Evans, 1985), one of the criterion variables was measured using self-reports (namely, turnover intentions). However, turnover intentions are perceptual and/or attitudinal and are therefore best measured using self-reports (Spector, 2006).

Finally, it should be noted that results in support of our main effect hypothesis (i.e. a positive relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee deviance) should be interpreted in light of the statistically significant, superseding interaction term, whereby the interaction term qualifies the main effect findings (Cohen et al., 2003). Thus, it is perhaps more appropriate to conclude that the positive relationship between supervisor abuse of customers and employee deviance only holds when employee moral identity is low and not high. Future experimental studies would be helpful in drawing firmer conclusions regarding this point.

Conclusion

In line with deontic justice arguments (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Folger, 1998, 2001; Folger et al., 2005), our results provide evidence that employees respond unfavorably to third-party mistreatment, even when controlling for employees' own mistreatment. We investigate an extension and caveat to the work of Folger and colleagues (Folger, 1998, 2001; Folger and Cropanzano, 1998, 2001; Folger et al., 2005; Turillo et al., 2002). Folger et al. argue that people respond unfavorably when others fail to abide by moral obligations, which then leads to retributive justice. Although it may be true that third parties react unfavorably to others' mistreatment, our results suggest that not everyone will respond to others' injustices by engaging in retribution in the form of punishment, or at least not punishment that is also morally offensive (Rupp and Bell, 2010). We find our results encouraging in that deontic reactions may lead to morally neutral or even constructive forms of retribution.

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