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Retaliating Against Customer Interpersonal Injustice in a Singaporean Context: Moderating
Roles of Self-Efficacy and Social Support

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Abstract

Few studies have examined the relationship between customer injustice and employees' retaliatory counterproductive behaviors toward customers, and those that have done so were conducted in a Western setting. We extend these studies by examining the relationship in a Singaporean context where retaliatory behaviors by employees might be culturally constrained. While the previously-established positive relationship between customer injustice and counterproductive behaviors was not replicated using peer-reported data from employees across two hotels in Singapore, we found that individuals' self-efficacy and perceived social support moderated it. Specifically, the injustice-to-counterproductive behaviors relationship was positive for individuals with high self-efficacy, and for those who perceived high levels of supervisor social support. The findings offer insights into when Singaporean employees and, potentially, employees from other Confucian Asian societies will retaliate against customer injustice, and provide practical implications of how managers can help employees cope with customer injustice.

Keywords: counterproductive work behavior; retaliatory behavior; customer interpersonal justice; social support; self-efficacy; Singapore

**Retaliating Against Customer Interpersonal Injustice in a Singaporean Context:
Moderating Roles of Self-Efficacy and Social Support**

Research in organizational justice has looked at multiple sources of justice and fairness in the workplace, including the organization, supervisors, and coworkers, but in comparison, one particular source of injustice – customers and guests of the organization – has received relatively less attention in the applied psychology and organizational behavior literature (Rupp & Spencer, 2006). This oversight is unfortunate given the evidence that mistreatment by customers is a common occurrence in many organizations (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Harris & Reynolds, 2003; Reynolds & Harris, 2006), and can trigger a wide range of negative psychological and behavioral reactions from employees, ranging from emotional exhaustion and greater emotional labor, to more frequent absences and violations of service display rules (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004; Rupp, McCance, Spencer, & Sonntag, 2008; Rupp & Spencer, 2006). More recently, a couple of studies have demonstrated that another common employee reaction to such customer injustice is engaging in counterproductive, retaliatory acts against the customers, including speaking bluntly to a customer or being derogatory to the customer (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008; van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010). As demonstrated in prior studies, such counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) can be costly to an organization in terms of customer satisfaction, their intention to return and, ultimately, the organization's performance (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005; Teo & Lim, 2001). These behaviors can also possibly engender economic costs to the retaliating employee, such as demotion in rank and pay, or even termination of employment, as well as social costs in terms of social disapproval, public censure, or ostracism from one's coworkers and supervisors. As such, these potential negative

repercussions of CWBs underscore the need to examine whether and when employees' will engage in such behaviors when faced with customer injustice.

At the same time, scholars have advocated for research on retaliatory behaviors to go beyond a purely manager-centered perspective that only focuses on the costs of such behaviors, to also consider, from an employee-centered perspective, the benefits that such behaviors may bring to them (Bies & Tripp, 2005). Adopting such a perspective, two studies found that despite the potential costs and risks that employees face when they retaliate against customer injustice, employees do, in fact, engage in retaliatory CWBs, thereby corroborating that such behaviors serve multiple purposes and provide several benefits to the employees (Skarlicki et al., 2008; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). Specifically, research on revenge has established that retaliating against injustice helps to restore the victims' self-image which may have been threatened by the injustice, and also serves as an outlet for the negative emotions ensuing from the injustice (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Bies & Tripp, 2005). As such, retaliation serves a psychological purpose in terms of restoring the victims' psychological well-being. Second, retaliating against injustice can serve an instrumental purpose by deterring the perpetrator from engaging in future unjust acts, and by realigning dysfunctional power relationships between the victim and the perpetrator of the injustice (Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler, & Schminke, 2001; Tepper & Henle, 2011). Finally, retaliation can fulfill a deontic or moral purpose, in that individuals are inherently driven to redress injustice and restore a sense of equity and deontic justice. Based on the moral perspective of justice, individuals feel a sense of moral obligation to punish others who behave unjustly and violate norms of moral conduct, and this automatic and subconscious reaction is independent of any tangible or instrumental benefits that they may obtain from such retaliation (Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003; Folger, Cropanzano, & Goldman, 2005; Skarlicki & Folger, 2004).

Overall then, to the extent that employees perceive that the benefits of, and impetus for, retaliation outweigh the costs and constraints against retaliation, employees may indeed be inclined to retaliate against customer injustice, as evidenced in the previous two studies.

The fact that these two studies were conducted in a Canadian call center raises the question of whether similar findings would exist outside of a Western context. This issue is important because culture is one key factor that shapes people's reactions to injustice (Greenberg, 2001; Rego & Cunha, 2010), and it is imprudent to assume that employees in non-Western cultures will respond similarly to unjust or unfair treatment from customers. In particular, because engaging in CWBs toward customers can engender not only economic but also social costs to the employee, the extent to which a society or culture constrains or condones such behaviors is important in determining whether individuals in that culture will enact such behaviors in response to injustice. For instance, many non-Western cultures with higher collectivism place great emphasis on avoiding conflict that may disrupt relationships, and as such, employees may be less inclined to strike back against unjust customer treatment because of the additional social costs, such as social disapproval from one's coworkers and supervisor, of violating these cultural norms. Underscoring the importance of culture, scholars have noted that management research has traditionally assumed an "implicit universalism" and tends to be parochial in nature, focusing primarily on the North American context (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Tsui, 2004). Consequently, there have been calls for more indigenous country-specific research, particularly in Asia and other developing economies (Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007), as well as for more international research on discretionary behaviors in order to fill the gap in global management knowledge (e.g., Fay & Sonnentag, 2010; Gelfand, Erez, & Ayeon, 2007),

and the present study addresses both issues by examining the relationship between customer injustice and customer-directed CWBs in Singapore.

A concomitant objective of this study is to investigate moderating factors that can influence Singaporean workers' inclination to engage in such behaviors in the face of customer injustice. While we expect that Singapore's cultural dynamics may impose additional constraints that reduce workers' impetus to engage in CWBs in response to customer injustice, we also believe that both individual and social factors play a moderating role, specifically by either increasing workers' impetus to retaliate or decreasing such constraints, such that Singaporean workers will use CWBs in response to injustice if these moderating conditions are present. We argue that one factor that can enhance workers' impetus to retaliate is their job-related self-efficacy, which has been previously demonstrated to provide individuals with the drive to engage in risky or costly behaviors (Krueger & Dickson, 1994), particularly when their self-views are threatened. Because more self-efficacious employees may view customer injustice as particularly unwarranted and a threat to their positive self-beliefs, they may experience a greater drive or need to restore their self-efficacy, which thus suggests that self-efficacy is critical in helping employees overcome the constraints imposed by their perceptions of the potential costs of retaliatory behaviors. Additionally, based on the fact that Singapore is a more collectivistic country where individuals are strongly tied to collectives such as their workgroup, the role of social support from coworkers and supervisor is likely to be important in reducing the constraints stemming from potential economic and social costs associated with retaliation. Thus, we contend that social support from coworkers and supervisor would also moderate the injustice-CWB relationship, such that workers who perceive greater social support would be more inclined to

retaliate against customer injustice. Our examination of these moderators thus provides a richer, more contextualized model of customer injustice and CWBs in the Singapore context.

Beyond enriching the existing theoretical model and providing a new cultural context that goes beyond the traditional emphasis on North American settings, the present study also makes several other contributions. For one, our specific focus on Singapore is important given the increasing role of the tourism and hospitality sector in the country, as evidenced by the growth in international visitor arrivals, tourism receipts, room revenues and food-and-beverage revenues over the past decade (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011). Historically, the tourism and hospitality sector has played a vital role in the Singapore government's economic and planning agenda (Toh & Low, 1990), and in recent years, this emphasis has only increased, as underscored by the government's development of two integrated resorts in the country in order to augment Singapore's reputation as a tourist destination. Related to this is the fact that Singapore is currently experiencing a shortfall of customer service employees (Tan, 2011), and thus existing employees have to deal with mounting workloads and job demands. These include more frequent interactions with customers who may, because of the shortfall in service staff and, in turn, service quality, be more displeased with their service experience and be uncivil to the employees. This further underscores the need to understand employees' reactions to such injustice.

The findings from this study are also important not only in understanding Singaporean firms and employees, but also in informing similar phenomena in other Confucian Asian societies such as China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Because the Singaporean culture is, in many aspects, closely aligned with the average profile of the Confucian Asian cluster (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007), it is likely that Singaporean employees' reactions to customer

injustice, as well as the moderating conditions that provide the impetus for or overcome constraints against retaliation, can be extended to these other societies that have somewhat similar cultural orientations. In doing so, this study provides a starting point from which to understand and predict a similar set of behaviors in those countries.

Finally, the fact that our present study is conducted with customer-contact employees and their coworkers in two hotels also provides a new research setting. The two previous studies examining customer injustice and CWBs were conducted in call centers where employees only needed to interact with customers over the phone (Skarlicki et al., 2008; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), and the impact and salience of customer injustice on employees may be less severe than in the present context where employees have to interact face-to-face with the customers and be subject to unjust treatment in the possible presence of other customers and coworkers. Furthermore, the impact of customer-directed CWBs on customers is likewise potentially greater in face-to-face interactions, in part because of the additional presence of visual and other non-verbal cues that are not present in phone conversations. Thus, these underscore the need to understand customer injustice and CWBs in contexts where employees and customers have face-to-face interactions. Overall, by examining customer injustice and CWBs in a new (face-to-face) context and a different cultural setting, and by investigating the moderating roles of self-efficacy and social support in this relationship, the present study adds to our current understanding of employee retaliation against customer injustice.

Theoretical Development and Hypotheses

Employee Responses to Customer Interpersonal Injustice

Despite the fact that customer interpersonal injustice is a frequent occurrence in the service industry (Harris & Reynolds, 2003), organizational behavior research that examines

employees' reactions to such injustice is relatively scant. At present, only a handful of published studies have looked at how employees react to customer interpersonal injustice, that is, when customers violate the fairness criteria of respect and propriety by not treating employees with respect and dignity, or by making personal attacks or prejudicial statements against the employees (Bies & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1993). In two studies conducted by Rupp and colleagues (2008; 2006), participants who reported greater interpersonal injustice from customers experienced more difficulty conforming to the organization's display rules. Of even greater relevance, two studies conducted in a Canadian call center found that respondents who experienced greater customer injustice and incivility engaged in more acts of sabotage and incivility against the customers, such as hanging up on them, lying to them, and being derogatory (Skarlicki et al., 2008; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). While prior research has examined various types of CWBs and used various terminology to distinguish them conceptually (e.g., retaliation, aggression, incivility, social undermining), the measurement of these variables are, to a large extent, similar (Tepper & Henle, 2011). Consequently, we use the broader term of CWBs to encapsulate the various forms of employee behaviors that are counter to the organization's legitimate interests (Sackett, 2002).

While the studies described above (Skarlicki et al., 2008; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010) support the notion that employees will engage in customer-directed CWBs as a response to customer injustice, research has noted that the link between justice and employee behaviors is influenced by the values to which those employees subscribe (Fischer & Smith, 2006; Morris & Leung, 2000). Thus, the fact that these studies were conducted in a Western context raises the question of whether a similar relationship between customer injustice and CWBs will be found in countries with different cultural backgrounds and settings. Singapore provides a distinct context

to examine this relationship because its population is predominantly Chinese (74% Chinese, 13% Malays, 9% Indians, 3% others) and subscribes to traditional Asian values that are in many ways different from those of Western societies (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011). At the same time, its cultural orientation is similar to the average profile of other Confucian Asian societies (Chhokar et al., 2007), suggesting that the implications from this study may be extended to these other countries as well.

Singapore's cultural values differ from those of Canada and other Western countries in two key aspects that suggest that the previously demonstrated relationship between customer injustice and employee CWB will be weaker in Singapore. First, Singapore is a more collectivistic society compared to Canada and the United States, as evidenced by its lower individualism score in both Hofstede's (2001) and the GLOBE (R. J. House et al., 2004) studies. In turn, because collectivistic societies place greater emphasis on harmony and maintaining harmonious relationships, their members have a preference for conflict avoidance behaviors that do not disrupt such harmony (Chan & Goto, 2003; Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991; Leung, Koch, & Lu, 2002), suggesting the additional presence of cultural constraints against CWBs, beyond the economic constraints (e.g., demotion, termination of employment) commonly associated with such behaviors. As such, we expect Singaporean employees to be less inclined to defend themselves despite unjust treatment from customers, or to use aggression and other counterproductive behaviors in retaliation against such injustice. This is consistent with prior empirical studies demonstrating that Asians tend to be less assertive (Fukuyama & Greenfield, 1983; Westwood, Tang, & Kirkbride, 1992; Zane, Sue, Hu, & Kwon, 1991) as well as less aggressive and confrontational in conflict situations (Kirkbride et al., 1991), compared to their Western counterparts.

Another outcome stemming from greater collectivism is a disinclination to openly express one's emotions, particularly negative ones, in the presence of others. Beginning with the work of Ekman (1972) and Friesen (1972), research over the past four decades has found cultural differences in emotional display rules and the expression of emotions, with Asians more likely than Americans to mask their negative feelings in the presence of others (Matsumoto, 1990; Matsumoto, Takeuchi, Andayani, Kouznetsova, & Krupp, 1998). In particular, people from more collectivistic cultures are less comfortable expressing unpleasant emotions (e.g., annoyance, anger, impatience) than those from individualistic cultures (Matsumoto et al., 1998; Stephan, Stephan, Saito, & Barnett, 1998), thereby suggesting that Singaporean employees, being more collectivistic, are less likely to let their negative feelings become visible even in the face of customer injustice.

Beyond the cultural constraints against retaliatory behaviors ensuing from greater collectivism, we contend that there are also social costs that serve to further constrain customer-directed CWBs in the Singaporean context. These social constraints derive from the greater cultural tightness in Singapore, whereby cultural tightness captures the strength of social norms in a society and the degree of tolerance for deviations from such norms (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006). Singapore has been described as a culturally tight (vs. loose) society (Gelfand et al., 2006; Templer, 2012), having stronger norms and a higher degree of sanctioning when such norms are violated. Thus, there is greater conformity to norms, rules, and traditions in Singapore and other similar Asian societies (Huang & Harris, 1973; H. Kim & Markus, 1999), and such conformity norms have in turn been negatively linked to assertive behaviors (Yik & Tang, 1996), because "open disagreement is a source of embarrassment" (Bond, 2004, p. 459). In the context of customer service delivery, there are not only stronger norms against behaving in

counterproductive ways to customers, but also greater social costs, such as censure and ostracism from coworkers and supervisors, when such norms are violated. Taken together, the higher collectivism and cultural tightness in Singapore suggest that Singaporean employees face more cultural and social constraints on customer-directed CWBs and, thus, are disinclined to retaliate against customer interpersonal injustice.

Moderating Conditions in the Injustice-CWB Relationship

While we expect that the additional cultural and social constraints in Singapore diminish employees' tendency to retaliate against customer injustice, we nonetheless anticipate that certain moderating factors can serve to either diminish the costs and constraints associated with retaliation, or amplify employees' impetus for retaliation over and beyond the costs of retaliation, such that employees will ultimately retaliate against customer injustice in the presence of these factors. In this study, we focus specifically on self-efficacy and social support as individual and situational moderating factors, based on the reasons detailed earlier, and we next elaborate on the roles that these moderating factors play in the relationship between injustice and CWBs.

Self-efficacy. As an individual characteristic, self-efficacy reflects individuals' own beliefs about their ability and competence to perform successfully in various achievement situations (Bandura, 1997). In the present study, we focus on individuals' job-related self-efficacy, that is, their beliefs about their ability to do the job. While job-related self-efficacy is a more specific and narrower form of self-view relating expressly to individuals' assessment of their work ability, it nonetheless constitutes an individual's beliefs about himself/herself, and thus research in self-appraisals and self-views is useful in informing us of the moderating role of job-related self-efficacy.

Of particular relevance is self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 2012), which contends that people are motivated to maintain their beliefs and feelings about themselves, because self-views provide “a source of coherence, a means of organizing experience, predicting future events, and guiding behavior” (Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007, p. 1236). When these self-views and self-beliefs are threatened by or are contrary to external appraisals, individuals will react in various ways to restore their self-views. In particular, research by Baumeister and colleagues maintain that people with favorable views of themselves, such as those with high job-related self-efficacy, are inclined to react negatively, including engaging in aggressive, violent, and other harmful acts, when they receive negative feedback that threatens their positive self-views (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Applied to the current context, this suggests that to the extent that employees have high job-related self-efficacy, customers’ rude or disrespectful treatment against them will be perceived as a threat to their positive view of their work competence and as particularly unjustified and unwarranted behavior, which then provides them with the impetus to retaliate against the customers, despite the potential costs involved, so as to redress the injustice as well as restore their positive self-view of their work ability. On the other hand, people with low self-efficacy who encounter rude customers may perceive such treatment as being consistent with their lower beliefs of their job-related abilities and attribute the injustice to their own inability to perform up to standard. As such, they experience little or no threat to their self-beliefs and, in turn, little motivation to retaliate through CWBs.

A second explanation is that individuals’ self-efficacy determines their courage and propensity to engage in potentially risky and costly behaviors. Conceptually, self-efficacy has been linked to an individual’s courage (Hannah, Sweeney, & Lester, 2007), such that self-efficacy decreases an individual’s tendency to be fearful when faced with a risky or threatening

situation. Furthermore, self-efficacy increases the individual's propensity to engage in courageous acts despite feelings of fear. Empirically, a study by Krueger and Dickson (1994) supported these contentions, in that individuals who believed that they were less efficacious at a task tended to be more risk-averse, such that they perceived more threats in a situation and took fewer risks in their decisions, compared to those with higher self-efficacy. Applied to the present context, given that CWBs against customers are risky acts in that they can engender economic and social costs as previously discussed, it is likely that low self-efficacy employees will be disinclined to engage in them. On the other hand, their high self-efficacy counterparts are less likely to be fearful in the face of rude, disrespectful, and unjust customers, and would also have more courage to retaliate against such treatment, despite the potential risks involved, so as to restore the injustice toward them.

H1: Self-efficacy moderates the relationship between customer interactional injustice and customer-directed CWBs, such that the relationship is more positive when self-efficacy is high than when it is low.

Social support from coworkers and supervisors. Defined as the degree to which individuals perceive that they have positive social relationships with others in the workplace (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001), perceived social support has traditionally been conceptualized as a buffering mechanism that moderates the relationship between stress and various psychological and physical strain outcomes. Specifically, the buffering hypothesis proposes that people with more social support should, when confronted with stress, cope better with such stress and thus experience less strain reactions such as anxiety and depression (S. Cohen & Wills, 1985; Karasek, 1979). Despite this intuitive argument, however, empirical support for this buffering hypothesis has been weak and inconsistent, with prior studies finding

that social support can accentuate, diminish, or have no impact on the link between stress and various individual outcomes (e.g., Beehr, 1995; De Jonge & Kompier, 1997). In the context of CWBs, only a couple of studies have examined the moderating role of social support in predicting such behaviors, with contradictory findings. On the one hand, a study by Lim (1996) found that social support attenuated the positive relationship between job insecurity and employees' non-compliant job behaviors. However, in a more recent study, job resources (which included social support) accentuated the positive relationship between negative affect and CWBs, such that when job resources were more available, increases in negative affect resulted in more CWBs, contrary to the buffering hypothesis (Balducci, Schaufeli, & Fraccaroli, 2011).

In our present study, we build on prior research in social support to hypothesize and explain the moderating role of social support. Specifically, we expect that workers' perception of social support will influence their use of CWBs as a coping strategy to deal with customer injustice, such that individuals with more social support will be more inclined to engage in such behaviors as a reaction to injustice, compared to those with less social support. As counterintuitive as this idea may seem at first glance, it is, in fact, consistent with the perspective that retaliation against injustice is one possible coping strategy to deal with a personal offense (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999), because retaliatory behaviors can engender positive outcomes as previously discussed, such as the restoration of justice and one's self-view, and the deterrence against future injustices. As such, to the extent that social support diminishes the economic and social costs associated with retaliatory behaviors, a victim of customer injustice could perceive these costs as being outweighed by the benefits deriving from such behaviors, and will thus be inclined to retaliate against the injustice.

In particular, in a collectivistic and culturally tight society such as Singapore's, in-group and out-group distinctions, as well as the influence of in-group norms, are especially strong (Gelfand et al., 2006; Triandis, 1994), suggesting that social support from coworkers and supervisors may be especially influential moderators. Specifically, social support from one's in-group (e.g., coworkers and supervisors) can diminish the social costs and repercussions (e.g., social disapproval, public censure) associated with retaliatory behaviors, based on several mechanisms. First, social support provides feelings of belongingness and solidarity (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Thus, to the extent that an individual believes that in-group members will support or stand by his or her decision to retaliate against customer injustice, he or she will be more emboldened to engage in retaliatory behaviors. Consistent with this argument, researchers have found support for the notion that "revenge should be more likely when the third parties are perceived to favor it, whereas it should be less likely when they are perceived to oppose it" (S. H. Kim, Smith, & Brigham, 1998, p. 354). Second, because socially supportive members tend to exhibit greater empathy for the focal employee (J. S. House, 1981), such increased concern for and understanding of the employee's perspective and rationale for retaliation will also decrease the social costs of retaliation. Third, to the extent that social support from others provides an implicit indication of approval for retaliatory behaviors and "normalizes" them as a response to customer injustice, this will create a group norm that makes such behaviors acceptable and less costly within the group (Kwok, Au, & Ho, 2005). Finally, when individuals feel that coworkers and supervisors are socially supportive, this enhances their perception of being central to and valued in the organization (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). In turn, such higher status,

and the concomitant knowledge that the individual is unlikely to be punished given their value to the organization, may decrease the costs of engaging in CWBs in response to customer injustice.

In addition to the above arguments, the moderating role of supervisory social support is also expected to be salient in a high power-distance culture like Singapore's, where the values of respect for and compliance with authority, as well as the tendency to defer to power, make the role of one's supervisor especially influential (Hofstede, 2001; R. J. House et al., 2004). To the extent that employees believe that their supervisor values their contributions, cares for their well-being, and can be relied on to support them (Eisenberger et al., 2002), they will perceive lower economic risks (e.g., demotion or termination) associated with retaliatory behaviors, and will thus be more inclined to use CWBs.

H2: Coworker social support moderates the relationship between customer interactional injustice and customer-directed CWBs, such that the relationship is more positive when coworker social support is high than when it is low.

H3: Supervisor social support moderates the relationship between customer interactional injustice and customer-directed CWBs, such that the relationship is more positive when supervisor social support is high than when it is low.

Method

Setting and Participants

We approached all the customer-contact employees across various functions (e.g., concierge, food and beverage services, front office, and sales) from two luxury hotels in Singapore that are part of two different international hotel chains. The first hotel had 58 customer-contact employees, while the second had 73, resulting in a total sample of 131. In both hotels, employees were asked to complete a questionnaire measuring the control, independent,

and moderating variables. Employees were also provided with a survey packet measuring the dependent variable, customer-directed CWBs, and were asked to distribute these questionnaires to three coworkers whom they worked with regularly and who had observed them at work on a regular basis. To match the employees' responses with their selected coworkers, we asked employees to generate a secret code comprising six alphanumeric characters and to write this on their and the coworkers' questionnaires. Both the employee and the coworkers were instructed to return their completed questionnaire by placing them in a locked box that could only be opened by the research team. Because English is the main language of instruction as well as commerce in Singapore, the questionnaires were in English, similar to other surveys conducted in Singapore (e.g., Klassen et al., 2010).

In the first hotel, 40 of the 58 customer-contact employees (69.0%) returned fully-completed and usable questionnaires. Of these, 32 (80%) received coworker-ratings on their CWBs. In the second hotel, 58 (79.5%) of the 73 employees returned fully-completed questionnaires, and 46 (79.3%) of them received coworker ratings. In total, we had complete and usable matched responses on 78 employees across the two hotels, and these constituted our final sample. Thirty-five of them were male, and each employee had, on average, been with the organization for 2.49 years.

While using peer-reports reduced the final response rate to 59.5% of the original sample, this approach has the advantage of eliminating self-reporting bias and reducing the risk of common method variance influencing the results (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), thereby providing a more conservative test of the hypotheses. Also, to address the potential risk of response bias in our final sample, we compared the 78 employee respondents who received coworker ratings against the 20 who did not, and *t*-tests revealed that these two

groups were not significantly different in terms of tenure, customer injustice, self-efficacy, and social support from supervisors and coworkers (t -values ranged from 0.72 to 1.75, ns). Results of a χ^2 test also indicated that the two groups were not different in terms of gender distribution ($\chi^2 = 0.66$, ns), thereby indicating that response bias is not a major concern in this study.

Measures

CWBs toward customers were evaluated by coworkers and were measured with twelve items developed and validated by Hunter and Penney (2007). These items, as well as those for subsequent variables, are presented in the Appendix. Coworkers were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (every day), how often they observed the focal employee engaging in each of the twelve behaviors, which comprised behaviors targeted specifically at customers within the hospitality industry (e.g., restaurants, hotels) and included items such as refusing a reasonable customer request, ignoring a customer, and insulting a customer. We chose to use this scale instead of the ones developed more recently by Skarlicki and colleagues (Skarlicki et al., 2008; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), because the latter were customized for a call-center context and included items that were not applicable to the hotel setting in our study (e.g., items such as “hung up on a customer” or “put a customer on hold”), where interactions with customers were primarily face-to-face instead of over the phone.

Customer interpersonal injustice was measured on a 7-point scale using four interpersonal justice items developed by Colquitt (2001) and adapted to refer to customers as the focal figure. Because the original items were phrased in terms of justice (e.g., “The customers treats me in a polite manner”), we reversed-scored the items to arrive at respondents’ evaluation of injustice. The alpha coefficient for this variable was 0.86, indicating good scale reliability.

Self-efficacy was measured with a 10-item job-related self-efficacy scale developed by Riggs and colleagues (Riggs, Warka, Babasa, Betancourt, & Hooker, 1994), and respondents indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Alpha coefficient for this self-efficacy scale was 0.79. Each of the two social support variables was measured with a 4-item social support scale developed by Caplan and colleagues (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Pinneau, 1980). Depending on the source of the social support, the item wordings were adapted to indicate either “supervisor” or “coworkers” as the referent. Employees rated each item on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much). Alpha coefficient for coworker social support was 0.79, while that for supervisor social support was 0.82.

Finally, based on prior research, we included respondents’ gender and tenure as control variables, because men have been found to engage in more CWBs than women, as have people with longer tenure in an organization (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Harris & Reynolds, 2003). We also included the hotel that respondents worked for as a control, to account for the possibility that the results may vary due to inter-organizational differences.

Results

The descriptive statistics and correlations among these variables are presented in Table 1. Consistent with our expectations, interpersonal injustice from customers was not significantly correlated to CWBs in our Singaporean sample ($r = 0.05$, *ns*), a pattern that deviates from prior findings using Canadian respondents. To provide a more rigorous test for this relationship and the hypotheses, we conducted a series of three hierarchical moderated regression analyses, one for each moderating variable. The control variables were entered in the first step, followed by the independent variable (customer injustice) and the relevant moderating variable in the second

step, and the interaction term in the final step. To address the multicollinearity issue pertaining to interaction terms, both the independent variable and moderators were centered in order to compute the interaction terms (Aiken & West, 1991).

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

As presented in Table 2, the regression results replicated the correlation results in that customer injustice was not significantly related to customer-directed CWBs across the three regression models ($b = -0.02$ to $.00$, *ns*). At the same time, two of the interaction terms were significant, suggesting that the relationship between customer injustice and CWBs was significant under certain moderating conditions. Specifically, while both customer injustice and self-efficacy were not significant ($b = -.02$ and $-.05$ respectively, *ns*), the interaction term between the two variables was significant ($b = 0.07$, $p < .05$), as seen in Model 1(b) of Table 2. In view of the issues pertaining to the practice of null-hypothesis significance testing and the reliance on p -values, including the fact that such values are a function of sample size and that the conventional threshold of $p < .05$ is arbitrary (J. Cohen, 1994; Rosenthal, 1992), we also computed the effect size of this interaction, since effect sizes are not sensitive to sample size and better represent the strength of association between the variables (Wilkinson, 1999). The effect size (Cohen's f^2) for the interaction between customer injustice and self-efficacy was 0.08, which exceeded the 0.02 threshold for small effect sizes stipulated by Cohen (1988).

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found that customer injustice was positively related to CWBs when an individual's self-efficacy was high (one *SD* above the mean), but a simple slope analysis revealed that the positive relationship was not statistically significant at this level

(simple slope = 0.04, *ns*) (Aiken & West, 1991). Likewise, the simple slope at low self-efficacy (one *SD* below the mean) was negative but not significant (slope = -0.08, *ns*). While these simple slopes were not significant at the conventionally-determined levels of one standard deviation above and below the mean, some researchers have noted that the choice of using standard deviation as the definition of high and low levels is arbitrary, and that other levels, such as the upper and lower observed values of the moderator, can be acceptable as well (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). We thus conducted supplementary analyses using the upper and lower observed values of self-efficacy to represent high and low self-efficacy respectively, and the slopes were both statistically significant at these values. Taken as a whole, these results offer some support for Hypothesis 1, in that respondents' inclination to engage in CWBs as a response to customer injustice differed significantly depending on their self-efficacy, and the relationship was more positive at higher levels of self-efficacy.

In terms of Hypothesis 2, the interaction between interpersonal injustice and coworker social support is presented in Model 2(b). The interaction term was not statistically significant ($b = .10, p < .05$), but its effect size of 0.06 exceeded the threshold for small effect sizes. As such, we conducted simple slope analyses, and while the relationships were in the predicted directions (simple slope = .07 and -.06 at high and low coworker social support respectively, *ns*); they were not statistically significant. Overall, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Finally, as seen in Model 3(b), the results supported Hypothesis 3 in that the interaction between interpersonal injustice and supervisor social support was significant ($b = .19, p < .01$), and the effect size was 0.16, exceeding the 0.15 threshold for medium effect sizes. As illustrated in Figure 1, the relationship between interpersonal injustice and CWBs was positive when supervisor social support was high

(simple slope = .09, $p < .05$), and negative when supervisor social support was low (simple slope = -.11, $p < .05$).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Discussion

The present study not only extends the limited research in customer injustice and customer-directed CWBs to a Singaporean perspective, but also examines the moderating conditions under which the relationship between the two variables occurs. Contrary to previous studies that were conducted in Canada and found a positive relationship between customer injustice and CWBs toward customers, the present study shows that this relationship does not replicate across cultures, specifically to a Singaporean one, arguably because the society's cultural tightness and higher collectivism, together with the greater emphasis on harmony and avoidance of conflict, confrontation, and emotional expression, constrain employees from using CWBs as a response to customer injustice. However, this is not to say that Singaporean employees tolerate any and all levels of customer injustice. Instead, the results provide a nuanced perspective to the relationship by demonstrating that certain individual and social determinants can overcome cultural constraints and provide employees with the impetus to retaliate, and that these should be considered in determining when injustice will trigger retaliatory behaviors.

In terms of individual characteristics, we found that self-efficacy moderated the relationship between customer injustice and CWBs, such that the relationship was more positive when an individual had high job-related self-efficacy than when he or she had low self-efficacy. While the simple slopes were not significant at the conventional one standard deviation

difference from the mean, they were significant at the upper and lower observed values of self-efficacy. Thus, these results offer some evidence that self-efficacy moderates the relationship between customer injustice and CWBs, such that the relationship is more positive when self-efficacy is higher. More broadly, this is the first study to demonstrate the moderating role of self-efficacy in the context of customer injustice and customer-directed CWBs, and the results are consistent with existing psychological theories on self-views, which propound that external feedback that is inconsistent with one's views or beliefs about oneself will trigger a response from the individual, which includes behavioral actions targeted at the source of the feedback (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1996; Swann, 1983, 2012). In the present context where we examined a specific form of self-beliefs, namely job-related self-efficacy, we found a similar effect, such that individuals with higher self-efficacy were more inclined to use CWBs as a response to customer injustice, given that such injustice is inconsistent with, as well as a threat to, their beliefs of their work competence, which then motivates them to strike back against such treatment to restore their positive self-view. On the other hand, employees with low job-related self-efficacy may have interpreted customer injustice as being consistent with their low self-beliefs in their work abilities and thus were less inclined to retaliate. In fact, the results suggest that for workers whose self-efficacy levels were at the extremely low end, the stronger the injustice, the less likely they were to engage in CWBs. This could be because their very low self-beliefs make them easily intimidated and threatened when dealing with unjust customers, such that the more unreasonable and uncivil the customers are, the more fearful and less self-assured they become and, thus, the less likely they are to retaliate for fear of further provoking the customer. Taking into account the fact that this result was obtained at the lowest observed value of self-efficacy, the finding remains tentative and requires further replication to bolster its validity.

In terms of social determinants, the results show that social support from supervisors also influenced an individual's tendency to engage in CWBs as a response to customer injustice. Consistent with the argument that in a high power-distance culture such as Singapore's, support from one's supervisor will be particularly instrumental in bolstering one's confidence to retaliate against unjust customer treatment, we found that employees who perceived higher levels of supervisor social support engaged in more CWBs in reaction to customer injustice. Because supervisory support indicates that the supervisor values the employee's contributions and cares for his or her well-being, this can be interpreted by the employee as meaning that the supervisor will be supportive, or at least tolerant, of his/her decision to strike back against injustice and not punish him/her for it, thereby reducing the potential costs of retaliation. On the other hand, employees with low perceived supervisor social support may interpret the lack of support as not only meaning that the supervisor will not tolerate retaliatory behaviors, but also that they are not highly valued by the supervisor. Thus, when faced with customer injustice, such employees may refrain from retaliating because these behaviors will not be condoned by the supervisor and can result in greater scrutiny and punishment by the supervisor, because the latter may view the customers' unjust treatment as indication of the employees' poor performance and failure to deliver quality service to the customers. Consequently, when confronted with increasing customer injustice, employees with low supervisor social support may be less inclined to engage in retaliatory behaviors so as not to further provoke the customer and draw supervisory attention to themselves.

Finally, while we expected coworker social support to play a moderating role, the results did not support this hypothesis. One possible reason is that compared to supervisor support, coworker support may not be as strong in overcoming the economic and social constraints on

CWBs. Because the supervisor is an agent of the organization and makes key decisions including the employee's performance appraisal, raises, and promotions or demotions, he or she has a larger role in determining the consequences that an employee faces for retaliating against customers. As such, the employee may construe receiving supervisor support as an implicit relaxing of the constraints on CWBs and, consequently, become emboldened to engage in CWBs. However, the same cannot be said of coworkers because by virtue of their lack of formal authority, they are not organizational representatives to fellow workers and have less influence on how the organization will react to an employee's retaliatory behavior. Thus, even though employees may perceive coworkers as being supportive of them and their actions, such support does not extend to the organization's support of similar actions. In addition, we speculate that a second reason why coworker social support is not a key moderator hinges on the fact that while Singapore is a collectivistic society, it is not one of the highest-ranking countries in terms of collectivism (ranking 13th out of 53 countries). As such, having the support of in-group members may not be as influential in overcoming constraints on using CWBs as it may be in more collectivistic societies such as South Korea, Taiwan, or China (Kwok et al., 2005), where the support and endorsement of one's peers may play a greater role in shaping workers' behaviors and attitudes.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offers important insights for customer service managers as well as human resource managers. First, managers need to be cognizant of the fact that supporting their subordinates, while immensely beneficial in many ways, can have unintended consequences. Thus, rather than reducing supervisory support, managers can be trained on how to offer more effective support. For instance, a first step is for managers to help subordinates

frame the context of the unjust customer treatment by increasing subordinates' use of rational as opposed to emotional information processing. A recent study showed that individuals primed with a rational frame, where they were asked to focus on facts and to be objective, reacted less negatively to injustice compared to those who were primed with an emotional frame and focused on their experiences, emotions, and gut feelings (Maas & van den Bos, 2009). Second, recognizing that highly self-efficacious employees tend to use problem-focused (as opposed to emotion-focused) coping strategies to deal with stressful situations such as customer injustice, managers can offer them alternative problem-solving strategies that do not involve retaliation against the customers (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). To illustrate, managers could step in and help a subordinate take over handling a difficult customer, and provide advice to the subordinate after the interaction is over. Managers could also allow employees to use a work break without penalty for a certain number of occasions, thereby allowing them to exercise restraint in the face of unjust customers. Finally, drawing on findings from previous studies on injustice and retaliation, managers may offer social support in the form of educating subordinates on taking the perspective of customers, and engaging in less blame attribution, so as to better empathize with customers' experiences and frustrations (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001; Rupp et al., 2008).

Limitations and Future Research

Because data on our dependent variable were collected from different and multiple sources than those on our independent and moderating variables, the risk of common method bias is decreased considerably (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, this advantage of using different raters also contributed to the smaller sample size and, in turn, statistical power available in the final analyses, despite our collecting data from two different organizations. Nonetheless,

the fact that we were able to find support for two of three proposed moderating effects suggests that our sample size provided sufficient statistical power to detect the interaction effects (Aguinis, 1995). Furthermore, the effect size results, which are not sensitive to sample size, offer even greater confidence that these moderating effects are not negligible. Supplementary analyses using Cook's distance and centered leverage values were also conducted to assess the risk of one or more influential cases skewing the results, and they indicated that such a risk was low (P. Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2002). Taken together, these reasons serve to mitigate the sample size concern, although we encourage future research to replicate these findings with larger samples so as to further demonstrate their validity.

With regard to the issue of causality, the lack of longitudinal data prohibits us from making causal conclusions on whether customer injustice leads to more customer-directed CWBs or vice versa. While our contention that individuals' perceptions and attitudes shape their behaviors is consistent with psychological theories such as the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), it is possible that employees' performance of CWBs toward customers may trigger angry responses from the customers which, in turn, increase the employees' perceptions of customer injustice. While this argument fails to explain the moderating roles of self-efficacy and social support that were found, we nonetheless acknowledge that future research of a longitudinal design needs to be conducted to establish the causality of the relationships.

Finally, we adopted an indigenous approach in our study, which prevented us from conducting cross-cultural comparisons between Singapore and the Western context. Relatedly, we did not measure respondents' cultural dimensions, and instead assumed that the cultural dimensions of Singapore identified in previous cross-cultural studies applied to our Singaporean sample. While such an assumption is not unreasonable and is consistent with prior practice (e.g.,

Nauta, Liu, & Li, 2010; Rego & Cunha, 2010), we also recognize that there can be individual-level variation in cultural dimensions even among people from the same country (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, we recommend that future research measure the relevant cultural values at the individual level and include these as additional moderators. Furthermore, research that seeks to replicate the present findings across different countries and cultures is also warranted, given that the current findings are derived from only one country. In particular, to the extent that the present findings can be replicated in other Asian countries that are high on collectivism and power-distance but low on assertiveness, this would offer even stronger evidence that the link between customer injustice and employees' inclination to retaliate through CWBs is indeed bounded by cultural constraints.

Conclusion

Overall, the present study extends the limited research on customer injustice and customer-directed CWBs to a new cultural context and demonstrates that the previously-established positive relationship between the two constructs found in a Western setting does not replicate to a more collectivistic, culturally tighter Asian society. In so doing, we not only underscore the value of considering cultural factors in the study of justice and counterproductive behaviors in the workplace, but also enrich the conceptual model by demonstrating the role of individual and social characteristics as moderators that can overcome cultural constraints. From a practical standpoint, given the vital role that the hospitality industry plays in the Singapore economy, this study serves as a timely investigation on Singaporean employees' counterproductive behaviors toward guests, and offers several suggestions on how to manage such behaviors. Extending beyond the Singapore context, this study could also be of potential

value to other Confucian Asian societies that share similar cultural values and aim to capitalize on the growing Asian tourism market.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations among Variables

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Hotel | 0.59 | 0.50 | - | | | | | | | |
| 2. Gender | 0.55 | 0.50 | .03 | - | | | | | | |
| 3. Tenure | 2.49 | 0.67 | -.34** | -.06 | - | | | | | |
| 4. Interpersonal injustice | 2.79 | 1.15 | .13 | -.06 | -.09 | (.86) | | | | |
| 5. Self-efficacy | 5.17 | 0.92 | -.20 | -.01 | .18 | -.19 | (.79) | | | |
| 6. Coworker social support | 3.11 | 0.56 | -.26* | .11 | .09 | -.19 | .19 | (.79) | | |
| 7. Supervisor social support | 3.09 | 0.51 | -.21 | .27* | .09 | -.11 | .09 | .40** | (.82) | |
| 8. Customer-directed CWBs | 1.32 | 0.29 | .21 | .07 | -.14 | -.05 | -.26* | -.11 | -.19 | (.72) |

Note. *N* = 78. Reliability coefficients are presented in parentheses along the diagonal.

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01.

Table 2

Results of Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analyses Predicting Customer-Directed Counterproductive Behaviors (N = 78)

| Predictors | Control | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
|---|-----------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| | variables | (a) | (b) | (a) | (b) | (a) | (b) |
| Constant | -.19 | -.16 | -.19 | -.18 | -.08 | -.20 | -.18 |
| Hotel | .11 | .09 | .08 | .10 | .07 | .09 | .08 |
| Gender | .04 | .04 | .07 | .05 | .02 | .07 | .08 |
| Tenure | -.02 | -.01 | -.01 | -.02 | -.02 | -.02 | -.02 |
| Customer interactional injustice | | -.00 | -.02 | .00 | -.00 | .00 | -.01 |
| Self-efficacy | | -.07 | -.05 | | | | |
| Coworker social support | | | | -.04 | -.02 | | |
| Supervisor social support | | | | | | -.11 | -.06 |
| Interactional injustice * self-efficacy | | | .07* | | | | |
| Interactional injustice * coworker social support | | | | | .10† | | |
| Interactional injustice * supervisor social support | | | | | | | .19** |
| R^2 | .05 | .10 | .17* | .06 | .11 | .09 | .21** |
| ΔR^2 from prior step | - | .05 | .07* | .01 | .05† | .03 | .13** |

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

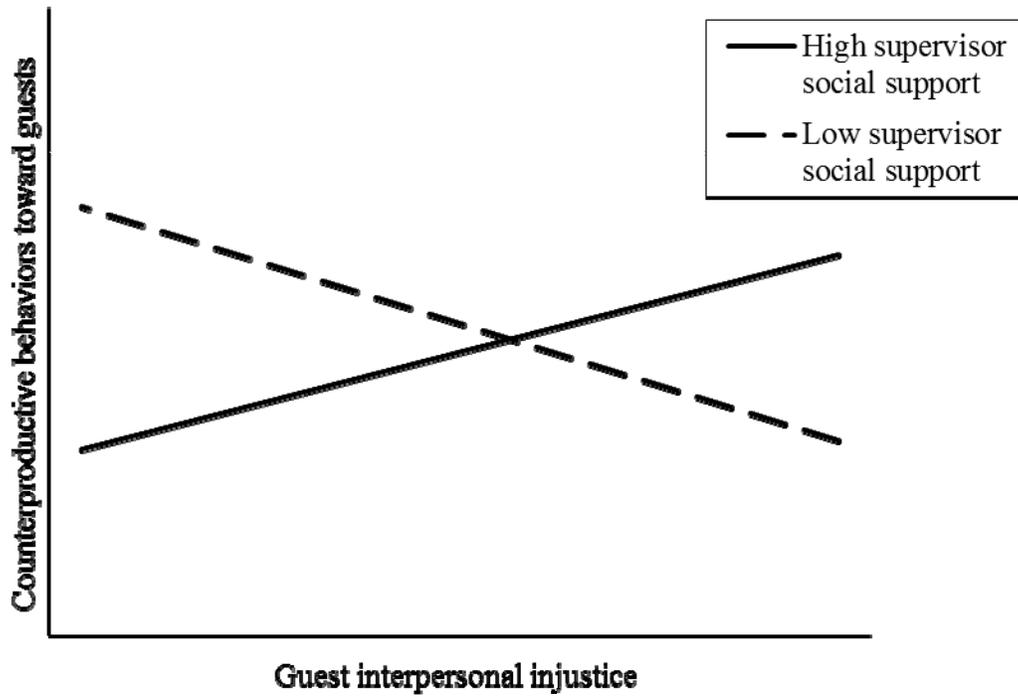


Figure 1. Interaction of customer interpersonal injustice and supervisor social support predicting counterproductive behaviors toward guests.

Appendix

List of Items Measuring Study Variables

CWBs toward customers (peer-rated):

How often have you seen your coworker:

1. Argue with a guest?
2. Act rudely toward a guest?
3. Make fun of a guest to someone else?
4. Ignore a guest?
5. Lie to a guest?
6. Make a guest wait longer than necessary?
7. Raise his/her voice to a guest?
8. Overcharge a guest?
9. Refuse a reasonable guest request?
10. Fail to verify the accuracy of a guest's order?
11. Insult a guest?
12. Threaten a guest?

Customer interpersonal injustice (reverse-coded):

1. The guests treat me in a polite manner.
2. The guests treat me with dignity.
3. The guests treat me with respect.
4. The guests refrain from improper remarks or comments.

Job-related self-efficacy:

1. I have confidence in my ability to do my job.
2. There are some tasks required by my job that I cannot do well (reverse-coded).
3. When my performance is poor, it is due to my lack of ability.
4. I doubt my ability to do my job (reverse-coded).
5. I have all the skills needed to perform my job very well.
6. Most people in my line of work can do this job better than I can (reverse-coded).
7. I am an expert at my job.
8. My future in this job is limited because of my lack of skills (reverse-coded).
9. I am very proud of my job skills and abilities.
10. I feel threatened when others watch me work (reverse-coded).

Social support (coworkers/supervisor):

1. How much do/does your co-workers/supervisor go out of their way to do things to make your work- life easier?
2. How easy is it to talk to your co-workers/supervisor?
3. How much can your co-workers/supervisor be relied on when things get tough at work?
4. How much is/are your co-workers/supervisor willing to listen to your personal problems?