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Testing an Empathy Model of Guest-Directed Citizenship and Counterproductive Behaviours in the Hospitality Industry: Findings from Three Hotels

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**TESTING AN EMPATHY MODEL OF GUEST-DIRECTED CITIZENSHIP AND
COUNTERPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIORS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY:
FINDINGS FROM THREE HOTELS**

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Abstract

This research proposes and tests an empathy model of guest-directed discretionary behaviors (i.e., citizenship and counterproductive behaviors) using two studies conducted in three hotels. Building on the two-stage model of empathic mediation, we examined the mediating role of empathic concern in the relationship between perspective taking and both forms of discretionary behaviors in Study 1. Support for this mediated model was found in relation to citizenship behaviors but not for counterproductive behaviors. Study 2 was conducted to extend these findings using peer-reports of discretionary behaviors, and to apply an interactional psychology perspective to predict guest-directed counterproductive behaviors. We drew upon trait activation theory to highlight the importance of situational triggers, in the form of interpersonal injustice from guests, in moderating the relationship between perspective taking and counterproductive behaviors, mediated through empathic concern. We found support for the hypothesized moderated mediation effect, such that perspective taking inhibited counterproductive behaviors through empathic concern only when interpersonal injustice was high, but not when injustice was low. Replicating the results in Study 1, perspective taking also positively predicted peer-reported citizenship behaviors, but this was not mediated by empathic concern. Research and practical implications from these findings are discussed.

Practitioner Points:

- Highlights to organizations in the hospitality industry the importance of perspective taking in generating customer goodwill, through promoting employees' citizenship behaviors toward guests, and in reducing their counterproductive behaviors in instances of guest injustice.

- Suggests ways in which organizations can develop employees' perspective taking, such as appointing mentors or role models, providing training programs to help employees improve their interpersonal skills, and assessing job applicants' trait empathy as part of the selection process.

**TESTING AN EMPATHY MODEL OF GUEST-DIRECTED CITIZENSHIP AND
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In the hospitality industry, as with other service-related industries, the delivery of customer service contributes to the organization's performance and competitive advantage (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Pfeffer, 1994). Customer-contact employees occupy an important boundary-spanning position and play a major role in delivering service and fulfilling the firm's promise to guests and customers (Bowen & Schneider, 1985). The service that guests receive and the interactions they have with customer-contact employees are key criteria used by guests to evaluate the overall quality and competitiveness of a hotel (Hartline, Wooldridge, & Jones, 2003). Customer-contact employees who engage in guest-directed citizenship behaviors, defined as discretionary behaviors toward guests or customers that go above and beyond formal role requirements (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997), serve to enhance the guests' experiences and, in turn, result in higher sales figures (George, 2001). Likewise, organizational units that report more of such guest-directed citizenship behaviors by their employees enjoy higher customer satisfaction ratings and sales revenues (George & Bettenhausen, 1990; Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005).

While the importance of guest-directed citizenship behaviors has been well-established in both the popular press and scholarly literature, their negative counterpart, in the form of negative or counterproductive behaviors toward guests, is comparatively understudied and less well understood. These guest-directed counterproductive behaviors constitute voluntary behaviors directed at a guest or customer that hurt the guest or customer, and examples include acting rudely to a guest, refusing a reasonable request, or making a guest wait longer than necessary

(Hunter & Penney, 2007). Both reason and anecdotal evidence suggest that bad service and counterproductive interactions with guests are equally important as, if not more important than, citizenship behaviors, and the former can tarnish guests' experience and, ultimately, the organization's performance (e.g., Higley, 2006; Paterik, 2002). Research in negative event asymmetry has demonstrated that negative interactions are more salient than positive interactions in shaping social judgments, thereby suggesting that guests' negative interactions with employees may have a greater impact on their overall experience at the hotel (Taylor, 1991). As such, researchers have recently examined such behaviors and found that customer-induced stressors and disproportional customer expectations predicted the performance of these counterproductive behaviors (Hunter & Penney, 2007; Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008; van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010). Thus, given the roles of both citizenship and counterproductive behaviors toward guests in shaping guests' service experience and the firm's performance, this study aims to understand the factors and processes that drive customer-contact employees to engage in these two forms of discretionary behaviors.

We propose and test an empathy-based model of guest-directed discretionary behaviors (i.e., citizenship and counterproductive behaviors) using two studies conducted in three hotels, and examine both mediating and moderating factors that link empathy to the two behaviors. We focus on empathy because social psychological research has established its role in motivating helping behaviors in experimental settings, but yet this relationship is less firmly established in field settings (S. G. Taylor, Kluemper, & Mossholder, 2010), much less when the criterion variable involves counterproductive behaviors. Because research has shown that the cognitive form of empathy, also referred to as perspective taking, can be developed and nurtured (e.g., Axtell, Parker, Holman, & Totterdell, 2007; N. D. Feshbach & Feshbach, 1982; Hojat, 2009;

Parker & Axtell, 2001), significant findings here will underscore organizational efforts to develop employees' perspective taking and provide firms with a viable avenue to promote citizenship behaviors and deter counterproductive behaviors. Additionally, extending the role of perspective taking to the realm of discretionary behaviors would further validate its relevance to the field setting and the larger organizational context. In doing so, we contribute to extant research in several ways. First, we extend the scarce research on antecedents of guest-directed counterproductive behaviors and propose a new antecedent – perspective taking. Because only a handful of studies (Hunter & Penney, 2007; Skarlicki et al., 2008; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010) have sought to investigate the drivers of customer-directed counterproductive behaviors and focused primarily on the role of situational stressors, the present study adds to our understanding of what drives such behaviors.

Second, this study goes beyond investigating the predictive power of perspective taking in relation to counterproductive behaviors to provide a more nuanced perspective of this link by exploring the mediating process and moderating condition under which it relates to such behaviors. We extend the two-stage model of empathic mediation to the context of guest-directed counterproductive behaviors and test the mediating role of empathic concern. In doing so, we open the proverbial black box and tease apart the explanatory mechanism underlying the relationship between perspective taking and counterproductive behaviors. Furthermore, recognizing the power of the situation and adopting an interactional psychology perspective, we incorporate the moderating role of interpersonal injustice in determining when empathy will serve to diminish employees' counterproductive behaviors, and address the call by scholars to adopt an interactionist perspective to understanding such behaviors (e.g., Sackett & DeVore, 2001).

Finally, while the influence of empathy on helping and citizenship behaviors has been previously demonstrated in several laboratory-based experiments (e.g., Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997; Dovidio, Allen, & Schroeder, 1990; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987), a similar relationship is much less firmly established in the management literature and in organizational settings, particularly as it pertains to guest-directed citizenship behaviors. To our knowledge, only two studies have tested the link between perspective taking and customer-directed citizenship behaviors (Axtell et al., 2007; Bettencourt, Gwinner, & Meuter, 2001), of which only one found mixed support for the mediating mechanism underlying this link (Axtell et al., 2007). Thus, the present study adds to this scant body of research by testing this relationship in three different hotels using both self- and peer-reports of citizenship behaviors, and by examining the mediating process which thus far lacks robust empirical support.

Study 1: A Mediated Model of Empathy and Guest-Directed Discretionary Behaviors

The Concept and Nature of Empathy

The concept of empathy has a long history in psychology and can be traced back to the early 1900s (e.g., Lipps, 1903; Titchener, 1909; cited in Wispe, 1986), and has been conceptualized in multiple ways by different groups of researchers (see Duan and Hill (1996) and Eisenberg and Miller (1987) for historical development and reviews). One approach views empathy as a relatively stable trait or individual difference, such that some individuals are more predisposed, either by nature or by development (i.e., from the way they were raised), to understand other people's experiences and feelings across situations and contexts (e.g., Davis, 1980; Hogan, 1969; Mead, 1934). The second approach views empathy as a situation-specific experience, such that regardless of one's dispositional level of empathy, an individual's empathic experience can vary across situations and in response to specific stimuli, events, or people (e.g.,

Batson & Coke, 1981; Stotland, 1969). As a result, empathy can be manipulated in experiments and developed through training, and this approach is most common among social psychologists. These two approaches are not necessarily at odds with each other, as reflected in prior studies that integrate both approaches and acknowledge that while people are relatively stable in the extent to which they empathize with others, external and situational factors can also shape or change how much they experience empathy (Axtell et al., 2007; Parker & Axtell, 2001). This is consistent with the notion of a quasi-trait, defined as a “somewhat stable trait that can be modified by appropriate situational characteristics” (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005, p. 1101), and has the advantage of recognizing that organizations can shape employees’ work situations and kindle their empathy toward customers. Evidence for the validity of this conceptualization can be seen from the fact that both job characteristics (e.g., job enrichment) and individual characteristics (e.g., role orientation) were predictors of customer-directed and supplier-directed perspective taking (Axtell et al., 2007; Parker & Axtell, 2001). Thus, consistent with more recent work on customer-directed empathy, we adopt a similar conceptualization of empathy in that while we recognize that individuals differ in their generalized tendencies to understand the perspectives and feelings of others, our focus is on situation-specific perspective taking, namely employees’ perspective taking toward a specific group of people (guests) and in a specific work setting (customer service jobs).

Prior research has also varied in terms of the specific nature of empathy. Some researchers refer to it as a cognitive, intellectual form reflecting the cognitive act of adopting the perspective of another and understanding or recognizing that person’s thoughts and perspectives (e.g., Dymond, 1949). This form of empathy has been variously labeled perspective taking, cognitive empathy, intellectual empathy, and cognitive perspective-taking in prior research (e.g.,

Duan & Hill, 1996; Parker & Axtell, 2001; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002). In our study, we investigate this cognitive element of empathy, which we call perspective taking, as a predictor of both citizenship and counterproductive behaviors. Another form of empathy that researchers have considered is affective in nature, specifically the feelings and emotions (e.g., concern, compassion) that an individual experiences as a result of another's emotional state or condition, and this has been termed empathic concern, sympathy, and empathic emotion (e.g., Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Wispe, 1986). Consistent with more recent studies (Axtell et al., 2007; Batson, Eklund, Chermok, Hoyt, & Ortiz, 2007), we refer to this form of empathy as empathic concern. Finally, while a third form of empathy exists in the form of emotions that match or are similar to those of another person (e.g., N. D. Feshbach & Roe, 1968; Stotland, 1969), we do not examine this as it falls beyond the scope of the two-stage model of empathic mediation that we adopt in this study and which is detailed in the following sections.

Perspective Taking and Discretionary Behaviors

Grounded on the argument that perspective taking enables one to understand another's experience and identify with that person and his/her experience (Batson, Sager et al., 1997; Hornstein, 1978), experimental studies have demonstrated a positive link between perspective taking and helping, whereby subjects who were instructed to take the perspective of another person were more inclined to help and engage in prosocial behaviors toward that person, compared to subjects who were told to remain objective (see Batson, 1991; Davis, 1994; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987 for reviews of such studies). Within organizational research, a similar relationship has also been established, most often in relation to citizenship behaviors directed at the organization (e.g., Borman, Penner, Allen, & Motowidlo, 2001) and at one's coworkers (e.g., McNeely & Meglino, 1994; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002). However, in terms of citizenship

behaviors directed at customers and guests, only two studies have examined the predictive role of perspective taking. Bettencourt and colleagues (2001) found that customer-contact employees who reported higher levels of perspective taking also reported higher levels of service delivery behaviors. More recently, Axtell and colleagues (2007) also found a positive relationship between customer service agents' perspective taking toward customers and both self- and supervisor-rated helping toward customers.

At the same time, perspective taking has been found to reduce individuals' inclination to engage in aggressive behaviors (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988), and this is premised on three mechanisms. First, looking at things from another party's perspective helps to reduce the occurrences of interpersonal misunderstanding and conflict, which in turn diminishes the need to engage in counterproductive behaviors. Furthermore, even if conflict were to arise, the ability to understand the perspective of others is “prerequisite to taking into account the others' needs when responding to social conflicts” (S. Feshbach & Feshbach, 1986, p. 193), such that individuals with higher perspective taking are less inclined to use counterproductive behaviors as a response to such conflict. Finally, because perspective taking helps one better identify with the other party, such identification then precludes the individual from harming the other (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). Supporting these arguments, multiple studies conducted across different contexts and samples have demonstrated a negative relationship between empathy and aggressive, antisocial, and other forms of negative behaviors, as summarized in a meta-analysis by Miller and Eisenberg (1988). Thus, extended to the present organizational setting, these works suggest that customer-contact employees who are better able to understand guests' perspectives will be less inclined to engage in counterproductive behaviors against them.

Hypothesis 1: Perspective taking is positively related to guest-directed citizenship behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: Perspective taking is negatively related to guest-directed counterproductive behaviors.

Two-Stage Model of Empathic Mediation

Empathy research also provides a lens through which the mediating mechanism for the above relationships can be better understood, specifically in the form of the two-stage model of empathic mediation (Batson, Coke, & Pych, 1983; Coke et al., 1978). The model proposes that looking at things from another's perspective will trigger an empathic emotional reaction that involves feelings of concern, empathy, and compassion toward the other party (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997), a contention that is consistent with the notion that emotions and affect derive from cognition (e.g., Lazarus, 1982). In turn, empathic concern, with its "emotional essence and psychological immediacy to individuals' actions" (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002, p. 258), arouses individuals to take action to help another party, and has been found to mediate the relationship between perspective taking and coworker-directed citizenship behaviors. The relationship between empathic concern and helping is premised on two reasons: first, the inclination to help is driven by an egoistic motive to relieve oneself of feelings of sadness that derive from empathic concern for the other party (Cialdini, Kenrick, & Baumann, 1982; Cialdini et al., 1987). Second, helping behaviors can also be driven by an altruistic motive, namely to reduce the distress of the other party (e.g., Batson & Coke, 1981; Batson & Oleson, 1991).

Beyond facilitating citizenship behaviors, empathic concern is also expected to decrease counterproductive behaviors. Earlier works have found that concern for another party enhances one's desire to improve the other party's condition and decrease his/her distress, which then

reduces the occurrence of aggressive and antisocial behaviors toward the other (S. Feshbach & Feshbach, 1986; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). In addition, greater concern for another's well-being increases one's tendency to engage in cooperative conflict resolution (Eiseman, 1978), which then decreases the likelihood of counterproductive behaviors as a way of retaliation. Finally, concern for others can negate self-interested behavior (Davis, 1994; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002), such that while a less empathically concerned employee may be inclined to engage in guest-directed counterproductive behaviors (e.g., making a guest wait) so as to make his or her own work easier, such self-interest will be counteracted in employees with higher empathic concern. Overall, these arguments underscore the contention that feelings of empathic concern for another, triggered by perspective taking, will lead one to engage in citizenship behaviors and to refrain from counterproductive behaviors toward guests.

While support for this mediation model has been demonstrated in previous studies (e.g., Batson et al., 2007; Coke et al., 1978; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002), more equivocal support has been found in predicting customer-directed helping behaviors, in that empathic concern partially mediated the perspective taking to helping relationship when self-ratings of helping behaviors were used, but no evidence of the mediation process was found using supervisor ratings of helping (Axtell et al., 2007). Furthermore, no studies have yet to test this mediation model in the context of guest-directed counterproductive behaviors. Thus, the present study extends the two-stage model of empathic mediation to the organizational setting to predict both guest-directed citizenship behaviors and counterproductive behaviors.¹

Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between perspective taking and guest-directed citizenship behaviors is mediated by empathic concern.

Hypothesis 4: The negative relationship between perspective taking and guest-directed counterproductive behaviors is mediated by empathic concern.

Methods

Participants and procedure. We collected data in 2008 from customer-contact employees at a luxury hotel in Singapore that is part of a larger international hotel chain. We invited customer-contact employees from across various functions such as concierge, food and beverage services, front office, and sales to participate in the study. Through the Human Resource department, we distributed questionnaires to the employees, who were instructed to seal their completed questionnaire in a provided envelope and deposit the envelope in a customized box that was placed at the Human Resource office and which could only be opened by us.

While the use of self-report data introduces the possibility of common method bias, we adopted such an approach for several reasons. First, the independent and mediating variables dealt with respondents' own internal cognition and affect, for which the respondents themselves were the most appropriate informants. Second, because guest-directed citizenship behaviors and, in particular, counterproductive behaviors could be enacted when there were no coworkers around, third-party reports of such behaviors may be inaccurate or incomplete (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007). Nonetheless, to mitigate the possibility of social desirability bias influencing the results, and because of the sensitive nature of the questions, the questionnaire was anonymous and individual responses were kept confidential (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Of the 95 employees, 82 (or 86.3%) returned valid and usable questionnaires. Overall, 38 (46.3%) of the respondents had been with the hotel for more than a year, 45 (54.9%) were women, and 74 (90.2%) interacted with guests at least several times a week.

Measures. Guest-directed citizenship behaviors were measured with five items developed by Bettencourt and Brown (1997). Respondents indicated, on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (every day), how often they engaged in each of the listed behavior, an example of which was “voluntarily assisted guests even if it meant going beyond job requirements”. Guest-directed counterproductive behaviors were measured, on the same 5-point scale, with twelve items developed and validated by Hunter and Penney (2007). Examples of such behaviors include refusing a reasonable guest request, ignoring a guest, and insulting a guest.

Perspective taking and empathic concern toward guests were both measured with scales used in Axtell et al.’s (2007) study. Perspective taking was measured with four items (e.g., “I try to see things from the guests’ viewpoint”) that had respondents rate, using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (true to a very large extent), how truly each statement described them. Empathic concern was measured with three items using the same seven-point scale (e.g., “I feel concerned for the guests if they are experiencing difficulties”). Because prior research has demonstrated that males and longer-tenured workers engage in more counterproductive behaviors (e.g., R. A. Baron, Neuman, & Geddes, 1999), we controlled for gender and tenure. We also controlled for respondents’ frequency of guest interactions as this captures one’s opportunity to engage in either forms of discretionary behaviors and has been found to positively predict both outcomes (Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007). Finally, we controlled for respondents’ positive and negative affect at work, based on findings that positive affect predicted citizenship behaviors while negative affect predicted counterproductive behaviors (e.g., Dalal, 2005; Spector & Fox, 2002). These two variables were each measured with ten items from the Job-Related Affective Well-being Scale (Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000). The scale reliabilities of the multi-item variables were satisfactory, as indicated

along the diagonal in Table 1. Not surprisingly, the frequency of guest-directed citizenship behaviors, averaging 3.53, was higher than that for counterproductive behaviors, which averaged 1.42 across the respondents.

 Insert Table 1 about here

Analysis and Results

We adopted Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach to test the hypotheses. First, we found that perspective taking was significantly related to empathic concern ($b = .77, p < .01$), even after including the control variables. Furthermore, as presented in Table 2, perspective taking was positively related to guest-directed citizenship behaviors ($b = .21, p < .05$), offering support for Hypothesis 1. When empathic concern was added in the subsequent step, perspective taking became non-significant ($b = -.03, ns$), while empathic concern was positively related to citizenship behaviors ($b = .31, p < .05$). Thus, these results support the mediation effect proposed in Hypothesis 3. On the other hand, for the dependent variable of counterproductive behaviors, the results in Table 2 indicated that it was not significantly predicted by perspective taking ($b = -.03, ns$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 and, by implication, Hypothesis 4 were not supported.

 Insert Table 2 about here

We also conducted a more rigorous supplementary test of the hypothesized mediation model using the bootstrapping analysis recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The advantage of this approach, compared to the more conventional regression analyses and Sobel

test (Sobel, 1982), is that it does not require large samples, nor does it assume that the sampling distributions of the total and indirect effects are normal (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). For the citizenship behavior outcome, the bootstrap results supported a mediation model (and Hypothesis 3), in that the total indirect effect of perspective taking on citizenship behavior, mediated through empathic concern, was significant, with a point estimate of .24 and a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of .05 to .53. However, no mediation effect was found for the counterproductive behavior outcome (and Hypothesis 4), because the total indirect effect of perspective taking on counterproductive behavior, mediated through empathic concern, was -.08, with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of -.20 to .01.

Study 2: A Moderated Model of Empathy and Guest-Directed Counterproductive Behaviors

Despite the fact that both theory and tangential evidence led us to expect a relationship between perspective taking and counterproductive behaviors, results from the first study failed to support such a premise. Rather than dismissing the existence of such a link, however, we conducted a follow-up study to explore the possibility that this relationship may indeed exist, but only in certain situations. The notion that individual characteristics interact with situational factors to shape behavior is well-established in organizational research (e.g., Lewin, 1936; Schneider, 1983). These theories underscore the notion that both individual and situational differences can serve as boundary conditions, and personal variables may shape behaviors only in instances where the situation supports or provides cues for these personal variables to be expressed. Thus, drawing on an interactional psychology perspective and trait activation theory in particular, we argue that perspective taking will predict counterproductive behaviors only in the presence of trait-relevant situational cues, specifically interpersonal injustice from guests,

and we conducted a second study to examine the moderating role of this situational factor. An ancillary purpose of this second study was to replicate the findings from Study 1 relating to citizenship behaviors in two different samples and with peer-ratings of the discretionary behaviors. This would not only address the potential of same-source bias accounting for the results in that study but also strengthen the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Moderating Role of Interpersonal Injustice

One possible explanation for the non-significant relationship between perspective taking and counterproductive behaviors can be derived from trait activation theory and the role of situational triggers (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000). Trait activation theory focuses on the person-situation interaction and contends that behaviors are a response to trait-relevant cues arising from the situation (Lievens, Chasteen, Day, & Christiansen, 2006), such that “traits influence behavior only in relevant situations” (Kenrick & Funder, 1988, p. 29). To the extent that the situation provides cues that trigger a particular trait or individual attribute or provide opportunity for its expression, this attribute will then manifest in behavioral responses. In the context of counterproductive behaviors, because of the undesirability and costliness of these negative behaviors, organizational and normative constraints abound to discourage employees’ enactment of them, such as organizational guidelines and norms on how employees should and should not treat guests. In the presence of these constraints, the role of individual empathy as a deterrent of these behaviors is made less salient. As suggested by trait activation theory, however, empathy may become activated in the presence of situational cues that provide opportunity for its expression. We propose that one such facilitator is interpersonally unjust treatment from guests, that is, when guests fail to treat the employees with dignity and respect, and to refrain from personal attacks (Rupp & Spencer, 2006).

Specifically, in situations where employees are treated unfairly by guests, such injustice serves as a trigger for perspective-taking to become more salient. This is because the injustice attenuates the normative constraints that previously deterred employees from engaging in counterproductive behaviors (Skarlicki et al., 2008), especially given that the guests themselves have violated moral norms of interpersonal conduct (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). The diminution of such constraints in turn allows for perspective taking to become more salient, such that in the face of guest injustice, employees with higher perspective taking can better understand the guests' frustrations and feel more empathic concern for their plight. In turn, such concern decreases the employees' self-interest and their desire to avenge the injustice against them (Rupp, McCance, Spencer, & Sonntag, 2008), and be less inclined to engage in counterproductive behaviors in retaliation.

In contrast, in situations where guest injustice is low, the role of perspective taking is expected to be less salient in predicting empathic concern and, in turn, counterproductive behaviors. Beyond the fact that organizational rules and norms pre-empt the role of perspective taking, the lack of guest injustice also implies that guests do not exhibit behaviors manifesting their anger or frustration, and thus the need for employee perspective taking is lower. Furthermore, when guests treat employees fairly, such fair treatment may serve as an additional constraint on the influence that perspective taking has on counterproductive behavior "by restricting cues for its expression" (Tett & Burnett, 2003, p. 505), because the generalized norm of reciprocity obligates employees, even low-empathy ones, to reciprocate such fair treatment with similar behaviors, or at least refrain from harmful behavior (Gouldner, 1960). Consequently, we expect the relationship between perspective taking and counterproductive behaviors, mediated through empathic concern, to be weaker in low injustice situations. Overall,

we propose a moderated mediation model where the mediated relationship from perspective taking to empathic concern to counterproductive behaviors is stronger in situations with high guest injustice, and weaker in those with low guest injustice.²

Hypothesis 5: The negative relationship between perspective taking and guest-directed counterproductive behaviors, mediated through empathic concern, is moderated by interpersonal injustice. Specifically, the relationships from (a) perspective taking to empathic concern, and from (b) empathic concern to counterproductive behaviors are stronger when interpersonal injustice is high, and weaker when interpersonal injustice is low.

Methods

Participants and procedure. We collected data on the control, independent, mediating, and moderating variables from 111 customer-contact employees from two luxury hotels in Singapore belonging to two different international hotel chains. Employees were also provided three sets of survey packets measuring their guest-directed citizenship and counterproductive behaviors, and were asked to distribute these to three of their 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, employees generated a secret code comprising six alphanumeric characters and wrote this on their and the coworkers' questionnaires. The coworkers rated the incumbent on the two forms of discretionary behaviors.

Of the 58 customer-contact employees in the first hotel, 46 (79.3%) returned valid and usable questionnaires. Thirty-six (78.3%) of them had been with the hotel for more than a year, 43 (93.5%) interacted with guests at least a few times a week, and half of them were women. In terms of completed peer ratings of the employees' discretionary behaviors, 23 (50.0%)

employees were rated by all three coworkers, 9 (19.6%) were rated by two coworkers, and 4 (8.7%) were rated by one coworker. In total, we had usable peer ratings on 36 of the 46 responding employees (78.3%) from the first hotel. In the second hotel, 65 (89.0%) of the 73 employees responded to the survey; 44 (67.7%) of them had been with the hotel for more than a year, 55 (84.6%) interacted with guests at least a few times a week, and 30 (46.2%) of them were women. Thirty-three (50.8%) employees were rated by all three coworkers, 13 (20.0%) were rated by two coworkers, and 11 (16.9%) were rated by one coworker. This yielded usable peer ratings on 57 of the 65 employees (87.7%) from the second hotel. Across both hotels, each coworker had, on average, known the target employee for 2.51 years.

Measures. The control, independent, mediating, and dependent variables were measured with the same items used in Study 1. The moderating variable, interpersonal injustice, was measured with four items adapted from Colquitt (2001) that measured interpersonal justice. Respondents indicated on a 7-point scale how much they agreed with each item (e.g., “The guests treat me in a polite manner”). We then reversed-scored the items to arrive at respondents’ evaluation of injustice. The descriptive statistics and correlations among these variables are presented in Table 3. Because 83.9% of respondents were rated on the dependent variables by two or more coworkers, we also assessed the appropriateness of aggregating coworkers’ ratings for each individual by computing interrater reliability using James, Demaree, and Wolf’s (1984, 1993) r_{wg} formula. The r_{wg} values for citizenship and counterproductive behaviors exceeded the .70 cutoff for interrater agreement, with median and mean values of 0.89 and 0.70 respectively for citizenship behaviors, and 0.99 and 0.97 respectively for counterproductive behaviors.

 Insert Table 3 about here

Analysis and Results

To test the mediation analysis involving guest-directed citizenship behaviors, we again used the bootstrapping analysis recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The results supported Hypothesis 1 in that the total effect of perspective taking on guest-directed citizenship behaviors was significant ($b = 0.15, p < .05$). However, the indirect effect of perspective taking on citizenship behavior, mediated through empathic concern, was not significant, in that the path from perspective taking to empathic concern was significant ($b = .24, p < .05$), but the path from empathic concern to citizenship behavior was not ($b = -.03, ns$). Overall, the indirect effect had a point estimate of $-.01$ and a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of $-.07$ to $.04$, and failed to support Hypothesis 3.

In terms of predicting counterproductive behaviors, because Hypothesis 5 involved a moderated mediation model where empathic concern was a mediator and interpersonal injustice a moderator, we used Edwards and Lambert's (2007) path analytical framework to provide a more holistic test of the model. Compared to the more commonly used piecemeal approach where moderation and mediation are each tested in separate regression models, and the moderated causal steps approach advocated by Muller and colleagues (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005), the path analytical approach offers several advantages. First, it allows moderation to be tested for each path of the mediated model, whereas the other two approaches test moderation for only one of the paths, thereby offering only a partial test of moderation. Additionally, this approach can estimate the indirect effect of perspective taking that is transmitted through the mediator on counterproductive behaviors, and shows how this effect varies across different levels of the moderator (Edwards & Lambert, 2007).

Our hypothesized model is consistent with Edwards and Lambert's (2007) first-and-second-stage moderation model. We first conducted a regression analysis that regressed empathic concern on the control variables, perspective taking, interpersonal injustice, and the multiplicative term of perspective taking and interpersonal justice. Then, we regressed counterproductive behaviors on the control variables, perspective taking, empathic concern, interpersonal injustice, and the multiplicative term of empathic concern and interpersonal injustice. Because these equations included products of regression coefficients, the bootstrapping method was used to generate 1000 bootstrap samples to compute bias-corrected confidence intervals, which were then used to test the indirect effects.

Table 4 presents the simple effects of the two stages of the mediation model at low and high levels of interpersonal injustice, as well as the differences in these effects. When interpersonal injustice was higher, the first stage of the model, from perspective taking to empathic concern, was significantly positive ($b = 0.41, p < .01$), and the second stage from empathic concern to counterproductive behaviors was also significant ($b = -0.17, p < .05$). In total, the indirect effect was significant ($-.07$; 99% bias-corrected confidence interval of -0.15 to -0.02). However, when interpersonal injustice was low, the first and second stages were both not significant ($b = 0.16$ and 0.00 respectively, *ns*), which resulted in a non-significant indirect effect ($.00$, 95% bias-corrected confidence interval of -0.01 to 0.02). Comparing differences between high and low injustice levels, we see that even though the first stage of the model (from perspective taking to empathic concern) was significant at high interpersonal injustice and not significant at low injustice, this difference was not statistically significant (95% bias-corrected confidence interval of -0.59 to 0.07). On the other hand, for the second stage of the model from empathic concern to counterproductive behaviors, the difference across the two levels of

injustice was significant, with 99% bias-corrected confidence interval of 0.02 to 0.33. Overall, the difference in indirect effect of perspective taking on counterproductive behaviors was significant and in the predicted direction (99% bias-corrected confidence interval of 0.01 to 0.16), and taken together, these results offer support for the moderated mediation model proposed in Hypothesis 5.

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion

Contributions and Research Implications

The present findings underscore the importance of employees' perspective taking toward guests in the hospitality setting and offers support for an empathy model of guest-directed discretionary behaviors. We extended the two-stage model of empathic mediation to the field setting, and not only demonstrated the role of perspective taking in predicting self- and peer-reported citizenship behaviors, but also found some support for the mediating role of empathic concern. Furthermore, we established the situational context under which perspective taking predicted counterproductive behaviors via the mediating role of empathic concern. In doing so, we offer several contributions to extant literature.

First, we address a phenomenon that has been relatively under-studied thus far – guest-directed counterproductive behaviors – and uncover not only a new antecedent, perspective taking, but also a nuanced perspective of how and when this antecedent relates to such behaviors. Specifically, we found that perspective taking for the guests inhibited such behaviors via empathic concern only when the relevant situational trigger, in the form of interpersonally unjust

treatment from guests, was present to arouse the role of perspective taking and to provide the opportunity for its expression, specifically by increasing feelings of empathic concern, which in turn inhibited the performance of guest-directed counterproductive behaviors.

When interpersonal injustice was low, perspective taking did not predict empathic concern or counterproductive behaviors, an indication that the presence of organizational rules and reciprocity norms made the role of perspective taking less necessary or relevant in preventing such behaviors. However, when employees felt that they were treated unjustly by customers, the presence of this situational trigger aroused the role of perspective taking, such that employees with higher perspective taking felt more empathic concern for the guests and, in turn, were less inclined to engage in guest-directed counterproductive behaviors. Supporting the notion that “situations vary in their capacity to abet or constrain human agency” (Johns, 2006, p. 387), this finding underscores the need to consider contextual factors when examining the link between empathy and counterproductive behaviors, a perspective that has not been illustrated until now. The fact that this relationship was found using peer-reported counterproductive behaviors, which are presumably underreported since many forms of such behaviors are enacted in the absence of observers, provides a conservative test of this model and offers confidence that these findings are not simply results of methodological artifact.

A second contribution of this study lies in the mediating mechanism that links perspective taking to discretionary behaviors. In the context of counterproductive behaviors, Study 2 demonstrated the mediating role of empathic concern in a high interpersonal injustice situation, providing support to the two-stage model of empathic mediation advanced previously. Empathic concern also mediated the relationship between perspective taking and self-reported citizenship behaviors in Study 1, but this was not replicated in Study 2 using peer-reported

citizenship behaviors. This finding mirrors that in Axtell et al.'s study (2007) where, despite a larger sample size than that in Study 2, empathic concern did not play a mediating role for manager-reported helping outcomes. We offer several explanations for this. First, peer observations of guest-directed behaviors are likely to be underreported given that such behaviors are enacted toward guests and may be undertaken in the absence of coworkers who would witness and rate such acts (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007). Hence, the effect of perspective taking on citizenship behaviors, as well as the mediating role of empathic concern, may indeed be stronger than currently observed with peer-ratings of citizenship behaviors, and the findings based on self-ratings may indeed be more accurate than those with peer-ratings. Some support for this argument is provided in a recent study in which Spector and colleagues noted that “incumbents show better discriminant validity (and perhaps better accuracy) among measures of different aspects of their jobs than do other sources” (Spector, Bauer, & Fox, 2010, p. 782).

A second explanation is that the relationship between perspective taking and citizenship behaviors may be partially mediated by some cognitive, non-affective mechanisms. For instance, employees' perspective taking helps them better understand guests' expectations and experiences, which may then enhance their awareness of possible actions that are necessary to enhance guests' experience (i.e., a cognitive process), and such awareness may ultimately contribute to more frequent and successful enactment of citizenship behaviors toward the guests. Alternatively, perspective taking could relate to citizenship behaviors via an attribution process (Parker & Axtell, 2001), such that employees with higher perspective taking are more likely to attribute guests' positive behaviors to dispositional factors and negative behaviors to situational factors, and thus become more inclined to help the guests.

Finally, the fact that the two studies were conducted in Singapore warrants some discussion of the cultural implications. To the extent that our findings relating to guest-directed citizenship behaviors replicate those in earlier research (Axtell et al., 2007), this offers some evidence that the role of perspective taking in shaping helping behaviors is similar across different cultural contexts. However, because our hypothesized model linking empathy to counterproductive behaviors has not been previously tested, cross-cultural differences cannot be assessed. Nonetheless, we speculate that cultural factors, in particular the notion of cultural tightness (vs. looseness), may be especially relevant in the context of discretionary behaviors. Cultural tightness captures the strength of social norms and a society's tolerance for deviance from norms (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006), and because discretionary behaviors are, by definition, behaviors that vary from employees' formal job prescriptions, this cultural dimension is likely to influence such behaviors, such that in cultures that are culturally tighter, such as Singapore's (Gelfand et al., 2006), employees' enactment as well as reporting of citizenship and, in particular, counterproductive behaviors will be lower than those in culturally looser societies. The fact that such lower figures make detecting relationships more difficult suggests that the significant findings demonstrated in our study would be even stronger in studies conducted in culturally looser societies (Bobko, 2001).

Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study suggest that hotels and other organizations in the hospitality industry with empathic employees are more likely to generate customer goodwill. How then should organizations enhance employees' perspective taking toward guests? One possible way suggested by prior research is by appointing mentors or role models who can provide guidance and training to employees on how to engage in perspective

taking. Having the opportunity to observe a role model in action not only provides employees with specific know-how on how to take on another party's perspective, but also provides them the confidence that such an ability can be acquired and subsequently exercised. Another viable strategy is to enhance employees' job characteristics such as job autonomy and job enrichment, which have been previously demonstrated to augment employees' perspective taking (Axtell et al., 2007; Parker & Axtell, 2001).

Additionally, educational and training programs to help customer-contact employees improve their empathy and interpersonal skills (N. D. Feshbach & Feshbach, 1982), and to develop their sensitivity to nonverbal cues, have been shown to be effective in increasing participants' empathy (Hojat, 2009). Finally, to the extent that empathy also has trait-like elements, organizations may want to consider assessing job applicants' trait empathy (Davis, 1983) as part of the selection process. Organizations can also consider recruiting workers as contract staff or on a probationary basis before deciding whether to bring them on as full-time employees, so as to better assess the workers' ability to empathize with customers over a longer period of time.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all empirical research, the studies here are not without limitations. First, because of the cross-sectional design of both studies, we are unable to determine the direction of causality. While we hypothesized that employees' empathy will result in their enacting certain behaviors, it is plausible that their behaviors could have caused them to retroactively rationalize that they do or do not empathize with the guests. Second, because Study 1 relied on self-reported measures of all variables, we cannot rule out the possibility that the observed relationship between perspective taking and citizenship behaviors is an artifact of common method bias.

However, this risk is largely mitigated by the fact that the same relationship was observed in Study 2 using peer-ratings of citizenship behaviors. Similarly, the threat of common method bias accounting for the results on counterproductive behaviors is low, given that such behaviors were measured using peer-reports, and especially since such a methodological bias does not serve to explain the moderating effects that we found. Third, because the two studies are conducted with upscale, luxury hotels that have stringent organizational policies, controls, and programs to ensure high service standards, the frequency of counterproductive behaviors may be lower than the norm and, in turn, reduce the likelihood of detecting such behaviors and their antecedents. The presence of these organizational controls also serves to constrain individual discretion and reduce the role of individual factors, such as perspective taking, from shaping employee action, which then suggests that the relationships observed here may be even stronger in other less upscale establishments. Finally, the relatively small sample sizes in both studies contribute to a higher risk of type II error, sampling error, and unstable parameter estimates, and thus the results may not be representative of larger samples. The small sample sizes may also compromise the statistical power to detect significant effects, particularly in the context of moderation, but the fact that we did find support for the moderating role of interpersonal injustice in the second study suggests that our sample size was adequate.

To address these concerns, we encourage subsequent research to replicate the present results with larger samples and across a larger cross-section of the hospitality and service industries. This would not only serve to validate the current findings but can potentially reveal important situational factors that can accentuate or diminish the role of perspective taking in shaping employees' discretionary behaviors. Another avenue for research is to explore the mediating mechanism(s) through which perspective taking relates to citizenship behaviors.

While we hypothesized that empathic concern would serve as a mediator, we found support for this only in the first but not the second study. While we offered several possible explanations for this mixed finding, we also encourage subsequent research to reexamine the role of empathic concern and explore other possible mediators. Finally, future attempts to establish the causal sequence of the empathic process is encouraged. For instance, researchers can use an experience sampling methodology to determine individuals' momentary emotional reactions of empathic concern as a response to their perspective taking, and in turn assess the discretionary behaviors that ensue from such emotional response. Alternatively, an experimental approach akin to that used in social psychological studies on empathy would be appropriate as well.

In conclusion, our study extends research in both guest-directed counterproductive and citizenship behaviors. We present and find evidence for an empathy model of counterproductive behaviors whereby perspective taking constrained such behaviors in instances of interpersonal injustice, and the linkage is mediated through empathic concern. Additionally, we replicated the positive relationship between perspective taking and citizenship behaviors in a field setting, and found some support for the mediating role of empathic concern. Overall, this study provides a nuanced perspective on the role of empathy in shaping guest-directed discretionary behaviors, and underscores the organizational value of developing employee empathy toward guests.

Footnotes

¹ Another model that presents emotion as a mediator in the stressor-to-discretionary workplace behavior relationship is Spector and Fox's (2002, 2005) emotion-centered model. However, the two-stage model of empathic mediation differs from the emotion-centered model in several ways. First, the emotion-centered model focuses on general job affect as mediators, while the current model focuses on a much more specific form of emotion (empathic concern) toward a specific target (customers). Second, Spector and Fox's model conceptualize empathy as a personality trait distinct from emotions, while we view empathy as having both cognitive and affective forms, with the affective form (empathic concern) mediating the relationship between perspective taking and discretionary behaviors. Finally, while the emotion-centered model contends that positive affect predicts citizenship behaviors while negative affect predicts counterproductive behaviors, we hypothesize that empathic concern toward a specific party can predict *both* citizenship and counterproductive behaviors toward that party. Thus, our hypothesized model is distinct from the emotion-centered model and yet not inconsistent or contradictory to the prescriptions of the latter.

² While one may expect interpersonal injustice to also moderate the relationship between perspective taking and citizenship behaviors, we contend that this is not the case because unlike counterproductive behaviors, citizenship behaviors are desired in organizations, and thus there is little need for situational triggers to exist before perspective taking can play a part in enhancing such behaviors. To test our contention, we conducted supplementary analyses that included interpersonal injustice as a moderator in the mediated relationship between perspective taking and citizenship behaviors and did not find a significant moderating effect.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations among Variables: Study 1

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	0.43	0.50									
2. Tenure	1.91	1.20	.31**								
3. Frequency of guest interactions	3.76	0.67	.24*	.07							
4. Positive affect	3.21	0.61	.24*	.12	.19	(.84)					
5. Negative affect	2.50	0.66	.05	-.16	.02	-.17	(.86)				
6. Perspective taking	5.58	1.00	.30**	.07	.16	.25*	-.22*	(.91)			
7. Empathic concern	5.57	1.11	.27*	.14	.30**	.33**	-.24*	.63**	(.92)		
8. Guest-directed citizenship behaviors	3.53	0.96	.14	.02	.41**	.20	-.11	.28*	.41**	(.83)	
9. Guest-directed counterproductive behaviors	1.42	0.35	-.18	.03	-.13	-.16	.21	-.19	-.33**	-.08	(.72)

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

Note: Numbers along diagonals (in parentheses) are reliability coefficients.

Table 2

Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Citizenship and Counterproductive

Behaviors: Study 1

Variables	Citizenship behaviors		Counterproductive behaviors	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Constant	-.07	.12	1.47	1.49
Gender	-.09	-.05	-.11	-.11
Tenure	-.00	-.03	.03	.04
Frequency of guest interactions	.51**	.42**	-.04	-.01
Positive affect	.17	.10	-	-
Negative affect	-	-	.11*	.10
Perspective taking	.21*	-.03	-.03	.05
Empathic concern		.31*		-.11*
R^2	.22**	.27**	.10	.14*
ΔR^2 from prior step	-	.05*	-	.04*

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

Note: Numbers represent unstandardized regression coefficients.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations among Variables: Study 2

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Hotel	0.41	0.50											
2. Gender	0.52	0.50	-.03										
3. Tenure	2.47	1.34	.38**	.04									
4. Frequency of guest interactions	3.59	0.83	.29**	-.14	.17								
5. Positive affect	3.05	0.62	.24*	-.10	.21*	.28**	(.79)						
6. Negative affect	2.14	0.61	-.27**	.02	-.17	-.27**	-.35**	(.83)					
7. Perspective taking	5.73	1.15	.26**	.02	.11	.31**	.34**	-.29**	(.91)				
8. Empathic concern	5.70	1.04	.35**	.01	.26**	.22*	.41**	-.53**	.44**	(.82)			
9. Interpersonal injustice	2.88	1.17	-.06	.06	-.10	-.16	-.21*	.35**	-.38**	-.38**	(.86)		
10. Guest-directed citizenship behaviors (peer-report)	3.75	0.79	.21*	.07	.19	.08	.18	-.09	.27**	.14	-.04	(.90)	
11. Guest-directed counterproductive behaviors (peer-report)	1.30	0.25	-.14	-.18	-.15	-.03	-.19	.20	-.04	-.29**	.07	-.03	(.77)

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

Note: Numbers along diagonals (in parentheses) are reliability coefficients.

Table 4

Analysis of Simple Effects at High and Low Interpersonal Injustice

	First stage (Perspective-taking to empathic concern)	Second stage (Empathic concern to counterproductive behaviors)	Total indirect effect
High injustice	0.41**	-0.17**	-0.07**
Low injustice	0.16	0.00	0.00
Difference	-0.25	0.17**	0.07**

** $p < .01$.

Note: Numbers represent unstandardized regression coefficients.