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Unpacking the Relationship Between Customer (In)Justice and Employee Turnover Outcomes: Can Fair Supervisor Treatment Reduce Employees' Emotional Turmoil?

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Abstract

Service employees can experience considerable resource demands from customers and supervisors in their day-to-day work. Guided by the conservation of resources (COR) perspective and organizational justice research, we explored the relationship between interpersonal injustice (e.g., being treated with low dignity and respect) by customers and employee turnover (e.g., voluntary turnover, turnover intentions). Specifically, we proposed that customer interpersonal injustice relates positively to employee turnover outcomes through a process first involving employee experiences of negative emotions, and second, employee emotional exhaustion. We also examined whether supervisor interpersonal justice mitigates this process by providing emotional resources that buffer the demands of customer interpersonal injustice. We evaluated these predictions in a programmatic series of three complementary field studies involving retail employees (Study 1, $N = 263$), restaurant employees (Study 2, $N = 206$), and contact center employees (Study 3, $N = 317$). The results showed that (a) customer interpersonal injustice relates positively to employees' negative emotions, (b) employee negative emotions are positively associated with emotional exhaustion, and (c) emotional exhaustion relates to higher employee turnover outcomes. Our results also show that the indirect effect of customer interpersonal injustice on employee turnover intentions (Study 2) and voluntary turnover (Study 3) is weaker when employees perceive more (vs. less) supervisor interpersonal justice. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords

customer interpersonal injustice, organizational justice, voluntary turnover, conservation of resources theory, conditional indirect effects

Turnover can undermine customer service quality in service organizations (e.g., retail stores, restaurants, and contact centers) where annual employee turnover can range from 26% to 200% and reduce customer loyalty, the service experience, and brand image (Batt and Colvin 2011; Subramony and Holtom 2012; Subramony et al. 2017). Thus, *voluntary turnover*, defined as an employee's decision to leave a job, is an ongoing dilemma for service managers because high levels of employee turnover can significantly reduce firm performance (Holtom and Burch 2016). Considerable research indicates that negative interactions involving individuals within organizations (e.g., coworkers, supervisors) predict employee voluntary turnover (Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000). Far less research examines the relationship between customer interactions and employee turnover behaviors. This oversight is noteworthy for two reasons. First, service employees often experience customer mistreatment—low-quality interpersonal treatment from customers (e.g., aggression, rudeness, Koopmann et al. 2015; rage, Surachartkumtonkun, McColl-Kennedy, and Patterson 2015). Second, the North American service workforce is expanding, highlighting a growing need to understand this effect (Pugh and Subramony 2016).

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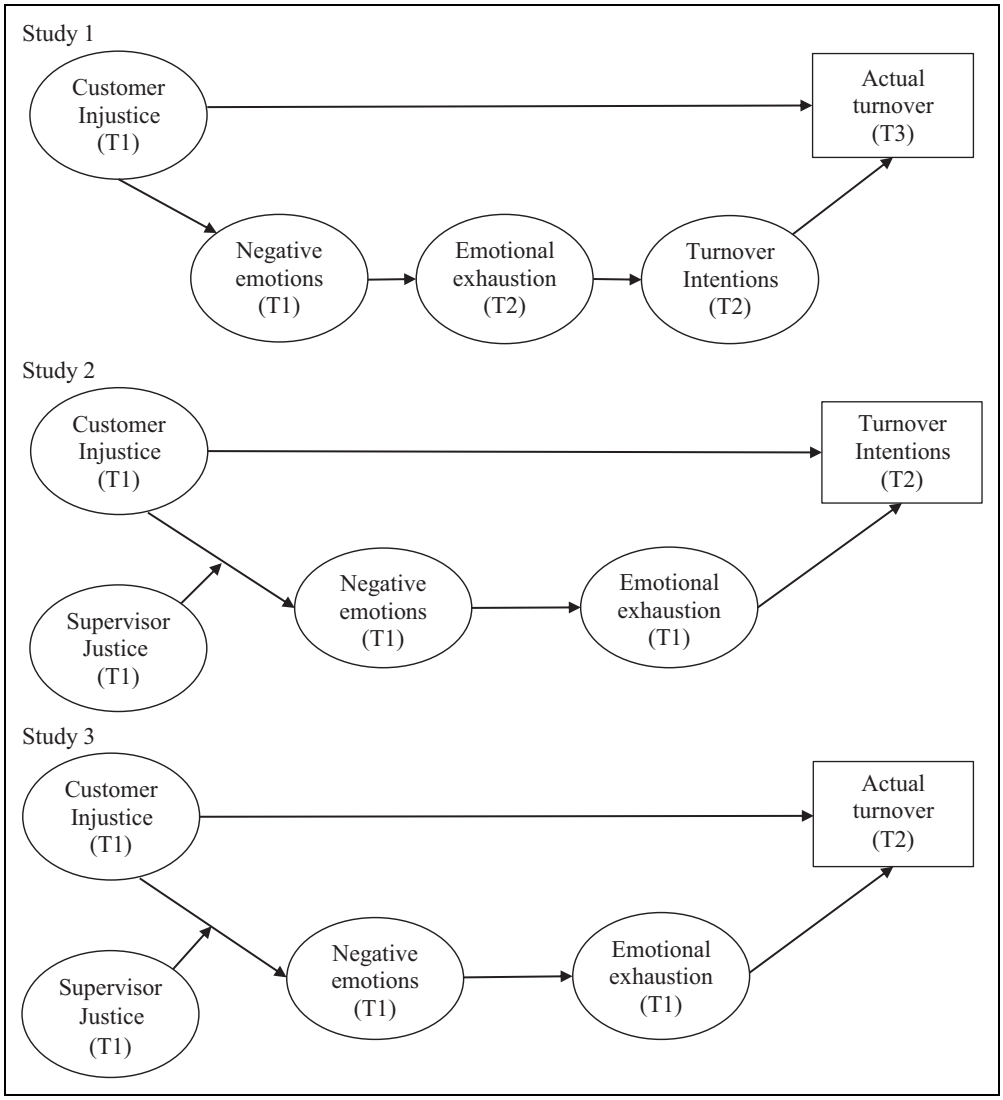

Figure 1. Proposed indirect and conditional indirect effect models. For clarity, the main effect from supervisor interpersonal justice predicting turnover intentions (Study 2) and voluntary turnover (Study 3) is not shown.

Customers can be a more frequent source of negative events (e.g., aggression, incivility, hostility, and rage) for employees than other sources such as coworkers (Grandey, Kern, and Frone 2007; Gong, Yi, and Choi 2014). Employees report that 43% of the mistreatment they encounter originates from customers who might be frustrated by aspects of the service delivery process (Grandey, Tam, and Brauburger 2002; Voorhees et al. 2009). Customer mistreatment can diminish employee well-being resulting in emotional exhaustion (Grandey, Dickter, and Sin 2004), negative moods, poorer physical health (Sliter et al. 2011), lower service performance (Rafaeli et al. 2012), lower employee job satisfaction (Gong, Yi, and Choi 2014), and greater employee sabotage that targets customers (e.g., Wang et al. 2011).

Across three studies, we examined the effects of customer interpersonal injustice, defined as the degree to which employees perceive that customers (e.g., callers, clients, guests) treat them with a lack of dignity, respect, and politeness (Greenberg 1993; Rupp and Spencer 2006), on employee turnover. Examples of customer interpersonal injustice include customers making demeaning comments toward employees, being unreasonably demanding, and yelling at employees.

Along with their supervisor, service employees can view customers as a second manager (Grandey et al. 2010). Interpersonal (un)fairness from either customers or supervisors could influence employee outcomes and, in turn, organizational performance. While research has examined employee reactions to customer injustice (Rupp and Spencer 2006), less is known about its effect on turnover intentions and actual turnover (for exceptions, see Holmvall and Sidhu 2007; Li and Zhou 2013). We build on these studies by proposing that negative emotions and emotional exhaustion can help explain the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and employee turnover outcomes including turnover intentions and actual turnover. We present our conceptual models in Figure 1.

We contribute to service research in three ways. First, we clarify the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice, a form of customer mistreatment (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker 2008; Wang et al. 2011), and employee turnover outcomes. Second, we examine whether customer interpersonal injustice fosters employees' activated and unpleasant negative emotions. Employees can, in perceiving continual customer interpersonal injustice, develop an aggregated view of the emotions they experience arising from this unfairness. This distinction considers the experience of emotions as a *social entity* (Cropanzano et al. 2001) accumulating over time and across different customers, as opposed to emotions as an *event* associated with a specific customer service interaction. Entity-level negative emotions represent the emotional norms that employees experience as a consequence of customer interpersonal injustice.

We draw on conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll 1989) to explain the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and turnover outcomes. We propose that negative emotions arising from customer interpersonal injustice deplete employees' emotional resources contributing to their emotional exhaustion (Maslach 1993). Resource loss resulting in a resource-depleted state, with lower stress resistance, motivates employees to quit (or think about quitting). We extend research on emotional exhaustion as a theoretical explanation of the relationship between customer verbal aggression and turnover intentions (e.g., Li and Zhou 2013) by integrating entity-level negative emotions into our theorizing. In short, we propose that a serial indirect effect through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion exists in the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and turnover outcomes.

Third, we examine the role of supervisor interpersonal justice (Bies and Moag 1986) as a boundary condition influencing employee perceptions of negative emotions arising from customer interpersonal injustice. Supervisors are a highly salient source of employee emotional resources in the workplace (Greenberg 2006). Employees perceive greater supervisor interpersonal justice when supervisors provide information and emotional support improving how employees feel about their at-work experiences (Colquitt and Greenberg 2003). Consistent with COR, we propose that *supervisor interpersonal justice* could provide emotional resources to employees to offset the negative emotions arising from customer interpersonal injustice. COR supports this logic suggesting that employees experiencing resource loss can utilize other resources (e.g., socio-emotional resources from supervisors) to offset resource depletion. While research has examined supervisor justice in the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and customer-directed sabotage (Skarlicki et al. 2016), less is known about the interplay among customer interpersonal injustice, supervisor interpersonal justice, and turnover outcomes. We also offer practical insights about how organizations can reduce employee turnover.

Theory and Hypotheses

Customer Interpersonal Injustice and Turnover

COR theory (Hobfoll 1989, 2002) helps explain both the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and turnover outcomes and the roles of entity-level negative emotions and emotional exhaustion in this relationship. The COR perspective assumes individuals have a finite supply of mental, physical, and emotional resources to handle job demands, such as customer demands (Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll 2001). Consequently, people strive to retain, protect, and build resources (Hobfoll 1989). When individuals experience potential or actual resource loss, their stress increases and they protect resources through coping strategies including allocating resources to prevent loss, reframing threats as challenges, and devaluing exposed resources (Hobfoll 1989).

Mistreatment and verbal aggression can contribute significantly to employee stress (Almeida 2005; Grandey et al. 2012). The severity of these resource threats can lead to secondary resource loss wherein coping responses fail to replenish the initial resources consumed to address the threat (Diefendorff, Richard, and Croyle 2006; Lewis 2005). Prior COR research indicates that customer verbal aggression (Grandey, Dickter, and Sin 2004), customer incivility (Kern and Grandey 2009; van Jaarsveld, Walker, and Skarlicki 2010), customer-related social stressors (Dorman and Zapf 2004), and customer interpersonal injustice (Rupp and Spencer 2006) consume employee resources. We suggest that the experience of customer interpersonal injustice over time is a resource threat. Employees can decide to leave an organization to protect and recover resources because they have difficulty coping with resource loss.

Our logic is consistent with research on the relationship between unfairness originating within organizations and employee withdrawal. Lim, Cortina, and Magley (2008), for example, found that coworker and supervisor incivility, a process that affects employees through interpersonal injustice perceptions (Andersson and Pearson 1999), were positively associated with turnover intentions. Further, empirical research on (a) customer verbal aggression (Li and Zhou 2013), (b) customer incivility (Wilson and Holmvall 2013), and (c) customer interactional injustice (Holmvall and Sidhu 2007) suggests that employees exposed to more customer mistreatment report higher turnover intentions. Studies, however, have yet to examine how customer interpersonal injustice relates to actual employee turnover and how customer unfairness functions in conjunction with supervisor fairness. The following hypothesis replicates and extends research on how customer interpersonal injustice influences turnover outcomes.

Hypothesis 1: Customer interpersonal injustice is positively associated with voluntary turnover (1a; Study 1 and Study 3) and turnover intentions (1b; Study 2).

The Indirect Effect of Negative Emotions and Emotional Exhaustion

Customer interpersonal injustice can trigger negative employee emotions by: (a) impeding the employee's goal of providing high quality customer service, and (b) detracting from the employee's preferred state of being treated with dignity and respect. Empirical studies indicate that customer mistreatment can arouse negative employee emotions (Rupp and Spencer 2006). We theorized that both customer interpersonal injustice and negative emotions exist as entity-level constructs (Cropanzano et al. 2001). Entity-level customer interpersonal injustice refers to an employee's perception of customer unfairness experiences aggregated over days and across encounters. Moreover, employees also develop an entity-level assessment of the negative emotions they feel as a result of customer interpersonal justice. Entity-level negative emotions represent an employee's general tendency to experience emotions rather than the emotions associated with the specific emotion-evoking events.

Emotionally insensitive attitudes and actions at work can lead to strong, energy-draining negative emotions (Maitlis 2008) that can influence employees' emotional outbursts, rude, and abrasive behavior, disturbed sleep, and organizational withdrawal (Gilliland, Steiner, and Skarlicki 2007; Goldman 2008). Negative emotions are a direct measure of employee reactions to interpersonal injustice because interpersonal injustice can violate the "sacred self" and result in a severe emotional experience (Bies 2001). At an event level, customer interpersonal injustice can result in discrete emotions such as anger (Rupp and Spencer 2006). More generally, however, negative emotions (e.g., anger and frustration) can contribute to withdrawal behaviors (Hanisch and Hulin 1991). We theorized that entity-level negative emotions, rather than specific event-level emotions, are likely to be associated with turnover outcomes.

Emotional exhaustion is a central component of burnout indicating the depletion of physical and emotional resources (Maslach and Jackson 1986) that, in turn, can lead to turnover intentions (Lee and Ashforth 1993) and voluntary turnover (Lee and Ashforth 1996). COR theory supports a resource-based explanation of processes linking customer interpersonal injustice and turnover because employees can react to resource loss by trying to recover lost resources, or taking steps to reduce resource drain (Hobfoll 1989, 2002).

We reasoned that the more (vs. fewer) negative emotions employees perceive that they have experienced from customer injustice, the greater the likelihood that these energy-draining emotions are associated with emotional exhaustion (Hobfoll and Shirom 2001). Hobfoll and Freedy (1993) note that, consistent with COR theory, work demands including regulating one's emotions can deplete psychological resources that, in turn, can contribute to emotional exhaustion (Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice 2007). Employees who regularly experience negative emotions might also develop difficulties coping with emotions, triggering secondary resource loss, and attempting to protect resources in response to primary resource loss. Secondary resource loss can result in individuals using ineffective approaches to cope that consume resources more rapidly (Hobfoll 2002) further contributing to emotional exhaustion.

We proposed that customer interpersonal injustice relates to voluntary turnover through its effect on aggregate employee perceptions of negative emotions. When employees develop a norm regarding negative emotions associated with customer interactions, it indicates resource loss that can be associated with emotional exhaustion, a resource-depleted state. From COR theory, we know that resource-depleted employees search for options to minimize resource loss. Thus, quitting becomes a viable option to withdraw from emotion-depleting work by both preventing further resource depletion and ending the cycle of primary and secondary resource loss that service employees confront. This line of reasoning leads to the following hypothesis.

> **Hypothesis 2:** The indirect effect of customer interpersonal injustice on turnover outcomes (voluntary turnover, turnover intentions) occurs through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion.

The Moderating Role of Supervisor Interpersonal Justice

On organizational frontlines, customers, and supervisors are sources of interpersonal (in)justice for the service workforce (Skarlicki et al. 2016). The multifoci justice perspective (Cropanzano et al. 2001) offers theoretical support for examining supervisor interpersonal justice in our model proposing that (in)justice sources affect target responses to (un)fair treatment, influencing target reactions towards the source (Lavelle, Rupp, and Brockner 2007; Rupp and Paddock 2010). Supervisors can influence the ongoing emotions that employees experience in organizations more than other within-organization justice sources because they are the organization's "face" and employees' primary interpersonal link to the organization (Fassina, Jones, and Uggerslev 2008). Thus, supervisors can be an important employee resource because fair treatment from supervisors can enhance employee perceptions that their supervisor values their efforts and well-being (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber 2011).

Fair treatment by an authority figure is a socioemotional resource because it signals one's status, sense of dignity, and self-esteem (Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler 1989). As such, supervisor justice can reduce the negative impact of customer injustice by providing additional resources to offset the negative emotions employees can experience in these encounters (Wang et al. 2011). Moreover, supervisors have relatively more status than coworkers and are more familiar with employees than customers (Grandey et al. 2010). Thus, we reasoned that employees can simultaneously view one source as unjust (customers) and another source as just (supervisors; Lavelle et al. 2015; Tepper 2000). Consistent with the multifoci model of justice (Lavelle, Rupp, and Brockner 2007), we focused on employee reactions to customer interpersonal injustice and the

potential for supervisor interpersonal justice to buffer employee reactions to customer interpersonal injustice over and above other internal sources of justice.

We reasoned that supervisors, through fair treatment of employees, provide emotional and social resources that reduce negative emotions (Halbesleben et al. 2014; ten Brummelhuis and Bakker 2012). External resources such as fairness from supervisors are "the major vehicle by which individuals' resources are widened outside of the limited domain of resources that are contained within the self" (Hobfoll et al. 1990, p. 467). From COR theory, erosion of these resources reduces employees' stress resistance and emotion regulation, leading them to experience more negative emotions associated with customer interpersonal injustice.

We proposed that fair interpersonal treatment from an employee's supervisor alters this mechanism such that employees reporting more (vs. less) fair supervisor treatment are better able to regulate their emotions and resist stress which, in turn, can lessen the negative emotions associated with customer interpersonal injustice. Supervisor fairness also provides a means to acquire new emotional and social resources which can potentially buffer employee reactions to stress at work (Greenberg, 2006). Indeed, research has shown that supervisor fairness has an important influence on the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and customer-directed sabotage (Skarlicki et al. 2016). However, research has overlooked its influence on the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and turnover outcomes.

In summary, we predicted supervisor interpersonal fairness alters the indirect effect of customer interpersonal injustice on negative emotions. That is, the indirect relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and turnover outcomes (via negative emotions and emotional exhaustion) is weaker when employees perceive higher (vs. lower) levels of supervisor fairness. Employees who perceive they are being fairly treated by supervisors experience fewer negative emotions related to customer interpersonal injustice because fair treatment from supervisors provides socioemotional resources to employees. Thus, we hypothesized:

> **Hypothesis 3:** The indirect relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and turnover outcomes (through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion) is moderated by supervisor interpersonal justice such that the indirect effect is weaker under conditions of high (vs. low) supervisor interpersonal justice. Employees perceiving high (vs. low) supervisor interpersonal justice experience fewer negative emotions from customer interpersonal injustice.

Method

We tested our hypotheses with three field studies of service employees involving: (1) 420 retail employees (Study 1), (2) 363 restaurant employees enrolled in a food safety and hygiene course (Study 2), and (3) 940 customer service representatives employed in an outsourced contact center (Study 3). Studies 1 and 2 were undertaken in the Philippines, whereas Study 3 was undertaken in Canada. The brief and episodic service encounters evaluated in the three studies were consistent with the *pseudo encounters* that Gutek (1995) describes in her typology of service relationships and encounters. In Study 1, retail employees interact with 100–200 customers per shift while in Study 2, restaurant employees interact with 250–350 customers per day while in Study 3 contact center employees handled 70–100 calls per day. The customer and service employee communication channel differed across studies with face-to-face interactions in Studies 1 and 2, and voice interactions in Study 3, enabling us to examine whether employees react differentially depending on communication channels (Baranik et al. 2017; Lavelle et al. 2019; Walker, van Jaarsveld, and Skarlicki 2014).

Study 1: Customer Interpersonal Injustice and Retail Employee Voluntary Turnover

Participants and Procedure

We tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 in a field study of 420 full-time employees from a large retail organization in the Philippines. We surveyed employees whose work primarily required interacting with customers. At Time 1 (T1), employees received a paper survey including a letter outlining study goals, a confidentiality agreement, and a self-report survey. Respondents answered the survey in English because a large majority of the Filipino population speaks English (Bernardo 2004). We received 378 completed T1 surveys (90% response rate) that measured the customer interpersonal injustice respondents experienced over the last month, their intraorganizational justice perceptions, and the negative emotions experienced when encountering customer interpersonal injustice.

Three months following the initial survey administration (Time 2 [T2]), we administered a second survey to 378 T1 respondents assessing their emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. The T2 survey generated 309 responses (82% response rate). We excluded 12 surveys with considerable missing data ($n = 2$), inaccurate anonymous codes ($n = 7$), and unanswered surveys ($n = 3$). At Time 3 (T3), 18 months following T2 data collection, we obtained actual turnover data for T2 respondents. We matched turnover data to our T1 and T2 surveys resulting in a three-time period matched sample of 263 retail employees (63% response rate). Forty-nine percent of the sample was female, the average age was 33.2 years ($SD = 6.82$), and average job tenure was 5.3 years ($SD = 2.96$). Most participants (91.3%) had a college degree.

Measures

We used a 7-point Likert-type scale for all survey items with the exception of the demographic variables. We coded items so that a higher score indicated more (vs. less) of the focal construct.

Table 1. Study 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender[a]								
2. Customer injustice (T1)	−.02	**.88**						
3. Distributive justice (T1)	.06	−.33***	**.94**					
4. Procedural justice (T1)	.06	−.37***	.18**	**.80**				
5. Negative emotions (T1)	.06	.19**	−.14*	.00	**.86**			
6. Emotional exhaustion (T2)	.12	.13*	−.13*	.04	.46***	**.72**		
7. Turnover intentions (T2)	.04	.12*	−.28***	−.04	.21***	.33***	**.88**	
8. Actual turnover[b] (T3)	.02	.20***	−.06	−.09	.13*	.19**	.39***	
M	0.49	3.12	4.00	4.53	3.43	3.06	2.82	0.13
SD	0.50	1.01	1.36	0.85	1.24	1.05	1.31	0.34

Note. $N = 263$. Higher customer injustice scores indicate greater unfairness. We calculated the average score for each employee for distributive justice, procedural justice, turnover intentions, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and customer justice. Square roots of the average variance extracted are in boldface along the diagonal. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.

[a]Gender is coded 0 (*male*) and 1 (*female*); We report point-biserial correlations for dichotomous variables. [b]Voluntary turnover coded 0 (*stay*) and 1 (*quit*); We report point-biserial correlations for dichotomous variables.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Customer interpersonal injustice. We used Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker's (2008) measure of customer interpersonal injustice-targeting contact center employees. We conducted two focus group discussions with eight retail workers in each group to determine the relevance of the customer interpersonal injustice measure in a retail context. Focus group participants indicated that 4 items ("refused to listen to you," "interrupted you: cut you off mid sentence," "raised irrelevant discussion," "doubted your ability") did not apply in their retail context. Thus, the final measure consisted of 4 items. Retail workers reported the customer interpersonal injustice they experienced over the preceding month (1 = *never* to 7 = *all the time*). Sample items included "Yelled at you" and "Spoke aggressively to you."

Negative emotions. We operationalized negative emotions as emotions in the activated and unpleasant quadrant of the circumflex model of emotions (Russell and Barrett 1999). At T1, respondents indicated how often they experienced these negative emotions when dealing with difficult customers (1 = *never* to 7 = *always*). This scale assessed employee hostility, irritability, and distress experienced using 3 validated scale items (Watson and Clark 1984).

Emotional exhaustion. We used a 7-item self-report measure to assess T2 emotional exhaustion (Maslach and Jackson 1981). The retail workers reported their agreement (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *always*) with items such as "I feel emotionally drained from my work."

Turnover intentions. We assessed respondent turnover intentions at T2 with an established 3-item scale (Hom, Griffeth, and Sellaro 1984). Respondents indicated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) with items such as "I often seriously think about resigning from my job."

Voluntary turnover. The retail organization's Human Resources division provided us with respondents' voluntary turnover data 18 months after the T2 survey. During these 18 months, 13% of survey respondents ($N = 35$) voluntarily left the organization. We coded turnover using a binary variable with 0 (*employees remaining with the organization at T3*) and 1 (*employees who quit the organization by T3*).

Control variables. We controlled for fair treatment originating from other organizational sources to rule out alternative justice-based explanations for our findings. We assessed distributive justice with 4 items (based on the highest factor loadings) and procedural justice with 7 items developed by Moorman (1991). We controlled for employee gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*) because women report more customer injustice than men (Sliter et al. 2010).

Results

We present summary statistics, correlations, and the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for all Study 1 variables in Table 1. We used structural equation modeling implemented in Mplus (Version 8; Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017) to evaluate latent variable unidimensionality and the hypothesized effects. Before evaluating our hypotheses, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the discriminant validity and unidimensionality of the model latent variables (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). We compared a six-factor measurement model against competing models grouping indicators onto combinations of latent variables (e.g., grouping negative emotions with emotional exhaustion). We present CFA results and comparison models in the Study 1 section of Table 2. From these analyses, the six-factor model best fit the data, supporting the distinctiveness of our latent measures.

Our structural models consisted of a direct effects model and a serial indirect effects model. We incorporated a dichotomous turnover variable into these models that we account for by using weighted least squares parameter estimates with a mean and variance-adjusted χ^2 (WLSMV) in our analyses

Table 2. Fit Indices for Alternative Measurement Models.

Factors		Factor Descriptions	*df*	χ^2	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA (90% CI)
Study 1	4	Injustice,[a] negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions	344	2,650.78	7.71	.60	.56	.18	[.15, .17]
	5	Negative experiences,[b] distributive justice, procedural justice, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions	340	1,119.46	3.29	.87	.85	.10	[.09, .10]
	5	Customer injustice, distributive justice, procedural justice, emotion outcomes,[c] and turnover intentions	340	944.74	2.78	.90	.88	.06	[.08, .09]
	6[d]	Customer injustice, distributive justice, procedural justice, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions	335	599.05	1.79	.95	.95	.05	[.05, .06]
Study 2	5	Injustice, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, turnover intentions (T1), and turnover intentions (T2)	220	979.77	4.45	.72	.68	.14	[.12, .14]
	5	Customer injustice, supervisor interpersonal justice, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions	220	738.79	3.36	.81	.78	.10	[.10, .12]
	5	Customer injustice, supervisor interpersonal justice, emotion outcomes, turnover intentions (T1), and turnover intentions (T2)	220	567.70	2.58	.87	.86	.08	[.08, .10]
	6[d]	Customer injustice, supervisor interpersonal justice, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, turnover intentions (T1), and turnover intentions (T2)	215	471.38	2.19	.91	.89	.07	[.07, .09]
Study 3	3	Injustice, negative emotions, and emotional exhaustion	186	1,677.05	9.02	.68	.63	.12	[.15, .17]
	3[c]	Customer injustice, supervisor interpersonal justice, and emotion outcomes	186	665.13	3.58	.90	.88	.08	[.08, .10]
	3[b]	Negative experiences, supervisor interpersonal justice, and emotional exhaustion	186	657.08	3.53	.90	.88	.07	[.08, .10]
	4[d]	Customer injustice, supervisor interpersonal justice, negative emotions, and emotional exhaustion	183	423.00	2.31	.95	.94	.04	[.06, .07]

Note. $N_{(Study\ 1)} = 263$, $N_{(Study\ 2)} = 206$, and $N_{(Study\ 3)} = 317$. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; SRMR = standardized root-mean-squared residual; RMSEA = root-mean-squared error of approximation; CI = confidence interval.
[a]All study organizational justice variables combined. [b]Customer injustice and negative emotions combined. [c]Negative emotions and emotional exhaustion combined. [d]The model that best fits the data and the model used to calculate estimates.

rather than maximum likelihood (ML) estimation (Muthén, du Toit, and Spisic 1997). Path coefficients to the dichotomous voluntary turnover variable are probit regression coefficients. We assessed path estimate significance using 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals (CIs) constructed with 5,000 resamples.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, customer interpersonal injustice (T1) was positively associated with voluntary turnover (T3), controlling for employee gender, distributive justice (T1), procedural justice (T1), and turnover intentions (T2; $\gamma = .25$, 95% CI [.08, .42]). In Table 3, we present the results in the Study 1 column.

Hypothesis 2 proposed a serial indirect effect of customer interpersonal injustice on voluntary turnover through negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions. We added negative emotion, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intention latent variables to the direct effect model. We present our results in Table 4. The bootstrapped indirect effect estimate was 0.03, 95% CI [.01, .05], indicating that customer interpersonal injustice had a statistically significant indirect effect on employee voluntary turnover through negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions. We summarize the indirect effect findings in Table 5. In sum, Study 1 provides support for Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Study 2: Customer Interpersonal Injustice and Restaurant Employee Turnover Intentions

Participants and Procedure

We tested our three hypotheses in a field study of 363 Filipino restaurant employees participating in food safety and hygiene training. All employees worked full time and spent all of their working time directly serving customers. Study 2 enabled us to replicate Study 1 and to examine the role of supervisor interpersonal justice in employees' negative emotions associated with customer interpersonal injustice. At T1, 300 employees completed a paper survey (83% response rate) assessing perceptions of customer interpersonal injustice, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, perceptions of supervisor interpersonal justice, and turnover intentions.

Three months after the T1 survey, 239 of the initial 363 employees (66% response rate) answered a survey assessing their current turnover intentions (dependent variable). We excluded 33 surveys with considerable missing data ($n = 4$), incorrect anonymous codes ($n = 19$) and unanswered surveys ($n = 10$). We matched surveys for 206 respondents at T1 and T2 (57% response rate). The final matched sample was 54% female, had an average age of 28.9 years ($SD = 7.09$), and an average job tenure of 2.7 years ($SD = 3.35$).

Table 3. Main Effect Structural Equation Modeling Results.

	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	
	Actual Turnover (21 Months After T1)		Turnover Intentions (3 Months After T1)		Actual Turnover (16 Months After T1)	
Variable	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]
Gender	.07	[−.33, .47]	.10	[−.22, .42]	−.31	[−.65, .02]
Distributive justice (T1)	.21	[.00, .43]			−.06	[−.24, .11]
Procedural justice (T1)	−.04	[−.22, .16]			.09	[−.16, .35]
Interpersonal justice (T1)			−.15	[−.37, .09]	−.19*	[−.35, −.04]
Informational justice (T1)					−.02	[−.20, .14]
Turnover intentions (T2 Study 1 and T1 Study 2)	.67***	[.49, .84]	.11	[−.11, .35]		
Job demands (T1)					−.17	[−.37, .02]
Customer injustice (T1)	.25**	[.08, .42]	.35***	[.17, .54]	.17*	[.02, .32]

Note. $N_{(Study\ 1)} = 263$, $N_{(Study\ 2)} = 206$, and $N_{(Study\ 3)} = 317$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2.
[a]Bootstrapped confidence interval (5,000 bootstraps).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 4. Study 1: Indirect Effect Structural Equation Modeling Results.

	Negative Emotions (T1)		Emotional Exhaustion (T2)		Turnover Intentions (T2)		Actual Turnover (T3)	
Variable	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]
Gender	.13	[−.14, .40]	.22	[−.05, .47]	−.01	[−.32, .29]	.01	[−.36, .37]
Distributive justice (T1)	−.11	[−.26, .05]	−.08	[−.24, .08]	−.35	[−.57, −.14]	.16*	[.01, .34]
Procedural justice (T1)	.10	[−.05, .26]	.04	[−.11, .18]	−.01	[−.19, .17]	.25	[.02, .50]
Customer injustice (T1)	.23**	[.09, .40]					.25**	[.06, .43]
Negative emotions (T1)			.55***	[.42, .69]				
Emotional exhaustion (T2)					.37***	[.23, .51]		
Turnover intentions (T2)							.61***	[.42, .79]

Note. $N = 263$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.
[a]Bootstrapped confidence interval (5,000 bootstraps).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 5. Summary of Indirect and Conditional Indirect Effects.

Hypothesized Indirect Effect	Point Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Proportion of Customer Injustice Total Effect (%)
Study 1 Customer injustice → negative emotions → emotional exhaustion → turnover intentions → actual turnover	.03	[.01, .05]	10
Study 2 Customer injustice → negative emotions → emotional exhaustion → turnover intentions	.04	[.01, .10]	14
−1 *SD* interpersonal justice: Customer injustice → negative emotions → emotional exhaustion → turnover intentions	.07	[.01, .13]	24
+1 *SD* interpersonal justice: Customer injustice → negative emotions → emotional exhaustion → turnover intentions	.01	[−.02, .04]	5
Study 3 Customer injustice → negative emotions → emotional exhaustion → actual turnover	.17	[.04, .30]	45
−1 *SD* interpersonal justice: Customer injustice → negative emotions → emotional exhaustion → actual turnover	.20	[.05, .35]	49
+1 *SD* interpersonal justice: Customer injustice → negative emotions → emotional exhaustion → actual turnover	.14	[.03, .25]	40

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; *SD* = standard deviation.
[a]Bootstrapped confidence interval for indirect effects models (5,000 bootstraps); conditional indirect effect confidence intervals calculated using numerical integration (Studies 2 and 3).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 6. Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender[a]							
2. Negative emotions	.04	**.66**					
3. Emotional exhaustion	.07	.24***	**.75**				
4. Interpersonal justice	.08	−.35***	−.26***	**.79**			
5. Customer injustice	.00	.17*	.42***	−.12	**.77**		
6. Turnover intentions (T1)	−.06	.23***	.36***	−.46***	.38***	**.92**	
7. Turnover intentions (T2)	.02	.14*	.40***	−.20**	.32***	.27***	**.81**
M	0.46	3.43	2.41	5.66	2.28	2.43	2.39
SD	0.50	1.26	1.07	1.02	1.00	1.12	1.24

Note. $N = 206$. Higher customer injustice scores indicate greater unfairness. We calculated the average score for each employee for negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, interpersonal justice, customer injustice, and turnover intentions. Square roots of the average variance extracted are in boldface along the diagonal. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.

[a]Gender coded 0 (*male*) and 1 (*female*); We report point-biserial correlations for dichotomous variables.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Measures

We used identical measures to Study 1 for negative emotions, turnover intentions (T1 and T2), and gender. Gender and turnover intentions (T1) were control variables in Study 2.

Customer interpersonal injustice. We used the Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker (2008) measure to assess unfair customer actions targeting restaurant employees. Two focus groups consisting of 12 restaurant employees indicated that 3 items from the original measure, "refused to listen to you," "interrupted you: cut you off mid sentence," and "raised irrelevant discussion" did not apply in their restaurants. Focus group participants explained that most of their unfair experiences involved customers questioning their job abilities ("doubted my ability"), demeaning them ("calling me stupid"), being aggressive ("yelling at me," "raising their voice," and "scolding me"), and making unreasonable demands. The final measure included 5 items relevant in face-to-face interactions. Respondents reported the customer interpersonal injustice experienced over the preceding month (1 = *never* to 7 = *all the time*) indicating the extent to which customers, for example, "Yelled at you" and "Spoke aggressively to you."

Emotional exhaustion. We assessed emotional exhaustion using 5 items (Maslach and Jackson 1981). We shortened the emotional exhaustion measure because the organization administering the training program restricted the survey length. We identified the 5 items with the highest factor loadings in the Maslach and Jackson (1981) Scale. The restaurant employees reported their agreement (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *always*) with items such as "I feel emotionally drained from my work." In order to examine whether the shortened emotional exhaustion measure was equivalent to the full measure, we administered the scale to an independent sample of 254 service workers in the Philippines. Bivariate correlations suggest that the short and long versions correlate highly ($r = .98$, $p < .01$).

Supervisor interpersonal justice. We used Colquitt's (2001) 4-item measure to assess employee supervisor interpersonal justice perceptions. We included items such as: "My immediate supervisor treats me with dignity." Responses ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7).

Results

We present summary statistics, correlations, and the square root of the AVE for all Study 2 variables in Table 6. Similar to Study 1, we conducted CFA to assess the discriminant validity of study constructs. We present CFA results in the Study 2 section of Table 2. The six-factor model best fit the data, supporting the discriminant validity of our latent measures.

The structural models consisted of a direct effect model, a serial indirect effect model, and a conditional serial indirect effect model. Where available in Mplus (e.g., the main effect model, the serial indirect effect model), we assessed path estimate significance using 95% bootstrapped CIs constructed with 5,000 resamples. For the conditional serial indirect effect model, we constructed a latent variable interaction between customer interpersonal injustice and supervisor interpersonal justice following a latent moderated structural (LMS) equations approach (Klein and Moosbrugger 2000). This approach implements numerical integration and did not permit bootstrapped CIs. Instead, for this model, we used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR; Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017) because it provided ML parameter estimates with standard errors and a χ^2 test statistic robust to observation nonnormality and nonindependence.

Hypothesis 1 stated that customer interpersonal injustice is positively related to turnover intentions. Consistent with Study 1, customer interpersonal injustice was significantly and positively related to turnover intentions ($\gamma = .35$, 95% CI [.17, .54]). In Table 3, we present the full model results in the Study 2 column.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that customer interpersonal injustice predicts turnover intentions through a serial indirect effect

Table 7. Study 2: Indirect Effect Structural Equation Modeling Results.

	Negative Emotions (T1)		Emotional Exhaustion (T1)		Turnover Intentions (T2)	
Variable	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]
Gender	.19	[−.20, .54]	.12	[−.20, .43]	.02	[−.28, .35]
Customer injustice (T1)	.29***	[.04, .51]			.23*	[.05, .41]
Interpersonal justice (T1)	−.45**	[−.65, −.21]				
Negative emotions (T1)			.37**	[.14, .58]		
Emotional exhaustion (T1)					.34**	[.13, .55]
Turnover intentions (T1)					.11	[−.08, .31]

Note. $N = 206$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2.
[a]Bootstrapped confidence interval (5,000 bootstraps).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 8. Study 2: Conditional Indirect Effect Structural Equation Modeling Results.

	Negative Emotions (T1)		Emotional Exhaustion (T1)		Turnover Intentions (T2)	
Variable	Estimate	95% CI [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI [LL, UL]
Gender	.25	[−.10, .61]	.12	[−.20, .44]	.02	[−.28, .33]
Customer injustice (T1)	.33***	[.15, .52]			.23*	[.06, .40]
Interpersonal justice (T1)	−.27*	[−.50, −.03]				
Interpersonal justice (T1) × Customer injustice (T1)	−.24**	[−.40, −.09]				
Negative emotions (T1)			.36**	[.16, .56]		
Emotional exhaustion (T1)					.34**	[.14, .54]
Turnover intentions (T1)					.11	[−.07, .30]

Note. $N = 206$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

involving negative emotions first followed by emotional exhaustion. We present model results in Table 7. Customer interpersonal injustice had a positive and significant indirect effect on employee turnover intentions through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion (bootstrapped indirect effect estimate = .04, 95% CI [.01, .10]). Customer interpersonal injustice was positively associated with the negative emotions employees reported. These negative emotions were positively related to increased emotional exhaustion, and increased emotional exhaustion was positively related to employees' future turnover intentions, even after accounting for initial turnover intentions. We concluded that customer interpersonal injustice had an indirect effect on turnover intent through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion, supporting Hypothesis 2.

We modified the indirect effect model to test Hypothesis 3 proposing that the customer interpersonal injustice on turnover intentions indirect effect is conditional on supervisor interpersonal justice. We added a latent customer interpersonal injustice by supervisor interpersonal injustice interaction predicting negative emotions to the indirect effect model. First, we constrained the relationship between the interaction and negative emotions to zero. Next, we estimated the interaction effects using MLR estimation with numerical integration. We calculated a model difference test comparing the model with the interaction term estimated to the constrained model. We used adjusted log-likelihood values and difference tests with scaling correction factors providing χ^2 distributed test statistics (Satorra and Bentler 1999) to test the statistical significance of adding the interaction term to the model. Our results in Table 8 indicating a statistically significant customer interpersonal injustice by supervisor interpersonal justice interaction predicting employee negative emotions, in combination with the comparison test, support Hypothesis 3, $\gamma = -.24$, 95% CI [−.40, −.09], $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 48.88$, $p < .001$.

We interpreted the conditional indirect effect using a Johnson–Neyman (1936) region of significance plot of the indirect effect strength across standard deviations of the latent supervisor interpersonal justice variable away from its mean. We display the regions of significance in Figure 2. The conditional indirect effect of customer interpersonal injustice on turnover intentions, through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion, becomes smaller at higher levels of supervisor interpersonal justice. Table 5 reports the simple slope of the conditional indirect effect one standard deviation above (Study 2 row 3) and below (Study 2 row 2) the latent moderator mean. Taken together, the Study 2 results support Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

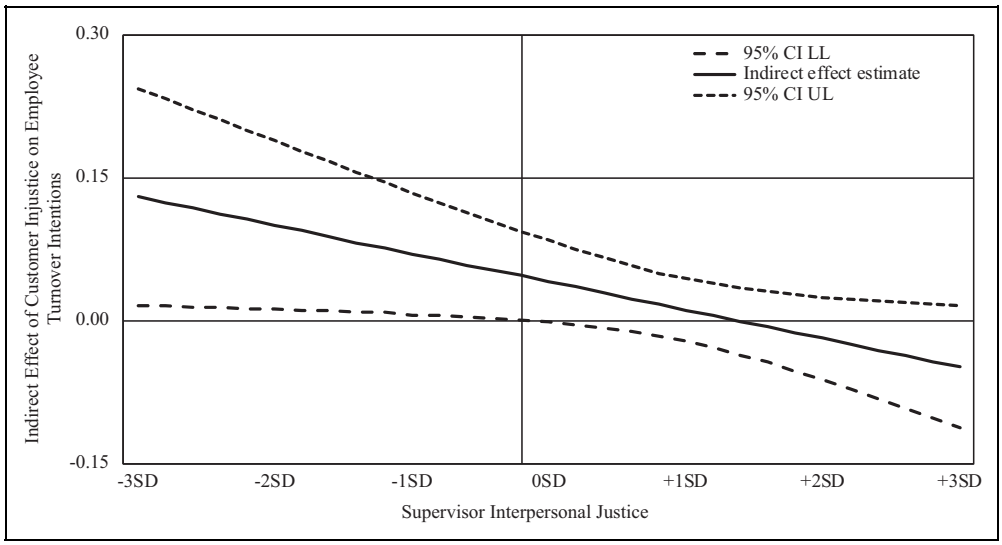

Figure 2. Study 2 region of significance plot of the indirect effect of customer injustice on employee turnover intentions through employee negative emotions and emotional exhaustion across levels of supervisor interpersonal justice. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; *SD* = standard deviation.

Study 3: Customer Interpersonal Injustice and Contact Center Employee Voluntary Turnover

Participants and Procedure

We further investigated our hypotheses in a field study of 940 service employees working in a Canadian contact center. In Study 3, we sought to replicate the findings from Studies 1 and 2. Moreover, in Study 3, we assessed whether the findings from Studies 1 and 2 were present in technology-mediated as opposed to face-to-face interactions because social presence makes social norm violations more salient in face-to-face interactions (Friedman and Currall 2003), potentially leading contact center employees to have weaker responses to customer interpersonal injustice. At T1, 358 employees (38% response rate) completed a paper-based survey assessing exposure to customer interpersonal injustice, the negative emotions they felt, emotional exhaustion, and perceived supervisor interpersonal justice in exchange for a movie ticket.[1]

At T2, 16 months following the T1 data collection, we obtained actual respondent turnover data. We matched turnover data to all T1 surveys resulting in a two-time period matched sample of 358 customer service representatives. We excluded 41 surveys with missing data ($n = 41$). Seventy-one percent of the final sample was female, the average age was 32.8 years ($SD = 12.00$), and average job tenure was 1.7 years ($SD = 1.53$). Most of the participants (60.9%) had completed college or university.

Measures

Study 3 measures for negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and gender were identical to those in Study 1. We used the Study 2 supervisor interpersonal injustice measure in Study 3.

Customer interpersonal injustice. We measured employee interpersonal injustice perceptions using an 8-item measure (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker 2008), which has been used in previous research (Skarlicki et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2011). Respondents reported the frequency over the last month that they felt unfairly treated by customers using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *frequently*). The scale assessed customer behaviors including "Yelled at you" and "Refused to listen to you."

Voluntary turnover. The contact center's Human Resources Manager supplied employee voluntary turnover data 16 months after the initial survey. During these 16 months, 52% of survey respondents ($N = 188$) voluntarily left the organization. We excluded employees dismissed for poor performance and employees who departed for other involuntary reasons from our turnover measure. We coded turnover using a binary variable with 0 (*employees remaining with the organization at T2*) and 1 (*employees who quit the organization by T2*).

Control variables. Job demands are important predictors of voluntary turnover (de Croon et al. 2004) and emotional exhaustion (Janssen et al. 2004; Wilk and Moynihan 2005). Thus, we controlled for job demands in both of these outcomes using a 7-item measure (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*; Karasek 1979). We controlled for other intraorganizational justice (distributive, procedural, and informational justice) using Colquitt's (2001) measures. Including these control variables enabled us to demonstrate the effect of customer interpersonal injustice in employee voluntary turnover decisions beyond job demands and justice originating within the organization.

Table 9. Study 3: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender[a]										
2. Distributive justice	.20***	**.93**								
3. Procedural justice	.13*	.70***	**.71**							
4. Interpersonal justice	−.03	.23***	.35***	**.90**						
5. Informational justice	.06	.37***	.47***	.77***	**.87**					
6. Job demands	.00	−.37***	−.31***	−.05	−.15**	**.67**				
7. Negative emotions	−.02	−.31***	−.36***	−.15**	−.26***	.28***	**.77**			
8. Emotional exhaustion	−.10	−.47***	−.54***	−.16**	−.24***	.49***	.56***	**.83**		
9. Customer injustice	.08	−.26***	−.30***	−.20***	−.23***	.24***	.53***	.40***	**.70**	
10. Actual turnover[b]	−.11*	.00	.03	−.09	.00	−.10	.08	.09	.08	
M	0.72	2.97	3.00	4.48	4.12	3.43	3.56	3.36	3.18	0.52
SD	0.45	1.22	0.83	0.80	0.95	0.83	1.32	1.75	0.77	0.50

Note. $N = 317$. Higher customer injustice scores indicate greater unfairness. We calculated the average score for each employee for distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, informational justice, job demands, negative emotions, emotional exhaustion, and customer injustice. Square roots of the average variance extracted are in boldface along the diagonal.

[a]Gender coded 0 (*male*) and 1 (*female*); we report point-biserial correlations for dichotomous variables. [b]Actual turnover coded 0 (*stay*) and 1 (*quit*); we report point-biserial correlations for dichotomous variables.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Results

The summary statistics, correlations, and square roots of the AVE for Study 3 variables are shown in Table 9. We adopted the Studies 1 and 2 data analytic approach and tested a four-measurement model against competing models. We present CFA results in the Study 3 section of Table 2. The four-factor model best fit the data, supporting the discriminant validity of our latent measures. Consistent with Study 2, our structural models included a direct effect model, a serial indirect effect model and a conditional serial indirect effect model. Our binary turnover variable required the use of WLSMV in our analyses rather than ML estimation (Muthén, du Toit, and Spisic 1997). Path coefficients to the dichotomous voluntary turnover variable are probit regression coefficients.

We assessed path estimate significance for the main and serial indirect effect models using bootstrapped 95% CIs constructed using 5,000 resamples. For the conditional serial indirect effect model, we constructed a latent variable interaction between customer interpersonal injustice and supervisor interpersonal justice following an LMS approach (Klein and Moosbrugger 2000). This approach implements numerical integration and did not permit bootstrapped CIs nor did it allow using the WLSMV estimator. For this model, we assessed the parameter estimates using CIs computed through numerical integration using MLR estimation.

In support of Hypothesis 1, our results showed that customer interpersonal injustice was significantly and positively related to employee voluntary turnover even after controlling for employee gender, perceived job demands, and other sources of intraorganizational justice ($\gamma = .17$, 95% CI [.02, .32]). In Table 3, we present the full model results in the Study 3 column.

We examined the serial indirect effect of customer interpersonal injustice on voluntary turnover through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion to test Hypothesis 2. To do so, we included these latent variables in the direct effect model. We present results in Table 10. The bootstrapped indirect effect of customer interpersonal injustice on voluntary turnover through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion was .17, 95% CI [.04, .30]. Examining model estimates, customer interpersonal injustice was positively associated with negative emotions, negative emotions were positively related to emotional exhaustion, and emotional exhaustion was positively related to employees' future voluntary turnover. Similar to Study 2, customer interpersonal injustice had an indirect effect on voluntary turnover through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion, providing support for Hypothesis 2.

In Hypothesis 3, we proposed that the indirect effect between customer interpersonal injustice and voluntary turnover is conditional on supervisor interpersonal justice. We followed the process and model comparison approach from Study 2 to test the effect of adding a latent interaction between customer interpersonal injustice and supervisor interpersonal justice predicting negative emotions to the indirect effect model. Our results in Table 11 indicating a statistically significant interaction between customer interpersonal injustice and supervisor interpersonal justice predicting negative emotions, in combination with the model comparison test, support Hypothesis 3, $\gamma_{(\text{interaction term})} = -.15$, 95% CI [−.28, −.02], $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 9.21$, $p < .01$.

Consistent with Study 2's approach, we interpreted the conditional indirect effect plotting its strength across standard deviations of the latent supervisor interpersonal justice variable away from its mean. We plotted the region of significance in Figure 3. The conditional indirect effect of customer interpersonal injustice on voluntary turnover, through negative emotions and emotional exhaustion, was smaller at higher levels of supervisor interpersonal justice. Table 5 reports the simple slope of the conditional indirect effect at one standard

Table 10. Study 3: Indirect Effect Structural Equation Modeling Results.

	Negative Emotions (T1)		Emotional Exhaustion (T1)		Actual Turnover (T2)	
Variable	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI[a] [LL, UL]
Gender					−.31	[−.64, .03]
Distributive justice (T1)					−.06	[−.24, .12]
Procedural justice (T1)					.09	[−.16, .35]
Informational justice (T1)					−.02	[−.20, .15]
Job demands (T1)			.66***	[.45, .86]	−.29**	[−.49, −.09]
Customer injustice (T1)	.69***	[.47, .93]			.11	[−.05,.27]
Interpersonal justice (T1)	.09	[−.07, 0.26]			−.20*	[−.35, −.05]
Negative emotions (T1)			.52***	[.37, .70]		
Emotional exhaustion (T1)					.18**	[.06, .30]

Note. $N = 317$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.
[a]Bootstrapped confidence interval (5,000 bootstraps).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 11. Study 3 Conditional Indirect Effect Structural Equation Modeling Results.

	Negative Emotions (T1)		Emotional Exhaustion (T1)		Actual Turnover (T2)	
Variable	Estimate	95% CI [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI [LL, UL]	Estimate	95% CI [LL, UL]
Gender					−.64*	[−1.18, −0.14]
Distributive justice (T1)					−.09	[−0.37, 0.19]
Procedural justice (T1)					.45*	[0.00, 0.89]
Informational justice (T1)					.34	[−0.10, 0.77]
Job demands (T1)			.67***	[.48, .86]	−.48**	[−0.83, −0.14]
Customer injustice (T1)	.79***	[.63, .95]			.21	[−0.13, 0.54]
Interpersonal justice (T1)	−.04	[−.19, .11]			−.59*	[−1.14, −0.05]
Interpersonal justice (T1) × Customer injustice (T1)	−.15*	[−.28, −.02]				
Negative emotions (T1)			.68***	[.53, .83]		
Emotional exhaustion (T1)					0.31**	[0.09, 0.53]

Note. $N = 317$. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

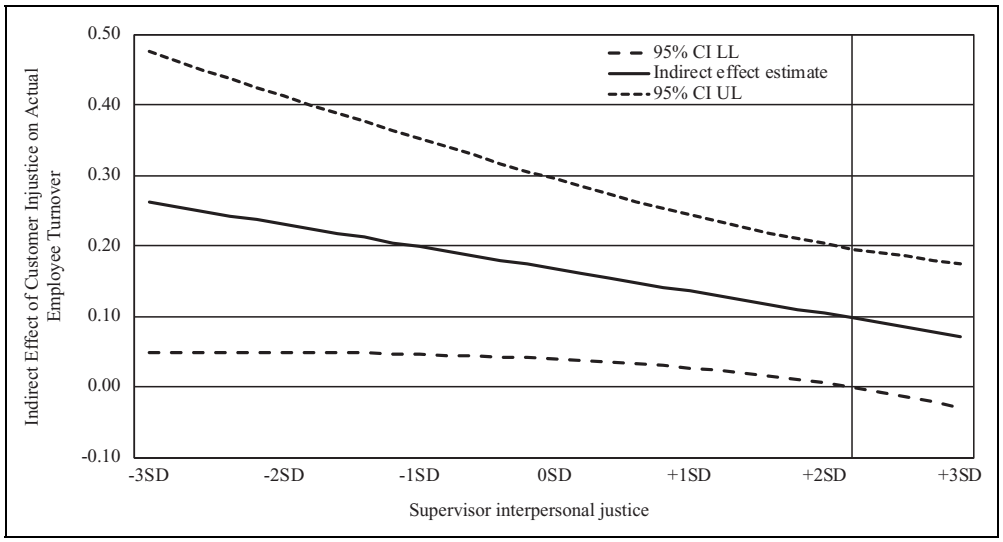

Figure 3. Study 3 region of significance plot of the indirect effect of customer injustice on employee turnover through employee negative emotions and emotional exhaustion across levels of supervisor interpersonal justice. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; *SD* = standard deviation.

deviation above (Study 3 row 3) and below (Study 3 row 2) the latent moderator mean. Overall, Study 3 supports Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

Discussion

We advance our understanding of how customer treatment of service employees affects turnover outcomes in three important ways. First, we show that customer interpersonal injustice relates positively to turnover outcomes via negative emotions and emotional exhaustion. Our findings held across three studies using different assessments of intraorganizational fairness as control variables, indicating that customer interpersonal injustice is a unique predictor of voluntary turnover, independent of justice originating within organizations. Our tests predicting voluntary turnover (Studies 1 and 3) indicate a behavioral consequence of customer interpersonal injustice beyond customer-directed sabotage and diminished service performance (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker 2008; Sliter, Sliter, and Jex 2012; Wang et al. 2011). While a few studies connect customer verbal aggression, customer incivility, and customer interpersonal injustice to employee turnover intentions (Holmvall and Sidhu 2007; Li and Zhou 2013; Wilson and Holmvall 2013), to our knowledge, the findings we report are among the first linking a specific form of customer mistreatment, namely, customer interpersonal injustice, to voluntary turnover.

Second, we advance understanding of how negative emotions and emotional exhaustion explain the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and service employee turnover outcomes. COR theory illustrates that negative emotions can erode employee resources as service employees deal with interpersonally unfair customers. As Studies 1 and 3 demonstrate, quitting provides a withdrawal response that might protect employee resources.

Third, we found that supervisor interpersonal justice moderated the relationship between customer interpersonal injustice and negative emotions (Studies 2 and 3). Service employees encounter both fairness and unfairness from sources within and outside the organization. We show that resources from a supervisor deemed highly fair reduce the negative employee emotions arising from customer interpersonal injustice thereby reducing the negative consequences of these emotions. Specifically, employees are most likely to experience negative emotions and emotional exhaustion from customer unfairness when they lack access to resources that limit the experience of negative emotions.

We build on research showing that supervisor fairness buffers the effect of customer interpersonal injustice on customer-directed sabotage (Skarlicki et al. 2016). Customers and supervisors each exert authority over service employees (Grandey, Dickter, and Sin 2004). Often, for employees, customer and supervisor expectations come into conflict with customers asking employees to violate service policies to fulfill requests (Eddleston, Kidder, and Barrie 2002). We show how supervisors can help service employees replenish the resources customer demands consume demonstrating the important role that supervisors have in helping service workplaces retain service employees.

Alternative models consistent with COR theory propose that supervisor interpersonal justice could moderate the link between (a) negative emotions and employee exhaustion or (b) employee exhaustion and turnover. To rule out alternative explanations, we moved the supervisor interpersonal justice interaction term in our models to (a) negative emotions and supervisor interpersonal justice predicting emotional exhaustion and (b) emotional exhaustion and supervisor interpersonal justice predicting turnover. Post hoc analyses did not support these alternative models. In the first case, the interaction term (Negative Emotions $\times$ Supervisor Interpersonal Justice) predicting emotional exhaustion was not significant (Study 2: $\gamma = -.07$, 95% CI [$-.19$, .05]; Study 3: $\gamma = .01$, 95% CI [$-.09$, .10]). For the second case, the interaction (Emotional Exhaustion $\times$ Supervisor Interpersonal Justice) predicting turnover was not significant (Study 2: $\gamma = .06$, 95% CI [$-.08$, .21]; Study 3: $\gamma = .18$, 95% CI [$-.01$, .36]).

Overall, these analyses increase precision regarding how supervisory fairness affects our proposed process. Our data suggest that rather than offsetting employees' existing negative emotions arising from customer injustice, or rather than replenishing resources when employees feel emotionally depleted, fair interpersonal treatment from supervisors reduces the tendency for employees to generally perceive negative emotions in response to customer unfairness, thereby reducing subsequent employee emotional exhaustion and voluntary turnover.

Study Limitations and Future Research

Our research has limitations and our results should be considered with these in mind. First, generalizability is a limitation because we studied low wage, high turnover service occupations with brief and episodic interactions (Batt and Colvin 2011). The relationships we observed could differ in occupations where employees earn a higher income, have more education, and develop relationships with customers (e.g., health care). Second, we did not include measures of positive or negative affect which could influence employee emotions in response to customer interpersonal injustice. Third, inclusion of self-reported measures in our study raises common method variance concerns, and we acknowledge that our model fit was weaker for Study 2 compared with Studies 1 and 3. Fourth, our use of cross-sectional measures impedes our ability to make causal claims. Our turnover measures, however, provided partial causal evidence because we collected them after a time lag from our last respondent contact. Fifth, we focus on *customer injustice* overlooking that positive customer encounters can help employees recover resources (Zhan, Wang, and Shi 2016). Moreover, customers simply witnessing service employees being unfairly treated by other customers are more likely to be supportive of service employees (Hershcovis and Bhatnagar 2017).

A further aspect of service dynamics requiring more research attention is the possibility that employees, rather than

customers, might instigate unfairness (Porath, MacInnis, and Folkes 2011). Whether the unfairness originates from the customer or the employee could differentially affect employee voluntary turnover. Finally, we did not account for established explanations of turnover (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) in our models. Future research should investigate customer interpersonal injustice in turnover outcomes with these variables.

Our research points to several research opportunities. First, other resources might buffer the effect of unfair treatment on negative emotions and subsequent turnover. Gong, Yi, and Choi (2014) identify a range of managerial interventions including social support, employee participation, empowerment, and rewards that can help protect employees from dysfunctional customers. Among these options, the authors show that rewards have the largest impact on perceived justice. Consistent with this insight, in our Study 3, a respondent noted: "I would have to be paid a lot more to wish to stay for a long period of time," prompting the question whether high distributive justice (e.g., pay) offsets the negative effects of customer injustice on employee outcomes. We tested this alternative model using Study 3 data replacing supervisor interpersonal justice with distributive justice in Figure 1. Distributive justice significantly predicted negative emotions (Study 3: $\gamma = -.27$, 95% CI [−.40, −.15]). The interaction term between distributive justice and customer mistreatment, however, was not a significant predictor of negative emotions (Study 3: $\gamma_{(\text{Customer injustice} \times \text{Distributive justice})} = .01$, 95% CI [−.04, .06]). The Study 3 site prioritized minimizing labor expenditures. Examining this research question among service workers in a high-wage company would be a more valid test. Improving our understanding about why customers are frustrated in the first place (e.g., wait time; Voorhees et al. 2009) could provide insights about how to better support the customer service workforce. Clearly, more research is needed on these points.

Second, abusive supervision research (Tepper 2000, 2007), indicates supervisors can be sources of workplace mistreatment, who can increase employee voluntary turnover. While we find in Studies 2 and 3 that supervisors help offset the effects of customer interpersonal injustice on employee emotions, supervisors could both replenish and deplete employees' resources. Thus, future research could examine under what conditions, and for which individuals, supervisor interpersonal fairness can enable the service workforce to cope with customer injustice.

Third, our customer interpersonal unfairness measures assess an aggregate perception of unfair treatment. Thus, it is difficult to discern whether employees are recalling one difficult interaction with a customer or several (Glomb 2002). We know from event-level customer mistreatment research that service employees respond to specific interactions (e.g., Walker, van Jaarsveld, and Skarlicki 2017) and to overall impressions of how they expect customers to treat them in specific service events (Walker, van Jaarsveld, and Skarlicki 2014). Future research needs to investigate how mistreatment events become more permanent perceptions (entities). For example, customer mistreatment might function like a tipping point where an event might convince an employee to quit, but only in a workplace with ongoing mistreatment. Moreover, it would be useful to learn the relative weights of recent encounters as compared with past negative customer encounters on employee perceptions of customer injustice. Surachartkumtonkun, McColl-Kennedy, and Patterson (2015) show that customer rage can unfold over time and whether the specific type of negative emotions (e.g., annoyance, anger, rage) employees experience intensifies as the episodes of customer injustice increase warrant further research.

Finally, we know little about how technological advances in service delivery affect service interactions (Singh et al. 2017). Although customers can contact companies through multiple channels (e.g., call center, Internet, Chatbot; Polo and Sese 2016), much remains to be understood about whether channel choice alters negative customer behaviors. New service dynamics are emerging with increasing use of workplace robots (Huang and Rust 2018). These technological trends highlight the need to utilize more rigorous methods to better understand how emotions unfold between customers and employees as emotion dynamics increase in complexity (Rafaeli, Ashtar, and Altman 2019).

Implications for Management Practice

We highlight the importance of supervisors treating employees encountering customer interpersonal injustice with dignity and respect (Skarlicki et al. 2016). Analyzing turnover for Study 3 employees below and above the median reported supervisor interpersonal fairness score reinforces this point (low fairness: 57% voluntary turnover; high fairness: 47% voluntary turnover). Over 16 months, higher supervisor interpersonal fairness could have reduced voluntary turnover by 94 employees, saving the company over CAD$300,000 (94 employees × CAD$3,495/employee; van Jaarsveld, Frost, and Walker 2007). Supervisors should be aware that fair treatment of employees can lessen negative outcomes, including voluntary turnover, associated with customer interpersonal injustice.

At the same time, it is important for organizations to recognize that employees also seek support from peers (Gong, Yi, and Choi 2014). These authors show that some employees are exposed to customer injustice frequently and repeatedly. Thus, it is important for companies to develop strategies that ensuring employees feel comfortable discussing customer mistreatment with supervisors and that supervisors receive training to recognize when employees are encountering difficulties with negative customer encounters.

In conclusion, we explore the relationship between customer mistreatment and service employee turnover outcomes. We found that customer interpersonal injustice was positively associated with service employee voluntary turnover and turnover intentions through a serial indirect effect consisting of negative employee emotions first and emotional exhaustion second. These effects were stronger when supervisor interpersonal fairness was low rather than high. These insights can guide managers about how to support employees to reduce service

employee voluntary turnover improving service performance and the well-being of the service workforce.

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Note

1. Some data we report in this article were reported in Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker (2008) and van Jaarsveld, Walker, and Skarlicki (2010). The voluntary turnover measure has not been reported previously.

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