

DEVIANT CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR: AN EXPLORATION OF FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE TACTICS

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Insufficient attention has been devoted to the study of contexts in which managerial guidelines espouse customer sovereignty and yet, frontline employees experience endemic customer misbehavior. The aim of this study is to explore how frontline employees manage interactions with poorly behaved customers. The objective is to supply insights into the reality of frontline service and respond to a number of calls for research into the "darker" side of service. Analysis of interviews with frontline employees and managers reveals 15 main forms of coping tactics. The paper culminates with a discussion of the potential implications of the study for theory and practice.

Within the marketing literature, it is universally accepted that the development of a customer orientation will generate not only superior business performance but also increased levels of employee and customer satisfaction (Deshpandé and Farley 1999; Donovan, Brown, and Mowen 2004). Indeed, the theoretical foundation of the marketing discipline, the marketing concept, dictates that firms should achieve profitability and growth through putting the interest of customers first (Drucker 1954; Levitt 1960). Hence, given the widespread acceptance of the veracity of the link between customer orientation and business performance, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that the ethos of customer sovereignty, wherein the primary focus and function of an organization is to fulfill the demands of the customer (Keat and Abercrombie 1991), has grown in momentum to become a *principal* philosophy for *both* private- and public-sector organizations (see Mansfield and Poole 1991; Poole, Mansfield, and Mendes 2001, 2003).

However, a small number of studies argue that while the customer may well be "king," in some respects, the customer is also a dictator and that the development of a customer focus can be detrimental to customers, employees, and organizations (Harris and Reynolds 2004; Shamir 1980; Sturdy 1998). Parallel to this body of thought is a small but growing stream of literature that explores the activities of deviant customer behavior (that is, deliberate

acts by customers that violate widely held norms) (see Best and Luckenbill 1994). Yet, to date, studies have overlooked how employees within organizations that are driven by a customer focus cope with acts of customer misbehavior (e.g., Donovan, Brown, and Mowen 2004; Judd 2003; Pecci and Rosenthal 2000).

Consequently, the aim and primary focus of this study is to explore how frontline, customer contact employees cope with or manage interactions with deviant customers. In this regard, the objective is to supply insights into the harsh reality of frontline service and respond to a number of earlier calls for research into the deviant side of service exchange (see Babin and Babin 1996; Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994; Harris and Reynolds 2004). The intended audience includes not only marketing scholars interested in issues of customer focus but also a more critical body of managerial theorists who question the utility of the concept of customer sovereignty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Marketing Concept and Market Orientation

The marketing concept is widely argued to have been first forwarded in the early 1950s and popularized in the 1959 study by Felton (Brownlie and Saren 1992; Strong and Harris 2004). Yet, while the concept became refined and widely accepted by marketing theorists, a number of surveys conducted in the 1960s through the 1980s found that the marketing concept was not universally adopted in practice (Ames 1970; Hise 1965; McNamara 1972). Indeed, studies uncovered that while academics prescribed the marketing concept, practitioners considered the concept to be vague,

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unhelpful, and difficult to translate into practice (Dickinson, Herbst, and O'Shaughnessy 1986; Sachs and Benson 1978). Consequently, researchers in the 1990s focused their attention on the operationalization of the market philosophy into an orientation—a market orientation.

In the early 1990s, two contrasting conceptualizations and measures of market orientation emerged. First, Kohli and Jaworski (1990) offer a market intelligence-based viewpoint. This perspective contrasts with Narver and Slater's (1990) culture-based perspective. However, in synthesizing these perspectives, Deshpandé, Farley, and Webster (1993) suggest that being market oriented is synonymous with being customer oriented (a viewpoint that this paper will adopt, manifested in the interchange use of the terms *market orientation* and *customer orientation*).

The advances in measuring the extent to which the marketing concept is developed within an organization led to a plethora of surveys exploring and describing links between the level of customer/market orientation and organizational performance. A substantial number of studies found that firms that adopted a customer/market orientation perform significantly better than those firms that did not (see Deshpandé and Farley 1999; Singh and Ranchhod 2003). Thus, the marketing literature is abound with studies that claim that achieving a customer focus is the most critical component in attaining business profitability and growth (Deshpandé, Farley, and Webster 1993). Further, empirical studies find significant links between the level of market orientation and a wide range of factors, including market share (Pelham and Wilson 1996), customer satisfaction (Gray et al. 1998), employee commitment (Donovan, Brown, and Mowen 2004), and even job satisfaction (Ruekert 1992).

Limitations of Customer Orientation

While the discipline of marketing seems almost overwhelmingly to espouse a customer orientation, a small body of studies questions the utility of the marketing concept and the merits of developing a customer focus (see, for example, Dixon 1992; Henderson 1998; Korczynski and Ott 2004).

A number of authors question the very foundations upon which market orientation theory relies. Brown (2002) queries the assertion that customers "know what they want," while Brownlie and Saren (1992) suggest that it is desirable for firms to play a role in directing demand. This supports Du Gay and Salaman (1992) and Ritson (2004), who both question the economical and social viability of organizations gratifying all the demands of customers.

The practical implications of implementing market/customer orientation are also widely cited as "problematic"

(e.g., Felton 1959; Halliday 2002; Stampfl 1978). Indeed, it has been argued that the issue of implementation constitutes an Achilles' heel of marketing (Brownlie and Saren 1992). Thus, viewing market orientation from a cultural perspective, Harris and Ogbonna (1999) question the assumption that organizational culture can be readily controlled and manipulated by management in implementing market orientation schemes. Moreover, Sturdy proposes that, in some cases, the implementation of customer orientation may occur merely on a superficial level wherein employees are "smiling but not meaning it" (1998, p. 32).

Parallel to such studies is research that claims that, in some cases, frontline employees can fall "victim" to market-oriented programs. For example, Rozell, Pettijohn, and Parker (2004) explore the paradox of the "three-cornered fight" (Bateson 1985), wherein frontline employees within customer-oriented firms are expected to foster customer satisfaction through customer-focused single-mindedness, while simultaneously maximizing profits for the organization. This parallels research that identifies employee dissatisfaction and burnout as a consequence of "emotional labor" driven by customer orientation initiatives (Diefendorff and Gosserand 2003; Hochschild 1983).

Dysfunctional Customer Behavior

While research into the implications of a customer orientation has made considerable advances, such studies are limited by a single assumption. That is, the prevailing presumption inherent to studies that embrace (Kennedy, Goolsby, and Arnold 2003; Singh and Ranchhod 2003) or critique (Dixon 1992; Svensson 2001) customer orientation is that customers will behave in a manner that is both rational and functional (at least from the perspective of the organization). However, this conflicts with contemporary research that demonstrates that norm-breaking "deviant" behaviors are not only present but also commonplace (see Fullerton and Punj 1993; Harris and Reynolds 2004; Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly 1998; Shamir 1980).

In examining customer dysfunction, a number of labels are utilized in referring to customer "behavior in the exchange setting which violates the generally accepted norms of conduct in such situations and which is therefore held in disrepute by marketers and most customers" (Fullerton and Punj 1993, p. 570). A small sample of these terms include *deviant customer behavior* (Moschis and Cox 1989), *aberrant customer behavior* (Fullerton and Punj 1993), *dysfunctional customer behavior* (Harris and Reynolds 2003), *problem customers* (Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994), and *jaycustomer behavior* (Lovelock 1994). The above-listed terms have been

employed by researchers of customer misbehavior in examining a wide variety of deviant forms of behavior. Such behaviors include, for example, shoplifting (Babin and Babin 1996; Piron and Young 2000), vandalism (Fisher and Baron 1982; Goldstein 1996), customer resistance (Gabriel and Lang 1997; Penaloza and Price 1993), customer aggression and violence (Grove, Fisk, and John 2004; Rose and Neidermeyer 1999), and illegitimate customer complaining (Kowalski 1996; Reynolds and Harris 2005). Fullerton and Punj (2004) organize 34 recognized acts into five broad categories, including customer misbehavior directed against an organization's employees, merchandise, customers, financial assets, and the destruction of physical and electronic property.

Despite inconsistent categorizations of such behaviors, researchers are united in arguing that deviant customer behaviors are performed by the majority rather than the minority of consumers. For example, Klemke (1982) reveals that as many as 60 percent of consumers have engaged in shoplifting behavior at some time during their lives. In addition, Fullerton and Punj (1993) argue that customer deviance is representative of customer behavior overall, and therefore, the perpetrators of such acts should not be viewed as a segregate or distinct group of society. Harris and Reynolds assert that empirical evidence that reveals the customer is "not always right" (2004, p. 351) contradicts with the underpinnings of consumer sovereignty that is based (in part) upon the assumptions of consumer rationality and integrity.

While empirical research demonstrates the pervasiveness of such deviant behaviors, the consequences are also highlighted. For example, Harris and Reynolds (2003) reveal three main groupings of consequences that affect the organization, frontline employees, and the other customers present during the aberrant incident. With regard to employees, Fullerton and Punj (2004) and McGrath and Goulding (1996) separately highlight the link between the occurrence of customer deviance and elevated levels of employee stress and job turnover. Moreover, Bailey and McCollough (2000) underline the relationship between the utilization of emotional labor as a coping tactic, and feelings of job dissatisfaction, and, ultimately, self-estrangement. In addition, a number of studies emphasize the financial costs that are incurred by organizations as a result of customer misdemeanors (e.g., Freestone and Mitchell 2004; Tonglet and Bamfield 1997). Finally, in exploring the effect that acts of customer deviance have upon fellow customers within a service setting, Kowalski (1996) notes the occurrence of a behavioral contagion of jaycustomer behavior between patrons.

In summary, this review reveals that the market/customer

orientation literature prescribes the practice of customer focus and supports the notion of customer sovereignty on the basis that organizational performance is improved (Deshpandé, Farley, and Webster 1993; Donovan, Brown, and Mowen 2004). However, while both the theory and practicalities of being market oriented are criticized (e.g., Harris 2000; Henderson 1998), this critique fails to acknowledge that the customer may not "always be right" and, further, may frequently act in deviant ways. Thus, insufficient attention has been devoted to the exploration and description of work environments wherein managerial guidelines espouse customer sovereignty and yet, frontline employees are faced with endemic customer misbehavior. Therefore, the focus of the current study is to explore the tactics that frontline workers both generate and utilize as a means of coping with episodes of customer deviance.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The preceding literature review highlights the commonness of management-espoused customer orientation as well as the prevalence of deviant customer behavior. However, this overview also notes that, to date, no study has directly scrutinized how frontline, customer contact employees cope with dysfunctional customer behavior. Therefore, the primary focus of the current study is in examining the tactics that frontline workers employ as a means of handling acts of deviant customer behavior. In order to develop a greater understanding of the core concepts within this area, an exploratory design and a qualitative approach were deemed appropriate. In particular, data collection methods utilized in-depth interviews to gain "rich" and "deep" insights (see Bryman 2004; Miller 1991; Stainback and Stainback 1988).

Informants were sought and selected because of their extensive participation in instances of service exchange. In this regard, respondents were required who had daily, prolonged experience with frontline customer contact. The hospitality industry was deemed appropriate due to its characteristics of frequency and closeness of customer contact, size, and economic importance (see Harris and Ogbonna 2002; Hartline and Ferrell 1996). The industry has been highlighted as a particularly potent area within which to research and explore themes surrounding dysfunctional customers (Gill et al. 2002; Harris and Reynolds 2003; Jones and Groenenboom 2002). A total of 64 interviews were conducted with frontline employees and managers of 21 restaurants (all of which have a reception area and private bar for patrons, and 11 of which also had at least one public

bar). Outlet size varied from branches with seven employees to outlets with well over 60 staff members (with an average part-/full-time ratio of 75:25). Efforts were taken to gather insights from a range of different types of employees (such as full-/part-time, experienced, newly hired, as well as a cross-section of ages and genders). Of the 64 employees interviewed, 10 were managers (eight male), 18 supervisors (14 female), and 36 frontline employees (24 female), each often undertaking multiple roles but predominantly as four reception staff, 10 bartenders, and 22 food servers. Eighteen informants were employed full-time and 46 part-time (although part-time employees frequently worked full-time during festive or "high" seasons). The average age of those interviewed was 27.3, 40 were female (24 male), the average length of tenure in the current firm was 2.3 years, with an average industry experience of 4.7 years.

The interviews were conducted individually and typically lasted 45 minutes (although some lasted for as long as two hours). Given the nature of some of the issues under discussion, respondent confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. As advocated by Patton (1990), in order to assure the accuracy of the recorded data, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by the interviewer. The interviews followed a broad schedule, yet specific efforts were made to avoid becoming overly restricted by the development of checklists. Thus, as recommended by Lindolf (1995), the researcher seized appropriate opportunity to follow potentially worthy lines of inquiry in order to encourage elaboration. Each interview began with confidentiality assurances (to aid open discussion on the part of the informant) and the collection of socio-demographic data. Typically, introductory questions to the central issues of interest included:

1. What standard of service does your company recommended/prescribe? How (if at all) were these communicated to you? How do they ensure that you follow "company procedure"?
2. Do you personally always adhere to the standards of service set by your company? Why? Why not? In what ways do you differ? How often?
3. Who do you consider to be the "perfect"/"worst" customers? Describe their behavior. How does their behavior affect you in terms of doing your job? How do you generally manage these behaviors?
4. Describe an occasion within the past month on which, during your shift, you have witnessed an act of deviant customer behavior. Describe the situation. Exactly what happened? How did you deal with it? How did your colleagues react?

5. What do you consider to be the most destructive form of such behavior? How? Why? How do you react? How do your colleagues react?
6. What are the most common forms of such behaviors by customers? Which form is the most "stressful," hardest to cope with? Easiest to deal with?

Such questions were used to initiate free-flowing and open-ended narratives. These discussions allowed the researchers to ask more precise and tailored questions and also allowed individuals to provide personalized illustrations, narratives, examples, and other broader insights.

Data collection stopped at the point termed *theoretical saturation* by Strauss and Corbin (1998), referring to the stage in data collection where no new insights are divulged. Subsequent data analysis followed a systematic process of transcript-based analysis following a form of the iterative stage process summarized by Turner (1981). This approach involves seven stages of analysis (developing categories, saturating categories, developing abstract definitions, using definitions, explaining categories, linking categories, and evaluating links) supplemented by the iterative examination of the analysis at the end of each step. This form of analysis provides broad definitions and general boundaries of key constructs while identifying and evaluating linkages between such constructs. As such, this process contains the employment of both inductive reasoning (Lincoln and Guba 1985) and comparative methods (Martin and Turner 1986). Codings were conducted independently by two experienced qualitative researchers. Thereafter, results were corroborated and discrepancies resolved by discussion or by third-party mediation.

Yin (1994) argues that the employment of such a systematic approach to qualitative data collection and analysis enhances reliability. However, to further improve the reliability of the study findings, the recommendations of Merton, Fiske, and Kendal (1990) were adopted, and interviews were transcribed and used jointly with recordings and interview notes. Following the recommendations of Price, Arnould, and Curasi (2000), both internal and external veracity checks were performed. Internally, the coding and categorization procedures were reviewed by an experienced grounded theory researcher. Externally, eight ex post interviews with long-serving frontline employees were undertaken wherein the informants were asked to comment on the accuracy of the developed framework.

In an attempt to avoid excessive quotation, this paper presents what are simply representative and illustrative narratives intended to demonstrate the consistency of informants' views (Zaltman, LeMasters, and Heffering 1982). To maintain the anonymity of individuals and organizations,

details encompassing respondents' names and locations have been changed.

FINDINGS

Analysis of data reveals that all informants are able to recall at least two incidences of deviant customer behavior within the previous two working days. Further, the findings uncover an array of frequently utilized tactics for coping with acts of deviant customer behavior. While a small number of respondents claim they had been exposed to some form of basic training with regard to deviant customers (generally involving sympathizing with the customer), *all* informants maintain that such managerial prescriptions were universally disregarded by frontline employees. Rather, in their place, the frontline employees appear to have developed their own informal tactics and mechanisms (often without formal managerial consent) to cope with the prevalence of deviant customer behaviors. Possibly driven by the employee-oriented approach to data collection, the coping tactics that emerged are temporal in nature and divided into tactics prior, during, and after acts of dysfunctional customer behavior. To act as a guide and reference for future discussions, Table 1 documents the definitions and descriptions of such tactics and provides a brief illustration.

To reflect data analysis and for ease of presentation, what follows is a sequential discussion of frontline employee-coping tactics classified under tactics that deal with dysfunctional behavior before, during, and after incidences of deviant customer behavior.

Preincident

Coding procedures uncovered four main categories detailing how employees prepare themselves for contact with deviant customers—"mental preparation for work," "consuming drugs," "altering one's clothing," and "observing patrons." Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

The first form of preincident tactic is labeled "mental preparation for work." This refers to the mental and emotional processes that frontline employees undergo in psychologically preparing themselves to enter the workplace. In this regard, frontline employees acknowledge the likelihood that they will encounter acts of customer misbehavior, and recognize the need to engage in a degree of mental preparation. Practices documented within this category range from employees working themselves into specific frames of mind, to extreme cases wherein customer contact personnel adopt distinct personas to their customary characters. Two employees explain:

Before you start work, you just need to get yourself in the right frame of mind, "in the zone," if you know what I mean. You need to get yourself ready to take the crap . . . if you don't you'll react, you'll lose it, you'll quit. (Female, age 23, four years experience)

I think you have to become a new person. I always spend five minutes or so getting myself ready before I go into the restaurant. I just sit there and get myself into work mode . . . you know, just psyching myself up for the shift ahead. (Female, age 37, 10 years experience)

These findings may be likened to research by Grove, Fisk, and John (2000), which adopts the analogy of "service as theatre" in detailing that frontline employees are "actors" who "perform" during exchange. However, the issue of employees engaging in "acting" has been the subject of much debate, particularly with reference to the negative effects on employees of emotional labor (Goffman 1959; Hochschild 1983). Usage of this tactic was common, with 90 percent of respondents stating that they engage in some form of mental preparation before partaking in interaction with customers, directly due to the believed certainty that they will encounter some form of customer misbehavior during their working hours.

The second coping tactic used by employees is labeled here as "consuming drugs." This refers to the consumption of both legal and illegal substances by frontline employees as a method of preparing themselves for subsequent interactions with deviant customers. Specifically, nicotine and alcohol performs what is considered by many respondents to be a valuable and often indispensable precursory role in work preparation. In noting a difference between the sexes, data analysis reveals that, generally, females favor the use of cigarettes, whereas males prefer to consume alcohol. For example:

By way of preparation? I chain smoke three cigarettes. . . I only smoke when I work here—never during the week. (Male, age 32, four years experience)

Between you and me, before I start here, I go to the Dog and Duck [an adjacent public bar] and have a quick pint or two! (Male, age 27, six years experience)

Although no actual incidences of illegal drug use were personally admitted by informants, 15 percent of those interviewed claim to know a fellow employee who regularly consumes illegal drugs prior to work. Therefore, in line with research that highlights the considerable problem of substance abuse by customers in frequenting bars and restaurants (see Appleby 2003; Homel and Clark 1994), the findings of the present study appear to suggest that frontline

Table 1
Definitions, Descriptions, and Illustrations of Frontline Employee Tactics

Title	Description and Illustration of Tactic
Preincident	
Mental preparation for work	Process that frontline workers undertake in mentally preparing themselves to enter the workplace in the knowledge that they are likely to encounter incidences of customer misbehavior. For example, adopting a different persona at work.
Consuming drugs	Refers to workers consuming both legal and illegal drugs, prior to their shift, as a means of preparing themselves for subsequent interactions with deviant customers. For example, consumption of nicotine and alcohol.
Altering one's clothing	Indicates efforts by frontline employees, prior to the beginning of their shift, to alter their state of dress in an attempt to discourage inappropriate sexual advances from patrons. For example, wearing clip-on ties.
Observing patrons	Denotes practices utilized by employees while within the exchange setting as a means of preempting and identifying potentially deviant customers. For example, making an evaluation of individuals as they enter the establishment.
During the Incident	
Ignoring difficult customers	Signifies employees' conscious efforts to ignore or disregard acts of dysfunctional customer behavior. For example, avoiding confrontation and eye contact with a deviant.
Bribing customers	Represents attempts by employees, during incidences of customer deviance, to induce and restore, through offering free goods and services, order to the service setting. For example, offering free food and drink.
Using emotional labor	Depicts attempts by employees to feign emotion and psychologically distance themselves from incidences of aberrant customer behavior. For example, faking sincerity through smiling, acting in a polite manner, and nodding in agreement with the deviant.
Exploiting sexual attractiveness	Refers to employees behaving in a sexually overt or promiscuous manner in order to diffuse acts of customer misbehavior. For example, wearing items of revealing clothing in the workplace.
Eliciting support from patrons	Entails acts by employees designed to foster physical and emotional support from loyal patrons when dealing with acts of customer deviance. For example, calling upon regular customers to assist in the handling of deviant customers.
Altering personal speech patterns	Portrays conscious efforts by employees to modify their verbal repertoire and accent in an attempt to align themselves closer to the deviant. For example, mimicking the deviant's use of language.
Manipulating the servicescape	Describes the adjustment or removal of items within the service setting, by employees, during incidences of customer deviance. For example, removing a pint glass from within reach of a dysfunctional customer.
Postincident	
Individual isolation	Depicts efforts by frontline workers to physically distance themselves from both employees and customers after incidences of customer deviance. For example, sitting alone in a cold storage room to calm down.
Talking to colleagues	Refers to workers engaging in discussions with their fellow employees regarding episodes of dysfunctional customer behavior they have encountered. For example, partaking in after closing hours group chats over drinks.
Physical release of emotion	Denotes attempts by employees to rid themselves of the stresses and tensions of dealing with deviant customers through physical exercise. For example, using a punch bag in a storage room as a means of releasing negative feelings.
Gaining revenge	Portrays deeds by frontline workers that are performed with the intention of gaining some form of retribution over deviant customers. For example, deliberately sneezing over the deviant customer's food.

employees are also turning to these substances as a "crutch," which enables them to endure their workday.

In addition to the mental and consumption processes, findings also reveal the frequent occurrences of alterations to work attire in the anticipation of deviant customer behaviors. This tactic is frequently exercised by employees who were concerned, predominantly due to negative past experiences, with aggressive customer behaviors. For example:

I always wear a clip-on tie—I've seen a couple of guys be damn near strangled to death by, let's call it, a "customer with an issue that needs solving." (Male, age 23, two years experience)

I saw a customer punch my manager in the face, he was wearing his glasses, the lenses smashed and his eyes were sliced up, I wear glasses normally, but won't ever wear them to work again after seeing that. (Female, age 29, four years experience)

In addition, the data reveal evidence of, in particular, female employees altering their state of dress in an attempt to discourage inappropriate sexual advances from male customers. Two female employees explain:

I tie my hair up. If I don't, you get the dirty old b*****s running their hands down your hair and touching you up. (Female, age 19, one year experience)

I always wear a high-collared shirt with long sleeves to work, even if you just show them a bit of flesh they are all over you—it's disgusting. (Female, age 23, two years experience)

While research has long recognized that the sex of the service provider influences the dynamics of the service encounter (e.g., Fischer, Gainer, and Bristor 1997; McColl-Kennedy, Daus, and Sparks 2003), and that female customers within the hospitality context frequently feel uncomfortable due to the acts of fellow male customers (see Schmidt and Sapsford 1995), the current study demonstrates that frontline employees also recognize this issue and are subsequently adopting informal tactics in an attempt to minimize acts that, in other contexts, could be deemed as sexual assault.

The final preincident tactic is termed "observing patrons." In contrast to the above-discussed personal strategies that occur prior to the employee partaking in contact with customers (preceding their shift), "observing patrons" refers to practices employed by frontline personnel while *within* the exchange setting as a means of preempting and identifying customers who may potentially be deviant. Acts

documented within this category range from observing new patrons at the entrance to the organization, to attempting to gauge the atmosphere within the exchange setting. For example:

During busy periods, we have someone on the door to vet the customers as they come through. You can just tell the troublemakers, they have a certain look about them, then you make an extra effort to keep an eye on these individuals, waiting for when they kick off. (Male, age 29, six years experience)

After a few years, you can sense the start of any trouble—whether it's someone complaining or getting frisky or whatever. You just get a prickle at the back of your neck, and it's almost like a ripple goes through the place. When that happens, it's time to stop and look around, try and find out what's up—try and spot what's going on and if you can stop it before it really starts. (Female, age 37, 10 years experience)

Observation tactics that attempt to anticipate the occurrence of deviant customer behavior appear to be very common with the majority of respondents reporting such practices to be habitual to their everyday work routines. In particular, informants recount informally learning such tactics from experienced fellow employees through engaging in conversations and observation. Therefore, this category complements research that notes the valuable role that informal mentors perform in the workplace in both socializing and educating new recruits of informal work practices (see Nemanick 2000; Singh, Bains, and Vinnicombe 2002).

During the Incident

In addition to the tactics frontline employees utilize prior to work, analysis of data reveals seven distinct categories of coping strategies that customer contact employees use *during* incidences of deviant customer behavior. These are named "ignoring difficult customers," "bribing customers," "using emotional labor," "exploiting sexual attractiveness," "eliciting support from patrons," "altering personal speech patterns," and, finally, "manipulating the servicescape."

The label "ignoring difficult customers" refers to efforts by employees to discount or overlook acts of deviant customer behaviors. In this regard, employees make a conscious effort to disregard or ignore acts of customer misbehavior that are occurring within their immediate vicinity. Two main rationales for this tactic are offered. First, frontline employees feel that they are not paid enough to take physical risks in directly tackling deviant customer behaviors. Two frontline employees explain:

I don't look, they don't pay me enough to go and rugby tackle some six-foot Neanderthal who's stealing glasses. Don't look, don't notice, and don't piss them off! (Male, age 27, six years experience)

I'm just not paid enough to deal with that type of thing. The hassle that it creates when you confront them isn't worth it. I could end up in hospital, and for what, a measly \$5 an hour? (Female, age 23, three years experience)

Second, informants report ignoring incidences of deviant customer behavior due to the fear that such actions may result in them being subjected to disciplinary procedures or, ultimately, dismissal. For example:

All I want to do is just give them a slap and tell them what I really think of them, but I can't. If I do that I will lose my job, so I just ignore it and try and get on with my day. (Female, age 35, 16 years experience)

In some senses, these findings indicate that customer contact employees are assuming a differentiated moral code in their work and nonwork lives. That is, for understandable instrumental reasons (fear of job loss and physical harm), employees lower their level of moral sensitivity significantly below that which they would usually assume in a nonworking environment. Indeed, many of those who adopt this tactic recognize a distinctive difference between their work and nonwork personas. This finding is consistent with that of Sosteric (1996), who, in examining the labor processes of nightclub employees, reveals evidence of a conflict between management's espoused customer service policies and the employees' "sense of themselves."

The second coping tactic utilized during incidences of deviant customer behavior is labeled "bribing customers." In direct contrast to employees who ignore episodes of deviance, acts of bribery denote incidences wherein frontline employees attempt to induce deviant customers through offering free goods or services (without formal managerial consent). In particular, enticements are presented to deviant customers in an attempt either to restore calm to the service setting or as an inducement to encourage them to exit the establishment. Bribes range from large-scale offerings of free goods and services (at the expense of the organization) to cases wherein employees personally pay deviant customers to exit the establishment. Two frontline employees illustrate:

Give them some freebies. Coffee, desserts, whatever—it's not my profits. All I want is everybody happy and bloody great tips! (Female, age 37, 10 years experience)

I bought them out in the end. I couldn't get them to leave. The four of them were getting physical and I

was working alone, so I bought them each a bottle of beer and they left. Ten dollars it cost me and I got rid of them. I wish I'd done that earlier. (Male, age 28, three years experience)

Acts of bribery were common, with 79 percent of informants reporting having partaken in such behavior. However, such activities raise serious ethical implications. Many of these incidences involve acts of theft that could lead to criminal charges being brought against frontline employees. Yet this must be balanced against a consideration that customer contact employees felt that such actions were necessary due to the deviant behaviors of customers. In this sense, it would seem that employees are inculcated with "the cult of the customer" (Du Gay and Salaman 1992, p. 613) to the extent that they feel obliged to take significant personal risks in order to maintain customer satisfaction.

Frontline employees also adopt the tactic of "using emotional labor," referring to employees feigning emotional display in order to cope with occurrences of deviant customer behavior. This tactic denotes activities by employees to diffuse and psychologically distance themselves from episodes of deviant customer behavior through faking sincerity and empathy. This is akin to what Hochschild (1983) calls "surface acting." Two employees explain:

You just detach yourself and act all obedient. You put on a big cheesy grin, and hope that by agreeing with them, they will calm down. (Male, age 45, 17 years experience)

If I saw him [the customer] in the street, I would love to punch him on the nose. But you can't, so I have to be fake. You have to be polite and apologize, smile, and keep them happy. (Female, age 29, six years experience)

Acts of surface acting emotional labor were extremely common, with the majority of informants reporting regularly to engage in such coping tactics. Yet respondents further report experiencing feelings of frustration and fatigue from having to feign positive emotions and force smiles. For example:

I've been told in my training that the customer is always right, so I must smile at them, and be helpful, even when they are being really rude. But it's just so utterly exhausting I hate it. It's like leading a double life . . . that's the worse part, they are really nasty and you have to fake it and be nice back to them! (Female, age 21, 1.5 years experience)

This finding complements research that acknowledges the use of emotional labor by customer contact employees to be a negative consequence of deviant customer behav-

ior (Bailey and McCollough 2000; Harris and Reynolds 2003). Further, this supports Sturdy (1998), who directly links the growth of emotional labor to the rise of frontline employee posts and the pervasive application of consumer sovereignty.

The fourth coping tactic utilized by employees is labeled "exploiting sexual attractiveness." This refers to employees who behave in a sexually overt or promiscuous manner in order to diffuse acts of customer deviance. Informants who reported performing this tactic directly contrast with employees who partake in "altering one's clothing." That is, rather than engaging in behaviors actively to discourage sexual behaviors by patrons (altering one's clothing), employees who undertake acts of "exploiting sexual attractiveness" consciously invite and encourage such activities as a technique for coping with deviant customer behaviors. Two employees illustrate:

If things get silly, all you got to do is "put on your little girly voice and say you're really, really sorry, sir. Aren't I just a silly-billy" [said in an affected "little girl" voice—somewhat akin to the voice of Marilyn Monroe], and most of them go all fatherly on you. (Female, age 35, eight years experience)

Men go all gooey if you flash a little cleavage or show a little thigh. Male customers are just men who're in here—they still go gooey. (Female, age 37, eight years experience)

Data analysis reveals that such acts were exclusively utilized by female employees. Behaviors classified within this category range from employees using sexually explicit language to the wearing of revealing items of clothing. Therefore, in contrast to research that highlights the growing problem of the sexual abuse of employees, by customers, within the service industry (see Harris and Reynolds 2004; McGrath and Goulding 1996; Tyler 1999), the present findings suggest that in some cases, employees feel that they are being driven to behave in what may be called a sexually degrading fashion in order to pacify acts of customer deviance and uphold the "customer is king" ethos.

The fifth form of coping tactic uncovered is described as "eliciting support from patrons." This tactic denotes acts by employees designed to foster physical and emotional support from regular customers when dealing with acts of deviant customer behaviors. In this case, customer contact employees actively encourage and welcome the assistance of long-standing patrons in diffusing situations. Two employees explain:

Get the locals on your side. Builders are the best—big

f*****s who drink from 5 'til closing every day. Any trouble and it's "Ahem, John can you help me here." (Male, age 32, four years experience)

It's really family oriented in here, any sign of trouble and you don't even need to ask, the locals always step in and sort out the troublemakers, it's really reassuring to know that they are at hand. (Female, age 55, 26 years experience)

Informants report deliberately nurturing close and supportive relationships between themselves and regular patrons, without the formal consent of management, with the intention that when difficulties arise with deviant customers, assistance by patrons will be given. One employee illustrates:

We always keep the locals on our side. We really take our time to work on this. We treat them well, because we know that when things get severe, they will help us out—especially the big guys, they always step in and protect us, it's like having 18 big brothers. (Male, age 23, three years experience)

Yet, while marketers espouse the benefits of relationship marketing (Priluck 2003; Sheth and Parvatiyar 2000), it is ironic that frontline employees have adopted their own forms of relationship management as an attempt to protect themselves from unruly customers. Further, it is interesting to observe that such supportive customers have, in effect, allowed themselves to become unofficial (at least not officially rewarded) employees of the organization. In some senses, parallels may be drawn between these findings and those of Bowers, Martin, and Luker (1990), who discuss the exchange of roles between customers and employees during service provision.

The sixth coping tactic utilized by customer contact employees during incidences of deviant customer behavior is termed "altering personal speech patterns." This refers to efforts by employees to alter their verbal repertoire and accent, with the purpose of socially aligning themselves closer to the deviant customer. Informants recall performing such behaviors as a means of creating a form of bond with the deviant customer, through fostering an impression of mutual understanding. For example:

You have to talk to them in a certain way and go down to their level. If you try and talk to them all posh, they will just react badly to you, you need to adapt the way in which you talk and then it calms them. Then you appear to be on their side. (Female, age 28, 13 months experience)

I always try and mimic their accent, just subtly or they'll think you are taking the p**s. . . . I also echo

their language—there's no point in trying to make them look stupid by using long words if they can't even read, is there? . . . It just signals to them that you understand where they are coming from. (Male, age 25, four years experience)

This coping tactic is evidence of Trudgill's (1986) accommodation theory, which illustrates how speakers accommodate each other linguistically by reducing the dissimilarities between their speech patterns. Within the current study, this tactic is used by employees as a mechanism to reduce the social disparity between themselves and the deviant customer and thus calm the situation. Indeed, acts of altering personal speech patterns were common, with 67 percent of informants reporting the deliberate use of such behavior.

Finally, evidence emerged that suggests employees manipulated the servicescape during periods of deviant customer behavior. This form of coping tactic is described as "manipulating the servicescape," which signifies the modification or removal of objects within the service setting, by frontline employees, during events of customer deviance. Two main forms of "manipulating the servicescape" tactics are revealed. The first are episodes wherein employees attempt to remove potentially harmful items from the immediate servicescape (that is, away from the reach of the deviant customer). Two employees describe:

Try and distract them, move the ashtray or glass out of their reach. (Male, age 27, six years experience)

I have been known to actually remove tables and chairs—just get everything that they could pick up and throw at you away from them. (Male, age 26, three years experience)

The second are incidences in which customer contact employees attempt to modify individual ambient variables of the servicescape as a means to stop current acts of deviant customer behavior. Most commonly influenced are the establishment's temperature, lighting, and music levels. For example:

Josie always says "when things are getting heated—cool the room," so we open the windows and doors and get a breeze through . . . people then start complaining that its too cold rather than punching each other! (Male, age 23, two years experience)

If somebody's complaining, we turn the music down—it makes them feel self-conscious. (Male, age 18, one year experience)

These findings are concurrent with research that notes the influence the service environment may have on the

occurrence of deviant customer behaviors. For example, Areni (2003) draws a direct link between the presence of music within hospitality outlets and the occurrence of deviant customer behaviors. Further, Fullerton and Punj (1993) and Harris and Reynolds (2004) highlight the role that servicescape design may play in deterring acts of customer deviance.

Postincident

The final category of coping tactics uncovered denotes the informal procedures that are utilized by frontline employees *after* episodes of customer deviance. In this regard, the current category details the methods exercised by customer contact employees that enable them to psychologically manage the experienced incident of customer deviance. Four main forms of tactics were revealed—"individual isolation," "talking to colleagues," "physical release of emotion," and "gaining revenge."

The term "individual isolation" signifies efforts by frontline employees to isolate themselves from both their fellow employees and customers after incidences of deviant customer behavior. This self-segregation occurs as a means to enable the individual employee to regain their composure in private. Typically, episodes classified within this category detail employees placing themselves in chilled environments to aid them in cooling down, in both a physical and psychological sense. For example:

Afterwards I get out, stand outside where it's cold and cool myself down. I mean, you have to be so nice but inside you're burning to slap them. (Female, age 31, seven years experience)

I always go and stand in the cellar for a few minutes, just to let myself cool down and get my head back on track. (Male, age 26, two years experience)

These findings indicate the profound effect incidences of deviant customer behavior have on employees. While it is widely acknowledged that employees' actions, such as emotional labor, may have a negative effect (Hochschild 1983; Sturdy 1998), within the current case, it would appear that the customers are a source of enragement and frustration.

In contrast to coping tactics in which employees segregate themselves from their fellow colleagues, "talking to colleagues" denotes activities by frontline employees to cope with earlier cases of deviant customer behavior in a collaborative manner. Such tactics range from spontaneous postwork discussions, to what may be considered as predetermined and customary informal conversations in which

participants recount previously experienced incidences of customer deviance. All cases of "talking to colleagues" occurred within the workplace, after closing time, when no customers were present. Commonly, such tactics involve employees attempting to describe and view incidences of deviant customer behavior in a "humorous light." Two employees describe:

It can really affect you. At the time it feels like a complete disaster, so making it a comedy is a way to deal with it. We call it "tales from the crib," we all sit down and tell our tales. I think that is the only way to deal with it, talk about it and make it humorous. (Female, age 31, six years experience)

We always sit down after work and have a little bitch about a situation. . . . Everyone will chat about their nasty customers or their nice customers, and we have a laugh about it then. (Male, age 23, two years experience)

Frequently, alcohol appeared to play an integral role in both aiding discussion and relieving employee tension. Indeed, 92 percent of informants state that their current workplace actively engages in alcohol-aided informal discussion sessions, thus enabling employees to psychologically recuperate from incidences of customer deviance prior to concluding their workday. Two employees explain:

After every shift we have a drink and a time to talk. . . . You need to share what happened, you need to get it straight. If you don't, you won't sleep. (Male, age 21, one year experience)

Every bar I've ever worked in, it's always the same. You close the doors, pour yourself a drink, put your feet up, and chew the cud. Talking about what happened, what went wrong, just talking to chill yourself out. (Male, age 51, 23 years experience)

Instances of such informal group discussions appear to not only offer employees a source of emotional and psychological support, but such discussions also seem to provide employees with a forum in which, through sharing their experiences, they can learn effective tactics of dealing with deviant customer behaviors. This finding lends support to Bandura's (1971) social learning theory, which details that human behaviors are learned through the observation of others' behaviors or ideas.

The third coping tactic employed details of postwork attempts by frontline employees to rid themselves of the anxieties and tensions incurred during contact with deviant customers. This behavior is labeled "physical release of emotion." Typically, such activities comprise efforts by

employees to alleviate themselves of hostile feelings and stress through partaking in some form of physical post-service exercise. First, informants recount these activities occurring within the workplace. For example:

I do the bottles [emptying a large box of empty bottles into recycling containers]. After ten minutes of smashing the "recycles" [into the container], it kind of makes you feel better. (Male, age 41, nine years experience)

We have a punch bag in the storage room. Whenever I've had a difficult customer, I go upstairs and pound at that—it makes me feel so much better. (Male, age 30, 10 years experience)

Second, the findings reveal evidence of employees undertaking physical exercise after their working hours. Such activities are carried out with the intention of reducing stress levels that had been previously elevated by contact with deviant customers. Two employees describe:

I go home and work out. Thirty minutes of "hips and thighs" aerobics you can't be angry with anything. (Female, age 35, two years experience)

After a nasty customer, I always go to the gym and run really hard on the treadmill for an hour. It's literally as though I am sweating those b*****s out of my system. (Male, age 25, three years experience)

It is interesting to note that the psychological and emotional strain on employees dealing with incidences of deviant customer behavior is such that employees are compelled to alleviate their feelings of stress in a physical manner. This finding is concurrent with that of Ogbonna and Harris (2002), who uncover evidence of employees partaking in physical activities as a method with which to cope with perceived managerial controls.

The final coping tactic utilized by employees following acts of deviant customer behavior is labeled "gaining revenge." This term represents deeds by frontline employees that are performed with the intention of attaining some form of retribution over deviant customers. This mirrors the earlier findings of Bies and Tripp (1998), who uncover evidence of employee revenge within organizations. In this regard, employees make a conscious decision after experiencing an incident of customer deviance to retaliate against the perpetrator. Analysis of data reveals two main forms of customer contact employee revenge. The first are episodes wherein customer contact employees undertake acts of revenge *immediately* after incidences of deviant customer behavior in order to restore perceived equity. In this sense, such activi-

ties can be regarded as acts of "hot revenge" (owing to them being driven by heated emotions). For example:

I got my own back [on the customer] when John served his coffee—I made sure I'd had a good spit in it first. (Male, age 18, one year experience)

I just saw red. There was no way that I was going to let her get one over on me, so I sneezed over her dessert. (Female, age 42, 10 years experience)

Second, contrary to employees who attempt to gain immediate retribution, the findings depict episodes of informants consciously deliberating and scheming feats of revenge against specific deviant customers over extended time periods. In this regard, these behaviors are conducted as acts of "cold revenge" (in that they are performed after what may be deemed as a degree of rational thought). Two frontline employees describe:

I just bided my time, and when he came back [to the bar] the next week, I just ignored him, I served every single customer in the whole place before I got to him, he must have stood there for at least an hour! (Female, age 45, 18 years experience)

I was so angry at the time. I just wanted to lash out, but I didn't. I did something much cleverer, the next day I phoned all the bar managers that I know in the area and told them what had happened. . . . I had that little s**t barred from them all. He will never drink another pint in this town again. (Male, age 35, 15 years experience)

These insights complement the earlier findings of Harris and Reynolds (2003), who forward evidence of employee revenge constituting a behavioral consequence of dysfunctional customer behaviors. Insights into the drivers of acts of employee retaliation can be garnered from an array of literature. In light of the current findings, of particular interest are studies that argue that customer contact employees will actively seek revenge when they perceive to have endured a perceived injustice (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Harris and Ogbonna 2002).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A review of extant literature finds that although some theorists have questioned the utility of customer orientation (Brownlie and Saren 1992; Halliday 2002; Harris 2000) and have highlighted the implications of such a management philosophy for frontline employees (Bateson 1985; Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Pecci and Rosenthal 2000), the impact of deviant customer behavior on such employees has been overlooked. Analysis of interviews with frontline

employees in the hospitality industry finds that customer contact employees adopt a wide range of coping tactics. Briefly, the study uncovers 15 coping tactics that emerge as tactics employed before, during, and after instances of deviant customer behavior. These findings lead to a number of implications for both theory and practice.

First, the current study contributes rich insights into the lives of frontline employees in the hospitality industry. Although a small number of commentators have argued that deviant customer behavior is common, the current study supplies empirical evidence that strongly supports the view that such behaviors by customers are not only common but endemic. That is, the findings demonstrate that many frontline employees are routinely faced with situations in which they are subjected to abuse and mistreatment by customers. The incidence of deviant customer behavior was such that *all* informants were able to recall at least two incidences of deviant customer behavior within the previous two working days. The pervasiveness of such acts by customers is an important finding in itself, and the significance of this finding is magnified when the effects of such actions on frontline employees are considered. The current study clearly demonstrates that the behavior of customers profoundly affects customer contact staff to the extent that they are forced to adopt strategies in order to cope with their work. For example, some of these tactics were detrimental to the well-being of employees (for example, taking drugs in preparation for work), while others constitute gross misconduct (for instance, "bribing customers") and even criminal offenses (for example, permitting illegal drug-selling activities). Ironically, however, while some tactics assist the service performance of the organization through diffusing the effects of deviant acts by customers, typically such actions by frontline employees are detrimental to the financial performance of the organization, in that such diffusions commonly involve giving the deviant customers free goods or services.

Moreover, the findings may offer insights into the issue of employee subjectivity, extensively discussed within the growing body of labor process theory (see Burawoy 1985; Jaros 2001). The current findings contribute to existing literature in highlighting that frontline employees may be more reflexive and adaptive in their daily working lives than previously considered (an issue highlighted by Thompson 1990). That is, evidence is presented that indicates employees adopt informal tactics (that is, commonly unbeknownst to and unauthorized by management) in order to cope with the stresses and strains of their working lives. In this way, the findings indicate that many frontline employees are not simply passive to acts of deviant customer behavior and managerially espoused customer sovereignty. Rather,

employees are organizing and partaking in activities that aid them in the development of their own personal, informal tactics for coping with incidences of deviant customer behavior. In this regard, individual employee and small informal groups of customer contact staff are adopting both defensive and proactive group and individual tactics to counter the negative effects of deviant customer acts. In this way, employees are protecting themselves (physically, emotionally, and psychologically) and their jobs from the destructive effects of deviant customers and customer-obsessed managements, while often ignoring the long-term effects for the financial performance of the firm. Interestingly, it is important to note that the development of these informal tactics is occurring within an industry that is characterized by very low rates of pay, poor working conditions, and very low levels of unionization.

The study also contributes in providing strong evidence that employees are adopting different work and nonwork personas. Employees who, in nonwork circumstances, considered themselves to be principled and moral citizens were found to undertake acts or tacitly permit behaviors that, if detected, would certainly lead instantly to dismissal or even criminal charges. There are two possible explanations for this finding. First, it seems likely that the moral or ethical standards of employees ease during work; either as a response to deviant acts by customers or in an effort to adhere to management dictates regarding customer sovereignty. If this is the case, then it can be argued that the "cult" of the customer erodes the moral welfare of employees. However, a second explanation could be that employees exposed to lower ethical standards in work, over which they have limited control, compensate by raising their own moral codes in their (more controllable) nonworking lives. If this is the case, then it could be claimed that managerially espoused, customer-oriented cultures are perpetuating immorality within work contexts. In either scenario, it can be argued that such a managerial philosophy is morally erosive.

Linked to the uncovering of work and nonwork roles are implications regarding the multiple personas adopted by frontline employees while working. The findings provide strong evidence that employees subjected to direct control or supervision (electronic or otherwise) adopt a façade of customer orientation for the benefit of managers and customers alike. However, once free of such control, employees either individually or collectively adopt a wide range of tactics to cope with customer deviance and general service. In this regard, the current study contributes to existing literature in forwarding evidence that suggests customer contact employees are adopting separate personas when in the workplace. While some of the coping tactics

adopted are *designed* to diffuse deviant customers (and, as such, can be viewed as consistent with the spirit of management prescriptions), the *implementation* of such tactics often involves acts detrimental to management objectives or customer needs (for example, bribing customers, allowing theft, etc.). Nevertheless, the informal and autonomous nature of such tactics leads to the suggestion that the subjectivity of frontline employees, within this context, is considerably higher than has previously been suggested (Jaros 2001; Thompson 1990).

While evidence is found of employee subjectivity, the study also highlights the extent to which customer focus and cultural change initiatives have been adopted and implemented within the hospitality industry. All the respondents reported that customer sovereignty was espoused by management as a core component of the "ethos" of their organization. In this sense, it appears that the "cult" of the customer has been enthusiastically and universally adopted within the sector studied. While the service nature of the context probably explains the rate of adoption (see Sturdy 1998), the volume of marketing prescriptions espousing the benefits of customer sovereignty (Deshpandé, Farley, and Webster 1993; Egan and Shipley 1995; Judd 2003; Krepapa et al. 2003) appears to have fostered the belief among practitioners that adopting a customer orientation is universally beneficial. In contrast, this study highlights a range of potentially harmful, unintended consequences for not only frontline employees but also managements and customers. Although many management prescriptions and change initiatives focus on (less than subtle) variations of the claim that the "customer is king," the frontline effects of the adoption of this "mantra" are unpredictable and certainly not universally beneficial. Employees adopt tactics to cope with and alleviate the stress of such working conditions and act in ways that have serious financial and legal implications. Similarly, customers driven by the knowledge of management claims of customer focus, and motivated by financial gain or for reasons of ego (see Harris and Reynolds 2004), may well find their service negatively affected (see revenge tactics, for example). In this sense, the present findings contribute to existing literature in uncovering a "dark side" of customer sovereignty in highlighting that incidences may occur wherein the customer is not "always right" and where frontline employees are obliged to adopt physically harmful, emotionally taxing, illegal, immoral, and even degrading tactics for coping with customers.

Although a number of (largely marketing) studies have argued that deviant customer behavior is common, the findings of the current study indicate that such actions are endemic within the hospitality sectors studied. This study

finds widespread deviant behaviors by the customers of bars and restaurants as well as actions by frontline employees that have been described as morally questionable. This has implications for how we conceive, model, and study service exchange dynamics. In brief, assumptions of compliant, submissive, and obedient employees (and customers) are, at best, outdated and, at worst, redundant. In many ways, both parties of service appear frequently to be acting in a dubious fashion. While the implications of such levels of societal morality are beyond the scope of this study, a recent paper by Harris and Reynolds (2004) provides an interesting insight. Harris and Reynolds (2004) find that service employees are more likely to become what they label "dysfunctional customers," because such employees witness the deviant acts of customers. This finding, when matched with the current study, suggests the possibility that constant exposure to deviant acts by customers desensitizes or educates employees to the extent that they become deviant customers. In this regard, it could be argued that deviant customer behavior is a self-perpetuating, vicious cycle.

The findings of this study also have implications for practitioners. In particular, the findings highlight what may be potentially serious implications for managers with regard to both their ability to perform their own executive role within the organization, and their capacity to secure employee welfare. Managers should consider the procedures they have in place to aid frontline workers in dealing with acts of customer misbehavior. For example, as an attempt to lessen the need for workers to employ their own "informal tactics" and gain some form of control and uniformity over the way in which employees manage episodes of customer deviance, managers should consider a number of techniques. First, managers might introduce and endorse "debriefing sessions" with frontline workers, wherein employees are encouraged to openly share their experiences, successes, and failures, with regard to acts of customer misbehavior they have encountered. Second, managers may wish to compile this information and create a log of incidences of dysfunctional customer behavior. This record may subsequently be used as a means of tracking and identifying persistent offenders and common misbehaviors. In turn, this data could be drawn upon by management in the creation of employee training programs, wherein useful, appropriate, and organizationally espoused tactics are conveyed.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study has made a number of contributions, the limitations of its design provide a number of avenues for

further research. First, coding procedures classified the data according to the stage during the service encounter in which the tactic occurred. However, in adopting this classification scheme, the current study fails to incorporate alternative means of classification that may provide further insight into this area of study. Therefore, further research may wish to consider different techniques of classification. For example, future studies could develop a classification pattern that observes how workers respond to each of the specific forms of dysfunctional customer behavior. By contrast, researchers might examine how individual workers personally utilize tactics in a longitudinal fashion (e.g., throughout their working day/week/month). In addition, future insights might be garnered in adopting different methods with which to gather data. Further, such methods might be employed as a means to examine employees' coping tactics with reference to existing classifications of dysfunctional customer behavior (e.g., Fullerton and Punj 2004).

Second, the focus of this research centers on frontline workers within a single service industry. The behaviors uncovered may be specific to the context in which they occurred. For example, environments in which alcohol is served may be more likely to fall victim to incidences of alcohol-induced customer deviance. Further, in such settings, workers may be more likely to engage in coping tactics that involve the consumption of alcohol. Moreover, the degree to which managers engage in, or are aware of, employees' tactics may differ. Therefore, the context and focus of this study limit its generalizability. Future research might wish to focus on alternative or contrasting service sectors (e.g., retail or health care).

Third, the focus of the current study is centered on examining the tactics that frontline employees utilize in dealing with incidences of customer misbehavior. Many of the tactics uncovered appear to occur without the knowledge or the consent of management. With regard to the generalizability of the study, this focus represents a limitation. Further research might wish to consider, in more depth, the role management plays in the creation and execution of frontline employee tactics. For example, future studies could consider the extent to which managers "turn a blind eye" to tactics that violate organizational procedures. Moreover, future research could examine the tactics managers employ in dealing with episodes of deviant customer behavior. In addition, future studies may wish to garner a more holistic perspective in concurrently examining the tactics of both frontline workers and managers.

Fourth, future research may wish to investigate the proposal that customer contact employees assume diverse personas within their working lives. Such research might investigate the short- and long-term psychological and

emotional consequences of such activities upon the individual employee. In uncovering evidence of incidences wherein employees engage in acts of revenge upon deviant customers, the current study provides tentative evidence to suggest that acts of deviant employee behavior may constitute a driving force or further provoke acts of customer deviance. Therefore, future research may wish to explore the relationship between the occurrence of witnessing deviant employee behaviors and subsequent participation in deviant behaviors.

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