HOLD THE PHONE! - CAN CUSTOMER ROLE CONFLICT COMPROMISE A SERVICE ENCOUNTER?

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The authors of this exploratory study propose customer role conflict as a possible explanation for why customers may not fully perform the customer role during a routine service encounter. Two levels of customer role conflict (present and absent) are used to examine how customer role performance may be influenced by customer role conflict and in turn, how customer role performance influences both customer and service employee satisfaction with a routine service encounter. Findings suggest that customer role performance is a significant predictor of customer and service employee satisfaction with a routine service encounter. Results also suggest that an absence of customer role conflict is associated with higher evaluations of customer satisfaction, service employee satisfaction, and perceived customer role performance.

INTRODUCTION

A recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* titled "Sorry, cellphones aren't on the menu" highlights a phenomenon with which marketers of services are increasingly trying to come to grips: their customers' use of (mobile) cell phones during service encounters. This particular story describes a deli owner who has refused to serve customers who are on their phones and refers to another restaurant that has a strict no-cell phone policy (Hoder, 2013). Cited concerns in the food service industry with respect to customers' cell phone use during service encounters include customers who talk so loudly they disturb those around them, customers who keep wait staff on hold at a table while finishing up a call and so disrupt service for everyone, and customers' returning of food that has cooled while they were busy talking on their phones (2013). The bottom line is that it can be problematic when customers do not do what they are *supposed* to do in a service situation.

Since the 1990s, marketing in general has focused increasingly on the relational and interactive features of exchange (Broderick,

1998). For services marketing in particular, the success of the exchange is contingent on those involved playing the roles expected of them well (1998). When individuals do not do what they are *supposed to do* in a service situation, the experience is potentially compromised for all involved. Given that customers can be productive resources for service organizations and contributors to quality and/or value (Bitner, Faranda, Hubbert, & Zeithaml, 1997), a cause for uncertainty (Ojasalo, 2003), and even a disruptive force in a service environment (e.g. Hsieh & Yen, 2005; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2013), we can appreciate that the customer role can be considerably larger and more complex than that of passive service recipient (e.g. Webb, 2000; Wieseke, Geigenmuller, & Kraus, 2012; Xie, Bagozzi, & Troye, 2008).

During service encounters customers may be cooperative, helpful, friendly, respectful (Lengnick-Hall, Inks, & Lawrence, 2000; Webb, 2000; Winsted, 2000), and even empathetic (Wieseke, Geigenmuller, & Kraus, 2012). However, little is actually known about how the performance of the customer role impacts the evaluation of the encounter. Instead, extant literature on behavior in a service context has focused on the service provider (Costa, 1995; Namasivayam & Hinkin, 2003). Our purpose is, therefore, to

demonstrate that when a customer is perceived to not fully and adequately play the customer role, both customer and service provider satisfaction with the service encounter is likely to be lower than when the customer participates in the usual or expected way (Gremler & Brown, 1999).

One factor found to impact service encounters is service employee conflict. Employee role conflict has been linked to such negative outcomes as their own job dissatisfaction, turnover, burnout, and poor performance (e.g. Chung & Schneider, 2002). Extending the line of research concerning role conflict in service situations (i.e. Lysonski, 1985; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988; O'Brien, Hill, & Autry, 2009), we explore customer role conflict as a potential compromising dynamic in service encounters. More specifically, we explore the possibility and implications of customer role conflict on customer role performance and customer and service provider satisfaction during and following a routine service encounter. Our scenario-based study compares the effects of customers' active participation in their expected customer role with the effects of customers' withdrawal from the expected customer role. The results of our exploratory examination are particularly relevant for service managers who wish to protect the customer experience in a service environment from customers who do not adequately perform the customer role, and to prepare service employees to deal with them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Service Encounter

The characteristics and dynamics of interpersonal interactions between customers and service employees in the delivery of services have been a considerable focus of extant research in services marketing (Mäki & Kokko, 2012). One of the ways customers and service employees interact is in face-to-face encounters. A face-to-face service encounter is an interaction between a buyer and seller in a service setting that allows strangers to interact

(Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). Service encounters are social encounters that often require some level of customer participation (Czepiel, 1990). Customer participation, which is often described in terms of level (i.e. high, medium, and low (see Bitner et al., 1997)), is important for services because it has been linked to organizational productivity (Fitzsimmons, 1985; Lovelock & Young, 1979), efficiency (Jones, 1990), quality (Claycomb, Lengnick-Hall, & Inks, 2001; Ennew & Binks, 1999), service performance (Mills, Chase, & Margulies, 1983), and customer satisfaction (Bateson, 1985; Cermak, File, & Prince, 1994). Importantly, any given level of customer participation can impact outcome variables such as these. However, the impact depends in part on how effectively customers participate. It therefore matters not only how much but also how well a customer participates in service encounters.

Customer Participation in a Retail Setting

Given the "commonplace nature of retail" and the "high number of frequent customers", retail is an area with "a long tradition of customer participation" (Mäki & Kokko, 2012, p. 97). In a retail setting, both service providers and customers are very much "on stage".While Mäki and Kokko (2012) reinforce the notion of customer participation in services in general, they also highlight the importance of the customer role in the retail service process. Since customer participation in the service production process is strongly connected with service productivity (see Ojasalo, 2003) a customer's inadequate or lack of appropriate participation could, among other negative outcomes, disrupt organizational routines and constrain the service provider's potential efficiency (Hsieh & Yen, 2005). Moreover, Xie, Bagozzi, & Troye (2008) note that the traditional view of buyers as passive consumers does not hold within the dominant logic of the service paradigm (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2006). In playing an active role in the co-creation of value, customers' participation becomes an essential part of the service offering (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Schneider & Bowen, 1995;

Greenwood & Lachman, 1996). This suggests that even in routine, low-participation service encounters, customers have roles to play and it matters how well these roles are played.

Role Playing in Service Encounters

A person's behavior may be best understood as the expression of multiple social roles (Ward & Robertson, 1973). Social roles are a set of patterned, functionally interdependent relations between a social person and a social circle involving duties and personal rights (Lopata, 1991). Service encounters are no exception to this model, for they too contain learned and consistent behaviors that should be performed by participants for interactions to proceed smoothly (e.g. Broderick, 1998; Schneider & Bowen, 1985). Over time and through experience, service customers come to know what is expected of them and what to expect from service providers.

For services marketing, role management, which deals with how individuals play out the roles expected of them by others in certain situations, is important because the degree of congruence with learned and expected patterns of behaviors exhibited by customers and service providers is an important determinant of satisfaction with those encounters (Solomon et al., 1985). Since customers can contribute to their own satisfaction through participation in service encounters, the extent to which customers perform well the customer role should also lead to greater service provider satisfaction given the importance of mutuality and reciprocation in service encounters (Broderick, 1998). In other words, the better a customer's performance of the role of customer, the more satisfied all involved should be with the encounter. We therefore hypothesize the following:

> H_1: *Customer role performance is a positive predictor of customer satisfaction with a service encounter.*
> H_2: *Customer role performance is a positive predictor of service*

provider satisfaction with a service encounter.

Role Conflict in Service Encounters

At times individuals may be required to simultaneously play out social roles governed by disparate norms (see Ward & Robertson, 1973; Lopata, 1991). In a service situation, for instance, service employees can be torn between the role of responding to and satisfying customer demands and the role of trying to satisfy the demands of management (e.g. Chung & Schneider, 2002; Hsieh & Yen, 2005). Employee role conflict has been linked to such negative outcomes as job dissatisfaction, turnover, burnout, and poor performance (see Chung & Schneider, 2002). In terms of customers, we can appreciate that there may be times when they may be torn between the role of satisfying the demands of the service customer role and the role(s) demanded of them by someone other than the service provider. In other words, while a customer may be expected to play the role of the service provider's temporary or partial employee by contributing effort, time, or other resources during service delivery (Bettencourt, 1997; Lengnick-Hall, 1996), that same customer may simultaneously be faced with playing another role expected of him or her by someone else.

When role conflict arises, people use coping strategies help to manage relationships. One strategy for dealing with role conflict is to downplay or abandon a lesser role in favor of a more important one. This may be particularly problematic for service encounters, which can easily be interrupted when the customer is required to also play the role of parent, child, significant other, friend, employee, or boss. The conflict resulting from the collision of these disparate roles in a service encounter may be resolved by the customer's downplaying of or withdrawal from the arguably lesser role of customer to focus on a greater role required of the individual by someone more significant. Such a coping strategy may compromise the customer's ability to adequately perform the customer role. Given that customers tend to

share the credit and the blame for service outcomes as they become more involved in the service process (e.g. Eisingerich & Bell, 2006), customers should be more satisfied with service encounters when their roles do not conflict because they would be free to perform the customer role more fully. Thus:

> *H₃: An absence of customer role conflict during a service encounter will be associated with higher levels of customer satisfaction with a service encounter.*

Since face-to-face service encounters are comprised of people, and service customer-employee interactions are important to service delivery in such interactions, it is important to understand not only the customer perspective but also that of the service employee (Harris & Fleming, 2005). Given the importance of mutuality and reciprocation in face-to-face service encounters (Broderick, 1998), customer role conflict should be inversely related to service provider satisfaction:

> *H₄: An absence of customer role conflict during a service encounter will be associated with higher levels of service provider satisfaction.*

Since a lower level of customer role conflict should allow customers to do what is expected of them by service providers, we hypothesize the following:

> *H₅: An absence of customer role conflict will be associated with more positive evaluations of customer role performance.*

METHOD

Sample

A convenience sample of 164 undergraduate students from a mid-south U.S. university was recruited to participate in this scenario-based study. Only three surveys were discarded since significant portions were not completed. Much like Dabholkara & Spaida (2012), who describe

the student sample for their recent study of technology-based self-service (TBSS) failure as ideal given the students' familiarity with TBSS, our respondents participate in and witness service encounters like the ones depicted in the scenarios presented in our study on a regular basis (see Mäki & Kokko, 2012). To confirm the meaningfulness of the scenarios, respondents were asked about their own cell phone usage while shopping. The responses reflect that 93% of respondents owned cell phones, that 65% sometimes use their cell phones while shopping, and that 32% sometimes use their cell phones during service encounters. This suggests that the scenarios were realistic and meaningful. Sample characteristics (n = 161) in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity were as follows: 70 males (43%) and 91 females (57%); 67% aged 18-24; 22% aged 25-34; 11% aged 35+; 65% White ; 16% African American; 7% Hispanic; 3% Asian; and 6% Other.

Design

This study employed a between-subjects design in which subjects read one of two common and routine service scenarios. The scenario method was employed for its "considerable advantages in terms of feasibility, economy, control, and the ethics of research" (Bradley & Sparks, 2012, p. 48). The depiction of a realistic service situation gave the study a degree of experimental and mundane realism. Furthermore, asking respondents to evaluate the role performance and likely satisfaction of hypothetical others minimized respondents' potential of giving socially desirable responses.

Stimulus Materials

Following Bradley and Sparks (e.g. 2000; 2012), participants were randomly assigned one of two scenarios to read whilst imagining they were witnessing the scenario unfold. The scenarios depicted a routine service encounter in a retail setting and the respondents responded to the multi-item instrument based on the scenario (see Appendix 1). The two scripts were reviewed by a panel of three experts.

The 208-word customer role conflict *present* scenario depicted a customer who was on a cell phone call for the duration of the service encounter and had minimal participation in it. The 200-word customer role conflict *absent* scenario depicted the same service encounter without a cell phone call and with a customer who actively participated in the encounter. Script content was held constant except for the behavior of the customer. Neither script provided any evidence of a service breakdown attributable to the service provider. Eighty-two (51%) respondents responded to the customer role conflict present scenario and 79 (49%) responded to the customer role conflict absent scenario.

Measures

Customer role performance was measured using an adapted version of Podsakoff and MacKenzie's (1994) measure of sales agents' performance. The items were adapted to refer to customers rather than to sales agents. Respondents used the five-item, seven-point scale, where higher scores indicate more of the construct to evaluate the role performance of the hypothetical customer depicted in the scenario presented. Given the pervasiveness of the depicted retail scenario in contemporary culture (Mäki & Kokko, 2012), respondents were assumed to be reasonably able to evaluate the role performance of other customers in similar situations.

Respondents were also asked to infer the level of the hypothetical customer's satisfaction with the service encounter. Perceived customer satisfaction was measured using Eroglu and Machliet's (1990) six-item, seven-point semantic differential generalized satisfaction scale, where lower scores indicate greater satisfaction. Respondents were asked to indicate how they thought the hypothetical customer would rate their service experience. Since respondents are customers themselves and have experience with their own satisfaction with routine service encounters (Mäki & Kokko, 2012), they were assumed to be reasonably able to infer another shopper's

satisfaction through their observation of the service encounter.

Respondents were also asked to infer the level of service provider satisfaction with the encounter. Perceived service provider satisfaction was measured using Eroglu and Machliet's (1990) generalized satisfaction scale. Respondents were asked to rate how the hypothetical service provider would likely rate the experience of serving the hypothetical customer in the scenario presented. The stimulus used to respond to this scale was the same as that used to evaluate perceived customer satisfaction, with lower scores indicating greater satisfaction. Given that respondents have experience with and are aware of how a routine service encounter should unfold when dealing directly with service providers (Mäki & Kokko, 2012), it was assumed that respondents would be reasonably able to empathize with the hypothetical service provider (Wieseke et al., 2012) and to infer his/her satisfaction with the encounter given the hypothetical customer's behavior.

Attributing Service Encounter Events to Customer Role Conflict

According to attribution theory (see e.g. Weiner, 2000), all events trigger searches for meaning. Attributions may be of locus (what caused this event), stability (more or less stable), and control (more or less controllable). Just as service failures "may be attributed to a variety of causes (e.g., management, service providers, customers, luck)" (Matt & Folkes, 2005, p.43), satisfaction with a service encounter may be attributed to a variety of causes. To determine to what extent if any our respondents attributed the hypothetical target's satisfaction to customer role conflict, we included a post-service scenario attribution open-ended question. Following, Matt and Folkes' (2005) use of open-ended responses to examine to what consumers' attributed a service provider's performance, we asked our respondents to indicate why they rated the hypothetical target's satisfaction with the service encounter the way they did. Rather than

provide pre-determined categories for independent raters to categorize the responses (e.g. Matt & Folkes (2005); Wang, Arndt, Singh, Biernat, & Liu, 2013), our judges independently grouped without guidance and later compared responses to determine to what satisfaction could be attributed.

Measure Assessment

The multi-item measures were subjected to exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to address issues of dimensionality and convergent and discriminant validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993). Exploratory factor analysis was performed using principal components analysis with varimax rotation to confirm the structure of the adapted measures. A clear three-factor structure emerged with all but one item loading on its expected component with factor loading values of at least .70 (Nunnally, 1978). One item from the customer role performance measure was removed from analysis due to a poor factor loading (Rummell, 1967). Factor loadings ranged from .78 to .89 collectively accounting for 88% of the variance explained. Appendix 2 includes the scale items and demonstrates that the internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha) of each measure is above the commonly accepted threshold of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Results of the confirmatory factor analysis using the sample covariance matrix as input to LISREL 8.51 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993) indicated that each item loaded significantly on its respective underlying concept. With the exception of the c^2, the results indicate an acceptable fit of the measurement model (c^2 = 211.09, *df* = 101, *p* = .00, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA] = .08, Normed Fit Index [NFI] = .93, Non-Normed Fit Index [NNFI] = .96, Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = .96) (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993).

As shown in Appendix 2, the magnitudes of the standardized loading estimates ranged from .70 to .98 and all loadings were significant (i.e. all *t*-values were larger than 2.00). In addition to

these loadings, and the various model fit statistics, average variance extracted (AVE) was used to demonstrate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All AVE values were greater than .50, demonstrating convergent validity. Discriminant validity is present since the largest value for shared variance between all pairs of constructs was .32, which is less than the lowest value for AVE (.55).

The open-ended question "Why did you rate the customer/service provider satisfaction with the service encounter the way you did?", which gave respondents an opportunity to attribute perceived customer and service provider satisfaction to as many factors as they were inclined to indicate, resulted in 174 customer satisfaction attribution statements and 176 service provider satisfaction attribution statements. Two judges independently categorized the responses and resolved any differences through discussion (see Matt and Folkes, 2005). Four attribution categories were identified: Social Interaction; Customer Effort; Customer Role Conflict; and Routine/No Failure. A theme that emerged from the responses was that from the customer perspective, customer cell phone use during a service encounter evoked respondents' empathy for the hypothetical customer and was viewed as an effort to manage customer role conflict. From the service provider perspective, however, customer cell phone use during a service encounter evoked respondents' evoked disdain for the hypothetical customer whose behavior was described by some as neglectful and disrespectful.

For perceived customer satisfaction, 32% of statements attributed satisfaction to social interaction and 14% to the customer's effort. Thirty-two percent of perceived customer satisfaction attribution statements referred to the routine/no failure nature of the encounter. As for the category labeled customer role conflict, 22% of customer satisfaction attribution statements referred to the customer's attempts to multi-task and/or tend to a more

TABLE 1:
Composite Score Correlations of the Study Variables*

	Customer Satisfaction	Provider Satisfaction	Customer Performance
Customer Satisfaction	1.00		
Provider Satisfaction	.59**	1.00	
Customer Performance	-.50**	-.87**	1.00

* Customer Performance was measured using a 7-point scale where higher scores indicate more of the construct. Customer and Provider Satisfaction were each measured on 7-point scales where lower scores indicate more of the construct.

TABLE 2:
Means and Standard Deviations for each
Dependent Variable for each Level Of Customer Role Conflict

	Customer Role Conflict Scenario	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Customer Satisfaction*	Absent	1.79	.91	79
	Present	2.93	1.11	82
Service Provider Satisfaction**	Absent	1.82	1.00	79
	Present	5.51	1.15	82
Customer Role Performance***	Absent	6.13	1.07	79
	Present	2.09	1.11	82

*Customer Satisfaction was measured on a 6-item, 7-point semantic differential generalized satisfaction scale where lower scores indicate greater satisfaction.
**Service Provider Satisfaction was measured on a 6-item, 7-point semantic differential generalized satisfaction scale where lower scores indicate greater satisfaction.

important issue, with 49% of respondents explicitly mentioning the cell phone call.

For perceived service provider satisfaction, 72% of statements attributed satisfaction to the customer-service provider interaction with 58% pointing to social interaction and 14% pointing to the customer's effort. Twenty-five percent of the statements referred to the routine/no failure nature of the encounter. Though 70% of respondents made statements regarding the inappropriateness of the customer's use of the phone in the customer role conflict present scenario, only 3% of respondents' statements could be categorized as attributable to customer role conflict.

RESULTS

After establishing the structure of the measurement model, three composite scores were created using the mean of the means to indicate each of the dependent variables. Table 1, which reports scale correlations, indicates that all variables were significantly correlated. Results suggest that customer performance is more highly correlated with the service provider's satisfaction with the service encounter than with the customer's satisfaction with the encounter.

The means and standard deviations are reported in Table 2. The means clearly indicate that respondents perceive customer role performance, customer satisfaction, and service provider satisfaction to be higher when customer role conflict is absent than when it is present.

Tests of Hypotheses

Linear regression models were created with customer role performance as the continuous independent variable and perceptions of

customer satisfaction and of service provider satisfaction as the two dependent variables to test hypotheses 1 and 2. Support for H_1 was revealed in a positive significant effect of customer role performance on evaluations of customer satisfaction (b = .50, $p < .00$; adjusted R^2 = .24). Support for H_2 was found in the positive significant effect of customer role performance on evaluations of service provider satisfaction (b = .88, $p < .00$; adjusted R^2=.76).

To test for differences between the two scenarios, subjects' responses were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The results of the MANOVA showed significant differences between the two scenarios for each of the three dependent variables at $p < .05$ (F = 275.15; Wilkes Lambda = .17). There were significant differences between the customer role conflict present and absent scenario responses for: evaluations of perceived customer satisfaction (F = 50.19, p = .00); evaluations of perceived service provider satisfaction (F = 472.56, p = .00); and evaluations of customer role performance (F = 703.25, p = .00). These results, in combination with those in Table 2, provide support for H_3, H_4 and H_5 respectively and suggest that a presence of customer role conflict significantly influences evaluations of customer satisfaction, evaluations of service provider satisfaction, and evaluations of customer role performance such that all are significantly lower than when it is absent.
In an effort to confirm whether, based on the

scenarios presented, customer and service provider satisfaction could be attributed in part to customer role conflict, a post-hoc sample t-test between proportions based on the results of the qualitative analysis was performed. This analysis was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the attributions of customer and service provider satisfaction in the role conflict present scenario. The percentage of responses attributing customer and service provider satisfaction with the encounter to the customer's effort (t (81) = .00, p = 1.00) and the routine/no failure nature of the encounter (t (81) = .84, p = .40) did not significantly differ at the .05 alpha level. However, significant differences between attributions of customer and provider satisfaction were revealed in terms of social interaction (t (81) = 2.58, p = 0.01) and customer role conflict (t (81) = 3.72, p = .00) (see Table 3).

These particular findings point to the importance of the customer-provider interaction in general. They demonstrate that our respondents had a shared view of how the encounter "should" unfold from both the customer and service provider perspectives – that customers should actively participate in the encounter and that there should be no failure. They also suggest that a customer's withdrawal from the customer role to focus on a greater role is viewed significantly differentially depending on the perspective (customer versus service provider).

TABLE 3:
Attributions of Service Encounter Satisfaction for Role Conflict "Present" Scenario*

Attribution	Customer	Service Provider	*t*	*p*
Social Interaction	32	58	2.58	.01
Customer Effort	14	14	.00	1.00
Customer Role Conflict	22	3	3.72	.00
Routine, No Failure	32	25	.84	.40

*N = 82

DISCUSSION

This study explored customer role conflict as a possible explanation for why customers may not fully perform their customer roles in service encounters. Taken together, our qualitative and quantitative analyses offer some insight. First, our qualitative analysis suggests that our respondents shared an idea of how the depicted encounter "should" unfold from both the customer and service provider perspectives. Most importantly, our analysis of the open-ended responses suggests that customer role performance is important for both customer and service provider satisfaction, and that customer role conflict can impact customer performance. However, poor customer performance was forgivable when taking the perspective of the customer. When attributing the customer's satisfaction, customer cell phone use during a service encounter evoked respondents' empathy for the hypothetical customer and was viewed as the customer's attempt to manage role conflict. However, when attributing the satisfaction of the service provider, the customer on cell phone example evoked disdain for the hypothetical customer whose behavior was described as anti-social at best.

In combination with our qualitative results, our quantitative results suggest that customer role conflict may compromise a service encounter's evaluation. Our findings demonstrate that customer role performance is an important and significant predictor both service customer and employee service encounter satisfaction. In terms of the gaps model of service quality (Zeithaml et al., 1988), our results suggest that the service performance gap may, from the service provider's perspective, be widened by the customer's experience of and coping with role conflict during a routine service encounter. This is particularly important for service situations such as those mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times* story (Hoder, 2013) and depicted in our study. Withdrawal and reliance on another to "pick up the slack" is a plausible role conflict coping strategy in routine service encounters since service customers and service workers often do not know one another (Solomon et al., 1985), which may result in

customers feeling little obligation toward the service provider and in service providers feeling ignored and disrespected.

Our results also suggest that if customers are faced with role conflict during a routine service encounter and they resolve this conflict by tending to a role other than that of customer, customer performance may be compromised. Such a compromise appears to have negative implications for perceived customer and service employee satisfaction with a service encounter. However, when customers are not faced with role conflict and play their customer roles as expected, levels of perceived satisfaction are significantly more positive for both the service customer and employee. In fact, the results suggest that service employees may be even more satisfied than their customers when customers do their part and are even more dissatisfied with the encounter than their customers when customers do not. It may not, however, be surprising that customer role performance during service encounters contributes less to customer satisfaction than to employee satisfaction. One conclusion we can draw is that even if customers do not fully "do their part" they are likely to be satisfied if in the end they "get what they want" and service employees "do their jobs". This echoes the position taken by one restaurant worker who explained "As a server, it's your job to ensure the best experience for the customer …so, if they want to be on their phone, we have to adjust accordingly" (Hoder, 2013).

Theoretical Implications

Past studies have suggested that service employees and customers are psychologically close because of the interactive nature of service delivery (i.e. Rafaeli, 1989; Schneider & Bowen, 1985), thus rendering employee feelings, attitudes, and behaviors critical determinants of service quality and customer satisfaction (Chung & Schneider, 2002). Further, frontline service delivery behaviors such as courtesy, personal attentiveness, and responsiveness have been shown to influence customer satisfaction and perceptions of service

quality (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Our findings suggest that such service employee perceptions of customer behaviors may similarly influence service employee satisfaction. They also lend support to Evans, Simona, and Murray's (2008) assertion that the customer attribute of respect for the service provider – as evidenced in actively participating in service encounters and tending to the role of customer – has a reciprocal effect on the service provider.

The results of our study suggest that service employee perceptions of customer behaviors are critical determinants of service employee satisfaction with the encounter. This supports Van Dolen, Lemmink, and De Ruyter (2002), who found that enhanced customer role performance not only improves the encounter but also improves the ability of service providers to perform their roles. In instances requiring face-to-face interaction, it must be recognized that a substantial part of the service experience comes out of that interaction (Harris & Fleming, 2005). The findings of our study reinforce the importance of considering service customers' behaviors and how these behaviors are perceived over the course of an interaction.

In considering clarity, ability, and motivation as three key customer co-production factors (see e.g. Bettencourt, Ostrom, Brown, & Roundtree 2002; Lengnick-Hall, 1996; Lovelock & Young, 1979; Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom, & Brown, 2005), two of the three factors do not adequately explain our findings. First, since the scenarios employed were ones familiar to all study respondents it is unlikely that a perceived lack of clarity as to how the customer *should have behaved* existed. Second, neither scenario indicated customer incompetence or disability that was likely to interfere with the customer's effective performance during the encounter. Motivation as a key factor, however, may provide more insight. Unless customers are sufficiently motivated to play the customer role, the customer role may be downplayed in favor of playing a more significant one especially during a routine, low-level service encounter such as the one employed in this study. Auh,

Bell, McLeod, & Smith (2007) go so far as to suggest that in low-involvement service situations like grocery shopping, few opportunities exist for customers to participate in value-enhancing ways, which may cause customers to perceive the situation as a chore. In short, in addition to being aware of how to contribute, the customer must have the ability and willingness to do so (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2000).

Implications for Managers

In general, the person-to person encounter between a buyer and seller is of utmost importance to the overall success of the marketing effort (Solomon et al., 1985). In fact, the strategic management of interactions between retail personnel and customers is an important source of competitive advantage (Lindsey-Milkin & Munger, 2011). It is therefore imperative that marketers understand how service encounters may be compromised by the customer's temptation or requirement to play roles other than that of customer. With the majority of service encounter satisfaction attributions in our study pointing to the interaction between the service customer and employee, the results suggest that customers and service providers are perceived as having certain expectations of themselves and of one another during service encounters. While our results suggest that a closer examination of the phenomenon of customer role conflict during service encounters is in order, such an examination appears to be especially important from the service provider's point of view.

Customer role performance in service encounters may impact not only the level of service employee satisfaction with an encounter but also employee productivity and morale over the long run. In fact, Hsieh and Yen's (2005) study points to customer participation as having the negative effect of increased job stress in customer high participation situations in which customers do not do their part and employees are forced to pick up the slack. The findings of our study suggest the same may be the case

even in low customer participation situations especially if employees are repeatedly subjected to what they perceive as anti-social and/or disruptive customer behavior.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

A key limitation of this study, particularly in relation to ecological and external validity, was the use of written scenarios rather than actual service encounters (see, e.g., Smith et al., 1999). While subjects were presented a depiction of a realistic (Dabholkara and Spaida, 2012) and common (Mäki & Kokko 2012) routine service encounter, future studies could employ field-based data-collection methods. Additional limitations include confining the scenarios to a single low customer involvement service encounter, operationalizing customer role conflict only in terms of its presence or absence, and examining a single role conflict coping strategy (withdrawal). Customer role conflict should be explored across service contexts and at various points in time throughout the service consumption process. For example, healthcare consultation and educational instruction are two services that may be impacted by customer role conflict as customers play their particular roles not only during but also between these service encounters.

While the use of a student sample is considered appropriate during the initial testing of a theoretical framework (see e.g. Barnes, Beauchamp, & Webster, 2010) and though our research was exploratory in nature, the use of a student convenience sample was a limitation of our study. Future studies should be undertaken using nonstudent samples to enhance external validity.

This study did not attempt to deal with service failure but rather with "business as usual" from the service employee side while exploring the potential influence of customer role conflict during a routine service encounter. Additionally, this study was framed in terms of customer role conflict rather than distraction since the use of a cell phone is customer-

controlled and can be conceptualized as an opportunity for the customer to accept, if not invite, role conflict into a service encounter. The study could also have been framed in terms of customer anti-social behavior since customer roles are learned (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). Thanks to the proliferation of cell phones, "cell phone etiquette is a challenge for a society that's becoming more dependent on these electronic devices" (Herrschaft, 2013). That over 90% of the student sample reported owning a cell phone speaks to the pervasiveness of cell phone technology and illustrates the extent to which opportunity exists for the collision and conflict of social roles in any context. This highlights the need of marketers in general and service providers in particular to understand how mobile communication technology impacts not only consumers and their roles as customers but also service employees as they interact with customers in an economy increasing reliant on marketing services. While customer cell phone use during service encounters is only one potential example of role conflict, it is an example that may be increasingly pervasive given that wireless subscriber connections penetration in the U.S. has reached 105% (CITA, 2012). However, future research should examine the extent to which cell phone and other wireless device use by customers in service situations may be changing the face and script of service encounters so that service managers and employees are prepared to adjust and respond accordingly.

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APPENDIX 1:
Stimulus Materials

Customer Role Conflict *Present* Scenario**:**

Imagine you are a customer standing in line to pay for your basket of items at a retail grocery store on a Saturday morning. There is one customer ahead of you who is about to be served. As you wait your turn, you can't help but see the customer and server. You are also close enough to hear their conversation.

Before the customer is served, the customer's cell phone rings and they answer the phone. As the customer places their basket onto the conveyer belt, the server smiles and says to the customer, "Good morning. Did you find everything you were looking for today?" The customer continues to talk on their cell phone.

As the server removes the items from the customer's basket, scans the items, and moves them to the bagging area, the customer remains in place and continues on the cell phone call. When all items are scanned and bagged, the server tells the customer the total and asks, "How would you like to pay?" The customer, still on the call, hands over cash. The server accepts the payment. As the customer leaves, the server smiles and says, "Thank you for shopping with us. Have a nice day." The customer walks away, still on the call.

Customer Role Conflict *Absent* Scenario:

Imagine you are a customer standing in line to pay for your basket of items at a retail grocery store on a Saturday morning. There is one customer ahead of you who is about to be served. As you wait your turn, you can't help but see the customer and server. You are also close enough to hear their conversation.

As the customer removes the items from their basket onto the conveyer belt for the server to scan, the server smiles and says to the customer, "Good morning. Did you find everything you were looking for today?" The customer smiles back and answers, "Good morning. Yes I did, thank you."

As the server scans the items and moves them to the bagging area, the customer moves to the bagging area to help load the items. When all items are scanned and bagged, the server tells the customer the total and asks, "How would you like to pay?" The customer answers, "Cash, please," and hands over cash. The server accepts the payment. As the customer leaves, the server smiles and says, "Thank you for shopping with us. Have a nice day." The

customer answers, "Thanks, you have a nice day too."

APPENDIX 2:
Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Items and Measurement Properties of the Scales

Scale Items*	Standardized Loadings	t-values
Customer Role Performance (PERF) (α = .97)		
In my opinion, this customer is outstanding	.70	9.34
This customer behaves just the way I like to see other customers behave.	.70	9.29
In my opinion, the customer acted appropriately.	.86	12.2
The customer did a good job of being a customer.	.70	9.37
Customer Satisfaction (CUST) (α = .94)		
How do you think the customer in that situation would rate their experience?		
Pleased/Displeased	.90	14.49
Pleasant/Unpleasant	.90	14.60
Liked it very much/Didn't like it at all	.86	13.43
Contented/Frustrated	.84	13.04
Delighted/Terrible	.84	13.01
Satisfied/Dissatisfied	.80	12.02
Provider Satisfaction (PROV) (α = .98)		
How do you think the service provider in that situation would rate their experience?		
Pleased/Displeased	.97	16.88
Pleasant/Unpleasant	.98	16.98
Liked it very much/Didn't like it at all	.95	16.23
Contented/Frustrated	.96	16.32
Delighted/Terrible	.94	15.83
Satisfied/Dissatisfied	.94	15.78

Model Fit Statistics:
c^2_{101} = 211.09, (p = .00)
RMSEA = .08, NFI = .93, NNFI = .96, CFI= .96)

Note: PERF was measured using a 7-point scale where higher scores indicate more of the construct. CUST and PROV were measured on 7-point scales where lower scores indicate more of the construct.
*All items are significant at the .01 level.