The role of social incompatibility in customer discomfort

Mark Scott Rosenbaum  
Department of Retailing, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, USA  
Tali Seger-Guttmann  
Department of Business Administration, Ruppin Academic Center, Emek Hefer, Israel, and  
Ofir Mimran  
Department of Organizational Development, Ruppin Academic Center, Emek Hefer, Israel

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of customer discomfort in service settings when employees and customers who share social incompatibilities, stemming from war, nationalism, religious differences or terrorism, work together in service settings.
Design/methodology/approach – The authors engage in triangulation research to understand how Israeli Arabs and Jews experience comfort/discomfort in services. Study 1 uses an experimental design to show how comfort differs when Israeli Jews work with Arabs and Jews in three different service settings. Study 2 employs survey methodology to explore how comfort differs among Israeli Arabs when they work with either an Arab or a Jewish employee. Study 3 uses grounded theory methodology to provide a theoretical framework that explains reasons for customer discomfort occurrence between Israel’s Arabs and Jews, its impact on customers’ attitudes and behaviors and suggestions for increasing comfort.
Findings – Israeli Arabs and Jews express various feelings of discomfort when working with each other, and Druze, in service settings. Israeli Jews express higher levels of discomfort when working with Arabs than vice versa, while Israeli Arabs express discomfort when working with Druze employees. Five strategies for increasing customer comfort are defined and developed.
Research limitations/implications – Social incompatibilities prevent many consumers and employees from experiencing comfort during service exchanges; however, managers can alleviate some of the factors that exacerbate customer discomfort.
Practical implications – Managers need to realize that customer discomfort leads to place avoidance and thus should implement strategies to assuage it.
Social implications – Unabated service situations that result in customer discomfort may lead to customer ill-being, including fear.
Originality/value – This study is the first to explore customer discomfort due to social incompatibilities in depth.
Keywords Israel, Customer relations, Arab–Israeli conflict, Commonalities
Paper type Research paper

Customers who share social commonalities with service providers, such as a cultural background, ethnicity (Sharma et al., 2009), marginalized status (Sarpong and Maclean, 2015), sexual orientation, country of origin (Rosenbaum and Walsh, 2012), disabilities, social media connections (Rosenbaum et al., 2013) or friendships (Nicholls, 2010; Price and Arnould, 1999), often realize relational benefits from doing so. These benefits include complimentary upgrades, discounts, gifts and feelings of comfort, which researchers define as positive emotions, including being “at ease” or having reduced anxiety (Lloyd and Luk, 2011; Spake et al., 2003) during their time in service settings.

Research shows that feelings of comfort between customers and employees result in customer satisfaction, trust, organizational commitment and perceived service quality (Sharma et al., 2015). Customers, who experience feelings of comfort during service
exchanges, also report receiving psychological benefits, including increased confidence, reduced anxiety and enhanced self-esteem (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Sharma and Wu, 2015). Customers also tend to engage in positive word of mouth regarding service providers that provide them with feelings of comfort (Lloyd and Luk, 2011).

Despite the apparent positive outcomes associated with social commonalities and, thus, comfort between service providers and their customers (Goodwin, 1997), managers often grapple with challenges posed by customers and employees who share social incompatibilities. For example, customers and employees who share social incompatibilities due to differences in gender, physical appearance, ethnicity, religion, race, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation and so forth often find themselves together during service exchanges. Consequently, both parties are susceptible to experiencing the negative outcomes of social incompatibilities, including violence (Martin, 2016) and even murder (Noelle, 2002).

Ample research reports that consumers who possess stigmatizing conditions (e.g. disabilities) or financial vulnerabilities often experience discomfort when interacting with other customers and employees in service establishments. This discomfort often manifests in the form of poor service and reduced self-esteem, self-autonomy and self-efficacy (Baker et al., 2007; Bone et al., 2014; Corus and Saatcioglu, 2015; Edwards et al., 2018). Despite the realities of customer discomfort, to date, service researchers have largely focused on exploring the benefits associated with customer comfort while overlooking the discomfort concept. Therefore, the authors conceptualize customer discomfort as the antithesis of comfort – that is, as an unpleasant state of a customer’s physical body or mental processes in reaction to a service setting or a service provider.

The dominant thinking in the services domain is that consumers tend to avoid consumption settings in which they sense discomfort from physical (e.g. ambient characteristics such as space, function, layout, signs, symbols or artifacts; Bitner, 1992) or social (e.g. customers or employees; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011) elements. Yet, in some service settings, especially in war-torn countries or areas with disputed territories (e.g. India/Pakistan, Cyprus, Bosnia, Israel/Palestinian Territories, Kosovo, Crimea), both consumers and employees may experience discomfort from social incompatibilities due to cultural, religious or ethnic differences, war, mistrust and divergent nationalist aspirations. These discomfort drivers may converge during service encounters, when members of incompatible social groups come together as both customers and employees.

However, while the marketing discipline knows a great deal about the positive outcomes associated with customer comfort (Lloyd and Luk, 2011; Spake et al., 2003), which often arise from social commonalities between employees and customers (Goodwin, 1997; Rosenbaum et al., 2013), researchers have tended to overlook the problems inherent in customer discomfort that may emerge from social incompatibility between customers and employees, who may engage with each other in service settings because of their need for convenience or limited options (e.g. public transportation, hospitals). Furthermore, the customer comfort concept is far from being a universally understood phenomenon, motivating Spake et al. (2003) to encourage researchers to explore how and why feelings of comfort often differ among customers who are present within the same service setting.

This work addresses these research voids by showing how customer discomfort arises among Israeli Arabs, Jews and, to a lesser extent, Druze who reside within Israel’s 1949 armistice boundary. More specifically, this work defines and develops so-called situational exacerbators that elicit feelings of discomfort between customers and service providers and affect customers’ emotional states and, ultimately, their approach/avoidance responses. In terms of managerial implications, this research offers practitioners five “situational alleviators” that they can put into action to help lessen the impact of these situational exacerbators and thereby encourage positive customer attitudes and behaviors.
In the following sections, the authors expand on the customer comfort paradigm by engaging in two empirical investigations that show how Israeli Arabs and Jews have differing feelings of comfort when they interact with like-other service providers as compared with when they interact with out-group service providers. Given that customer discomfort is a real phenomenon in service settings, attention turns to offering the services discipline a theoretical framework in the unexplored area of customer discomfort.

The theoretical framework emerges from qualitative data collected among Jews and Arabs living in Israel, though the framework has global implications for places where dissimilar consumers and employees who share a history of war, armed conflicts or terror must often work together in service settings. Researchers have explored consumption issues (e.g. water conservation) between Israeli Arabs and Jews because the extreme animosity that tends to exist between these groups is ideal for exploring the influence of social incompatibilities on buying behaviors (Grinstein and Nisan, 2009). Rayburn (2015, p. 806) coined the term “service captivity” to denote a consumer’s perception that he or she has no other options for obtaining a service than by remaining with a current service provider or organization, despite a reluctance to do so. For example, consumers may experience service captivity and its consequences, including feelings associated with having reduced options, lost control and powerlessness, when they engage with government or state services (e.g. social security, Department of Motor Vehicles, utilities). The work presented here focuses not on consumers who have no other choice than to remain with a service, but rather on consumers who enter routine services with employees with whom they would not have interacted had they had the opportunity to choose otherwise.

**Literature review**

Researchers have tended to explore the relational benefits that ensue when service providers share some type of social commonality with their customers. Rosenbaum and Walsh (2012, p. 242) coined the term “service nepotism” to capture the “favouritism an employee grants to a customer during a service encounter […] based on socio-collective commonalities (e.g. sexual orientation or country of origin) and without qualified substantiation related to either the customer’s economic value or organizational practices.” Similarly, Brady et al. (2012, p. 81) coined the phrase “service sweethearting” to denote a practice in which service providers extend unauthorized free or discounted products to customers whom they deem as friends, unbeknownst to management and often counter to established operating procedures.

Sarpong and Maclean (2015) suggest that service nepotism and sweethearting represent conscious efforts by employees of marginalized social groups to bypass organizational policies to support like-others and to ameliorate their real or imaginary alienation or marginalization in a society. Indeed, these researchers show that West African service providers are willing to put their jobs in jeopardy by giving unauthorized discounts and gifts to like-other customers, for no reason other than to share a common sense of community. Although many studies conclude that service providers tend to favor like-others (Rosenbaum and Walsh, 2012), this finding is not universal. That is, some studies have shown that black diners often tip black servers less than white servers who perform the same tasks (Lynn et al., 2008).

Research in marketing has well-examined relational benefits that emerge between service providers and customers who share commonalities, but it lacks knowledge on the consequences that may arise between these social units from social incompatibilities. Researchers largely maintain that customers attempt to avoid or minimize their time in service settings in which they sense discomfort from a lack of congruity between themselves and employees and other customers (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). Other researchers have shown that customer discomfort may arise from consumers feeling trapped or victimized during service encounters, especially when they work with unknowledgeable or
overbearing clerks (Fournier et al., 1998). Indeed, some studies show that some customers are so uncomfortable in, disillusioned about and cynical of the marketplace that they minimize their exposure to it (Helm et al., 2015).

Although consumers may opt to avoid patronizing certain service establishments from customer–employee social incompatibilities, doing so may be inconvenient in some cases. Social groups that share feelings of animosity and conflict, such as Jews and Arabs living in Israel or Russians and Ukrainians living in Crimea, often reside in the same locales and therefore routinely confront each other in service settings in which place avoidance is impractical, such as at a food service counter, or essentially impossible, such as in a hospital.

Although a plethora of people reside in areas with territorial disputes (Metrocosm, 2015), perhaps no other country in the world is involved in a more hostile dispute affecting the lives of millions of people than Israel. Israel’s emergence in the twentieth century, along with many Middle Eastern countries, resulted from the dividing of the Ottoman Empire by the British and French, with little regard to demographic realities. Thus, people with historical animosities, such as Jews and Arabs, Sunnis and Shiites and Christians and Muslims, or with different theological and nationalistic perspectives, such as the Druze, are denizens of the same territory.

For example, approximately 75 percent of Israel’s 8.2m residents, including those residing in the “disputed” Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, are Jewish; 18 percent are Muslim (Arab); and 2 percent are Christian and Druze (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Although Jews and Arabs had envisioned an agreement for cooperation on the development of a Jewish homeland and Arab nation in the Palestine Mandate in 1919, this agreement was short-lived (Friedman, 2008). Following the Arab Riots of 1920, trust between Jews and Arabs residing in the British-controlled Palestine Mandate eroded. A century later, and following Israel’s War of Independence in 1948, several Arab–Israeli wars, and protracted incidents of terror attacks and intifadas, distrust between Arabs and Jews living in Israel remains (Grinstein and Nisan, 2009; Shoham and Gavish, 2016). Furthermore, Israeli Arabs tend to view Israeli Druze with disdain. On the one hand, Druze speak Arabic and reside throughout Syria, Lebanon and Israel. On the other, Druze living in Israel generally accept Zionism as a nationalist ideal and actively participate in the Israel Defense Forces (Halabi, 2014); by contrast, Israeli Arabs are exempt from this service. Druze also lack pan-Arab nationalist aspirations and do not express a desire to join a Palestinian-only state.

To date, researchers have explored how animosity between countries, such as China and Japan, provokes consumers to boycott products based on country of origin (Harmeling et al., 2015). Shoham et al. (2006) find that feelings of animosity lead Jews to reduce their purchases of Arab’s products. Although product boycotts are outcomes of animosity, it is sometimes inconvenient or even impossible for consumers to refrain from entering into service exchanges with employees with whom the feel discomfort because of social incompatibilities. Despite the intuitiveness of customer discomfort, few studies have explored the phenomenon of how customer comfort varies by service provider type (Spake et al., 2003). For example, it may be that Israeli Arabs would sense comfort working with a service provider, such as a food service cashier, who wears a hijab (a head covering worn in public by some Muslim women), while Israeli Jews may feel discomfort when working with the same employee. In the following sections, the authors expand on the customer comfort paradigm by exploring how customer comfort varies among Israeli Jews depending on the type of service provider (i.e. Arab or Jew) in three different service settings.

Study 1
Researchers have shown that feelings of discomfort between Israeli Arabs and Jews often result in members of each group engaging in boycotts associated with the other group (Shoham et al., 2006). However, the authors contend that both Israeli Arabs and Jews are often
inclined to encounter each other as customers and employees in service settings. Indeed, some researchers suggest that frequent contact between people belonging to groups in conflict may reduce stereotypes and prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008); thus, it is possible that Israeli Arabs and Jews do not experience any discomfort when they encounter each other as customers and employees. This study explores this contention by empirically investigating whether customer comfort varies among Israeli Jews when they work with Arab service providers, as compared with Jewish counterparts, in three different service settings.

A total of 402 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.68$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.27$, age range: 21–64 years) took part in this study. Participants were recruited from the subject pool of an Israeli-based market research firm. Prospective participants needed to identify as Jewish; after accepting the offer to participate in the study, each participant received a survey link using Qualtrics software. The sample consisted of 276 (69 percent) women and 126 (31 percent) men.

**Scenarios and procedure**

The experiment was a $3 \times 2$ investigation. A total of 67 participants fell into each cell, resulting in 80 percent power, the minimum suggested for an ordinary study (Cohen, 1988; UCSF, 2017).

Each participant was randomly selected for one of three possible situations that would require the assistance of a service provider. The first situation involves food service and requires low customer presence during service delivery. The scenario stated, “You and your family went for a walk. The children noticed a fast-food stall and expressed their desire to eat falafel. The photograph in front of you shows the fast-food vendor, preparing the dish.” The second situation centers on hair styling, which requires a moderate level of customer participation in the exchange. The scenario stated, “You are going out to a family event tonight. You decided on short notice to contact a hairstylist. Only one hair salon is available to receive customers without a wait. When you arrive at the hair salon, the stylist in the photograph is standing before you. This hairstylist specializes in hair design for both men and women.” The third scenario involves medical care, which requires a high level of customer participation. The scenario stated, “It’s Saturday evening. Your three-month-old baby feels bad and has a temperature reaching 39 Celsius. You go to the hospital emergency room. The photograph in front of you shows the doctor who is on call to take care of your baby.”

Each participant then analyzed a picture that depicted either a Jewish or an Arab female service provider, dressed in apparel that corresponded to one of the three service-related occupations: food service, hairstylist or emergency room physician, working with a male customer. Every picture featured the same Jewish or Arab female model, in the same occupational setting, with the only difference being that the Arab model wore a hijab. The male customer was also the same model in each occupational setting.

**Measures**

A three-item scale adapted from Spake et al. (2003) measured participants’ perceived interaction comfort in a service setting. Each participant rated his or her degree of comfort (comfortable/uncomfortable), perceived safety (safe/unsafe) and feeling of calmness (calm/distressed) with working with the service provider depicted in the photograph. Each item was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale ($1 = \text{not at all}, \ 7 = \text{very much}$). A comfort score was tabulated by averaging the summation of these three items.

**Results**

A $3 \times 2$ analysis of variance (ANOVA) evaluated the effects of three service occupations (food service, hair styling and medical care) and a service provider’s ethnicity (Jewish or Arab)...
on participants’ perceived interaction comfort score. Table I lists the means and standard deviations for perceived comfort as a function of the two factors. The results of the ANOVA indicated a significant and large main effect for service provider ethnicity \((F(1, 396) = 1,808.97, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.82)\), a significant but small effect for occupation \((F(2, 396) = 5.76, p < 0.01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.03)\) and a significant interaction between ethnicity and occupation \((F(2, 396) = 9.67, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.05)\).

Because the interaction between ethnicity and occupation was significant, the authors chose to examine simple main effects for ethnicity and occupation separately. That is, follow-up tests explored the perceived comfort means between a Jewish and Arab service provider, respectively, among Jewish participants. Regardless of the occupation, the mean difference between perceived comfort with Jewish and Arab service providers was significant; Jewish participants expressed a significantly higher perceived comfort level when working with a Jewish service provider than when working with an Arab counterpart.

An analysis of the average comfort scores also revealed that Israeli Jews had lower levels of comfort when working with Arab employees rather than their Jewish counterparts in food service \((M = 1.94 \text{ vs } M = 5.17)\), hair styling \((M = 1.95 \text{ vs } M = 4.66)\) and emergency room medical care \((M = 2.10 \text{ vs } M = 4.63)\). The three pairwise mean differences between Jews and Arabs regarding food service \((M = 3.30; F(1, 396) = 784.26, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.66)\), hair styling \((M = 2.73; F(1, 396) = 561.63, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.59)\) and emergency room medical care \((M = 2.53; F(1, 396) = 482.42, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.55)\) were each significant \((p < 0.001)\). In addition, the strength of the relationship between service provider ethnicity and occupation, as assessed by \(\eta^2\), was strong in each of the three service settings. With regard to the smaller mean difference found for emergency room medical care, it is understandable that Jewish discomfort with Arab employees may be partly assuaged in situations that require professional credentials or standardized practices.

Among Jewish service providers only, the participants reported significant differences in average perceived comfort \((F(2, 396) = 14.08, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.07)\). The Jewish participants were significantly more comfortable working with the Jewish food service provider \((M = 5.17)\) than working with either the hairstylist \((M = 4.66)\) or the physician \((M = 4.63)\). This finding may be a relic of the service type, as it seems intuitive that consumers would naturally be more comfortable in a food service setting than in either a hair styling or emergency room medical care setting, in which the risks associated with service failure can have a significant impact on consumers’ lives. In contrast, among Arab service providers only, the Jewish participants did not report significant differences in average perceived comfort among the three service types \((F(2, 396) = 1.37, \text{n.s.})\).

**Discussion**

The findings reveal that despite living among Arabs in the same country, Israeli Jews tend to harbor feelings of discomfort when working with this group in common service settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service provider ethnicity</th>
<th>Service occupation (setting)</th>
<th>Perceived interaction comfort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Food service</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hairstylist</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emergency room physician</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Food service</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hairstylist</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emergency room physician</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Items are measured on a semantic differential scale \((1 = \text{“not at all,” } 7 = \text{“very much”})\)
even when their involvement in service delivery (e.g. food service) is minor. The mean differences show that Jewish discomfort with Arab service providers in occupations that require professional licensing or certification, and for which few substitutes are readily available (e.g. emergency room medical care), is less than the mean differences from other service occupations, such as hair styling and food service.

We conducted another analysis as a manipulation check. Each participant was asked whether he or she believed that the pictured service provider was either Jewish or Arab (0 = no, 1 = yes), depending on his or her experimental condition. All the participants who evaluated a Jewish service provider indicated that they believed the employee was Jewish. Similarly, all the participants shown an Arab model indicated that they believed the model was an Arab.

Although Study 1 shows the extent to which Israeli Jews experience discomfort when working with Arabs in services, the speculation remains as to whether Israeli Arabs also experience such discomfort. Study 2 addresses this speculation and further shows how customer comfort varies among customers within the same service establishment.

**Study 2**

**Participants**

To explore perceived comfort among Arab Israelis in their interactions with Jewish service providers, the authors conducted a study in a large camping, sport and fashion apparel store (approximately 8,000 square feet) located in a relatively large Arab village in Israel. The store employed approximately 20 employees in the store, 14 of whom were Arabs and 6 Jews. The sample comprised 87 Arab participants; 66 (76 percent) were men and 21 (24 percent) were women. The participants ranged in age from 20 years to 69 years ($M = 46$ years, $SD = 14.16$), and their education ranged from zero years of formal education to 18 years, with an average education of 12 years ($SD = 3.74$). All the participants identified as Arabs, with 39 percent indicating that they resided in a city, 46 percent in villages and 15 percent in other settlements within the 1949 Armistice line.

**Data collection and measures**

The store’s management team provided its consent for a research team to intercept customers after they completed their purchases. Two research assistants approached Arab customers after they exited the store, requesting their participation in the study. The store employed both Israeli Arab and Jewish sales associates, with Jewish associates wearing a small hat or skullcap and female Arab associates wearing a hijab. The assistants collected questionnaires at four different time points during a four-week period from 87 Arab customers, who agreed to participate in the study. Of these customers, 50 (57.5 percent) had chosen to work with an Arab employee, and 37 (43 percent) had chosen to work with a Jewish employee.

After a shopper agreed to participate in the study, he or she was told that the retailer was conducting a service quality study and that all answers were anonymous. A research assistant then administered the questionnaire to each participant and noted his or her responses to each question. The participants were first asked to indicate which service provider (employee) they worked with in the store and whether the provider was Arab or Jewish. Next, the authors measured participants’ perceived interaction comfort in a service exchange by employing the same three-item scale as in Study 1. In addition, customers’ satisfaction with the service provider was assessed with a three-item scale developed by Voss et al. (1998). The three items were measured on a Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”). Cronbach’s α for these three items was 0.98, indicating adequate scale reliability (Nunnally, 1978). The participants also indicated how much money they spent (Israeli shekels) in the store. In terms of demographic questions, they specified whether they
identified as Arab (yes/no) and indicated their age (years), education completed (years) and place of residence.

Results
A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) tested the effect of a sales associate’s ethnicity (Arab or Jewish) on the three dependent variables interaction comfort, satisfaction and money spent. Mildly significant differences were found among ethnicity on the dependent measures (Wilks’s $\Lambda = F(3, 83) = 3.66, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.12$). Table II contains the means and the standard deviations of the dependent variables for Arabs and Jews.

ANOVA were conducted on the dependent variable as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. Through the Bonferroni method, each ANOVA was tested at the 0.015 level (0.05/3). The ANOVA on interaction comfort was significant ($F(1, 85) = 4.69, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.08$); however, the ANOVAs on both satisfaction ($F(1, 85) = 1.14, \text{n.s.}$) and money spent ($F(1, 85) = 0.01, \text{n.s.}$) were not. Post hoc analysis reveals that Arab participants had a higher level of interaction comfort when they worked with Arab sales associates ($M = 6.74$) rather than their Jewish counterparts ($M = 6.27$). Furthermore, the results reveal that Arab shoppers were equally satisfied with their sales associates and equally likely to spend the same amount of money in the store, regardless of their sales associate’s ethnicity.

Discussion
A limitation of Study 2 is that it is not an exact replication of Study 1; however, Study 2 is a field study in a retail setting that requires a moderate level of customer participation, and the authors lacked readily available access to enough Israeli Arabs who were willing to participate in a research experiment and thus give the experiment a sufficient sample size for power analysis. In addition, the nature of the sales associate was not specifically probed; that is, an unexplored covariate may be a sales associate’s ability to evoke customer comfort by engaging in pleasant conversation or demonstrating product knowledge. Although both Studies 1 and 2 are exploratory in nature, they reveal the extent to which social incompatibilities between service providers and customers result in customers expressing a relatively unexplored phenomenon – namely, customer discomfort. Thus, Studies 1 and 2 address Spake et al.’s (2003) call by revealing how comfort varies for Israeli Arabs and Jews across different types of service providers.

Study 3
Spake et al. (2003) encourage service researchers to build on the customer comfort paradigm by identifying “the antecedents and other consequences [beyond service relationships] of comfort” (p. 329), to explore how “the level of involvement with a product or service affect[s] comfort” and to identify “the most effective comfort-increasing strategies” (p. 329). To address these research voids in the comfort paradigm, the authors engaged in grounded theory methodology to put forth an original framework that offers insights into these apparent chasms in the service literature and that delineates the impact of customer discomfort on consumption experiences.

Table II.
Means and standard deviations among Israeli Arabs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service provider ethnicity</th>
<th>Perceived interaction comfort $M$</th>
<th>Perceived interaction comfort $SD$</th>
<th>Satisfaction with service provider $M$</th>
<th>Satisfaction with service provider $SD$</th>
<th>Money spent on the transaction (Shekels) $M$</th>
<th>Money spent on the transaction (Shekels) $SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab ($n = 50$)</td>
<td>6.74</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>375.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jew ($n = 37$)</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>352.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Items are measured on a semantic differential scale (1 = “not at all,” 7 = “very much”)
Methodology

Study design. Given the socially sensitive nature of the research topic – that is, how Israeli Jews work with Arab and Druze service providers and, in turn, how Israeli Arabs work with Jewish and Druze service providers – we opted to employ snowball sampling to overcome the problems of the sensitive topic and difficult-to-reach informants (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997). It is worth noting that the idea of everyday encounters and coexistence in everyday life may be difficult for Israeli Arabs, Jews and Druze to comprehend, and place avoidance is often the norm. Indeed, the authors were unable to solicit any Druze informants to discuss the matter, even with the guarantee of anonymity.

One of the study’s researchers approached an Arab university employee who volunteered to participate in the study and who lived in Baqa al-Gharbiya, a predominately Arab city in the Haifa District. The employee provided the name of another resident who was also willing to participate in the study. Each informant provided the name of another informant, both of whom also resided in Baqa al-Gharbiya. The same type of sampling technique was employed for the Jewish informants. The sampling technique resulted in a varied mix of 20 informants: 10 Israeli Arabs and 10 Jews. The reason for this sample size was twofold. First, the emergence of conceptual categories and their related properties reached saturation; that is, after a certain point, the data no longer revealed additional categories or properties (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Second, Creswell (1998) suggests an optimal sample size of 20–30 informants for a grounded theory study. Table III illustrates the informants’ demographic characteristics.

Interview script. Each informant was asked to answer four questions that probed their attitudes toward working with dissimilar service providers (i.e. Arabs, Jews and Druze) in three different service settings. These questions probed emotions (e.g. “Describe how you

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential city</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Education (years)</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Discussed views on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jewish informants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Tel Aviv</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Holon</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Netanya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ramat Gan</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rehovot</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Hi-tech</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rishon Lezion</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>BD, P, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tel Aviv</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>BD, P, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tel Aviv</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>BD, P, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arabs informants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>C, HS, PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>BD, P, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>BD, P, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>BD, P, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Baqa al-Gharbiya</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>BD, P, S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Demographic analysis of the study’s informants

Notes: C, cashier; BD, bus driver; HS, hairstylist; P, pharmacist; PH, physician; S, surgeon
feel in this service setting”), behavioral changes (e.g. “Describe your actions or behaviors in the setting,” “Explain how you act in this setting”), sources of discomfort (e.g. “Explain why you are feeling comfort or discomfort in this service settings”) and methods that informants might employ to lessen their discomfort (e.g. “Discuss ways that your comfort could be increased or lessened in the service settings”). Each service settings also required different levels of customer participation (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Thus, each informant answered 24 questions about working with dissimilar employees in service settings, including food service or bus transportation (low customer participation), hair salons or pharmacies (moderate customer participation) and health care services with physicians or surgeons (high customer participation). In addition, the questions were broad enough to generalize novel concepts but sensitizing to yield a “meaningful picture” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 38).

**Coding procedure.** The same researcher conducted each interview in either Hebrew or Arabic. The transcripts were translated into English by the researcher, who is a native speaker of both languages. The transcripts were then analyzed in the NVivo 11 software package. By following the grounded theory methodology’s coding tenets, most notably the “Six Cs Coding Family” (Glaser, 1978, p. 74; Simmons, 2004), the data were sorted into conceptual categories that represented causes, consequences, contexts and contingencies, all of which support an original, integrative and conceptual framework (MacInnis, 2011), which is shown in Figure 1.

First, the authors coded the interview data to understand a customer’s emotional state when working in one of four customer situations (i.e. Jews with Arabs/Druze and Arabs with Jews/Druze). Second, the data were reanalyzed to understand how Jews and Arabs respond to working with dissimilar service providers, given a particular service encounter. Third, the data were recoded to round out the emerging framework by exploring situational exacerbators, that is, factors that lead to heightened levels of customer discomfort. Finally, attention turned to uncovering the factors that lead to heightened levels of customer comfort.

As the research goals were to address particular research questions and develop a model around the questions, the authors chose to follow one of Glaser’s (1978, 2005) proposed theoretical structures, rather than engaging in a more open, unstructured format.

---

**Figure 1.**
A causal-consequential framework for understanding discomfort among Israeli Arabs, Jews and Druze in service settings

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Israeli Arabs and Jews residing in Israel (1949 armistice border)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Situational Exacerbators (Decrease customer comfort) | • Current events  
• Historical memories  
• Perceived cultural differences |
| Customer’s Emotional State in a Service Setting | • Comfort (positive emotions, feeling at ease, reduced anxiety)  
• Discomfort (unpleasant emotional state)  
• Extreme duress (intense levels of stress, anxiety or panic) |
| Situational Alleviators (Increase customer comfort) | • Ability of employee to speak customer’s language  
• Employee professionalism  
• Daily/past interaction  
• Personal recommendations  
• Social media reviews |
| Contingencies: Customer Participation Requirements in a Service Setting | • Low (customer presence required)  
• Moderate (customer inputs required)  
• High (customer co-creates the service) |
| Customer’s Behavioral Response to a Service Setting | • No change/approach  
• Modify behavior  
• Place avoidance |
(Simmons, 2004). The Six Cs framework employed in this study fits the data well; however, it is not necessarily the only theoretical framework that can organize the data into a structure that addresses a research phenomenon.

**Post-interview questions.** After providing an interview, each informant was asked to again consider working with a specific service provider based on a specific ethnicity (i.e. Arab, Jew or Druze) and occupation (e.g. cashier, surgeon), as indicated in Table III. Informants were asked to provide an emotional term that best represented how they would feel working with each service provider by selecting 1 of 16 terms that capture the “core affect” of emotions (Russell and Barrett, 1999). These terms are available in Table IV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service provider and ethnicity</th>
<th>Informant 1</th>
<th>Informant 2</th>
<th>Informant 3</th>
<th>Informant 4</th>
<th>Informant 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab/Druze cashier</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Arab/Druze</td>
<td>Calm/calm</td>
<td>Relaxed/relaxed</td>
<td>Stressed/calm</td>
<td>Serene/relaxed</td>
<td>Upset/excited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>6/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>5/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>5/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab/Druze bus driver</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Arab/Druze</td>
<td>Tense/alert</td>
<td>Relaxed/relaxed</td>
<td>Stressed/relaxed</td>
<td>Tense/tense</td>
<td>Relaxed/relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab/Druze hairstylist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Arab/Druze</td>
<td>Calm/calm</td>
<td>Contented/relaxed</td>
<td>Tense/calm</td>
<td>Relaxed/relaxed</td>
<td>Stressed/excited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>7/1</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>5/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>7/1</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>5/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>7/1</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>5/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab/Druze pharmacist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Arab/Druze</td>
<td>Relaxed/relaxed</td>
<td>Relaxed/relaxed</td>
<td>Stressed/relaxed</td>
<td>Tense/tense</td>
<td>Serene/relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>6/1</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab/Druze physician</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Arab/Druze</td>
<td>Calm/calm</td>
<td>Calm/relaxed</td>
<td>Upset/calm</td>
<td>Relaxed/calmed</td>
<td>Tense/excited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab/Druze surgeon</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Arab/Druze</td>
<td>Stressed/upset</td>
<td>Relaxed/relaxed</td>
<td>Stressed/relaxed</td>
<td>Stressed/tense</td>
<td>Relaxed/relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>6/2</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>7/2</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>7/2</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table IV.** Israeli Jews emotional responses to working with Arab and Druze service employees
Next, informants were asked three questions that indicated their interaction comfort when working with a specific service provider. Sharma et al. (2015) employed this three-item semantic differential scale, which evaluates feelings of relaxation/tension, pleasantness/unpleasantness and comfort/discomfort on a seven-point scale, to explain challenges that employees and customers may have in service settings due to different cultural backgrounds and, thus, differing service expectations. The scale items and scores are available in Tables IV and V.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service provider and ethnicity</th>
<th>Informant 1</th>
<th>Informant 2</th>
<th>Informant 3</th>
<th>Informant 4</th>
<th>Informant 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jewish/Druze cashier</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Jewish/Druze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant 6</td>
<td>Informant 7</td>
<td>Informant 8</td>
<td>Informant 9</td>
<td>Informant 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab/Druze bus driver</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Jewish/Druze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/7</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>4/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant 1</td>
<td>Informant 2</td>
<td>Informant 3</td>
<td>Informant 4</td>
<td>Informant 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jewish/Druze hair stylist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Jewish/Druze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant 6</td>
<td>Informant 7</td>
<td>Informant 8</td>
<td>Informant 9</td>
<td>Informant 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jewish/Druze pharmacist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Jewish/Druze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>3/7</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant 1</td>
<td>Informant 2</td>
<td>Informant 3</td>
<td>Informant 4</td>
<td>Informant 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jewish/Druze physician</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Arab/Druze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant 6</td>
<td>Informant 7</td>
<td>Informant 8</td>
<td>Informant 9</td>
<td>Informant 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jewish/Druze surgeon</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional terms Jewish/Druze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax (1) vs tense (7)</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant (1) vs unpleasant (7)</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>2/6</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort (1) vs discomfort (7)</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table V.
Israeli Arabs emotional responses to working with Jews and Druze service employees
Results

Emotional states when Israeli Jews work with Arab employees. In general, Israeli Jews expressed feelings of significant discomfort (i.e. unpleasant emotional state) when working with Israeli Arabs in service exchanges that require low (e.g. cashier) or moderate (e.g. pharmacist) participation. The findings suggest that Israeli Jews are often afraid to work with Arabs in service settings that do not require service providers to have some type of professional credential, such as a medical degree. For example, in terms of discomfort, a Jewish informant explained the lack of feeling “at ease” when working with an Arab cashier:

I would not feel comfortable. However, if I had the option, I would go to a Jewish one [cashier] and not to an Arab. The problem is that you do not always know in advance and you don’t always have the option to choose. It’s not really a difficulty, but the feeling is not so pleasant. I think I won’t be afraid. I don’t know. Let’s say it’s an unpleasant situation. Besides, sometimes you have a communicating problem and he does not understand what you really want. If possible, I prefer to avoid it and be served by a Jewish cashier (Jewish man, age 40 years).

In terms of how discomfort influences a consumer’s modified behavior, the same informant discussed how he constantly scans the environment when working with Arabs:

I would try to act normal, even though there is “something that sits in my head,” it’s a warning light; more eye-opening and looking around, always with a watchful eye.

The idea of modifying one’s natural behavior by maintaining a “watchful eye” over Arab employees was echoed by another Jewish informant. Although he stated that he would behave “normally” with an Arab cashier, he noted the need to watch an Arab’s actions carefully and, as such, would refrain from visiting an Arab hairstylist:

I think I would behave normally [working with an Arab food server], asking for what I need, that’s it. I choose the food and the cashier cannot make different food for me because I am a Jew. However, I would watch her actions carefully. The truth is I never went to get a haircut from an Arab hairstylist. It’s like an abnormal situation, you understand me? They are holding scissors behind your back (Jewish man, age 23 years).

The need for Jews to maintain diligence with an Arab cashier falls by the wayside with Druze. This Israeli informant also noted that Jews can feel comfort (i.e. at ease) in situations with Druze:

With Druze, I can “turn of the engine” and close both eyes without fear. In contrast, with an Arab, I am always keeping one eye open. Because, at the end of the day, an “Arab is an Arab” and you cannot trust them one hundred percent (Jewish man, age 23 years).

Another Jewish informant offered insights into why many Jews limit their encounters with Arab employees. In the following excerpt, an Israeli Jew discussed her hesitation to patronize an Arab hair salon; she explained that when she leaves her “natural” environment, her community vanishes and thus discomfort ensues:

It’s a sense of insecurity, a feeling that you are not in your natural environment, your neighbourhood. When I think about it then it is not a fear of something happening to me as I feel that if something should happen, there will be nobody to help me (Jewish woman, age 57 years).

The impact of professional credentials seems to assuage many fears that Jews expressed when discussing working with Arab employees in occupations that require low-to-moderate levels of customer participation. This informant explained how the presence of credentials helps alleviate his fears when working with an Arab physician:

Physician is a different professional compared to a hairstylist or a cashier. It’s much more of a professional career, [with] many formal aspects, and they have the doctors’ oath. It’s different, I feel more confident (Jewish man, age 32 years).
Yet, for another Israeli Jew, the thought of working with an Arab surgeon resulted in extreme duress (i.e. intense stress, anxiety and even panic). In this case, credentials could not remedy the lack of trust that exists between Jews and Arabs:

I do not think that an Arab doctor, in an Israeli hospital, has reason to analyze me. Are Israeli doctors missing? I’m sure that there are those that this does not bother them, but it bothers me. The first thing it does not make sense to me [...]. The second thing is that I do not trust them. I think their professionalism is lower than an Israeli doctor (Jewish woman, age 32 years).

Emotional states when Israeli Jews work with Druze employees. Whereas Israeli Jews generally expressed unease with working with Arabs in nearly all service situations, they all expressed comfort with working with Druze. This feeling of comfort regarding Druze is exemplified in this excerpt:

Some of the Druze are more Israeli than Jewish Israelis. They are part of the state. They are loyal to the country and take part in everything just as the Jews (Jewish man, age 32 years).

Another Israeli Jew mentioned this feeling of comfort (i.e. being at ease), with a Druze physician:

I am comfortable working with a Druze physician, I see Druze as Jews (Jewish man, age 24 years).

Another Israeli Jew spoke about comfort, in terms of a positive emotion, with a Druze cashier:

As a cashier, I don’t see any difference between a Jew and Druze (Jewish woman, age 23 years).

A Jewish informant also noted that he would be comfortable with a Druze surgeon:

You know that one of the department heads of one of the most professional hospitals is a Druze? He is considered one of the best of the doctors in the world. [...] I cannot remember what field, but [people] all over the world comes to him to get his treatment and to be operated by him. Then, you think that because I am Jewish, and he is a Druze, that I’m not going to him? You are kidding! (Jewish man, age 24 years).

Emotional states when Israeli Arabs work with Jewish employees. None of the Arabs expressed feelings of extreme duress (e.g. from interacting with Israeli Jews in the studied service settings). This does not mean that Arab informants are comfortable working with all Jewish service providers, as many expressed discomfort (e.g. lack of feeling at ease) from their inexperience with interacting with Israeli Jews. An Arab explained that the possibility of working with a Jewish hairstylist, though not necessary inconceivable, was intriguing:

I imagine myself in this situation [working with a Jewish hairstylist]; it actually can be very interesting and intriguing, to know the other [Jewish] culture and to get to know different styles (Arab woman, age 31 years).

In this except, an Israeli Arab explained that she would not feel uncomfortable with a Jewish bus driver, only that her sense of comfort may be diminished by a possible terror attack:

The driver does not make me [sense] fear or [give me] an unpleasant feeling. It can be a scary situation if a terrorist attack, or things like that happened. It will also be scary because I myself might be afraid from a terrorist attack on the bus. But, mostly, I feel like I’m a suspect because I am Arabic and the terrorists are Arabs too. But, usually, it’s fine, there are no problems. He gives me service and it does not matter if I am an Arab or a Jew (Arab woman, age 34 years).

When discussing the implications of working with Jewish pharmacists, Israeli Arabs experienced with this service expressed comfort, though it was not universal. An Israeli Arab said:

I know that in this situation [being served by a Jewish pharmacist], I will get to be respected and I’ll get good service. The Jewish pharmacist gives a better service than an Arab, believe me, I felt it myself, I know it very well (Arab man, age 68 years).
Yet the same informant offered an explanation that suggests that Arabs alter their behavior with Jewish service providers:

I think that all Arabs behave politely and with dignity when they are going to get service from Jews, but then when they return to their village, they return and act undignified. If an Arab man is drinking a bottle that he bought in Hadera (Jewish majority), and he finished drinking, then he keeps the bottle and doesn’t throw it away. But, when he comes to the Arab village, he opens the window and throws it out. Why? (Arab man, age 68 years).

Similar to Israeli Jews who expressed a lack of trust when working with Arabs, some Arabs spoke of a lack of trust in Jews. In the following excerpt, an Arab, who expressed comfort with a Jewish bus driver, conveys reservations about working with a Jewish pharmacist:

I prefer it will be an Arab and not a Jewish pharmacist, because this is someone who likes me, who knows me, and knows my culture. So, it’s easier to ask what I need. I feel less safe if there is a Jewish pharmacist; I doubt the service he gives me, what he gives me, maybe he did not give me the best treatment that can be like an Arab will give me (Arab woman, age 23 years).

Another Arab informant discussed that his girlfriend experienced extreme duress (e.g. intense stress) at the thought of working with Israeli Jews because of unfamiliarity:

My girlfriend was stressed from such things [working with a Jewish pharmacist] because she grew up in [an Arab] village and not in the city with Jews. I grew up [in Haifa] with Jewish neighbours, and Christian neighbours, and Ethiopian neighbours, so I feel comfortable with everyone. This issue of Arabs that grew up in the city versus Arabs that grew up in a village community influences their reaction to Jews. You know Jews and it affects your behaviour. Those who grew up in a village […] when [they meet] a Jew, then there is such a fear at first (Arab man, age 27 years).

Overall, the Arab informants discussed a sense of comfort when working with either Jewish physicians or surgeons. In some instances, this comfort was due to a lack of choice. An Arab explained that her comfort working with a physician was related to language:

All my life, I go to Jewish physicians. Until 10 years ago, there were fewer Arab physicians, but today, there are many. I have no stress when I get treatment from Jews, maybe because I know the Hebrew language well. I have friends whose tension stems from the fact that they do not know the language [Hebrew]. If you do not know the language, so there is some concern that you can’t express your opinion right. It may seem surprising, but sometimes I just feel more comfortable with a Jewish physician compared to an Arab physician (Arab woman, age 31 years).

In other cases, the reputation of a Jewish surgeon helps Arabs make decisions. For example:

I chose a Jewish surgeon for my daughter. We were in Inchilov Hospital and they offered me an Arab surgeon and not the Jewish surgeon whom I came specifically for. So, I chose the Jewish surgeon. Here you choose what is best for you, what is safer. In this case, a Jewish doctor was safer. Ethnic origin of the person is irrelevant […] what is important is the professionalism (Arab man, age 43 years).

One Arab informant expressed discomfort about working with a Jewish surgeon, to the extent that she discussed her anxiety about the Arab–Israeli conflict:

Of course, I would prefer my surgeon to be an Arab surgeon and not a Jewish surgeon. I know that Arabs treat me better than the Jews and that Jews are better surgeons than Arabs. This conflict makes me anxious, it’s a big frustration. Oh, I don’t want to talk about it [laughs]. I really hate it; this really has a bad influence on me (Arab woman, age 23 years).

Emotional states when Israeli Arabs work with Druze employees. A surprising finding is the extent to which Arabs expressed feelings of discomfort when working with Druze.
One Arab informant explained the degree to which cultural differences with Druze affected her relationship with a cashier:

Druze sometimes behave more Jewish than Jews, then they hurt and show contempt for the Arabs more than Jews. Maybe because they serve in the army and do national service, maybe they think and feel more loyal and more Israeli. It’s obviously, that they are closer to Jews compared with Arabs (Arab woman, age 29 years).

This informant discussed that though she would feel comfortable with a Druze hairstylist, Druze serve in the Israeli army:

I think I would feel comfortable [with a Druze hairstylist]. I don’t see any difference between Jew and Druze. They [Druze] have loyalty to Israel. They served in the army. They say it as clearly as possible, feel and take an active part of the country. They are Israelis in every respect, just with a different religion, that’s all (Arab woman, age 25 years).

Another Arab spoke about ill feelings he faced from Druze, not Jews:

I do not like them [Druze]. You can write that down. From Jews, we are treated with a well attitude, but not from Druze. I remember once I asked a Druze if I can go to the restroom and he told me that it is not for me, meaning the Arabs (Arab man, age 43 years).

Although most Arab informants were indifferent with working with Druze physicians and surgeons, one Arab informant mentioned the importance of a common language in creating a sense of comfort:

If I see the Jewish surgeon smiling at me, then I know it’s not a real smile. You understand me? With the Druze surgeon, I feel a little more comfortable. The most important issue is language, we can talk to each other in Arabic (Arab woman, age 23 years).

Situational exacerbators. The results also revealed that current events (including the ongoing territorial struggles), both the historical memories and the contemporary ongoing fear of Islamic extremist attacks, and a general sense of fear and mistrust impede both Israeli Arab and Jewish customers from experiencing comfort during service exchanges. In the following excerpt, an Arab woman describes how her comfort in settings with Israeli Jews depends on the present security situation:

I think it [comfort] might be related to the security situation in Israel and when it is a little problematic […] ah […] I do not know if problematic is the exact word, but the security situation can greatly influence the service situation. You will feel it very strongly after the recent terror attacks. So now, I think twice before I go to Jewish places and I’m going to places of Arabs until the security situation improves (Arab woman, age 29 years).

In some instances, Israeli Arabs fear for their lives as a result of backlash from current events. An Israeli Arab spoke of the same fear of a terrorist attack from Israeli Jews:

When there was [a] stabbing in the streets, it was a bit frightening to go to a Jewish hairstylist. You know, he is holding sharp objects behind my back (Arab woman, age 25 years).

While an Israeli Jew spoke of the same type of duress regarding working with an Arab hairstylist:

I do not trust him [Arabs] and this is the conceptual default for me. To that, you can add that he [hairstylist] holds a razor behind my neck […] (Jewish man, age 40 years).

These quotes indicate that in many service encounters, especially those requiring low-to-moderate customer participation, both Israeli Arabs and Jews feel uncomfortable and fearful. An Israeli Jew explained why both Arabs and Jews fear each other:

I think there is something very deep in the relations between Jews and Arabs. There is a lack of trust. It is difficult for us to trust them and I think they do not trust us. It is no secret that each side
has its own narrative about the complex relations between us. Not every Arab is a terrorist, but all
have the potential to be a terrorist (Jewish man, age 32 years).

Another Israeli Jew suggested how current events, historical memories and perceived
cultural differences come together in service settings:

This [fear] is due to what? That he [bus driver] is an Arab. The Jewish driver, I know I can count on,
I have a sense of personal security, that he does not want to hurt me or kill me, but for Arabs,
I cannot say it. When there is an intifada, and it's not just the Palestinian territories, because many
attacks in the past year have been made by Arabs from East Jerusalem, who have identity papers,
just like yours [the interviewer]. So, it's pretty obvious that I cannot be cool if I get on the bus and
the driver was an Arab (Jewish man, age 34 years).

Regarding situational exacerbators toward Druze, one Arab informant linked discomfort
with Druze overall to the Al-Aqsa Mosque:

Let’s just stay I’m less attached to the Druze. I feel less comfortable with them, maybe it’s because
I hear people say that Druze hate Arabs […]. [I] do not know. For example, I’m going to pray at
Al-Aqsa and, at the entrance, there is a Druze policeman asking for my identity card. It hurts me.
Why? Because you are a Muslim and you know that I am a Muslim, so why do you not let me in [to]
pray? It hurts (Arab man, age 27 years).

Situational alleviators. Ability to speak the language. Both Arab and Jewish informants
provided insights into how both parties could create comfortable exchanges. Eight Arab
informants stated that they would be more comfortable working with Jews if Jewish
employees spoke Arabic. An Israeli Arab explains the impact of language and culture in
services and her preference for a Druze cashier (low customer participation) to a Jew:

I think that with Druze cashiers, I will feel more comfortable because [of] the common language and
that he is an Arab. But I do not want to believe that culture and language should influence on such
an interaction, but, in reality, it affects a lot (Arab woman, age 29 years).

Another Arab also indicated that a lack of Hebrew results in Arabs experiencing discomfort
with Jewish pharmacists (moderate participation):

In the case of older people [Arabs], who have difficulty with Hebrew, so they do not feel comfortable
with the Jewish pharmacist and prefer an Arab pharmacist (Arab man, age 43 years).

Yet, even a common language cannot guarantee feelings of comfort between Israeli Arabs
and Jews. In the following excerpt, an Israeli Jew discussed how an Arab speaking Hebrew,
without an Arab accent, which is rather unrealistic, would assuage his discomfort when
working with an Arab:

If I went to a pharmacy, which was placed in an Arab village […] what can make me feel more
comfortable in this situation? Maybe if the pharmacist speaks Hebrew well, and I do not hear his
Arab accent in his speech, so it feels more comfortable (Jewish man, age 34 years).

Employee professionalism. Both Arab and Jewish informants indicated that employee
professionalism influences their comfort level in service settings, especially in high
participation services (e.g. physicians, surgeons). An Israeli Jew discussed what would make
him feel comfortable when working with an Arab physician:

Professionalism and only professionalism. Plain and simple. It’s all about that. If the physician is
professional, so I am not going to worry (Jewish man, age 57 years).

Similarly, an Arab informant remarked on the need for professionalism when working with
Druze pharmacists:

If the [Druze] pharmacist does not have stereotypes about Arabs, then it might be a more
comfortable situation. If he treats me like any other person and gives me good service, then this
situation will be comfortable and pleasant (Arab woman, age 34 years).
Daily/past interaction. Both Arabs and Jews discussed how their daily or regular interaction with Jews and Arabs, respectively, resulted in them feeling comfortable in service exchanges. An Arab explained:

I think that mutual respect is what is important. If everyone wants to live together in peace, and without wars, so everything will be better. I work here with Jews and they treat me nice and respectfully. So, if I go to a store and the cashier is Jewish [...] and I am treated with respect, why not? Why should I be afraid of him? (Arab woman, age 25 years).

Similarly, an Israeli Jew discussed how Arabs are part of his daily experiences:

You’re walking around the flea market, where the sellers are Arabs. Then, what’s the problem? You walk into a restaurant and the waiters are all Arabs. It’s not that I was on the bus and the driver was wrapped in a flag of Hamas. I think I’m just used to Arabs, so it does not bother me or make me uncomfortable (Jewish man, age 23 years).

Other informants noted that comfort in service settings comes from the bonds of familiarity that Arabs and Jews develop with each other, rather than animosity. As one Arab informant explained regarding comfort with a cashier (low participation):

I work with Jews and they treat me respectfully. So, if I go to a store and work with a Jewish cashier, I treat him with respect (Arab female, age 25 years).

For another informant, however, any familiarity between Jews and Arabs was inconceivable:

Look, this is not a realistic situation [having an Arab bus driver]. What can make me comfortable? I’m going in with a gun and I have a gun license. That makes me feel more comfortable in my situations (Jewish man, age 34 years).

Personal recommendations. Informants also mentioned that they rely on personal recommendations, rather than ethnicity, when selecting a service provider, especially with a service that requires a high level of customer participation (e.g. physician). An Arab said:

I choose to go to a physician [based on] the recommendation, and not because of the origin, you understand me? (Arab woman, age 29 years).

In the following excerpt, an Israeli Jew discusses that she received a recommendation to an Arab hairstylist but she remains hesitant to patronize the store:

I would only enter the Arabic hairstylist if I hear recommendations. So, I will behave relatively normal. Although, if there are Arab customers, [...] there is unlikely to be a terrorist attack [laughs]. Obviously, I would not go to a hairstylist in the middle of an Arab village. I mean an Arabic hairstylist who worked in Tel Aviv, and then there are other people [Jewish] around me, so, it’s more relaxing (Jewish woman, age 57 years).

However, half the Jewish informants and one Arab informant remarked that Arabs and Jews could never truly work together in a comfortable manner in service settings. One Jewish informant said:

Being comfortable is not something that changes overnight. When I am meeting with Arabs, I simply do not trust them. To feel comfortable with someone and trust them, it takes a long time. If you ask me, it will not happen in our lifetime (Jewish female, age 23 years).

Social media reviews. Only one Arab informant discussed how she selects Jewish doctors (“The truth is, I only know Jewish physicians”). However, she further clarified that if she had to select a dentist (high participation), she would turn to Google to alleviate comfort concerns:

If I hear of a physician; for example, a dentist, he is very professional in his field and has a lot of recommendation, so I choose him. I look for him on Google, and, if he has recommendations, then I do not care if he is Russian, American, or do not know what. The main thing that I know he is very good and professional (Arab woman, age 31 years).
Discussion
The marketing discipline knows a great deal about the role of customer comfort in facilitating feelings of trust, commitment, satisfaction and active voice between buyers and sellers, and it serves as the bedrock for consumer propensities to form relationships with organizations and service providers (Spake et al., 2003). Moreover, research shows that social commonalities between service providers and their customers also enhance feelings of customer comfort in service settings (Rosenbaum and Walsh, 2012). Yet considerably less is known about situations in which service providers and customers lack social commonalities or when they share hostilities, which is quite frequent in many global locales.

This research expands the customer comfort paradigm by considering situations when consumers and service providers possess social incompatibilities, as opposed to social commonalities, and by showing how these social incompatibilities, fueled by historical and current events, cause customers not only to engage in place avoidance but also to feel discomfort or extreme duress and to fear for their well-being. In these situations, service interactions are antithetical to being transformative (Anderson et al., 2013); rather, quite often, they facilitate human ill-being by promoting feelings of stress, anxiety and unease. Unfortunately, many consumers often find themselves in service situations in which they are essentially captive, in terms of options to leave a service (Rayburn, 2015), and they must try to co-create value with service providers with whom they share social incompatibilities. Indeed, Duhachek (2005) found that consumers often turn to their friends or family to help them cope with stressful marketplace situations. These findings suggest that Israeli Arabs and Jews tend to cope with the inherent stress of working with each other by engaging in avoidance, by figuring out how to complete a service (e.g. looking for evidence of professionalism, maintaining a “watchful eye”), or by simply by doing anything except completing a service transaction.

Theoretical implications
Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 113) state that grounded theory can be used “when the researcher is convinced that his analytic framework forms a systematic substantive theory, that is reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, and that it is couched in a form that others going into the same field could use.” Again, Figure 1 represents a framework for understanding customer discomfort in service settings, and it offers researchers a foundation to refine and expand on with additional conceptual categories.

Although the framework addresses many research voids in the comfort paradigm (see Spake et al., 2003), opportunities exist for researchers in the paradigm. For example, relatively few studies have explored customers’ comfort when they interact with employees with disabilities (Siperstein et al., 2006). Situational exacerbators may include the nature of an employee’s disability and whether a disability is a physical or mental limitation. In addition, researchers could explore how service provider comfort influences marketplace exchanges and employees’ behavioral responses, such as the delivery of service quality, refusal to work with a customer or job abandonment.

Although the framework offers comfort-increasing strategies, researchers might also consider the possibility that humans have evolved psychological mechanisms that encumber cooperation, and thus, promote discomfort, when they socially interact with out-group members in consumption settings (Rosenbaum and Walsh, 2012). That is, evolutionary and social psychology studies show that once people realize that they share a social commonality, or an arbitrary phenotypic cue, they exhibit in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Curry and Dunbar, 2013). Perhaps, humans are innately driven to approach service establishments and service providers that offer person-place congruency based upon shared social commonalities, such as a shared religion or country of origin, between customers and service providers, and to avoid places that do not do so. Indeed, person-place congruency fosters customer–service provider cooperation, which fuels the co-creation of value and
customer comfort. In contrast, person-place incongruency hinders customer–service provider cooperation, limits the co-creation of value and promotes customer discomfort.

Managerial implications

The proposed framework further suggests that service organizations can minimize customer discomfort by realizing that customer groups possess social incompatibilities; conflicts; and cultural, racial or religious differences and by engaging in strategic efforts to minimize some of these incompatibilities. For example, the findings suggest that managers can assuage social incompatibilities by ensuring that employees maintain a sense of professionalism when working with all customers, regardless of their background, and are also committed to equitable service quality for all customers. Although this may seem intuitive, research indicates that frontline service employees often break organizational policies to extend care to like-other customers (Brady et al., 2012). Perhaps organizations need to maintain a zero-tolerance policy for employees who display any type of nepotism or discriminatory actions to customers with whom they share social similarities and incompatibilities, respectively.

The findings also suggest that organizations can help customers and employees experience comfort by ensuring that they can understand each other by speaking the same language. Thus, this work encourages human resource managers to consider the importance of hiring bilingual employees, motivating employees to learn a second language and producing integrated marketing communications, including both print and virtual communications, in their customers’ native languages.

This research also suggests that service organizations that confront challenges posed by customer–service provider incompatibilities develop self-service technologies to improve consumer well-being (Ostrom et al., 2015). In these instances, the replacement of frontline employees in service encounters that require low customer participation, such as a cashier-staffed checkout, by self-service technologies, may enhance customer comfort by eliminating social incompatibilities between customers and employees. Even service transactions that require a moderate level of customer participation, such as pharmacies, should consider employing self-service automation to eliminate customer–employee interactions and opportunities for customer discomfort.

Customer discomfort due to social incompatibilities remains a pioneering topic in the services marketing literature. Marketing academics have traditionally investigated positive customer outcomes, such as satisfaction, loyalty and future behavioral intentions. The literature traditionally examines antecedents that nurture buyer–seller relationships and explores how service exchanges may transform individual, societal and even global well-being. Although this optimistic view of marketplace activities is encouraging, the current research shows another aspect to the marketplace – namely, sources of customer discomfort.

Limitations

Although the emphasis on exploring interactions among Israeli Arabs, Jews and Druze in service settings may seem an anomaly, numerous global conflicts exist in which people who have social incompatibilities find themselves working together as service providers and customers. Furthermore, this paper did not address customer discomfort that arises from myriad other social incompatibilities, such as differences between service provider and customers that stem from differences in age, gender, appearance, religion, race, sexual orientation or socioeconomic tensions. Despite these limitations, theoretical and methodological opportunities abound for researchers to explore the customer discomfort paradigm. Indeed, any efforts that encourage people who share social incompatibilities to work together, even for something as mundane as simple marketplace exchanges, may help facilitate comfort for both customers and employees during service exchanges and permit both parties to co-create value for each other and even for society in general.
References


About the authors
Mark Scott Rosenbaum is Fulbrighter, Professor and Chair of the Department of Retailing at the University of South Carolina. His research focuses on retailing and services issues such as social support, transformative service research, third places, servicescapes and retail landscaping. Mark is Co-Editor of the Journal of Services Marketing and Associate Editor at the Journal of Business Research, Services Industries Journal and the Journal of Service Theory and Practice. He has published in leading journals and holds visiting positions with Externado University (Colombia) and the American Hotel Academy (Romania). Mark received his doctorate from Arizona State University in 2003. Mark Scott Rosenbaum is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: marosen@mailbox.sc.edu

Tali Seger-Guttmann is Senior Lecturer of Service & Organizational Psychology at Ruppin Academic Center in Emek Hefer, Israel. Her research expertise is in organizational psychology, specifically in service relationships and customer experience. Her work has been published in the Service Industries Journal, Journal of Services Marketing, International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, Services Marketing Quarterly and at other major publications. Tali received her doctorate from Haifa University in 2006.

Ofir Mimran is Lecturer at Ruppin Academic Center in Emek Hefer, Israel. He is also Human Resources Consultant with expertise in Organizational Development.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com