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# A deontic perspective on organizational citizenship behavior toward the environment: The contribution of anticipated guilt

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## Abstract

This study draws on deontic justice theory to examine an unexplored socioemotional micro-foundation of corporate social responsibility (CSR), namely anticipated guilt, in an effort to improve our understanding of employees' moral reactions to their organization's CSR. We empirically investigate whether environmental CSR induces anticipated guilt (i.e., concerns about future guilt for not contributing to organizational CSR) leading to organizational environmental citizenship behavior. We also consider two boundary conditions related to the social nature of anticipated guilt: line manager support for the environment and negative environmental group norms. To test our hypotheses, we analyzed data from a convenience sample of 503 managers working in Mexican organizations, using Latent Moderated Structural equation modeling. Overall, our results support the deontic argument that employees care about CSR because CSR embodies moral concerns. Specifically, our findings show that efforts to avoid a guilty conscience increase when the line manager provides increased resources and control to act for the environment, and when group members do not care for the environment, suggesting that employees feel they have to compensate for their group's moral failure.

**KEYWORDS**
anticipated guilt, corporate social responsibility, deontic justice, organizational citizenship behavior toward the environment

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In response to ongoing calls for a better understanding of employee responses to corporate social responsibility (CSR), research in so-called micro-CSR, characterized by a person-centric focus, has grown considerably (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019). This body of research aims to improve our understanding of how employees make sense of, react to, and contribute to their organization's CSR. Research findings suggest that CSR elicits favorable responses from employees (Gond et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019), including organizational pride (De Roeck et al., 2017; Ng et al., 2019), prosocial motivation (Ong et al., 2018), job satisfaction (De Roeck et al., 2014; Spanjol et al., 2015), organizational identification (De Roeck et al., 2017; Farooq et al., 2017), affective commitment (El Akremi et al., 2018; Hofman & Newman, 2014), work engagement (Rupp et al., 2018), in-role job performance (Newman et al., 2015; Vlachos et al., 2014), organizational citizenship behavior (Farooq et al., 2017; Ong et al., 2018), creativity (Spanjol et al., 2015), and employee CSR-related behavior (Erdogan et al., 2015; Vlachos et al., 2014).

Micro-CSR research has repeatedly drawn on deontic justice theory, stressing the role of morality-based concerns, to theorize employees' reactions to their organization's CSR, particularly CSR that

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is not directed at employees themselves (Aguilera et al., 2007; Rupp et al., 2006). However, despite interest in the interplay between CSR and employee morality (Erdogan et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017), research has yet to uncover the mechanisms underlying employees' deontic responses to CSR. Indeed, most of the mechanisms studied empirically in the literature overlook moral reactions to CSR (Gond et al., 2017), and particularly little is known about the role of moral emotions in the relationship between CSR and employee outcomes.

Moral emotions, or "emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent" (Haidt, 2003, p. 853), are central to deontic justice theory (Folger, 2001; Folger & Glerum, 2015). Research on moral emotions shows that contextual cues can activate one's desire to live up to moral or social standards (see, Greenbaum et al., 2020), leading people to feel guilt (a self-conscious moral emotion) and especially to anticipate feelings of guilt if their behavior deviates from these standards (Baumeister et al., 1994, 2007; Tangney et al., 1992, 2007). However, to date, most studies on anticipated emotions have focused on the private behavior of individuals, such as ethical consumption decision-making (e.g., Culiberg et al., in press; Escadas et al., 2019; Steenhaut & Van Kenhove, 2006), and pro-environmental behavior (e.g., Elgaaied, 2012; Rees et al., 2015), while neglecting organizational factors that elicit anticipated emotions in the workplace, and how these emotions translate into employee behavior.

Accordingly, this paper aims to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the links between CSR, the moral emotion of anticipated guilt, and employee CSR-related behavior (Gond et al., 2017). More specifically, the guiding research question for this study is: To what extent do employees in an organization respond to environmental CSR by anticipating the guilt of not engaging in organizational environmental citizenship behavior? CSR, defined as "context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance" (Aguinis, 2011, p. 855), is multidimensional in nature (Campbell, 2007; Carroll, 1999; El Akremi et al., 2018). The environmental dimension of CSR makes a better case to understand the deontic mechanism under study because it reflects an organization's overall concern for society (Erdogan et al., 2015). Indeed, micro-CSR research views environmental CSR as a form of third-party justice (i.e., the perceived fair treatment of a third party beyond the organization), and thus a heuristic that employees use to evaluate the moral standing of their organization (Aguilera et al., 2007; De Roeck et al., 2017; Gond et al., 2017; Rupp, 2011; Vlachos et al., 2014). We therefore explore how anticipated guilt helps define the link between environmental CSR and the voluntary actions of employees supporting this CSR, commonly referred to as organizational citizenship behavior toward the environment (OCBE) (Boiral et al., 2015; Erdogan et al., 2015). Moreover, recognizing that guilt is a socially constructed emotion (Baumeister et al., 1994, 2007; Bohns & Flynn, 2013; Tangney et al., 2007), we examine two boundary conditions that integrate proximal influences on employees (Cole et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2017), namely, line manager support and environmental group norms.

This paper makes three contributions to micro-CSR research. First, it highlights the role of anticipated guilt in driving OCBE in reaction to environmental CSR. We empirically validate guilt, and its anticipation, as a response to CSR, and thus support the deontic argument that employees care about CSR because CSR embodies moral concerns (Aguilera et al., 2007; Ellemers & Chopova, 2021; Kim et al., 2017; Rupp et al., 2006). Second, this research confirms the role of line managers in enabling employees to act for the environment (Cantor et al., 2015; Raineri & Paillé, 2016; Ramus, 2001). Indeed, line manager support provides employees with increased resources and control, thereby reinforcing their anticipation of guilt if they were to fail to act to benefit the environment. Third, we shed light on the role of group norms in the relation between CSR and anticipated guilt for inaction. Interestingly, employees appear to comply less with negative group norms when they perceive higher levels of environmental CSR. A possible explanation finds its source in the social compensation hypothesis (Williams & Karau, 1991), which states that individuals tend to contribute more to a meaningful goal when they witness others making lower efforts.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we present the theoretical background and develop the research hypotheses. Then, we detail the method and the results of the study. Finally, we discuss the implications of the findings and suggest directions for future research.

## 2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

### 2.1 | Deontic justice and CSR

Deontic justice theory (Folger, 2001; Folger & Glerum, 2015) asserts that people have an innate moral concern for justice, and care about how others (i.e., third parties) are treated, even when the treatment has no direct effect on them. This morality-based concern nudges people to value justice for its own sake (i.e., as an end in itself), and not just as a means to satisfy self-serving motives (Aguilera et al., 2007; Cropanzano et al., 2003; Erdogan et al., 2015). Accordingly, deontic justice is often referred to as third-party (or other-centered) justice, as opposed to first-party (or self-centered) justice (Rupp, 2011; Rupp et al., 2006).

Because deontic justice theory entails that people are drawn to justice (i.e., what appears just and fair) independent of how actions affect them personally, it offers a powerful framework for explaining people's moral reactions, including emotional ones, to perceived third-party justice (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Folger, 2001; Folger & Glerum, 2015). Indeed, deontic justice research reveals that in the workplace employees make moral judgments on, and react emotionally to, the treatment of their colleagues by managers (Skarlicki & Kulik, 2004), by the employer (Skarlicki et al., 1998), and by customers (Spencer & Rupp, 2009). Micro-CSR research draws on this evidence to explain employees' responses to CSR, especially CSR targeted at the community or the natural environment, which is

seen as a form of third-party justice (Aguilera et al., 2007; Erdogan et al., 2015; Rupp, 2011).

As noted, CSR involves norms and values regarding the treatment of external stakeholders (i.e., third parties) (De Roeck et al., 2017; Vlachos et al., 2014), and thus can function as a heuristic for assessing deontic justice (Gond et al., 2017; Rupp, 2011). Indeed, by contributing to the satisfaction of deontic needs, CSR leads to perceptions of justice and elicits moral behavior from employees. A study by Erdogan et al. (2015) supports this view by showing that top management commitment to the environment increases both perceptions of organizational justice and OCBE. Moreover, CSR behaviors (and especially, natural environment-oriented CSR) has been found to elicit consumers' moral emotions (Romani et al., 2016; Xie et al., 2019), and employees' moral reflectiveness (Kim et al., 2017), which in turn lead to individual behavior that supports this CSR. Therefore, consistent with this evidence, we expect employees to have moral responses to environmental CSR based on their deontic concerns for justice.

## 2.2 | Environmental CSR, OCBE, and anticipated guilt

Environmental CSR represents organizational initiatives designed to protect and promote the natural environment (De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012). CSR can be defined objectively by certain accepted standards, or by more subjective criteria that take the perspective of stakeholders. From the stakeholder's perspective, CSR is perceived and judged in relation to individual standards of appropriate and morally acceptable corporate behavior (Campbell, 2007). Notably, research shows that stakeholders see organizations as responsible for their impact on the natural environment (Öberseder et al., 2013). It is this perceived moral duty of organizations toward the environment that makes environmental CSR a form of third-party justice (De Roeck et al., 2017; Rupp, 2011). In doing so, environmental CSR shapes the social and psychological context of the organization by establishing environmental protection as a moral norm (Boiral, 2009; Raineri & Paillé, 2016), and organizational members may thus feel that behaviors that undermine environmental efforts represent violations of morally or socially valued principles (Kim et al., 2017). Indeed, when employees perceive that the organization is favorably disposed toward the natural environment, favorable employee reactions result because the organization is perceived as treating a third party fairly (Erdogan et al., 2015). A growing body of literature has examined the link between employees' perceptions of CSR and organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Farooq et al., 2017; Jamali et al., 2020; Ong et al., 2018), however, less research has focused on the link between environmental CSR and OCBE.

According to the literature, OCBE takes three main forms (Boiral & Paillé, 2012) comprising the same underlying construct (Raineri & Paillé, 2016): eco-initiative, that represents behavior and suggestions to improve environmental practices (e.g., recycling and proposing ideas to reduce resource consumption); eco-civic engagement, which represents involvement in the management of environmentally related activities (e.g., participating in the implementation of environmental programs); and eco-helping, which refers to behaviors that encourage coworkers to better integrate environmental concerns (e.g., cooperating to address environmental issues and offering environmental advice). To date, most studies have linked OCBE to environmental management practices or perceived organizational commitment to the environment using social exchange theory (e.g., Cantor et al., 2012; Raineri & Paillé, 2016; Temminck et al., 2015). This stream of research shows that employees are willing to exchange reciprocal support that benefits the natural environment for impression management and social approval purposes. The result is that the more employees perceive that environmental protection is important to their organization, the more they engage in OCBE.

Erdogan et al. (2015) are among the first to draw on deontic justice theory to explain how environmental CSR influences OCBE based on people's moral motivations, or their "basic respect for human dignity and worth" (Aguilera et al., 2007, p. 842). While the Erdogan et al. study demonstrates the link between CSR and OCBE, it does not empirically account for the role of moral emotions. We seek to extend this work by examining the extent to which employees respond to environmental CSR with anticipated guilt. Feelings of guilt arise due to violations of socially valued principles, and when a moral failure is the result of one's own behavior (Baumeister et al., 1994; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Greenbaum et al., 2020). Therefore, employees may anticipate feeling guilt for not supporting the organization, as a socioemotional response to environmental CSR. Indeed, those who fail to engage in behaviors to benefit the natural environment may sense that they are not making the moral choice, and thus experience the tension associated with guilt (Elgaaied, 2012; Rees et al., 2015).

Deontic justice theory suggests that justice judgments spur such moral emotions, which then lead to individual behavioral responses (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Folger, 2001; Folger & Glerum, 2015). Guilt has commonly been studied in relation to the natural environment (Elgaaied, 2012; Rees et al., 2015; see also, Kals & Müller, 2012), and is defined as an "unpleasant emotional state associated with possible objections to [one's] actions, inaction, circumstances, or intentions" (Baumeister et al., 1994, p. 245). Guilt brings about remorse or regret, as well as "a sense of tension that often serves as a motivation for reparative action" (Tangney et al., 1992, p. 469).

Because negative moral emotions such as guilt are unpleasant, people regulate their behavior in anticipation to avoid the resulting sense of tension (Baumeister et al., 2007; Bohns & Flynn, 2013; Escadas et al., 2019). This concept, known as anticipated guilt, refers to "concerns about experiencing [guilt] in the future" (Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010, p. 110), and it encourages individuals to make efforts to prevent the potential onset of feelings of guilt (Baumeister et al., 2007). People therefore tend to adopt morally and socially accepted behaviors (e.g., pro-environmental behaviors) or forgo morally questionable actions (e.g., anti-environmental behaviors), to avoid the bad moral conscience associated with guilt

(Baumeister et al., 2007; Elgaaied, 2012; Greenbaum et al., 2020; Rees et al., 2015).

Research shows that people who anticipate such guilt feelings take steps to prevent it, such as by engaging in socially desirable behaviors (Baumeister et al., 1994; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Tangney et al., 1992). In the context of environmental CSR, employee behavior that matches the morality displayed by the organization and its just treatment of the natural environment, translates into OCBEs (Boiral, 2009; Erdogan et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017; Raineri & Paillé, 2016). Specifically, the discretionary nature of OCBE (Boiral et al., 2015) makes it a relevant outcome of anticipated guilt in environmental sustainability contexts. Because OCBE is volitional and not explicitly required by the organization, people experience a sense of control over it and likely recognize that they have alternative possibilities for actions, for which they are individually and morally accountable (Boiral et al., 2015). Performing OCBE then may be a means to alleviate anticipated guilt feelings that otherwise would arise, if employees remained passive with regard to environmental protection. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1** *Anticipated guilt mediates the relationship between environmental CSR and OCBE.*

## 2.3 | The role of line managers and peers

Moral emotions such as anticipated guilt are social in nature (Baumeister et al., 1994; Bohns & Flynn, 2013; Tangney et al., 2007): people consider what others value and what is socially desirable before enacting their chosen moral stance (Baumeister et al., 2007; Greenbaum et al., 2020). In organizations, the line manager and peers represent the most proximal influences that shape the work context and thus employee outcomes (Cole et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2017). Therefore, we expect the actions and prescriptions of the line manager and peers, namely, line manager support for the environment and negative environmental group norms, to affect employees' propensity to experience anticipated guilt for not benefiting the environment.

First, line manager support, through resources or behavior, should contribute to reinforcing one's anticipation of guilt for inaction. Given their position in the hierarchical structure, line manager can exercise their discretion to allocate (or not) scarce resources to employees, such as, for example, time for training to develop environmental skills (Cantor et al., 2015; Ramus, 2001). Line managers can also signal their own behavioral commitment to the environment, in leading by example (Kim et al., 2017) or exhibiting transformational leadership (Robertson & Barling, 2013). By displaying such support for the environment, line managers empower employees and create a favorable climate for OCBE (Cantor et al., 2015; Raineri & Paillé, 2016). In the context of environmental CSR, employees with a supportive line manager should thus feel more anticipated guilt not to engage in OCBE, because they are electing to overlook

organizationally desirable behaviors for which they have been granted increased resources and control (see, Bohns & Flynn, 2013).

Second, the influence of peers, through social group norms, or "rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide and/or constrain social behavior without the force of laws" (Cialdini & Trost, 1998, p. 152), also should affect the level of anticipated guilt experienced by focal employees. Literature on social norms indicates that group norms influence people to align their individual actions with the values of the group (Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004). Indeed, within work groups, awareness of how peers behave, together with beliefs and opinions of those behaviors, constitute salient normative cues that inform employees' shared understanding of social expectations (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004). Especially, micro-CSR research has highlighted the positive influence of such group norms, noting that employees are more likely to engage in OCBE when they believe their coworkers are environmentally friendly (Kim et al., 2017; Norton et al., 2014). Yet both theory and practice also suggest that group norms may be detrimental to the advancement of the organizational CSR agenda. For example, Zohar and Luria (2004) illustrate how productivity pressures, internalized within work groups, can shift members' work priorities, to the extent that socially responsible practices come to be construed as competitive with task performance. If negative group norms lead employees to believe that environmental performance and work performance are at odds, CSR might come to be regarded as a burden (Gond et al., 2017) within the work group (Norton et al., 2014). Thus, employees whose peers establish negative environmental norms should be less likely to feel anticipated guilt for not supporting their organization's environmental CSR, whereas those whose work group has fewer such negative norms may be more inclined to feel such anticipated guilt. Therefore, on the basis of these discussions, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2** *Line manager support for the environment moderates the relationship between environmental CSR and anticipated guilt, such that the relationship is stronger (weaker) when line manager support is high (low).*

**Hypothesis 3** *Negative environmental group norms moderate the relationship between environmental CSR and anticipated guilt, such that the relationship is weaker (stronger) when negative environmental group norms are high (low).*

## 3 | METHOD

### 3.1 | Procedure and sample

We invited 1500 managers enrolled in an executive education program at a major Mexican university to voluntarily complete a paper-and-pencil survey at the beginning of a class session. To minimize response bias (e.g., acquiescence, social desirability), all respondents were assured that their answers were anonymous

and confidential and that there were no right or wrong answers (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In total, 598 questionnaires (40% response rate) were returned. After filtering out unusable returns with a person-level response rate below 30% (Newman, 2014), we were left with 503 completed questionnaires. In this sample, 73% of the respondents were men, their average age was 43.4 years (*SD* = 10.9 years), and their average organizational tenure was 10.6 years (*SD* = 8.7 years). Finally, 26% worked in small companies with 10–49 employees, 19% in medium-sized companies with 50–249 employees, and 55% in large companies employing 250 people or more.

## 3.2 | Measures

All variables were rated on a 5-point scales, with anchors ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). We report the scales items with their factor loading in the Appendix.

*Environmental CSR* was measured using the four-item scale from Judge and Douglas (1998). A sample item is: "My organization limits its impact on the environment beyond compliance". The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's $\alpha$) for this scale was .84.

We measured *line manager support for the environment* with a five-item scale (Raineri & Paillé, 2016) describing important managerial behaviors as identified by Ramus (2001). A sample item include: "My direct superior gives complete and accurate information regarding environmental issues" ($\alpha = .92$).

For *negative environmental group norms*, we used two items that reflected social norms (Ajzen, 2002) that detract from environmental sustainability. It is common to measure subjective norms with a single item, but by including two items, we could derive a reliability coefficient for this measure (which is an improvement to previous studies; Greaves et al., 2013). Items asked respondents: "Coworkers who are important to me think that... (1) environmental actions and initiatives are generally a waste of time; and (2) behaviors harmful to the environment cannot be avoided." The inter-item correlation was $r = .65$ ($\alpha = .78$).

*Anticipated guilt* was measured on a three-item scale adapted from Grant and Wrzesniewski (2010) and applied to an environmental sustainability context (Elgaaied, 2012). Items reflected respondents' anticipated guilt if they were to fail to act to benefit the environment. A sample item is: "I would feel guilty if I did not try to do my bit for the environment at work" ($\alpha = .84$).

For *OCBE*, we used the tridimensional 10-item scale from Boiral and Paillé (2012). This scale is a second-order construct ($\alpha = .94$) that assesses respondents' agreement that they were involved in eco-initiative in the workplace ($\alpha = .82$), eco-civic engagement to support the organization's CSR ($\alpha = .89$), and eco-helping directed toward other employees ($\alpha = .92$).

### 3.2.1 | Control variables

We controlled for gender, age and organization size, because research shows that demographic characteristics may account for environmental behavior in the workplace (Paillé et al., 2019).

## 4 | RESULTS

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the study variables.

## 4.1 | Measurement validation

We assessed the measurement model and tested reliability and validity assumptions using three approaches: chi-squared difference tests (Bentler & Bonett, 1980), the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), as well as the more robust heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015).

First, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses using MPlus (Muthén & Muthén, 2013) to assess the fit of our data to the measurement model. The goodness of fit was assessed using cut off values of .90 (or higher) for the comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and .08 (or lower) for the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Marsh et al., 2004). As Table 2 depicts, the measurement model with the seven first-order latent constructs—environmental CSR, line manager support, negative group norms, anticipated guilt, eco-initiative, eco-civic engagement, and eco-helping—demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2_{(231)}$ = 920.65, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, and RMSEA = .08. Also, the chi-squared difference tests show that the measurement model produced a superior fit than alternative nested models, providing support for the distinctiveness of the constructs.

Second, we computed the Jöreskog's rho index of composite reliability ($\rho$) and the average variance extracted (AVE) of the study variables. The results in Table 1 show that the Jöreskog's rho and the AVE of the constructs were above the .70 and .50 threshold values, respectively (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, the square root of the AVE was larger than all correlation coefficients, showing that each variable shared more variance with its items than with the other variables of the model.

Last, following the recommendation by Henseler et al. (2015), we computed the HTMT criteria for each pair of constructs on the basis of the item correlations (see Table 3). The HTMT ratio of correlations "is the average of the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of indicators across constructs measuring different phenomena), relative to the average of the monotrait-heteromethod correlations (i.e., the correlations of indicators within the same construct)" (Henseler et al., 2015, p. 121). Table 3 shows that the HTMT ratio of correlations is below the conservative .85 threshold value for each pair of distinct constructs. For the three OCBE subdimensions, the use of the more liberal cutoff value of .90 seems

**TABLE 1** Summary statistics and zero-order correlations

| Variable | Mean | SD | α | ρ | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Gender[a] | 1.27 | .44 | - | - | - | - | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 43.41 | 10.89 | - | - | - | -.20 | - | | | | | | |
| 3. Organization size[b] | 2.29 | 0.85 | - | - | - | -.02 | -.07 | - | | | | | |
| 4. Environmental CSR | 3.76 | 0.86 | .84 | .85 | .59 | -.03 | .04 | .09 | (.77) | | | | |
| 5. Line manager support | 3.47 | 0.94 | .92 | .93 | .71 | -.08 | .17 | -.01 | .70 | (.84) | | | |
| 6. Negative group norms | 1.93 | 0.84 | .78 | .79 | .65 | -.06 | -.03 | -.10 | -.31 | -.26 | (.81) | | |
| 7. Anticipated guilt | 3.90 | 0.74 | .84 | .86 | .67 | -.07 | .10 | -.02 | .38 | .44 | -.40 | (.82) | |
| 8. OCBE | 3.63 | 0.80 | .94 | .96 | .70 | -.07 | .23 | -.10 | .52 | .64 | -.28 | .54 | (.84) |

*Notes:* $\alpha$ is Cronbach's alpha internal consistency estimate, $\rho$ is Jöreskog's rho index of composite reliability, and AVE is the average variance extracted by the construct. Correlations greater than |.12| are significant at $p < .01$; those greater than |.10| are significant at $p < .05$. Diagonal elements (in parentheses) are the square roots of the AVE.

[a]Male = 1; Female = 2.

[b]Small companies = 1; Medium-sized companies = 2; Large companies = 3.

warranted given that they reflect the same second-order construct: their HTMT criterion is equal to or greater than .85, but less than .90, which supports the discriminant validity of our scales (Henseler et al., 2015). The tests conducted thus confirm the measurement model and the reliability and validity of the variables in our study.

## 4.2 | Common method variance

We collected data from single sources on self-report measures by using a cross-sectional design, which may cause common method variance. Therefore, we partitioned the variance between trait, method, and uniqueness to assess if systematic error variance unduly accounts for the observed relationships between the constructs, using the unmeasured latent method factor technique (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Results indicated no significant improvement in fit indices ($\chi^2_{[230]} = 920.43$; CFI = .93; TLI = .91; RMSEA = .08) and none of the method factor loadings were significant ($p > .05$), suggesting that common method bias was not a serious problem in our data.

## 4.3 | Test of hypotheses

Our research model integrates moderation and mediation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Thus, we decided to test our hypotheses using the Latent Moderated Structural equations approach (Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000). As this approach does not allow for the computation of conventional model fit indices and only provides information criteria, we first estimated the structural path model without the latent interaction terms (Friedman et al., 2018; Maslowsky et al., 2015). This first model, in which the moderators were included but did not interact with environmental CSR, has marginally acceptable fit: $\chi^2_{(313)} = 1511.41$, CFI = .87, TLI = .85, and RMSEA = .09. We then estimated the structural path model with the latent interactions and compared the two models using the Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC). The first model yielded an AIC of 26166.86 while the AIC value of the model with the interactions was 26146.20. Hence our research model without the interaction has a marginally acceptable fit, but the model with the interaction terms has a better fit with the data (Burnham & Anderson, 2002).

The results from the latent moderated structural equations are shown graphically in Figure 1. To obtain comparable coefficients, we mean-centered the variables forming the latent interaction terms, and used one standard deviation below and above the mean for low and high moderator values, respectively (Aguinis et al., 2017). In support of our prediction that anticipated guilt mediates the relationship between environmental CSR and OCBE (Hypothesis 1), we find that environmental CSR is positively and significantly related to anticipated guilt ($b = 0.10$, $p < .05$), and anticipated guilt is positively and significantly related to OCBE ($b = 0.33$, $p < .001$). Also, we computed 95% confidence intervals (hereafter, 95% CI) for the size of the indirect effect using the bootstrap (i.e., a nonparametric procedure) and found a significant indirect relationship between environmental

**TABLE 2** Fit indices for alternative measurement models

| Model | $\chi^2$ | Df | $\Delta\chi^2$ | CFI | TLI | RMSEA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| One-factor (all items combined) | 3501.98 | 252 | 2581.33*** | .65 | .62 | .16 |
| Three-factor (environmental CSR, line manager support and negative group norm combined) | 1774.75 | 249 | 854.10*** | .83 | .82 | .11 |
| Five-factor (OCBE items combined) | 1203.01 | 242 | 282.36*** | .90 | .88 | .09 |
| Seven-factor (measurement model) | 920.65 | 231 | | .93 | .91 | .08 |

***$p < .001$.

**TABLE 3** Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations

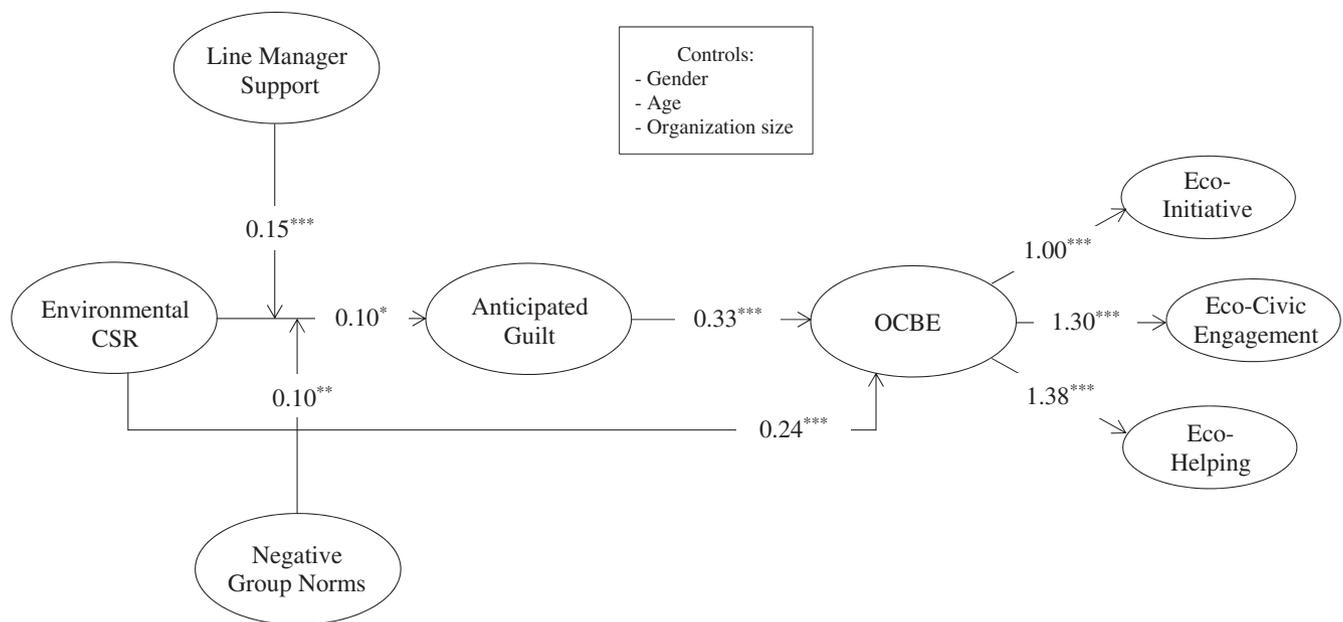| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Environmental CSR | – | | | | | | |
| 2. Line manager support | .81 | – | | | | | |
| 3. Negative group norms | .38 | .31 | – | | | | |
| 4. Anticipated guilt | .46 | .50 | .49 | – | | | |
| 5. OCBE: Eco-initiative | .55 | .63 | .37 | .61 | – | | |
| 6. OCBE: Eco-civic engagement | .59 | .69 | .31 | .58 | .89 | – | |
| 7. OCBE: Eco-helping | .50 | .64 | .27 | .55 | .89 | .85 | – |



**FIGURE 1** Unstandardized estimates of the latent moderated structural model. Parameters for the measurement portion and disturbance terms are not presented for the sake of parsimony. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

CSR and OCBE through anticipated guilt ($b = 0.03$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = [>0.00, 0.06]). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that line manager support would moderate the relationship between environmental CSR and anticipated guilt, such that the relationship should be more positive when line manager support is high. The results confirm that the interaction is positive and significant ($b = 0.15$, $p < .001$), in line with Hypothesis 2. Simple slope analyses show that environmental CSR

relates positively to anticipated guilt for employees who experience high level of line manager support ($b = 0.25$, $p < .001$), but not for those who experience low level of line manager support ($b = −0.06$, $p > .05$). The plot of the interaction depicted in Figure 2 suggests that the relationship between environmental CSR and anticipated guilt increases the most when line manager support is high (vs. low).

Finally, Hypothesis 3 predicted that negative group norms would moderate the relationship between environmental CSR and
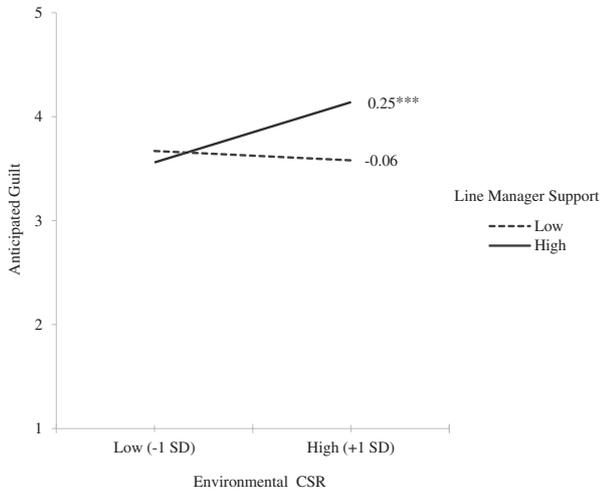
**FIGURE 2** Interaction of environmental CSR and line manager support on anticipated guilt. ***$p < .001$



**FIGURE 3** Interaction of environmental CSR and negative group norms on anticipated guilt. **$p < .01$

anticipated guilt, such that this relationship should be less positive when negative group norms are high. Instead, the interaction is positive and significant ($b = 0.10$, $p < .01$), leading us to reject Hypothesis 3. Simple slope analyses show that environmental CSR relates positively to anticipated guilt among employees who encounter high level of negative group norms ($b = 0.20$, $p < .01$), but not for those who encounter low level of negative group norms ($b = -0.01$, $p > .05$). The plot of the interaction depicted in Figure 3 suggests that the relationship between environmental CSR and anticipated guilt increases the most when negative group norms are high (vs. low).

Finally, we present the direct, indirect and conditional indirect effects related to our hypotheses in Table 4. The results show that when line manager support is low, the conditional indirect effects of environmental CSR on OCBE via anticipated guilt are not significant, regardless of the level of negative group norms (low negative group norms: $b = -0.04$, $p > .05$; high negative group norms: $b = 0.01$, $p > .05$). Conversely, the conditional indirect effects of environmental CSR on OCBE are significant as long as manager support is high. However, compared to the observed effect estimate when negative group norms are low ($b = 0.05$, $p < .05$), we find a stronger effect when negative group norms are high ($b = 0.11$, $p < .001$).

## 5 | DISCUSSION

With this research, we sought to improve understanding of the determinants of OCBE, defined as discretionary individual behaviors that contribute to a company's environmental performance. Drawing on deontic justice theory, we argued that employees engage in OCBE if they experience anticipated guilt for their inaction, in light of positive perceptions of the organization's environmental CSR. We also predicted that the social context acts as a boundary condition on the relationship between perceived CSR and anticipated guilt, such that
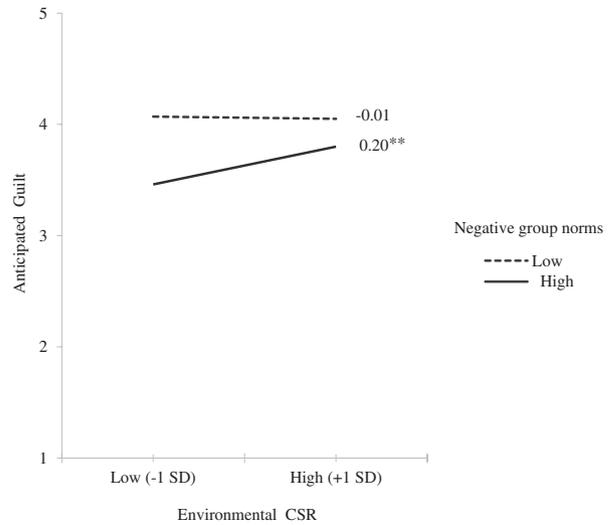
managerial support for the environment should strengthen anticipated guilt, but negative environmental group norms might weaken it. We found no support for the latter prediction; instead, employees who perceived negative environmental group norms appeared to experience even greater anticipated guilt.

### 5.1 | Theoretical contributions

This study makes three contributions to micro-CSR research. First, it provides empirical support for the theoretical mechanisms linking organizational CSR to employees' deontic concerns (Aguilera et al., 2007; Rupp et al., 2006). Indeed, while research argues that environmental CSR appeals to employee morality, the moral micro-foundations of CSR are seldom addressed (Gond et al., 2017). In this study, we examine a precise moral emotional response—anticipated guilt—to CSR targeted at the natural environment, and highlight its role in driving OCBE. We show that employees who perceive higher levels of environmental CSR experience greater anticipated guilt, thereby validating the idea that CSR both induces and satisfies employees' deontic concerns for justice (Rupp, 2011; Vlachos et al., 2014). In doing so, we extend deontic justice theory by providing additional insight into how anticipated guilt emotions are formed in response to justice events that target third parties, such as environmental CSR. Most research on deontic justice focuses on guilt, shame and anger resulting from witnessing negative events that harm the interests of others. Our results suggest that organizations' exemplary actions related to their perceived moral duty to the environment also lead employees to feel the tension associated with guilt. Similarly, research on anticipated guilt tends to focus more on deterring self-serving or unethical conduct that encouraging prosocial behavior (Escadas et al., 2019; Steenhaut & Van Kenhove, 2006). By examining how the negative moral emotion of guilt regulates a type of employee behavior (i.e., OCBE) that is not intended to directly

**TABLE 4** Results for conditional indirect effects at low and high values of the moderators

| | OCBE | |
|---|---|---|
| | *b* | 95% bootstrap CI |
| Direct effect of environmental CSR | 0.24[***] | [0.19, 0.30] |
| Indirect effect via anticipated guilt | 0.03[*] | [>0.00, 0.06] |
| *Conditional indirect effects of environmental CSR via anticipated guilt* | | |
| Low line manager support and high negative group norms | 0.01 | [−0.02, 0.05] |
| Low line manager support and high negative group norms | 0.01 | [−0.02, 0.05] |
| High line manager support and low negative group norms | 0.05[*] | [0.01, 0.09] |
| High line manager support and high negative group norms | 0.11[***] | [0.06, 0.17] |

*Notes*: Low and high levels of the moderators are at one standard deviation below and above the centered mean. Path values indicate unstandardized regression coefficients.
*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$.

benefit the employee or the organization, but the natural environment, we contribute to theory by adding knowledge about why people make the moral choice.

Second, we affirm the pivotal role of line managers in enabling employees to act for the environment (Cantor et al., 2015; Raineri & Paillé, 2016; Ramus, 2001; Robertson & Barling, 2013) by finding managerial support as a boundary condition of the relationship between environmental CSR and anticipated guilt for inaction. Indeed, this relationship held only for employees who reported a high level of support from the line manager, whereas perceptions of CSR failed to elicit anticipated guilt for employees who reported a lack of support. This finding also adds to research that emphasizes the importance of consistency between organizational CSR and CSR-related managerial behavior (e.g., De Roeck & Farooq, 2018). For employees of a socially responsible organization to feel anticipated guilt, and engage in OCBE, managerial support needs to come to them. If not, employees are less likely to experience such anticipated guilt, and thus to perform OCBE. In doing so, our study also suggests that micro-CSR research should more systematically account for the influence of managers in shaping employees' responses to their organization's CSR (De Roeck & Farooq, 2018).

Third, the unexpected result that group norms adverse to environmental protection reinforce the relationship between environmental CSR and anticipated guilt both questions the role of coworkers' influence on OCBE (Kim et al., 2017; Norton et al., 2014) and highlight the strength of moral emotions in driving socially desirable behavior (Baumeister et al., 1994, 2007; Greenbaum et al., 2020; Tangney et al., 1992). Norms act to regulate and constrain social behavior, thereby leaving less room for personal characteristics to express themselves (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004). In that sense, group norms that develop when

peers neglect the protection of the environment represent descriptive rules inviting more negligence from focal employees (Norton et al., 2014). However, our findings show that higher perceptions of environmental CSR resulted in greater levels of anticipated guilt for inaction only when negative group norms where high. A possible explanation for this finding comes from Williams and Karau's (1991) social compensation hypothesis, which states that individuals tend to contribute more to a meaningful goal when they witness others making lower efforts. Thus, when coworkers send signals that they are unlikely to support their organization's environmental CSR, focal employees may feel more responsibility to act (i.e., to compensate for their group's failure), and thus experience a heightened sense of anticipated guilt if they were to fail to benefit the environment.

## 5.2 | Practical implications

The findings of this study also offer interesting contributions for practice. Indeed, an implication of anticipated guilt is the possibility to enhance employees' support for CSR. When employees experience negative emotions, the consequences can range from irrational to constructive behaviors, often depending on how much autonomy the company grants them (Baumeister et al., 2007; Bohns & Flynn, 2013; Greenbaum et al., 2020). Therefore, involving and empowering employees should lead them to engage in more constructive behaviors that support and promote the organization's CSR. To do this, companies should notably work to increase the salience of their CSR activities and spread CSR-related leadership throughout their ranks. That is, companies should communicate clearly to their members what they do to benefit the environment and underscore the desirability of OCBE. Specifically, business executives should make sure to give line managers throughout the organization sufficient slack resources so that they can effectively encourage efforts in a domain that is often ancillary to employees' core job tasks (Boiral, 2009; Raineri & Paillé, 2016). Indeed, despite the role of CSR in shaping the technical, social and psychological organizational context, line managers may locally undermine CSR efforts by failing to create a climate that favors CSR-related behaviors. Therefore, a formal way to enable employees to act for the environment would be to provide them with increased resources and control, by means of "green" human resource management (HRM) practices covering, for example, information-sharing practices, training, recognition, and performance management (see, Renwick et al., 2016).

## 5.3 | Limitations and future directions

One of the limitations of this study is ethical; it echoes one of our managerial recommendations. Namely, our research stresses the role of anticipated guilt in fostering OCBE, but guilt and its anticipation are negative, unpleasant experiences. As Bohns and

Flynn (2013, p. 1169) acknowledge in their conceptual argument for organizations to create conditions for members to experience guilt, "it is worth noting some cautions and ethical concerns about using any negative emotion as a motivational tool." For organizations to induce feelings of (anticipated) guilt without providing employees with the means and resources to engage in behavior to resolve these feelings is both unethical and unproductive, and it suggests that organizations need to help members deal with guilt (and its anticipation) through the design of work (Bohns & Flynn, 2013). Future research should thus investigate the extent to which the formal structure of tasks, features of jobs, and content of HRM practices might help employees regulate the development of, and resolve, feelings of (anticipated) guilt.

Methodologically, we used a convenience sample to collect self-report data from managers working in Mexican organizations, which exposes our study to common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and limits the generalizability of our findings. Thus, future research needs to focus on obtaining data from different sources, such as other-ratings of behaviors, and from a more representative sample of employees, organizations, industries, and geographic locations. Notably, there is no guarantee that our results generalize to employees who do not have managerial responsibilities. Compared to employees, managers are better informed about their organization's CSR actions and environmental issues, and they possess more control or discretion to act accordingly (Raineri & Paillé, 2016; Robertson & Barling, 2013), which may increase feelings of guilt for inaction. Therefore, the anticipated guilt response to environmental CSR may be more prevalent or stronger among managers than employees.

Moreover, our cross-sectional study does not methodologically establish the hierarchical influence of organization- and group-level variables on employees' anticipated guilt and OCBE, nor does it examine temporal mechanisms, such as the focal organization's track record of CSR, that may influence the observed pattern of results. Therefore, we recommend further analysis using multilevel and/or longitudinal models to examine how the organization's perceived CSR history affects moral emotions and behaviors on the job.

Finally, we investigated the role of CSR perceptions and contextual influences on anticipated guilt and OCBEs, and overlooked individual-level differences that may interact with these factors to shape employees' reactions to CSR. Indeed, individual differences such as conscientiousness and empathy, as well as cultural values, such as collectivism and individualism, may affect both guilt-proneness (see, Bohns & Flynn, 2013) and CSR-related attitudes and behaviors (Farooq et al., 2017; Hofman & Newman, 2014; Kim et al., 2017). Thus, future research could benefit from addressing the role of individual-level differences in shaping employees' moral emotional responses to their organization's CSR. Consideration of both the organizational context and individual differences would expand our understanding of mechanisms underlying employees' deontic reactions to CSR.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

Deontic justice theory has gained influence in explaining employee responses to CSR, but the social–emotional mechanisms underlying the theory have not yet been addressed empirically, and our understanding of how moral emotions may influence the adoption of CSR-related behaviors is lacking. Therefore, this research sought to answer the question, "To what extent do employees in an organization respond to environmental CSR by anticipating the guilt of not engaging in organizational environmental citizenship behavior?" The results show that employees engage in OCBE to avoid a guilty conscience when the organization sets a positive example and when managers provide more resources and control to take action for the environment. Our study thus provides empirical support for the deontic argument that employees care about CSR because CSR embodies moral concerns.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request.

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## APPENDIX

| Scales | Factor loading |
| --- | --- |
| Environmental corporate social responsibility | |
| My organization limits its impact on the environment beyond compliance | .92 |
| My organization educates employees and the public regarding environmental protection | .78 |
| My organization complies with environmental regulations | .75 |
| My organization prevents and mitigates environmental crises | .58 |
| Line manager support | |
| My direct superior gives complete and accurate information regarding environmental issues | .91 |
| My direct superior makes sure that employees develop environmental skills | .88 |
| My direct superior listens carefully to and values inputs on environmental topics | .83 |
| My direct superior encourages environmental initiatives | .82 |
| My direct superior involves employees in environmental problem solving | .78 |
| Negative group norms | |
| Coworkers who are important to me think that environmental actions and initiatives are generally a waste of time | .83 |
| Coworkers who are important to me think that behaviors harmful to the environment cannot be avoided | .78 |
| Anticipated guilt | |
| I would feel guilty if I did not try to do my bit for the environment at work | .90 |
| I would feel remorseful if I did not try to improve environmental practices at work | .85 |
| I expect that I would feel bad if I did not try to solve environmental problems at work | .68 |
| OCBE: Eco-initiative | |
| I voluntarily carry out environmental actions and initiatives in my daily work activities | .83 |

| Scales | Factor loading |
|---|---|
| I make suggestions to my colleagues about ways to protect the environment more effectively, even when it is not my direct responsibility | .82 |
| In my work, I weigh the consequences of my actions before doing something that could affect the environment | .70 |
| OCBE: Eco-civic engagement | |
| I stay informed of my company's environmental initiatives | .87 |
| I actively participate in environmental events organized in and/or by my company | .84 |
| I undertake environmental actions that contribute positively to the image of my organization | .83 |
| I volunteer for projects, endeavors or events that address environmental issues in my organization | .77 |
| OCBE: Eco-helping | |
| I encourage my colleagues to adopt more environmentally conscious behavior | .91 |
| I spontaneously give my time to help my colleagues take the environment into account in everything they do at work | .90 |
| I encourage my colleagues to express their ideas and opinions on environmental issues | .87 |
| Variance explained | 67.30% |