

The Relationship between Leader-Member Exchange and Workplace Deviance with the Mediating Role of Workplace Exclusion

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This study tested the relationship between LMX and workplace deviance with the mediating role of workplace exclusion. Data were gathered from a sample of 242 employees of an industrial organization in Iran, selected by stratified random sampling method. Participants in this study completed LMX Questionnaire, Revised Workplace Exclusion Scale (WES-R), and Workplace Deviance Scale. Structural equation modeling (SEM) through AMOS-18 and SPSS-18 was used for data analysis. The results indicated that, LMX relates negatively to workplace deviant behaviors, LMX relates negatively to workplace exclusion, and workplace exclusion relates positively to workplace deviance. In addition, workplace exclusion mediated the relationship between LMX and workplace deviance.

Keywords: LMX(Leader-Member Exchange), workplace exclusion, workplace deviance

For most individuals, work is a context in which they devote most of their waking hours and from which they derive a central measure of their identities (Hulin, 2002). It is no surprise, then, that the workplace is a forum for the expression of various behaviors that are of consequence to individuals, organizations, and society. Although some of these organizational behaviors (such as helping or citizenship behaviors), are socially desirable, another set of behaviors may be viewed by most

members of society as improper. These behaviors have been investigated under various labels, including workplace deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2003), counterproductive behavior (Mangione & Quinn, 1975), and antisocial behavior (Giacolone & Greenberg, 1997).

Job performance is so important to industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology that it is often simply referred to as the criterion. The traditional view restricts job performance to what Borman and Motowidlo (1997) call task performance, that is, the effectiveness with which job incumbents perform activities that contribute to the organization's technical core. A recent review of the job performance literature indicates that there are three distinct components of work behaviors in the job performance sphere. They have been identified as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), workplace deviant behavior (WDB), and task performance (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). Of these, task performance has long been recognized by researchers as the most important aspect of work behaviors, and has sometimes been regarded as being synonymous with overall job performance. However, the importance of the two non-task behaviors (OCB and WDB) in determining overall job performance has also been documented in the literature. For example, Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994) found that OCB plays as important a role as task performance does in determining employee's overall job performance. Similar findings were reported recently by Rotundo and Sackett (2002) regarding the WDB.

Workplace deviance represents voluntary and intentional action that is counter to organizational norms and harmful to organizational functioning (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Examples of workplace deviance include withholding effort, theft, insubordination, physical aggression, and verbal abuse (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Based on the target of behavior, Bennett and Robinson (2000) categorized deviant behaviors into two forms: organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance. Organizational deviance refers to deviant behaviors that are directed toward the organization and interpersonal

deviance refers to deviant behaviors directed toward other employees in the organization. Workplace deviant behavior is an occupational crime that may vary along a continuum of severity, from minor acts, such as spreading rumors and embarrassing co-workers to serious acts, such as theft and sabotage (Kwok, Au, & Ho, 2005). Victims of workplace deviant behavior include employers, other employees or both. Despite the fact that these behaviors have been studied under a variety of labels (e.g., aggression, antisocial behavior, counterproductive work behavior, revenge), this line of research generally taps a common set of behaviors and often uses identical measurement scales (Spector & Fox, 2005; Spector, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, & Kessler, 2006). Due to its pervasiveness in organizations, the concept of workplace deviance has generated high interest among organizational researchers and practitioners in recent years. These behaviors are costly for today's organizations (Aquino, Galperin & Bennett, 2004). Previous studies (Shamsudin, 2003; Shamsudin & Rahman, 2006; Weber, Kurke & Pentico, 2003) have revealed that most employees engage in some form of workplace deviance. This includes absenteeism, abusing sick day privileges, abusing drugs and alcohol, filing fake accident claims, sabotaging, breaking organizations' rules, withholding effort, stealing, taking long breaks, working slowly, harassing other employees and hiding needed resources.

Unfortunately, workplace deviance has serious consequences for individuals and organizations. Indeed, financial estimates suggest that deviance costs organizations billions of dollars annually (Coffman, 2003). The prevalence and costs of employee deviance warrant research effort to understand why, when, and how employees engage in deviant behaviors (Liao, Joshi, & Chuang, 2004). Some authors (Robinson & Bennett, 1995) have pointed out that researchers pay less attention to the negative side of employee behavior and more to desirable behaviors, such as citizenship and commitment. Although there has been increasing interest in workplace deviance in recent years (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007;

Spector, et al., 2006; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008), this has largely been limited to business or for-profit organizations.

Due to the paucity of empirical research regarding workplace deviant behaviors, especially within Asian countries, this study aims to uncover how variables like LMX and workplace exclusion influence workplace deviant behaviors. While the role of LMX in workplace deviance is well documented, the mechanism through which LMX predicts deviant behaviors is little researched. This study investigates mechanisms, such as perceptions of workplace exclusion, through which LMX leads to workplace deviant behaviors. The present research adds to the literature by testing a proposed model in Iran, thus providing some cross-cultural validity to these relationships.

Figure 1 shows the proposed model.

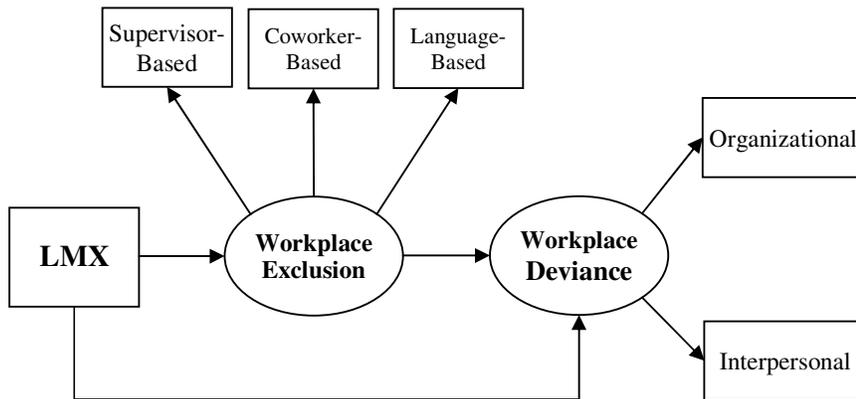


Figure 1
The Proposed Model of LMX and Workplace Deviance,

Background and Hypotheses

Leader-member exchange (LMX). In 1975, the idea that leaders tend to develop different relationships with different employees was first introduced (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). Referred to as the “Vertical Dyad Linkage” (VDL) model of leadership, leader-member

exchange (LMX) theory proposes that supervisor-subordinate relationships exist along a continuum. Some supervisors have relatively high quality exchange relationships with their employees, while others tend to have relatively low-quality exchange relationships with their employees (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005). In high-quality exchange relationships, employees and supervisors are loyal to one another, and employees and supervisors share mutual feelings of liking and respect (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). In contrast, in low-quality LMX relationships, the relationship between supervisors and employees tends to be defined by the employment contract.

Especially in earlier research, those employees with high-quality exchange relationships were described as in-group members or “trusted assistants” while those with low-quality exchange relationships were labeled out-group members or “hired hands” (Vecchio, 1986). LMX theory has emerged based on the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which supposes that social behavior involves the exchange of both material and non-material goods. One dominant approach to assessing supervisory support has been to assess the leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships (Ferris, Brown & Heller, 2009).

LMX and workplace deviance. Some researchers (e.g., Bauer & Green, 1996; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001) have sought to better understand the development of LMX relationships. Most research on LMX has been concerned with its consequences or outcomes (e.g., Liden et al., 1997). In particular, the results of a meta-analysis by Gerstner & Day (1997) indicate that high-quality LMX relationships are significantly related to higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and role clarity. According to their findings, employees in high-quality LMX relationships also experience less role conflict, have lower turnover intentions, have higher objective job performance, and receive better performance ratings from their supervisors. In contrast, individuals in lower-quality exchange relationships receive less supervisory support,

feel more negatively about their jobs, are faced with fewer advancement opportunities, and have stronger turnover intentions (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Previous studies (e.g., Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2005) also suggest that employees recognize this differentiation in treatment and have a fairly good sense of who is “in” and who is “out” with their supervisors. Moreover, Maslyn & Uhl-Bien's (2001) findings indicate that employees in lower-quality LMX relationships often desire better relationships with their supervisors. Not surprisingly, then, Vecchio (1995) found that employees in low-quality exchange relationships were envious of their peers who had high-quality exchange relationships with their supervisors, were more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs, and had a higher propensity to quit. In short, in contrast to the positive outcomes typically associated with higher-quality LMX relationships, lower-quality LMX relationships tend to be associated with a variety of negative outcomes. When a leader has high quality relationships with his/her follower, it means that he/she views the follower as “in-group” member, this interaction leads to trust, respect and obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bein, 1995). Low quality of interaction occurs when a leader perceives his/her follower as an “out-group” member, which characterized by lack of trust and support. When such group distinctions are made salient via exclusion, subsequent attitudes and behaviors may reflect such an in-group/out-group mentality (Hitlan & Noel, 2009).

A large body of research (e.g., Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Hitlan & Noel, 2009; Ferris, et al., 2009) show that supervisor support and organizational support are negatively related to counterproductive behaviors, and lack of supervisor support via exclusion, related more closely to counterproductive behaviors. Exclusively, Hitlan & Noel (2009) demonstrated a positive relation between exclusion by supervisor and organizational deviance.

Relationship with supervisor is one of the most important interactions in the workplace which, depending on its good or bad quality, lead to different consequences. For example, one of the negative interactions is

social undermining in the workplace (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). By definition, social undermining in the workplace includes behaviors intended to hinder a worker's ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success and favorable reputation (Duffy, et al., 2002). These behaviors can occur from coworkers or supervisor. Research has supported the positive relation between supervisor undermining and CWB (Duffy, et al., 2002). In fact, employees who experience undermining, show more counterproductive behaviors. On the other hand, social support refers to positive behaviors and actions with the purpose of fostering positive interpersonal relationships (Duffy, et al., 2002).

The Mediating Role of Workplace Exclusion

An organization's human capital represents the most important resource for ensuring the organization's competitiveness in the marketplace. Thus, it stands to reason that organizations would want their employees to feel a sense of inclusiveness within the organization, especially given the positive relation between perceived inclusiveness and social support, employee psychological health, organizational satisfaction, commitment, and productivity (Mor Barak & Levin, 2002). Based on previous research (Williams, 2007, Duffy, et al., 2002), workplace exclusion can be defined as the extent to which an individual (or group) perceives that they are being rejected and ignored by another individual (or group) within their workplace. One basic assumption underlying this definition is that many (if not most) times such behavior hinders one's ability to complete those tasks required for successful job performance.

The link between exclusion and deviant behaviors can be explained within the framework of belongingness theory. Based on the belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quality of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships. When a person is ignored and ostracized by other people her need to belong

cannot be satisfied and organizational deviance may result. Social exclusion may well be the most common and important cause of aggression (Kirkpatrick, Waugh, Valencia, & Webster, 2002). In general, ostracism is defined as the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others (Williams, 2007). Researchers have given these behaviors different names such as rejection and McDonald and Leary (2005) defined it as a form of being excluded from or devalued by a desired person, group or relationship. In organizational context, workplace ostracism has been conceptualized as a source of ignoring and rejecting. Leary, Tweng, & Quinlivan (2006) posit three possible explanations for the link between rejection and aggression: rejection as a source of pain, rejection as a source of frustration, and rejection as a threat to self-esteem. The third explanation is consistent with the belongingness theory in which Leary, et al. (2006) state that when people are ostracized, ignored or rejected, they are likely to perceive that other people do not adequately values their relationships and experience a lowered state of self-esteem. From this perspective, rejection-based aggression arises not from threats to one's ego or self-esteem but rather from the perception that one's value is low (Leary, et al., 2006). This hypothesis has been studied exclusively, in organizational contexts. Ferris, et al.'s study (2009) was the first attempt to directly test the lowered self-esteem as the psychological mechanism through which organizational support can influence organizational deviance. In belongingness theory framework, Ferris, et al. (2009) state that when the need to belong is thwarted by leaders and organizations by not providing support, lowered organization-based self-esteem and increased organizational deviance may result.

To understand the important psychological mechanism underlying harmful workplace behaviors, Penhaligon, Louis, & Restubog (2009) have recently shown the role of perceived rejection as a mediating link between workplace mistreatment and affective outcomes. Penhaligon, et al. (2009) explained that some affective outcomes such as lower

employee's self-esteem may serve as a mediator linkage rejection to certain negative outcomes (e.g., negative and counterproductive behaviors). To study the direct link between exclusion and counterproductive behavior, Hitlan & Noel (2009) demonstrated that both exclusion by supervisor and by coworkers resulted in organizational CWB.

The present research tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. LMX relates negatively to workplace deviant behaviors

Hypothesis 2. LMX relates negatively to workplace exclusion.

Hypothesis 3. workplace exclusion relates positively to workplace deviance

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between LMX and workplace deviance is mediated by workplace exclusion.

Method

Participants

Respondents for this study were selected by a stratified random sampling method from an industrial company in Iran. Anonymous questionnaires were distributed to 295 full-time employees (working in various company units). All together, 242 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 82%. Of the 242 respondents, 75% were men with an average age of 38 years ($SD=7.32$) and an average job tenure of 14.43 years ($SD=9.28$). In addition, 36.2% of the participants possessed a high school diploma, 51.5% had a bachelor degree, and 12.3% had a master degree.

Measures

LMX. The 7-item questionnaire developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) was used for the assessment of LMX. A sample item is "I can count on my manager to support me". Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (not much) to 5 (a great deal). Volmer, Niessen,

Spurk, Linz, and Abele (2011) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .86 for this scale. We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which provided evidence for construct validity of this questionnaire. In present study Cronbach's alpha was .93.

Workplace exclusion. Participants were asked to report their perceived workplace exclusion on a 17-item Revised Workplace Exclusion Scale (WES-R; Hitlan & Noel, 2009). This scale asks participants to indicate how often they perceived of themselves as experiencing different types of exclusionary behaviors during the past 12 months at their organization. The scale is comprised of three subscales, a 7-item subscale assessing one's perception of being excluded by coworkers, a 5-item subscale assessing one's perception of being excluded by supervisors, and a 3-item language-based exclusion subscale. The final two items represent criterion questions. Sample items are: "Supervisors not replying to your requests/questions within a reasonable period of time" (Supervisor); "Coworkers shutting you out of their conversations" (Coworker); "Coworkers speaking to one another in a language you do not understand" (Language); "Felt as if you were being ostracized by supervisors" (Criterion). All responses were obtained on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*most of the time*), with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived exclusion. Hitlan and Noel (2009) reported the reliability coefficients for the coworker ($\alpha=.76$), supervisor ($\alpha=.75$) and language ($\alpha=.75$). In the present study Cronbach's alpha for coworker, supervisor, and language subscales were .88, .74, and .64, respectively. In addition, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which provided evidence for construct validity of this scale.

Workplace deviance. A 19-item scale designed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was used for assessment of employees' workplace deviance (organizational and interpersonal). The scale is comprised of two subscales, a 12-item subscale assessing organizational workplace deviance, and a 7-item subscale assessing interpersonal workplace deviance. Sample items are: "Come in late to work without permission"

(organizational); “Said something hurtful to someone at work” (interpersonal). This measure used a 1-7 response scale (1=never, 2=once, 3=a few times, 4=several times, 5=monthly, 6=weekly, 7=daily) to assess the frequency of which the respondents engage in behaviors that are harmful to the organization or other employees. Term (2007) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .92 for this scale. In the present study Cronbach’s alpha for organizational and interpersonal deviance subscales were .96 and .90, respectively. In addition, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which provided evidence for construct validity of this scale.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between research variables are reported in Table 1.

Structural Model

Structural modeling results suggested that the hypothesized model fit the observed data adequately, $\chi^2=7.358$; $df=7$; $p>0.05$; $\chi^2/df=1.051$, $GFI=.99$; $CFI=1$; $TLI=1$; $NFI=.99$; $RMSEA=.01$.

The structural model and standardized parameter estimates shown in

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between Research Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. LMX	23.9	6.61	—	—	—
2. Workplace exclusion	40.8	17.32	-.89**	—	—
3. Workplace deviance	45	22.62	-.82**	.95**	—

** P<.001

Figure 2 indicates that H1, H2, and H3 regarding the direct paths were supported.

To determine the significance of the mediating effect, bootstrapping procedure was used. Bootstrapping procedure (using 5000 re-samples) was used to determine the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals around this effect. A confidence interval that did not span zero indicated a statistically significant effect. Table 2 indicates the results for bootstrapping analysis.

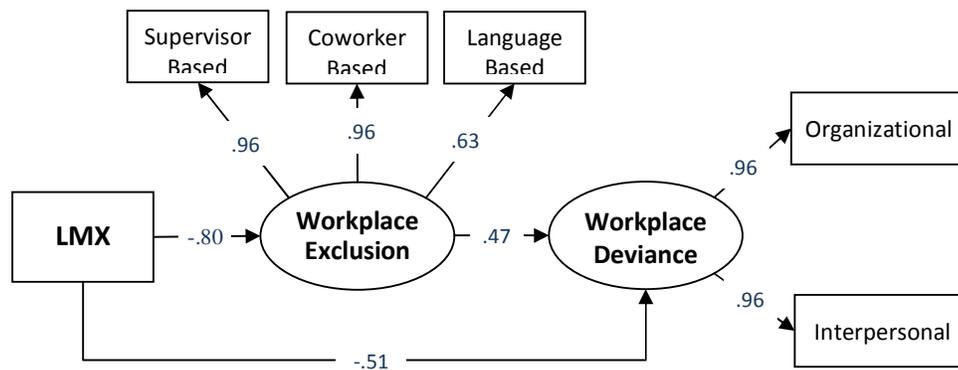


Figure 2
LMX and Workplace Deviance: Structural Model with Standardized Coefficients (All Paths are Statistically Significant, $p < .001$)

Table 2
Results for Bootstrapping Analysis with One Mediator: Effect on Workplace Deviance

	Data	Boot	Bias	SE	95% Confidence interval
Workplace Exclusion	-2.7503	-2.7474	.0028	.1198	-3.0060 – -2.5335

As shown in Table 2 the confidence interval, with one mediator (workplace exclusion) did not span zero which indicates statistically

significant mediating effect. The emerged pattern suggests a mediating role of perceived workplace exclusion (H4).

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to test the relationship between LMX and workplace deviance, considering the mediating role of workplace exclusion. These relationships, which had received support from previous studies, were examined with data from employees in an industrial organization in Iran. In fact, this study sought to investigate the process by which the concept of LMX is linked with deviant behaviors, by including perceptions of workplace exclusion as a potential mediator. This study contributes to the growing body of literature that examines harmful behaviors at work (e.g., Duffy et al., 2002; Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006). Notably, this study extends this research to investigate why this behavior is so damaging, suggesting that perceived rejection acts as an underlying psychological mechanism to create harm.

The first hypothesis that LMX relates negatively to workplace deviant behaviors, was supported. This result supports the previous research findings that LMX is negatively related to workplace deviance (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Hitlan & Noel, 2009; Ferris, et al., 2009). In an organizational context, LMX can be conceptualized as a source of acceptance and belonging within the organization (Ferris, et al, 2009). When a subordinate is seen as an “out-group” member by his leader and is ostracized at the workplace, his or her need to belong cannot be satisfied and this results in negative consequences. Data collected for this study supported hypothesis 2, that LMX has a negative relationship with employees’ perceptions of workplace exclusion. Using a belongingness theory framework, Ferris, et al. (2009), showed that when the need to belong is thwarted by leaders and organization by not providing support, sense of exclusion and lowered organization-based self-esteem (which impair self-regulatory ability), and increased organizational deviance may result. As Marcus & Schuler (2004) mentioned, one of the main causes of

deviant behaviors is impaired self-regulatory ability. Findings of the present study also support hypothesis 3, in that perceptions of workplace exclusion relate positively to workplace deviance. This finding is compatible with the previous research (e.g., Hitlan & Noel, 2009). The current research examined how an employee's perception of being excluded within his/her work environment relates to workplace deviance. Although there is a large body of literature examining how situational factors influence outcomes, little research has specifically addressed the phenomena of workplace exclusion, and its associated outcomes (Hitlan, Kelly, Schepman, Schneider, & Zárate, 2006). One of the goals of the current research was to fill this gap by examining how sources of exclusion contribute to the expression of workplace deviant behaviors. We relied on research evidence suggesting that sources of exclusion (e.g., coworkers, supervisors, language) may be important to more fully understanding the behavioral outcomes associated with such behavior.

Finally, the results of the present study reveal the mediating role of the perceived workplace exclusion in the relationship between LMX and workplace deviance. It is to identify the role of perceived rejection as a mediating link between workplace mistreatment and workplace outcomes. To understand the important psychological mechanism underlying harmful workplace behaviors, recently Penhaligon, et al. (2009) have shown the role of perceived rejection as a mediating link between workplace mistreatment and affective outcomes. According to belongingness theory, when a person is ignored and ostracized by other people her need to belong cannot be satisfied, and organizational deviance may result.

Practical implications, Limitations, and Future directions

The findings of the present study have important practical implications. Our results demonstrate that low-quality LMX and the workplace deviant behaviors are associated directly and indirectly through perceptions of workplace exclusion. In an attempt to avoid such negative behavioral

responses, we suggest that there is a strong need to make employees feel included within the workplace. This may be achieved by educating supervisors and organizational members regarding the damaging nature and associated consequences of mistreating behaviors. An understanding of the psychological underpinnings of mistreatment may be used to create practical interventions to minimize the harm of workplace mistreatment. For example, employee assistance programs could be targeted to provide organizational members with practical cognitive skills to better cope with mistreatment in the workplace. Thereby, even if the mistreatment continues, employees may have the ability to appropriately cope with the situation, without internalizing the mistreatment. More effective coping strategies (e.g., thought stopping and cognitive restructuring) may result in less harm to the individual, and consequently less reactivity and harm to the organization. Further, supervisors could be encouraged and trained to apply justice rules, explain their decisions to employees, and treat them with dignity and respect (Skarlicki and Latham, 2005). By providing explanations that support the legitimacy of decisions and treating subordinates well, they will contribute to the development of high-LMX. Similarly, organizations should be encouraged to develop high-quality exchange relationships with first-line managers as this may facilitate the emergence of high-LMX between managers and subordinates (Tangirala, Green, & Ramanujam, 2007). Finally, although not examined in this study, research suggests that the occurrence of deviant behaviors can also be reduced if organizations adopt formal policies that sanction deviance (Dupre & Barling, 2006; Inness, LeBlanc, & Barling, 2008).

Our study is not without limitations. It is important to highlight these limitations which can guide future research. First, we did not collect data over time; we cannot infer causal relationships from our findings. Longitudinal studies should be employed to test the hypotheses. Second, due to the self-report methodology and the sensitive nature of the information being obtained, responses may have been influenced by social desirability. Third, this study examines the role of only one

mediator. Although this mediator was theoretically derived, future research is needed to further understand the other possible mediators or moderators in this process.

Despite these limitations, our results offer a number of avenues for future research. An important direction for future research is to examine potential moderators of this relation; that is, to examine what causes individuals to engage in deviant behaviors or more positive behaviors. One such variable may include a global self-esteem level. High levels of global self-esteem buffer individuals against the identity threats. Furthermore, an individual's response to mistreatment may be influenced by his or her personality traits. For example, hostile attribution bias, or the tendency of a person to interpret events in a hostile light (Dodge & Coie, 1987), may influence how an individual responds to mistreatment. People high on this trait tend to interpret events in a hostile manner, and can consequently respond in a more negative manner for the same level of provocation (Douglas & Martinko, 2001). We suggest that researchers test the possible moderating role of hostile attribution bias on the relationships examined in the present study. Finally, an extension of the model presented in this article would be to examine whether commitment is a mediator between social exchange variables and deviance. Indeed, LMX can be an antecedent of organizational commitment. Therefore, it would be worth testing whether LMX affects deviance through reduced commitment to the organization.

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