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Negative Affect and Counterproductive Workplace Behavior: The Moderating Role of Moral Disengagement and Gender

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Abstract There has been growing scholarly interest in understanding individual-level antecedents of counterproductive workplace behavior (CWB). While researchers have found a positive relationship between individuals' negative affect and engagement in CWB, to date, our understanding of the factors which may affect this relationship is limited. In this study, we investigate the moderating roles of moral disengagement and gender in this relationship. Consistent with our hypotheses, we found that individuals with a greater tendency to experience negative emotions were more likely to engage in CWB when they had a higher propensity to morally disengage. Moreover, we found that this interacting relationship varied across men and women. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings and offer avenues for future research.

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been growing attention devoted to the study of counterproductive workplace behavior

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(CWB) (Jones 2009; Spector 2011; Yang and Diefendorff 2009). Also referred to as workplace deviance, anti-social behaviors and organizational misbehaviors, researchers have described CWB to include behaviors such as theft, drug and alcohol abuse, sabotage, vandalism, and disciplinary problems, among others (Ones 2002; Roberts et al. 2007). Moreover, estimates suggest that as many as 75 % of employees engage in CWB (Harper 1990; Jones 2009), while up to 95 % of organizations are affected by behaviors such as theft and fraud (Case 2000). Indeed, researchers have found that CWB is very costly for organizations (Mount et al. 2006). Research suggests that CWB costs U.S. employers nearly $50 billion on an annual basis and may explain up to 20 % of failed businesses (Coffin 2003).

Researchers have dedicated significant attention to investigating antecedents of CWB. Much of this research has focused on situational variables that are theorized to provoke employee CWB. For example, researchers have found that perceived injustice/unfairness (Cohen-Charash and Mueller 2007; Hershcovis et al. 2007; Jones 2009), desire for revenge (Jones 2009), and abusive supervision (Detert et al. 2007) are associated with CWB. Since situational stressors typically evoke negative emotions among employees (Fox et al. 2001), the experience of negative emotions appears to be a significant precursor of CWB. Perhaps, not surprisingly, one dispositional variable that has received a significant amount of attention in the CWB literature is negative affectivity (Yang and Diefendorff 2009), which represents a dispositional tendency toward experiencing negative emotions (Watson et al. 1988; Watson and Clark 1984).

While there is evidence that negative affect is positively associated with engagement in CWB (e.g., Hershcovis et al. 2007; Penney and Spector 2005; Yang and Diefendorff 2009), to date, we have a limited understanding of possible

boundary conditions of this relationship. In this paper, we investigate the role played by moral disengagement, a cognitive mechanism which deactivates moral self-regulatory processes (Bandura 1986; Detert et al. 2008) in the relationship between negative affect and CWB. We also examine whether this relationship is further complicated when considering the role of gender. Specifically, we draw on relational theory (Miller 1976) to suggest that the moderating effect of moral disengagement will differ across men and women. We thus contribute to the CWB literature by investigating important boundary conditions in the relationship between negative affect and CWB.

In the following section, we provide a brief overview of the relevant CWB literature. We then theorize negative affect, moral disengagement, and gender affect CWB, which enable us to generate our hypotheses. Thereafter, we discuss the methods and analyses we used to test our hypotheses, and present our results. Finally, we conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical contributions of our study, presenting its limitations and offering areas for future research.

Counterproductive Workplace Behaviors (CWBs)

CWB refers to employee behaviors that are harmful toward the organization and/or other employees (Robinson and Bennett 1995). Hence, there are two major types of CWB identified in the literature: individual- and organization directed (Bennett and Robinson 2000). CWB that is directed at other employees can include physical or verbal aggression and other forms of interpersonal mistreatment that can be described as harmful. CWB directed toward the organization includes theft, sabotage, withdrawal of work efforts, and any other type of behavior that is harmful to the organization (e.g., Mount et al. 2006). We are particularly interested in the latter type of behavior: organization-directed CWB.

As mentioned, a significant amount of research has found that negative affect is positively correlated with CWB (e.g., Hershcovis et al. 2007; Penney and Spector 2005; Yang and Diefendorff 2009). To date, however, we lack sufficient understanding of the conditions that may affect this relationship. Avenues that may offer insight into this relationship are morals and ethics. Surprisingly, there has been a paucity of research examining the role of morals and ethics in predicting CWB (Andreoli and Lefkowitz 2009; Henle et al. 2005), as evident in reviews of the CWB literature (e.g., Bennett and Robinson 2003; Judge et al. 2006; Spector 2011), although some researchers have suggested that individual-level constructs related to morals may help explain engagement in CWB (e.g., Dilchert et al. 2007). In this paper, we examine individuals' propensity to
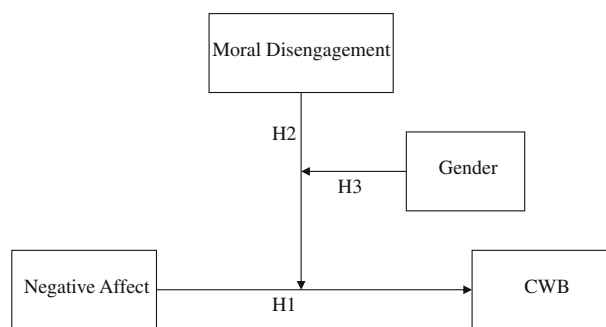

Fig. 1 CWB: a three-way interaction

morally disengage as a moderator of the negative affect-CWB relationship. We contend that individuals with high negative affect will be more likely to engage in CWB when their propensity to morally disengage is high. Furthermore, we investigate how this moderating effect differs across men and women. We present our diagrammatic model and hypotheses in Fig. 1 (below).

Negative Affect

Negative affect represents a dispositional tendency toward experiencing negative emotions (Watson et al. 1988; Watson and Clark 1984), such as anxiety, fear, sadness, and anger. A number of studies that examined the relationship between negative affect and CWB (e.g., Aquino et al. 1999; Fox et al. 2001; Hershcovis et al. 2007; Penney and Spector 2005; Yang and Diefendorff 2009) have found that individuals with high levels of negative affect are more likely to engage in CWB than those with low levels of negative affect.

Several explanations have been suggested to explain the impact of negative affect on engagement in CWB. Employees with high negative affect tend to perceive the world more negatively (Penney and Spector 2005) and may therefore have greater motivation to engage in behaviors that they believe will help them reduce, or cope with, these negative emotions (Cropanzano et al. 2003). An explanation for the relationship between negative affect and CWB is thus offered through the concept of "affect management" (Dalal et al. 2009, p. 1053), whereby employees who experience negative emotions will seek to repair their affective state through engagement in CWB. For example, employees who believe that the organization is a source of their negative emotions will tend to reciprocate by engaging in negative behaviors toward the organization to feel a sense of retribution (Blau 1964). Another example is employees who engage in withdrawal forms of CWB so as to repair their affective state by avoiding the problem (Dalal et al. 2009).

Even when employees do not view their organization as the source of their negative emotions, they may nonetheless

view it as an easy target on which they can diffuse their frustration (Cropanzano et al. 2003). With employees spending a significant portion of their day at work, the organization becomes a likely target for diffusing frustration. Hence, employees may engage in CWB as a way of managing their negative emotions regardless of the specific source of these emotions.

Furthermore, employees with high negative affect tend to have greater sensitivity and emotional reactivity to experiences at work than those with low negative affect (Larsen and Ketelaar 1991). This greater reactivity will make individuals with high negative affect more likely to convert their emotions into CWB than individuals who have low emotional reactivity. This is because emotional reactivity entails a stronger translation of affect into actual behavior (Larsen and Katelaar 1991). This is consistent with Spector and Fox's (2002) voluntary work behavior model. Their model suggests that work situations can produce greater affect, which energizes employee action tendencies through voluntary work behaviors such as CWB (Spector and Fox 2002). Therefore, employees who have a strong tendency to experience negative emotions will more likely engage in CWB directed toward the organization than those with a lower tendency to experience negative emotions. Based on the above discussion, we derive our first hypothesis below.

Hypothesis 1 There will be a positive relationship between individuals' negative affect and their CWB.

The Moderating Role of Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement refers to an individual's ability to deactivate moral self-regulation and self-censure, which allows individuals to engage in behavior that is inconsistent with moral standards without the associated self-sanctions and guilt (Bandura et al. 1996; Detert et al. 2008). More specifically, individuals deactivate moral self-regulation by reframing the situation in a way that allows them to rationalize and justify certain behaviors that are inconsistent with moral standards.

Moral disengagement is a relatively new construct applied in organizational research. Detert et al. (2008, p. 374) assert that in relation to its consequences, "our understanding of moral disengagement remains at an early stage." Extending prior research that investigated moral rationalizing and justification as a mechanism to justify previous actions, they found support for moral disengagement as a predictor of *future* unethical behaviors. Furthermore, in concluding, they "speculate" (p. 384) that moral disengagement may influence behaviors such as CWB.

Employees may use one of several rationalizations as a reflection of their moral disengagement. To illustrate,

employees may rationalize and justify their behaviors in a way that make these behaviors appear more acceptable (Bandura 1986). This can include explanations that justify the behaviors, such as theft in response to false promises from the organization or perceptions of inequity. Indeed, research has associated increased theft with perceptions of inequity about monetary compensation (Dilchert et al. 2007; Greenberg 1990). Conversely, employees may use advantageous comparisons to justify their unethical behaviors (Detert et al. 2008). Another way through which employees may rationalize behaviors that are inconsistent with moral standards is to displace responsibility onto others. For example, employees may convince themselves that certain organizational practices are responsible for their misuse of company time; thus, the organization should be blamed for employee actions. Employees may similarly attempt to diffuse responsibility by suggesting that they engage in fraud because other employees commit fraud, thereby diffusing responsibility from any single employee (Ashforth and Anand 2003; Murphy and Dacin 2011). Finally, employees may distort the consequences by suggesting that their acts of theft do not significantly affect the organization because of its strong revenue stream (Detert et al. 2008). Overall, there are a number of ways in which employees may rationalize their behaviors, which allow them to cognitively disassociate themselves with acting in an unethical or immoral manner (Claybourn 2011).

We contend that the ability of employees to morally disengage through various rationalization and justification mechanisms will tend to make it easier for them to engage in CWB because of fewer self-sanctions and less feeling of guilt. Because CWB is viewed as inconsistent with moral standards (Roberts et al. 2007) such behavior may be associated with initial feelings of guilt. However, individuals who can minimize feelings of guilt may be more likely to engage in CWB. Specifically, we suggest that employees who have high levels of moral disengagement may be more likely to act upon their negative emotions in a manner that is inconsistent with moral standards than those with low levels of moral disengagement. In other words, when employees have a tendency to experience negative emotions and morally disengage, they will engage in more CWB than those without a tendency to morally disengage. Thus, for example, employees with high moral disengagement may use one or more of many potential explanations to rationalize and justify their immoral behaviors (e.g., advantageous comparison, displacing responsibility) (Bandura 1986). Employees may convince themselves that engaging in a CWB such as theft or vandalism represents a more effective way of coping with their emotions than more aggressive behaviors such as violence (i.e., using advantageous comparison as a rationalization).

Similarly, employees may rationalize that engaging in CWB such as spending company time on personal issues or daydreaming and fantasizing is justified when considering that other employees arrive to work late on a regular basis. Alternatively, employees may rationalize their CWB by displacing responsibility. For instance, employees may convince themselves that the organization is responsible for their negative emotions (e.g., sadness, anger) and thus are deserving of the CWB. We therefore derive the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 Moral disengagement will moderate the relationship between negative affect and CWB, whereby employees with higher levels of moral disengagement will be more likely to engage in CWB than those with lower levels of moral disengagement.

The Moderating Role of Gender

Given extant literature on gender in the context of morality and ethics (O'Fallon and Butterfield 2005; Schminke et al. 2003), we believe that it is important to consider the role of gender in the negative affect-CWB relationship. Investigating ethics and morals provokes gender-related questions given the ongoing debate and conflicting views on the role of gender. More specifically, a significant amount of debate has occurred over the past few decades about the presence of gender differences in unethical behaviors and moral reasoning (Detert et al. 2008; Schminke et al. 2003). On one hand, several researchers have found empirical support for women being more ethical than men (e.g., Ameen et al. 1996; Singhapakdi 1999). On the other hand, other researchers have found little to no differences across gender in ethical behaviors (e.g., Jones and Kavanagh 1996; Robin and Babin 1997). Nevertheless, some more recent empirical evidence suggests that gender differences may be pronounced when considering the role of moral disengagement on unethical behaviors (Detert et al. 2008).

We draw upon relational theory (Miller 1976) to predict that high negative affect females with high moral disengagement engage in less CWB than similar males. Relational theory suggests that connectedness and relationship building represent central and desired aspects of women's development (Miller and Stiver 1997; Schminke et al. 2003). Moreover, this theory suggests that females possess a unique desire to develop and maintain personal relations with others (Schminke et al. 2003). Such desires and goals will tend to make women more hesitant than males to engage in behaviors such as CWB because these behaviors may likely compromise positive relations with others, such as supervisors and peers. Hence, females' desire for positive personal relations may tend to limit their engagement in CWB even when they have a high proneness to moral disengagement. For men, on the other hand, a relatively lower desire for connectedness and relationship building will be associated with a lower perceived cost of engagement in CWB and, in turn, greater engagement in such behavior. Hence, according to relational theory, moral disengagement will not strengthen the negative affect-CWB relationship for females as much as it will for males.

Furthermore, some research has demonstrated that females pay greater attention to distinguishing between ethical versus unethical behaviors (Frank et al. 1997). Researchers have also contended that females tend to be more accurate than males in their assessments of whether they are actually engaging in ethical versus unethical behaviors (Fiske and Taylor 1984; Schminke et al. 2003). This suggests that even when high negative affect females have a strong propensity to morally disengage, their ability to more clearly recognize unethical behaviors such as CWB will tend to result in lower CWB than males who have high negative affect and a strong propensity to morally disengage. Therefore, based on the above argumentation, we develop the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 There will be a three-way interaction between negative affect, moral disengagement, and gender to predict CWB, such that the two-way interaction between negative affect and moral disengagement will be stronger for males whereby high negative affect males who have high levels of moral disengagement will be more likely to engage in CWB than high negative affect females who have high levels of moral disengagement.

Method

Participants

We conducted a survey-based study in a large university in Canada. The project was evaluated and approved by the university's research ethics board according to the guidelines of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. 2005). The department from which these respondents were drawn offers many evening and night classes. Approximately 70 % of students in this department are employed full-time. Only students who were working were included in the sample. Hence, respondents who were not working were removed from the study. The students were pursuing majors in business/management disciplines (e.g., general management, marketing, human resource management) and were senior students completing their undergraduate degree.

In total, 274 surveys were completed of which 221 were useable (81 %). Because we restricted our sample to

senior-level students, the number of respondents with full-time work experience in our particular sample was higher than the 70 % at the departmental-level. With respect to years of full-time work experience, 26 % of respondents had between 1 and 2 years, 29 % had 3–4 years, 23 % had 5–6 years, 12 % had 7–8 years, 5 % had 9–10 years, and 5 % had more than 10 years of work experience. In terms of age, approximately 22 % of respondents were 18–20 years old, 49 % were 21–23 years old, 14 % were 24–26 years old, 6 % were 27–29 years old, and 9 % were 30 years of age or older. With respect to gender, 28 % of respondents were male.

Procedures

Respondents from several classes were invited to complete the survey during class time (students were told not to complete the survey if they did so in another class but there were no cases like this). A research assistant administered the surveys and assured respondents that their responses will remain anonymous. While the respondents completed hard copy surveys, they were instructed not to write their name anywhere on the survey to allow for full anonymity. The respondents submitted their completed survey directly to the research assistant and were made aware at the outset that the surveys would not be seen by their course instructors. Respondents were told that participation in the study was voluntary. A number of researchers investigating CWB have similarly used working samples of students (e.g., Jones 2009; Penney and Spector 2005; Spector et al. 2010; Yang and Diefendorff 2009).

Measures

Counterproductive Workplace Behaviors (CWBs)

In line with suggestions made in previous research (e.g., Detert et al. 2007), we took a broad approach to CWB by measuring a composite of behaviors, rather than single specific behaviors (e.g., theft). We measured CWB using a scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000). Since we were specifically interested in CWB directed toward the organization, we used the organization-directed CWB scale consisting of twelve items. The items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Often." Sample items included "taken property from work without permission," "spent too much time fantasizing or day-dreaming instead of working," and "littered your work environment." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.79.

We used a self-report of CWB, consistent with a number of studies measuring this construct (e.g., Cohen-Charash and Mueller 2007; Jones 2009; Marcus and Schuler 2004;

Yang and Diefendorff 2009). Moreover, recent meta-analytic evidence suggests that self-rater reports of CWB are in fact *more* predictive of employees' actual engagement in these behaviors than other reports (Berry et al. 2011). As Yang and Diefendorff (2009) similarly contend, CWB is reasonable to measure based on self-report data. Other potential sources of information about employee behaviors (e.g., peers, supervisors, subordinates) would tend to be less aware of their co-worker's engagement in various forms of CWB (e.g., fantasizing, daydreaming, intentional slowing down of work, discussion of confidential company information with outsiders, and dragging out of work for the purpose of increasing overtime pay) than the actual perpetrator (see Bennett and Robinson 2000).

Negative Affect

We used a 10-item scale to measure negative affect, developed by Watson et al. (1988). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they generally experience certain negative emotions and feelings. The items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Very slightly or not at all" to "Extremely." Sample emotions and feelings included "distressed," "upset," and "scared." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.85.

Moral Disengagement

We used a 24-item scale that was developed by Bandura et al. (1996) and later modified by Detert et al. (2008) to measure moral disengagement. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. The items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Disagree strongly" to "Agree strongly." Sample items include "it is alright to fight to protect your friends," and "if people are living under bad conditions, they cannot be blamed for behaving aggressively." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.90.

Gender

We used a one-item question requesting respondents to indicate whether they are male or female.

Control Variables

We controlled for work experience by asking participants to indicate the number of years that they have worked in an organization. We also controlled for age by asking participants to indicate their age group (e.g., 18–20; 21–23; 24–26; etc.).

Results

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 (above) presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the variables. Moral disengagement, negative affect, and gender are all significantly correlated with CWB. Work experience was essentially unrelated to CWB and weakly correlated with moral disengagement. Age was weakly correlated with both CWB and moral disengagement. Finally, the mean (2.50) and standard deviation (0.78) for moral disengagement, along with the mean (1.87) and standard deviation (0.52) for CWB, suggest that such tendencies and behaviors are not particularly high among employees. Moreover, the mean and standard deviation found for moral disengagement in this current study are similar to those found by Detert et al. (2008).

Moderators: Interactions Between Negative Affect, Moral Disengagement, and Gender

In order to test our hypotheses, we used hierarchical ordinary least squares regression analyses, following the moderated regression procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991) (see Table 2 above). We centered the independent variables when testing interactions. In Model 1, we included only the control variables. Work experience and age accounted for approximately 4 % of the variance in CWB. Furthermore, the results indicated that older respondents were less likely to engage in CWB ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$). Work experience was not significantly related to CWB.

In Model 2, the control variables (work experience and age) were entered, followed by each of the independent variables (negative affect, moral disengagement, and gender). As predicted in Hypothesis 1, negative affect was

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	3.40	1.40	–					
2. Work experience	4.80	3.59	0.62**	–				
3. Negative affect	2.16	0.71	−0.15*	−0.12	(0.85)			
4. Moral disengagement	2.50	0.78	−0.10	−0.11	0.12	(0.90)		
5. Gender	0.71	0.45	0.00	0.02	0.02	−0.22**	–	
6. CWB	1.87	0.52	−0.16*	−0.01	0.32**	0.43**	−0.24**	(0.79)

$N = 221$

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

Table 2 Results of hierarchical moderated regression analyses for counterproductive workplace behavior

Variables	Counterproductive workplace behaviors			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control variables				
Work experience	0.16	0.21**	0.19**	0.20**
Age	−0.26**	−0.22**	−0.21**	−0.23**
Independent variables				
Negative affect		0.28***	0.39***	0.30**
Moral disengagement		0.36***	0.44***	0.47***
Gender		−0.17**	−0.15**	−0.12*
Moderator variables				
Negative affect × moral disengagement			0.18**	0.40***
Negative affect × gender			−0.15	−0.08
Moral disengagement × gender			−0.11	−0.12
Negative affect × moral disengagement × gender				−0.27**
R^2	0.04	0.32	0.37	0.39
Adjusted R^2	0.03	0.31	0.35	0.37
Change in R^2	0.04	0.28	0.05	0.02
F change	4.66*	29.53***	5.47**	7.57**

Reported values are standardized regression coefficients

Gender: female = 1; male = 0
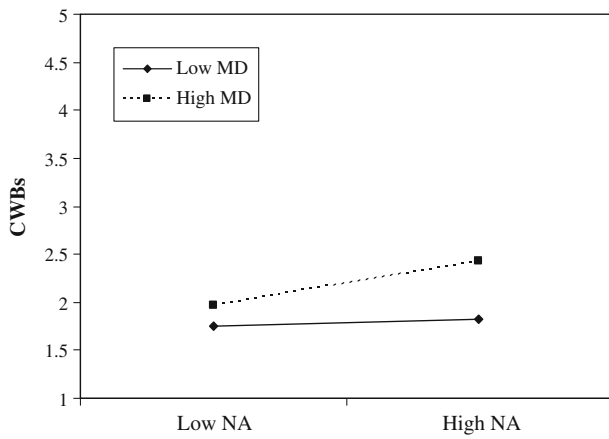
* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

Fig. 2 The moderating effect of moral disengagement on the negative affect–CWB relationship
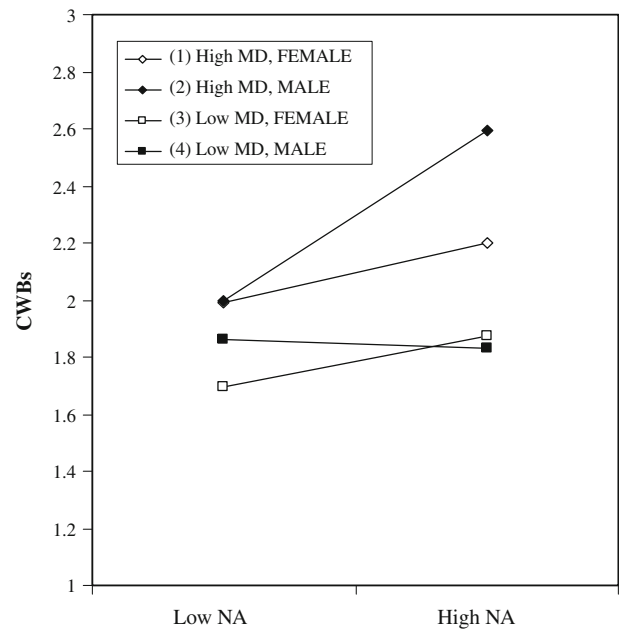

Fig. 3 A three-way interaction between negative affect, moral disengagement, and gender to explain CWB

Table 3 Slope differences for the three-way interaction

Pair of slopes	t value for slope difference	p value for slope difference
(1) and (2)	−2.826	0.005
(1) and (3)	0.243	0.808
(1) and (4)	1.338	0.182
(2) and (3)	3.381	0.001
(2) and (4)	4.232	0.000
(3) and (4)	1.205	0.230

significantly related to CWB ($\beta = 0.28$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals with higher levels of negative affect would be more likely to engage in CWB than those who have lower levels of negative affect. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

In Model 3, along with the control variables and the independent variables, we entered the three two-way interaction terms. As predicted in Hypothesis 2, the interaction between negative affect and moral disengagement was significant ($\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.01$). There was also a statistically significant increase in variance explained in R^2 in Model 3 ($F = 5.47, p < 0.01$). By means of the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991), in Fig. 2, we plotted this interaction. As illustrated, consistent with our hypothesis, individuals with high negative affect were more likely to engage in CWB when they had high moral disengagement.

In Model 4, we added the proposed three-way interaction. The three-way interaction between negative affect, moral disengagement, and gender was significant ($\beta = -0.27$; $p < 0.01$). Model 4 in Table 2 shows that the addition of the three-way interaction increases the overall variance explained by 0.02 ($F = 7.57, p < 0.01$). By means of the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991), we plotted this three-way interaction (Fig. 3). As hypothesized, the highest level of CWB is found for men with high levels of both negative affect and moral disengagement.

To investigate this three-way interaction further, we conducted post hoc analyses and calculated slope difference tests (Dawson and Richter 2006). The results are reported in Table 3 (see above), which show that slope 2, representing males with high moral disengagement, is significantly different than the other three slopes. Together, the above findings lend support to hypothesis 3. Interestingly, no significant difference was found between slopes 3

and 4, representing females with low moral disengagement and men with low moral disengagement, respectively.

Discussion

Our study illustrated that the relationship between negative affect and CWB is indeed fairly complex. More specifically, individuals with high negative affect were more likely to engage in CWB when their propensity to morally disengage was high. Furthermore, consistent with our hypothesis, this relationship was moderated by gender. We found that males were likely to engage in CWB more frequently than females with similar high negative affect and high moral disengagement. Our findings, therefore, reveal a complex three-way interaction between negative affect, moral disengagement, and gender in predicting CWB. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical

contributions of this study while providing directions for future research, the practical implications of our findings, and outline some limitations of our study.

Theoretical Contributions and Directions for Future Research

Our analysis demonstrates the telling role played by moral disengagement in explaining the negative affect-CWB relationship. Negative emotions are more likely to trigger engagement in CWB when individuals have a tendency to morally disengage. Moreover, we found that experiencing negative emotions may itself not be sufficient to explain why employees engage in CWB. Employees with high levels of negative affect who were not prone to morally disengaging were less likely to engage in CWB than those who were prone to morally disengaging. Building on our study, future research should further explore the role of morality and ethics in explaining CWB. For instance, does the ability to morally disengage predict whether individuals who perceive injustice retaliate with organization-directed CWB? Does an employee's proneness to morally disengage explain his/her engagement in aggression or bullying behavior toward others? These are interesting questions that can help us understand the mechanisms that individuals use to engage in such types of behaviors. Moreover, our analysis focused on the cognitive aspects of morals and ethics, whereby individuals' ability to rationalize unethical behaviors was used as a predictor. These cognitive mechanisms add an important piece to our understanding of CWB and researchers should investigate other possible cognitive mechanisms that may explain employee engagement in such behaviors.

We also investigated the role of gender in predicting CWB, which allowed us to contribute to the ongoing debate regarding gender and unethical behaviors. The interaction between negative affect and moral disengagement varied across gender as men tended to be more likely than women to engage in CWB when they both had high moral disengagement and negative affect. Investigating the varying effects of certain relationships across men and women may indeed tell us that such relationships are significantly different for women than for men. Accounting for these differences can enable us to more closely capture the effects of various phenomena. Therefore, we encourage researchers to investigate how important relationships about organizational phenomena may differ across gender, work experience, and so on. While capturing these variables as controls is certainly important in many cases, we believe—and illustrated—that investigating their direct and interacting effects can also add value to our understanding of phenomena.

Implications for Practice and Policy

There are some important implications from this study for organizations. First, this study indicated that negative emotion itself did not provide a complete picture of employees' engagement in CWB. While prior research has emphasized the role of negative affect, our study revealed that negative emotions were more likely to translate into CWB when employees also had high levels of moral disengagement. Hence, while organizations may take prior findings to suggest that they should resist hiring employees with high negative affectivity, such resistance toward hiring these individuals may not be necessary. Instead, organizations should focus on employee history or other characteristics that may signal their proneness or willingness to justify engaging in behaviors that are inconsistent with moral standards.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, given that all the measures in the study were captured through a single source, it is possible that there is a common method variance issue. To examine whether common method variance was a problem in this study, we conducted a post hoc Harman's single factor test which revealed multiple factors (13 factors) versus a single dominant factor (see Podsakoff and Organ 1986). By running a factor analysis, this test allowed us to identify whether there was the presence of a single factor solution. If there is the presence of one general factor, this would suggest substantial common method variance since this factor would explain the majority of variance in the variables (Chiaburu and Baker 2006). Running this test revealed that one single factor did not explain the majority of original variance in the variables. Moreover, common method variance is generally less likely to be a problem for complicated interaction effects (Chang et al. 2010). Furthermore, with gender playing an important role in our model, we believe that its objective nature further alleviates potential common method issues.

While self-reports may be problematic in certain contexts, it was important to measure the variables in this study from the employee's perspective. For instance, several researchers have used and/or indicate preference for self-reports of CWB since other sources of information (e.g., co-workers, supervisors) would be less likely to know whether their colleague is engaging in CWB such as spending significant time on personal emails, daydreaming, or stealing (e.g., Cohen-Charash and Mueller 2007; Jones 2009; Marcus and Schuler 2004; Yang and Diefendorff 2009). Notably, recent meta-analytic research in fact recommends self-reports of CWB over other-reports (Berry

et al. 2011). Finally, self-reports also more accurately capture individuals' ability to morally disengage through moral justification and rationalization, and for indicating their tendency to experience negative emotions than information from other sources.

This study gathered the data using a cross-sectional research design, which therefore does not allow us to infer causality. We believe, however, that the nature of the relationships we have tested intuitively lend themselves to a single direction. For instance, we find it difficult to theorize how CWB would causally lead to varying levels of negative affect, moral disengagement, or gender. Instead, theory has tended to suggest that moral disengagement (Detert et al. 2008; Dilchert et al. 2007) and negative affect (Hershcovis et al. 2007; Penney and Spector 2005; Yang and Diefendorff 2009) causally lead to CWB.

Finally, we used a sample of working students. Working student samples have been commonly used when investigating CWB (e.g., Jones 2009; Penney and Spector 2005; Spector et al. 2010; Yang and Diefendorff 2009). Nevertheless, we recognize and acknowledge the weaknesses associated with this research design. A study in a single organization may have isolated the effects of contextual factors. Nevertheless, we balanced this with the benefits of gathering responses from participants from multiple organizations, which led us to choose the latter design. In doing so, we can infer that factors inherent in the culture or climate of the organization are less likely to have inflated our results than if we had investigated our research question in a single organization.

Conclusion

There has been growing scholarly interest on CWB in the workplace as a result of the negative consequences these behaviors have for organizations. We contribute to this growing literature by investigating a more complex model focused on the base relationship between negative affect and CWB. In our model, we investigated the interacting roles of moral disengagement and gender in the negative affect-CWB relationship. We found empirical support for our hypotheses. Moral disengagement helped explain the psychological and cognitive mechanisms used by those who convert their negative emotions into CWB. Moreover, we found that this interacting relationship was stronger for men in comparison to women. This study provides a strong foundation to guide further efforts in exploring the powerful role of morality and ethics in predicting those who are more likely to engage in behaviors such as CWB. In addition, we hope our contribution will stimulate further debate and investigation about the role of gender in ethics and CWB.

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