

Relationships Between Moral Disengagement, Work Characteristics and Workplace Harassment

Marvin Claybourn

ABSTRACT. This study was undertaken to investigate whether work variables identified in theory and research as being related to employee experiences/behaviours add to the understanding and explain employees' experiences of workplace harassment. The extent to which social cognitive theory (SCT), specifically moral disengagement, explains the processes by which work characteristics are related to harassment was also examined. The purpose of the study was to identify the presence of relationships among work characteristics, satisfaction, moral disengagement and workplace harassment. According to the results, employees with negative opinions of their work tended to experience negative affect and to believe that it is acceptable to harm others. The results of this study provide evidence of (1) relationships between harassment and several workplace characteristics and (2) the applicability of SCT to the explanation of how work characteristics relate to harassment.

KEY WORDS: harassment, bullying, moral disengagement

Introduction

One of the earliest comprehensive discussions specifically focusing on workplace harassment was by Brodsky (1976) in his book titled *The Harassed Worker*. In *The Harassed Worker*, Brodsky described a number of people and situations drawn from the claims filed with the California Workers' Compensation Appeals Board and the Nevada Industrial Commission. The claims discussed by Brodsky involved the questionable treatment of one employee by another and were clear indicators that various forms of harassment were common problems. After 1976, it seems that little attention was paid to harassment until the 1990s when studies of bullying at work (Einarsen et al., 1994) and mobbing (Leymann,

1990) were published by several European researchers.

During the last two decades, several terms have been used interchangeably to refer to, arguably, the same phenomenon, and a number of researchers have recognized that the absence of an agreed-upon term and definition is problematic for the development of knowledge in this area (see Crawshaw, 2009; and Einarsen, 2000 for a list of terms used to describe the same or conceptually similar constructs). For the purposes of clarity and consistency in this report, the term 'workplace harassment' (or simply 'harassment') is used and is liberally defined as problematic interpersonal workplace interactions in which one or more employees feel themselves to have been victimized by one or more other employees. Moreover, the perspective from which the harassment was experienced or studied is not differentiated in this report; rather research on experiences of harassment from all available perspectives has been considered for the purpose of achieving a broad exploration of the mechanism(s) that might connect features of the employees' work environments to workplace harassment.

An idea of the extent of the problem posed by workplace harassment can be inferred from the results of studies conducted around the world. In studies that have examined harassment among large, non-student samples from various work settings and occupations, estimates of the prevalence of harassment have varied widely (9–100%; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Keashly et al., 1994; Lim and Cortina, 2005; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001; Rayner, 1997). Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) drew their sample from 14 different organizations and professions in Norway. Their respondents reported

being bullied for an average duration of 18.6 months with 20–30% who reported being bullied ‘now and then’. In a later study by Einarsen and Raknes (1997), 88% of 460 industrial workers, supervisors and managers at a Norwegian marine engineering organization reported experiencing one or more negative behaviours over a 6-month period, and 43.9% reported experiencing non-discriminatory and non-physical negative interpersonal behaviours ‘now and then’. Participants in these studies based their reports on their own definitions of bullying so the prevalence rates may not necessarily be comparable with rates found in other studies of harassment. However, other studies by Einarsen and his co-authors suggest that harassment occurs frequently, is widespread in that a high percentage of employees in a variety of occupations report experiencing harassment and is often experienced over a long period of time.

Factors that may affect workplace harassment

Employees’ workplace behaviour

Although identifying the influences on employees’ workplace behaviour has been a goal of many industrial and organizational psychologists for well over four decades (Latham and Budworth, 2007; Oldham and Hackman, 1981), harassment has not been investigated to the same extent as other influences in studies of workplace behaviour. Nevertheless, harassment has been proposed to be equally likely to influence organizations and their employees (Leiter and Maslach, 1988). If harassment is similar to other workplace behaviours, then employees who experience harassment will be more likely to also report such things as low levels of organizational commitment, more intentions to quit, higher levels of turnover, higher levels of absenteeism and lower ratings on job performance. If such connections exist with harassment, then it may be that the knowledge gained from research on variables influencing other workplace behaviours can be applied to understanding harassment. For example, it may be that employees of organizations that are characterized by high levels of harassment experience lower levels of organizational commitment than employees who work at organizations characterized by low levels of harassment. Furthermore, employees who have low

levels of commitment to their organization may also be less concerned about the well-being and courteous treatment of other employees.

Employee perceptions

Understanding of employees’ perceptions of their jobs and organizations is important for understanding a number of employees’ workplace experiences (Latham and Budworth, 2007). Researchers continue to work to identify and clarify the interaction between organizational characteristics, employees’ perceptions and employees’ behaviour and attitudes. Satisfaction is an employee perception that has consistently shown moderate-to-strong relationships with employees’ workplace behaviour and attitudes.

Job satisfaction. During studies of employee perceptions, researchers have often investigated how employees’ satisfaction with their jobs and organizations was influenced by work characteristics. Although there is variability in how job satisfaction is measured, researchers tend to agree that job satisfaction evaluations represent the degree to which employees consider their jobs and workplaces to be interesting and rewarding. Research findings indicate that employee satisfaction, work characteristics and employee behaviour are interrelated. For example, researchers have found statistically significant zero-order correlations between job satisfaction and such variables as organizational aggression (negatively correlated with job satisfaction; Hershcovis et al., 2007) and managers’ ratings of employees’ job performance (Brief and Motowildo, 1986; Lyons and O’Brien, 2006; Miller et al., 1999; Mulki et al., 2006; Smith et al., 1983) that range between 0.21 and 0.55.

Employee perceptions and job satisfaction have been observed to relate to employees’ workplace behaviour, particularly job performance, and so it was expected in this study that they would also relate to harassment. Further, it was expected that work variables that influence employee perceptions and job performance would also relate to harassment.

Predictors of harassment, employees’ behaviour, and perceptions: work characteristics

As early as 1935 (Latham and Budworth, 2007), researchers have investigated the ability of work and workplace characteristics to explain employees’ workplace behaviours and perceptions. Organiza-

tional characteristics that have received research attention include size, configuration, formalization, centralization and organizational climate. Organizational climate is the most ambiguous of the work characteristics included in this discussion. According to Gunter and Furnham (1996), organizational climate can be interpreted conceptually as '...the set of characteristics that describe an organization and that (a) distinguish one organization from another; (b) are relatively enduring over a period of time; and (c) influence the behaviour (and attitudes) of people in the organization' (p. 194). Researchers have also investigated relationships between job characteristics and employees' workplace behaviours and perceptions. Most often researchers have operationally defined job characteristics based on employee self-report data about various features of their jobs (e.g. Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Gunter and Furnham, 1996; Kacmar et al., 1999; O'Connor and Morrison, 2001; Parker et al., 1995) such as role ambiguity, role conflict and workload (Hemingway and Smith, 1999), autonomy (O'Connor and Morrison, 2001), job variety, influence in job and job importance/challenge (Gunter and Furnham, 1996).

Research findings that indicate that organizational climate influences employees' behaviour/perceptions in their workplaces have been observed consistently by researchers (Bacharach and Bamberger, 1992; Griffin, 2001; Gunter and Furnham, 1996; Hemingway and Smith, 1999; Jackofsky and Slocum, 1988; Kacmar et al., 1999; Kline and Boyd, 1991; Leiter and Maslach, 1988; O'Connor and Morrison, 2001; Ostroff, 1992). Organizations and jobs that that are perceived negatively (e.g. as less satisfying) by employees also tend to be characterized by higher levels of negative behavioural intentions and workplace behaviours than working environments that are perceived as less negative by employees. That is, the work characteristics experienced by employees which negatively influence their perceptions of their workplaces may also influence their experiences of harassment.

The question of whether the work characteristics that comprise an organization's climate specifically influence harassment has been the focus of both public attention (Einarsen, 2000; Leymann, 1996) and research attention. In a study by Einarsen et al. (1994), participants' (2215 members of six labour unions) reports of harassment were negatively cor-

related with satisfaction with leadership, work control, social climate and positively correlated with role conflict. Einarsen et al. observed from their results that, rather than being uniform, levels of reported harassment also differed by organization further suggesting that different organizational features may affect harassment differently. Low satisfaction with leadership, work control, social climate and high role conflict accounted for an average of 10% of the variance in harassment, ranging from 7% (Clerical and Officials Union workers) to 24% (Graphical Union workers). Employees in Einarsen et al.'s sample who reported being witnesses of harassment or being harassed themselves perceived their work environment as being of low quality, suggesting that any level of exposure to harassment is negatively related to employees' perceptions of their work environments.

Researchers have investigated the influence of other workplace characteristics on the occurrence of harassment, such as organizational structures or policies (Baron and Neuman, 1996; Howard, 2002; Schat and Kelloway, 2003) and employees' attitudes about their jobs or organizations (Appelberg et al., 1991; Jackofsky and Slocum, 1988; LeBlanc and Kelloway, 2002; McFarlane-Shore et al., 1990). Baron and Neuman (1996) investigated whether organizational changes (e.g. downsizing, organizational restructuring, management changes) influence the occurrence of workplace aggression and found that increased staff diversity, changes in management, pay cuts/freezes and increased use of part-time employees were related to levels of aggression that were both witnessed or experienced by employees. Baron and Neuman interpreted their results to suggest that instability in organizations affects levels of aggression.

According to results obtained by Schat and Kelloway (2003), the extent to which an organization provides employees with information that can be used to cope with personal and workplace problems was associated with a reduction in negative psychological and health consequences. Schat and Kelloway's results, as well as those obtained by others (e.g. Baron and Neuman, 1996; Howard, 2002), support the proposition that work characteristics, especially the extent to which such characteristics produce a stable environment, are related to the occurrence of harassment.

Social cognitive theory (SCT)

Research to date on workplace behaviours has offered no theoretical explanation as to how or why work characteristics and employees' perceptions relate to harassment. SCT may provide a more coherent theoretical framework for discussing and understanding these relationships with harassment. Harassment might be explained by the suggestion that characteristics of the workplace are being perceived and processed cognitively by employees. One of the results of such cognitive processes may be that employees affectively evaluate their work and work environments in terms of their satisfaction (e.g. 'I'm satisfied with the pace and variety of my job', 'I like working here', etc.) or their interpersonal treatment by others (e.g. 'I don't get enough support from my co-workers to do my job properly', 'Everyone who works here is just looking out for themselves'). The research on the relationships between work characteristics, harassment and satisfaction, which was reviewed above provides some support for this idea. A key question regarding harassment conceptualized from a social cognitive perspective is what circumstances would motivate employees to consider engaging in harassing behaviours towards other employees. A second question arises: in situations where employees are considering engaging in harassment, why is it that they choose harassment over other behaviours that are available (e.g. negotiation, utilizing bureaucratic or administrative channels that are part of the organization's structure). Some insight into these issues may be offered by Bandura's SCT of the moral self (Bandura, 1991).

According to SCT, knowledge is acquired through cognitive processing (Bandura, 1986). The social aspect of SCT indicates that how humans think and behave is influenced by their social environment. The cognitive aspect of SCT is in recognition of the idea that personal attributes and thought processes influence how humans perceive and behave in their environments. According to Bandura (1986), SCT differs from other theories of human behaviour by proposing that human behaviour is not the result of only psychodynamic forces or external influences. Rather, human functioning is explained in SCT using the idea of triadic reciprocity. 'Triadic reciprocity' (Bandura, 1986) refers to the idea that behaviours, personal factors and environmental events all operate on each other.

Bandura also proposed mechanisms that explain how the components of the person/environment/behaviour triad interact. According to Bandura, the three components of the triad influence each other bidirectionally, but they do not necessarily influence each other with equal strength. That is, although all the three components are present, they do not necessarily exert equal influence on each other. The implication of this idea is that the influence that one component exerts will vary depending on different behaviours, different personal attributes and different social circumstances. A simplistic but illustrative example of this idea is a person's choice of job. If a person decided to accept one job over another (behaviour) primarily on the basis of geographical location (environmental factor) rather than interest in the job activities (personal factor), then the environmental factor would be exerting more influence on the behaviour than the personal factor.

According to SCT, the mechanisms through which personal attributes, environmental features and behaviours interact are cognitive processes labelled by Bandura (1986) as 'basic human capabilities'. There are five basic human capabilities described by Bandura, which include (1) symbolizing capability (the capacity to use symbolic thinking to alter and adapt to environments), (2) forethought capability (the capacity to evaluate and decide on potential behaviours by symbolically representing potential consequences), (3) vicarious learning capability (the capacity to ascertain the probable consequences of behaviour by observing the behaviour of others, thereby enabling people to regulate behaviour without resorting to trial and error), (4) self-regulatory capability (the capacity to decide on current behaviours using a set of internal standards and, to decide on future behaviours by evaluating discrepancies between past performance of behaviours and internal standards), and (5) self-reflective capability (the capacity of people to gain understanding, evaluate and alter their thinking by analyzing and reflecting on their thoughts and experiences). Bandura proposed that these capabilities allow humans to cognitively process information about themselves, their behaviours and their environments. Humans choose how they will attempt to modify themselves, their environments or their behaviours on the basis of the results of these cognitive processes.

SCT of the moral self

According to Bandura (2002), there is extensive research on moral decision-making, but a lack of research on how moral decisions are translated into moral behaviour. In the SCT of the moral self, Bandura proposes that people translate moral reasoning (i.e. a cognitive decision-making process) into moral (or immoral) behaviour through self-regulatory processes. According to Bandura, people develop internal standards of morality which they use to evaluate their own behaviour and the behaviour of others – that is, these standards are used for self-regulation. This self-regulation is energized by the consequences of acting in accordance or contrary to one's standards of morality – acting in accordance leads to a desirable, positive self-evaluation whereas violating one's standards leads to undesirable self-censure (e.g. guilt). Thus, according to the theory, we are motivated to behave according to our moral standards. However, Bandura states that moral self-regulatory processes do not operate unless activated (i.e. one must perceive a situation or circumstances as having an ethical or moral component, termed 'moral awareness' by Moore, 2008). Furthermore, it is possible for the initiation of the moral self-regulation processes to be prevented from occurring at all, or stopped after they have begun – the cognitive processes involved in the prevention or circumvention of moral decision-making and moral behaviour are collectively referred to as moral disengagement in SCT (see Detert et al., 2008 for an excellent overview of the specific processes of moral disengagement). Disengagement of moral self-regulatory processes prevents uncomfortable self-censure by cognitively reconceptualising a behaviour that would typically violate one's moral standards so that it becomes morally acceptable. According to Bandura, whether people behave morally or engage in acts that are harmful to others is influenced by an ongoing interaction between moral reasoning, affect and social reception. With respect to harassment, this idea may be applied to employees when they are faced with behaviours that may be considered harmful to others. In such situations, employees' work environment may influence their moral decision-making processes. Affective responses (e.g. 'I hate this job; no one really cares how people are treated here', etc.) and situational or environmental factors may influence employees in such a way that the influence of personal moral standards is circumvented (e.g. 'It doesn't really matter

if I call my co-worker a jerk because people here do it all the time'). If employees engage in or observe harmful behaviours, then the presence or absence of self-censure and negative or positive social consequences (positive consequences such as achievement of goals/intentions, improvement in social standing or organizational position; negative consequences, such as punishment, social isolation) which are experienced (or observed) in association with the behaviours will influence future moral decision-making and moral conduct.

Purpose of the current study

The main purpose of this study was to test the extent to which work characteristics identified by theory and research relate to the occurrence of harassment and whether relationships between work characteristics and harassment are, in turn, better understood when job satisfaction and the self-regulatory processes dealing with moral behaviour are considered. It was predicted that employees with negative perceptions of their workplace would feel lower satisfaction with their work situation. As a result of low satisfaction, there would be a greater likelihood that self-regulatory processes related to moral behaviour would be circumvented. Higher tendencies for moral disengagement would then be related positively to employees' reports of experiences of harassment.

Method*Participants*

One hundred and thirty-three university employees participated in this study ($N = 133$; 39 females; 91 males; three non-responses to the gender item). Participants were recruited from among the faculty and staff of two campuses of a mid-sized university in Canada. The employees who participated ranged in age from 19 to 64 years ($M = 40.68$, $SD = 10.94$) and reported working for their current organization from 1 to 31 years ($M = 7.81$, $SD = 7.35$). The majority of employees who participated in the study reported currently working full-time (84.32%). Participants were not asked to identify their role or department in the university to reassure them that

their participation and responses would remain confidential. In an effort to obtain a general idea of the organizational levels of participants for descriptive purposes, participants were asked for how many people they were responsible and to how many people they were responsible. Participants mostly reported being responsible for between zero and 25 people with the exception of one participant who reported being responsible for more than 25 people. Participants also reported being responsible for between 0 and 50 people with the exception of two participants who reported being responsible for more than 50 people.

Respondents completed the questionnaires either online (88%) or in a paper-pencil format. All participants were informed through a written description that the purpose of the study was to examine workplace characteristics and interpersonal interactions; they were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and they were asked to formally indicate their intent to participate in the study. Respondents were provided with additional educational information about harassment following completion of the questionnaires. This study was evaluated and approved by departmental and university research ethics boards, both of whom follow the guidelines of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2005).

Measures

Work characteristics

Organizational climate. Organizational climate was measured using a modified version of the Litwin-Stringer Organizational Climate Questionnaire (LSOCQ; Litwin and Stringer, 1968 modified by Toulson and Smith, 1994). The unrevised LSOCQ consists of nine dimensions that measure employees' perceptions of how an organization treats its employees, including structure, responsibility, reward, risk, warmth, support, standards, conflict and identity. Based on the results from factor analysis, Toulson and Smith removed 16 items from the original version and treated the LSOCQ as a measure of one general factor that reflects overall organizational climate. Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each of the 34 statements on the revised LSOCQ using a five-point scale.

Toulson and Smith observed an excellent internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.94$ for the modified LSOCQ. In this study the LSOCQ again had a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.95$). Toulson and Smith also found evidence that supported the convergent validity of the modified LSOCQ with other measures of employees' perceptions of their organization.

Job characteristics. The Job Characteristics Inventory (JCI) was developed and validated by Sims et al. (1976) as a measure of employees' perceptions of the characteristics of their jobs. The JCI includes 30 items used to assess employees' perceptions of six different dimensions of their jobs including: (1) *variety*, (2) *autonomy*, (3) *task identity*, (4) *feedback*, (5) *dealing with others* and (6) *friendship opportunities*. Only the subscales that concern employees' interpersonal workplace experiences (*dealing with others* and *friendship opportunities*) were used for the current study. Sims et al. obtained adequate alpha reliability coefficients of 0.75 and 0.62 in a medical sample and 0.72 and 0.84 for a manufacturing sample on the *dealing with others* and *friendship* subscales, respectively. Lower but adequate reliability coefficients of $\alpha = 0.60$ and $\alpha = 0.62$ were obtained in the current study for the *dealing with others* and *friendship opportunities* subscales, respectively. Sims et al.'s findings also provided evidence for the discriminant and convergent validity of the JCI when compared to other measures of job and organizational features.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction. This study employed Griffin's (2001) measure of employees' levels of job satisfaction. Griffin's measure assesses employees' responses to their jobs by asking them to indicate the extent to which each of six statements describes how they feel about their jobs. Griffin reported evidence supporting the internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$) and validity of this scale (e.g. it correlates negatively and significantly with employees' feelings of alienation). In this study, the reliability coefficient obtained for Griffin's items was 0.89.

Moral disengagement

Moral disengagement. The Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale (MMDS; Bandura et al., 1996) is a multifaceted scale that assesses individuals'

proneness to disengage self-regulatory cognitive processes related to moral conduct. Eight mechanisms of moral disengagement are assessed in the MMDS by four items each. The eight mechanisms that people might use to rationalize the harmful treatment of others and that are assessed by the MMDS include (1) moral justification, (2) euphemistic labelling, (3) advantageous comparison, (4) displacement, (5) diffusion of responsibility, (6) distortion of consequences, (7) dehumanization and (8) attribution of blame. Respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each of the 32 statements using a 3-point (*agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree*). Although respondents had the option of choosing an apparently neutral response, Bandura et al. reported that this option is appropriately scored as indicating a higher tendency for moral disengagement. In recognition of this recommendation, higher scores on the MMDS indicate a greater tendency for respondents to justify injurious behaviour towards others.

The MMDS has not been extensively used, but it is the only instrument that assesses individuals' reasons for engaging in behaviour that is harmful to others. Findings on the psychometric properties of the MMDS have not tended to support the dimensional structure of the MMDS, but indicate that the total score has an acceptable level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$) as a unified measure (Bandura et al., 1996). The MMDS also obtained an acceptable level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$) in the current study. Bandura et al.'s results also supported the validity of the total MMDS score in that high scores on the MMDS were negatively related to the occurrence of prosocial behaviours and positively related to the occurrence of aggressive behaviours. Because Bandura et al. used the MMDS with elementary and junior high school students, the original form of the MMDS uses wording appropriate to respondents of that age group. In the current study, the wording of the MMDS items was modified to be relevant to working adults. Support for the validity of this scale when used with adult populations was obtained by South and Wood (2006), who found that scores from a similarly adapted 32-item version of the MMDS were able to differentiate between bullies and victims of bullies among prison inmates. Further support for the validity of the MMDS can also be found in research

by McAlister (McAlister et al., 2006) who, using an adapted scale of moral disengagement, was able to detect differences in moral disengagement before and after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. These studies provide support for the assumption that the MMDS can be adapted for different populations and still yield reliable and valid results.

Interpersonal conflict in the workplace

Interpersonal conflict in the workplace (ICW). Participants' experiences of workplace harassment were assessed using the two-part approach frequently used by Einarsen and colleagues regarding bullying behaviour in the workplace (Einarsen and Raknes, 1997; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2001; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001). First, participants were given a definition of harassment and asked to use the definition to respond to questions about their experiences during the previous 6 months. Respondents were provided with response categories where they indicated (1) whether they were exposed to harassment (*yes or no*), and (2) how often they were exposed (*very rarely, now and then, several times a month, several times a week, almost daily*). Three additional questions regarding employees' experiences of harassment were added to this measure. Employees were also asked how often they have been accused of perpetrating, if they have witnessed the occurrence of, and/or if they have been victims of workplace harassment.

Consistent with the second part of this approach, participants' experiences of harassment were also assessed with the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ; Einarsen and Raknes, 1997). The NAQ is a 22-item instrument that asks respondents to indicate which of 22 types of specific bullying actions they have experienced, and how often these had occurred (*never, occasionally, weekly or daily*). Einarsen and his colleagues have found evidence supporting the reliability (coefficients for the NAQ range from 0.85 to 0.91) and convergent validity of the NAQ (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2001; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001). A reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained for the NAQ in the current study.

Interpretations of Workplace Scenarios (IWS; see Appendix I). The IWS (Claybourn et al., 2004) is a measure of participants' tendencies to interpret as

harassment three written descriptions of ambiguous, interpersonal interactions that take place in a work setting. The IWS was used in this study to assess a facet of workplace harassment that has not been investigated to date, that is, participants' proneness to interpret work situations as being harassing. To respond to the IWS, participants are asked to read each of three scenarios and then indicate the extent to which they would describe the situation in the scenarios as *physically abusive*, *emotionally abusive*, *demeaning*, *hostile*, *humiliating*, *intimidating*, *harassing* and *positive/negative*. The descriptors were chosen based on a review of definitions of problematic interpersonal workplace behaviours that have been used by researchers and social institutions. Participants are asked to make their ratings on each of these eight items using a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *extremely*. A reliability coefficient of 0.94 was obtained for the IWS by Claybourn et al. (2004). A reliability coefficient of 0.94 was also obtained in the current study for the IWS. No information about the validity of this scale is currently available.

Results

Interscale correlations

The extent to which the scales, measuring work characteristics, satisfaction, moral disengagement and harassment, relate to each other is presented in

Table I. The LSOCQ did not relate to either measure of job characteristics, but the two subscales of the JCI were moderately related to each other. The relationship between the subscales of the JCI indicates that employees who reported a desire to deal with others in their jobs and had sufficient opportunity to do so, also tended to report having a desire and the opportunity to make friends at their current job.

Scores on the measures of work characteristics [LSOCQ, JCI-DO (Job Characteristics Inventory, Dealing with Others), JCI-FO (Job Characteristics Inventory, Friendship Opportunities)] indicated employees' perceptions of their jobs and workplace generally had small to moderate associations with job satisfaction. Further, organizational climate and job satisfaction were negatively correlated with moral disengagement (MMDS) so that those who reported a better organizational climate and who were more satisfied with their jobs had lower tendencies for moral disengagement in the various situations reported in the MMDS. As can be seen in Table I, employees who reported being subjected to more negative behaviours on the NAQ were also more likely to perceive ambiguous workplace interactions as harassment ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$). According to this relationship, it appears that employees who had a low 'harassment threshold' (i.e. a greater tendency to interpret an ambiguous interpersonal interaction as harassment) were more likely subjected to negative behaviours than employees with a high 'harassment threshold'.

TABLE I
Correlations between measures

| | LSOCQ | JCI-DO | JCI-FO | JS | MMDS | NAQ |
|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|
| LSOCQ | | | | | | |
| JCI-DO | 0.01 | | | | | |
| JCI-FO | 0.14 | 0.36** | | | | |
| JS | 0.27** | 0.19* | 0.09 | | | |
| MMDS | -0.30** | 0.01 | 0.10 | -0.29** | | |
| NAQ | -0.59** | -0.17 | -0.12 | -0.37** | 0.34** | |
| IWS | -0.19* | 0.08 | 0.11 | -0.12 | 0.28** | 0.27** |

* indicates correlation is significant at 0.05_{2-tailed} level; ** indicates correlation is significant at 0.01_{2-tailed} level.

LSOCQ Litwin-Stringer Organizational Climate Questionnaire; JCI-DO Job Characteristics Inventory, Dealing with Others; JCI-FO Job Characteristics Inventory, Friendship Opportunities; JS Job Satisfaction; MMDS Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale; NAQ Negative Acts Questionnaire; IWS Interpretations of Workplace Scenarios.

Relationships between moral disengagement, work characteristics and workplace harassment

As observed in past research work characteristics were expected to predict employees' levels of satisfaction such that positive perceptions of workplace climates and positive perceptions of job characteristics would both be associated with higher job satisfaction. This was tested using multiple regression. In this solution, satisfaction (JS scale) was regressed on organizational climate (LSOCQ) and job characteristics (JCI-DO and JCI-FO) in a single step solution. Significance testing of the multiple R indicated that work characteristics predicted job satisfaction [$R^2 = 0.105$, $F(3, 125) = 4.88$, $p = 0.003$]. The R^2 for the solution indicates that the three measures of work characteristics together accounted for 10% of the variability in job satisfaction (adjusted $R^2 = 0.08$). According to the standardized regression coefficients, statistically significant amounts of the variability in job satisfaction was accounted for jointly by the LSOCQ ($\beta = 0.26$, $p = 0.003$) and JCI-DO ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.035$). The results indicate that positive perceptions of the organizational climate and having sufficient opportunities to interact with others at work are predictive of being satisfied with one's job.

Drawing on previous research, it was expected that employees who reported favourable work characteristics and being satisfied with their jobs would report lower tendencies for moral disengagement than employees who reported unfavourable work characteristics and feeling dissatisfied with their jobs. This expectation was tested using a multiple regression analysis with a two-step sequential solution. In this analysis, moral disengagement (MMDS) was regressed sequentially on (step 1) work characteristics (LSOCQ, JCI-DO, JCI-FO), and (step 2) satisfaction (JS). According to the results, employees who perceived their organizational climates less favourably also reported greater tendencies for moral disengagement [Step 1: $R^2 = 0.11$, $F(3, 126) = 5.09$, $p = 0.002$]. The addition of employees' job satisfaction scores explained an additional 5% of the variance in moral disengagement such that low levels of satisfaction were associated with greater tendencies for moral disengagement [R^2 change = 0.05, $F(1, 123) = 7.92$, $p = 0.006$].

The LSOCQ emerged as the only significant predictor on the first step of the solution ($\beta =$

-0.32 , $p < 0.0001$) indicating that employees who perceived a less favourable organizational climate tended to be more likely to morally disengage. The extent to which employees reported being able to deal with others (JCI-DO) or to have opportunities to make friends while working (JCI-FO) did not add significantly to the prediction of moral disengagement. The addition of job satisfaction to the set of work characteristics resulted in a significant change in R^2 allowing for the explanation of an additional 5% of the variance in moral disengagement. The extent to which this additional variance explained by job satisfaction was statistically significant was formally tested using the Sobel approach¹ (Sobel, 1982 cited in Preacher and Hayes, 2004). The amount of additional variance accounted for by job satisfaction emerged as significant according to the critical ratio calculated using the Sobel approach (critical ratio = 1.98, $p = 0.02$).

With regard to harassment, it was predicted that relationships between work characteristics and workplace harassment would relate to satisfaction and moral disengagement. This relationship was partially tested by using a multivariate multiple regression with two dependent variables (IWS and NAQ). The predictors were work characteristics (LSOCQ, JCI-DO, and JCI-FO), job satisfaction (JS) and moral disengagement (MMDS). The multivariate multiple regression was calculated using the SPSS MANOVA program whereby the extent to which each of the predictors (i.e. LSOCQ, JCI-DO, JCI-FO, JS and MMDS) predicted the variability in an optimal linear combination of the IWS and NAQ was evaluated. The results of this analysis are presented in Table II. The predictors were entered in groups consistent with the proposed model. Work characteristics (LSOCQ, JCI-DO, and JCI-FO), job satisfaction (JS) and moral disengagement (MMDS) were entered on separate steps to evaluate whether they predicted a significant amount of variability in harassment scores (NAQ; IWS). As can be seen in Table II, the harassment scores were significantly predicted by work characteristics and by moral disengagement. The results indicated that work characteristics were moderately associated with harassment (partial $\eta^2 = 0.34$). The relationship between job satisfaction and combined harassment scores was not significant. However, even after the variability that the harassment measures shared with

TABLE II
Multivariate tests of relationships of work, job satisfaction and moral disengagement with harassment

| Model component | Wilk's Λ | Exact F | Hypothesis DF | Error DF | Probability of F |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------|---------------|----------|--------------------|
| Work characteristics | 0.66 | 7.77 | 6 | 204 | <0.001 |
| LSOCQ | | | | | |
| JCI-DWO | | | | | |
| JCI-FO | | | | | |
| JS | 0.96 | 2.57 | 2 | 102 | 0.12 |
| Moral disengagement | 0.93 | 3.55 | 2 | 102 | 0.03 |

LSOCQ Litwin–Stringer Organizational Climate Questionnaire; *JCI-DO* Job Characteristics Inventory, Dealing with Others; *JCI-FO* Job Characteristics Inventory, Friendship Opportunities; *JS* Job Satisfaction; *MMDS* Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale.

work characteristics and with job satisfaction was taken into account, a small (partial $\eta^2 = 0.07$) but statistically significant amount of the variability in the combined harassment measures was explained by moral disengagement. Where significant multivariate effects were observed, associations between individual predictors and each of the harassment measures (i.e. IWS, NAQ) were followed up with additional analyses. Because there was not a significant multivariate effect, *post-hoc* analysis results for job satisfaction were not conducted.

As can be seen in Table III, only organizational climate (LSOCQ) was significantly associated with the combined harassment measures. An examination of the standardized discriminant function coefficients shows that the NAQ contributed most strongly to the combination of the harassment measures that was significantly related to the LSOCQ. The LSOCQ explained approximately 30 and 4% of the variability in the NAQ and the IWS, respectively. According to the correlations between these measures, employees who reported more positive perceptions of organizational climate also reported being subjected to fewer/less frequent negative behaviours and having lower tendencies to interpret ambiguous situations as harassing. Moral disengagement was also significantly associated with the combined harassment measures. The standardized discriminant function coefficients show that the NAQ and the IWS were weighted equally in the combination of the harassment measures that was significantly related to the MMDS. Knowledge of employees' tendencies for moral disengagement allowed for the explanation of approximately 4% of the variability in both the

number/frequency of negative behaviours experienced by employees and their tendencies to interpret ambiguous situations as harassing. Employees with greater tendencies for moral disengagement also tended to report more experiences of negative behaviours and greater tendencies to interpret situations as harassing than employees with lower tendencies to morally disengage.

In combination, the results indicate that work characteristics, which have a direct relationship with workplace harassment, may also relate to harassment indirectly through job satisfaction and moral disengagement. Ten percent of the variability in job satisfaction can be explained by knowledge of employees' work characteristics. Job satisfaction by itself explains 5% of the variability in moral disengagement. Combined, work characteristics and job satisfaction explain 16% of the variability in moral disengagement. Moral disengagement explains a small but significant amount of the variability in harassment – in both employees' tendencies to interpret situations as harassment and in the number/frequency of negative behaviours that they experience. The extent to which moral disengagement predicted harassment above and beyond work characteristics and satisfaction was also formally tested for significance using the Sobel approach (1982 cited in Preacher and Hayes, 2004) and, according to the results, moral disengagement significantly added to the prediction of the number/frequency of negative behaviours experienced (critical ratio = 2.57, $p = 0.0051$) but not to the prediction of the tendency to interpret ambiguous workplace interactions as harassing (critical ratio = 0.38, $p = 0.3520$).

TABLE III

Post-hoc analyses of the relationship between work characteristics, moral disengagement and harassment

| Model component | Predictor | Criterion | Standardized discriminant function coefficients | Discriminant function loadings |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------|---|--------------------------------|
| Work/workplace characteristics | LSOCQ [Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.69$; $F(2, 104) = 23, p < 0.001$] | IWS | 0.14 | 0.99 |
| | | NAQ | 0.97 | 0.29 |
| | JCI-DWO [Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.99$; $F(2, 104) = 0.8, p = 0.48$] | IWS | * | * |
| | | NAQ | * | * |
| | JCI-FO [Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.98$; $F(2, 107) = 0.9, p = 0.41$] | IWS | * | * |
| | NAQ | * | * | |
| Moral disengagement | MMDS [Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.93$; $F(2, 104) = 3.6, p = 0.03$] | IWS | 0.67 | 0.75 |
| | | NAQ | 0.67 | 0.75 |

* indicates no discriminant functions were significant at an $\alpha = 0.05$.

LSOCQ Litwin-Stringer Organizational Climate Questionnaire; JCI-DO Job Characteristics Inventory, Dealing with Others; JCI-FO Job Characteristics Inventory, Friendship Opportunities; MMDS Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale; NAQ Negative Acts Questionnaire; IWS Interpretations of Workplace Scenarios.

Workplace harassment

The rates of harassment found in this study lend further support to the argument that workplace harassment is not rare for employees even in an academic institution. Seventy-five employees (56.4%) reported some sort of harassment experience within the past 6 months with 15% of all employees having reported being exposed to harassment 'several times a month' or 'several times a week'. When asked the types of harassment experiences they had, most reported that they had witnessed it (79.7%), and almost 1 in 4 (23.4%) reported being accused of it. More than half of the respondents (51.9%) reported to having been a victim at some time, and 5.3% of employees reported being a victim of harassment on a weekly or daily basis.

Information was also obtained from employees about the number, frequency and types of negative behaviours to which they were subjected. According to their responses on the NAQ, employees reported being subjected to an average of 5.6 (SD = 5.2) out of 22 possible negative behaviours within the past 6 months. The four items most often endorsed on the NAQ indicated that (1) 56.9% of employees believed that their opinions or views were occasionally neglected, (2) 54.3% of employees believed that information necessary to perform their jobs was occasionally withheld, (3) 47.7% believed that they

were occasionally being ordered to do work below their level of competence, and (4) 40.0% believed that they were occasionally deprived of responsibility and work tasks.

The IWS (Claybourn et al., 2004) allowed for an estimate of respondents' proneness to interpret workplace situations as harassment. Higher scores indicated a greater tendency than lower scores for respondents to interpret a situation as harassing. According to the mean IWS score ($M = 2.46$) participants generally tended to interpret the ambiguous scenarios as being harassment.

The extent to which the number/frequency of negative behaviours participants experienced (NAQ) and their tendencies to interpret ambiguous situations as harassment (IWS) differed according to the types of exposure to harassment that they reported (i.e. being a witness, a victim or being accused of committing harassment) was also evaluated. According to the results of a regression analysis, knowing the type of exposure to harassment that employees reported allowed for the prediction of 24% of the variability in NAQ scores, $F(3, 124) = 13.18, p < 0.001$. However, knowing the type of exposure to harassment that employees reported did not relate significantly to employees' tendencies to interpret ambiguous workplace scenarios as harassment, $R^2 = 0.05$; $F(3, 108) = 1.76, p = 0.16$. Follow-up analyses were conducted to

clarify how type of harassment exposure related to employees' NAQ scores. According to these results, employees who reported being accused of committing harassment reported being subjected to significantly [$F(3, 124) = 4.14, p = 0.04$] more negative behaviours (Mean NAQ score = 1.43) than employees who did not report being accused of committing harassment behaviours (Mean NAQ score = 1.23). Similarly, employees who reported being victims of harassment (Mean NAQ score = 1.37) reported experiencing significantly [$F(1, 124) = 9.70, p = 0.002$] higher levels of negative behaviours than employees who did not report being victims of harassment (Mean NAQ score = 1.16). The NAQ scores of employees who reported witnessing harassment did not appear to differ from the scores of employees who did not report witnessing harassment.

The extent to which tendencies for moral disengagement differed according the type of harassment experienced was also evaluated. According to the ANOVA results, the moral disengagement scores of people accused of committing harassment differed significantly from the moral disengagement scores reported by people who did not report being accused of harassment [$F(1, 127) = 5.03, p = 0.027$]. Although the difference was small, people who reported that they had been accused of harassment (Mean MMDS score = 1.30) had significantly higher mean moral disengagement scores than people who reported they had not been accused (Mean MMDS score = 1.27). Moral disengagement scores did not differ as a function of witnessing/not witnessing or being/not being a victim of harassment.

Discussion

The relationships that emerged between job satisfaction and the work characteristics indicate that employees' views of (1) how they are treated by their organization, (2) how people interact with each other in the organization, (3) whether their interpersonal needs are being met in the workplace and, (4) whether they like their jobs, are closely related to each other. These results provide a clear indication of some of the factors that were related to job satisfaction for employees. Better understanding of the correlates of employee dissatisfaction increases the

likelihood of being able to reduce or prevent dissatisfaction. The importance of reducing or preventing employee dissatisfaction is found in previous research that has shown that dissatisfied employees report lower levels of organizational commitment, higher levels of illness (both physical and psychological) and poorer job performance than satisfied employees (Bacharach and Bamberger, 1992; Brief and Motowildo, 1986; Hemingway and Smith, 1999; Miller et al., 1999; Smith et al., 1983).

Work/workplace perceptions and job satisfaction

Among the work characteristics measured in this study undertaken to characterize employees' work attitudes (organizational climate, interpersonal job characteristics-dealing with others and friendship opportunities), organizational climate and job characteristics-dealing with others were significantly associated with job satisfaction. Organizational climate reflects how employees feel about the way they are treated by their organization. Specifically, employees with higher organizational climate scores, that is, who felt that they were valued and treated respectfully by their organization, were more satisfied with their jobs than those with lower organizational climate scores.

Employees whose scores indicated they felt they had less opportunity for interpersonal interaction than they would like were less satisfied with their jobs than employees who reported enough interpersonal opportunities. This relationship is consistent with research that found positive relationships between job satisfaction and social support (Cohrs et al., 2006) which, though not identical, is conceptually similar to the perception that one has sufficient opportunities for interpersonal interaction at work. This relationship could be interpreted as illustrating differences in individual preferences for social interaction. For example, both sociotropic (i.e. individuals who need others in order to obtain desired levels of safety, help and gratification; Sturman et al., 2006) and extraverted individuals (i.e. outgoing, talkative, sociable individuals) would be likely to identify opportunities for social interaction as being important, or perhaps necessary to be satisfied at work. The extent to which such employees were able to meet their needs for

interpersonal interaction while at work may affect how they feel about their work. That is, employees' perceptions that their work is not giving them the opportunity to meet their social needs may be reflected in low job satisfaction.

Work/workplace perceptions and moral disengagement

The main purpose of this study was to test whether work characteristics that have been identified in theory and research as important for understanding organizational behaviour generally would also be useful for understanding harassment. Employees who reported relatively high tendencies for moral disengagement also were more likely to report having been subjected to more negative behaviours at work than those who reported low levels of moral disengagement. That is, those who were more likely to justify their own injurious behaviours towards others reported being subjected to more negative behaviours by others.

There have been a number of studies that have found relationships between work characteristics and how often workplace harassment occurs (e.g. Appelberg et al., 1991; Bowling and Beehr, 2006; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen et al., 1994; LeBlanc and Kelloway, 2002; Vartia, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996). Past research has also found that harassment is higher in organizations where employees feel dissatisfied with their work environment (e.g. Appelberg et al., 1991; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen et al., 1994; Vartia, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996). However, prior to the current research, no research has examined a mechanism, such as moral disengagement, through which work characteristics and perceptions could affect the organizational levels of harassment. This study has provided evidence that work characteristics might be related to harassment by affecting employees' attitudes about the acceptability of harming others (i.e. moral disengagement). It appears that feeling mistreated by other employees and by the organization as a whole might lead to employees being less satisfied with their jobs and to justifying harming others more readily, which in turn lead to increased levels of harassment.

This explanation is consistent with SCT which conceptualizes moral disengagement as a process

rather than as a stable trait and proposes that emotional reactions precede the occurrence of moral disengagement (Bandura, 2002). That is, it appears that emotional reactions to co-workers and the work environment influence how readily individuals start the moral disengagement process that ultimately permits them to engage in harmful behaviour towards others that they would normally consider immoral. However, in the absence of experimental research that has tested the causal relationships between work characteristics and beliefs about the acceptability of harming others, other plausible alternative explanations exist. For example, employees who have adopted harming others as a general strategy for dealing with interpersonal situations may have difficulties forming social relationships with others, may perceive others' behaviours as more manipulative, and generally label their social environments as negative so as to justify their harm of others. As with all correlational research, there may be unexamined additional variables that influence how employees perceive their work, their levels of job satisfaction, and their tendencies for moral disengagement.

Employees' tendencies to interpret ambiguous situations as harassment were not related to their type of exposure to harassment (i.e. being a witness, a victim or accused of workplace harassment). However, type of exposure did relate to the level of negative behaviour to which employees were subjected and to their tendency for moral disengagement. Employees who reported having been accused of committing harassment reported being subjected to the highest levels of negative behaviours from others and had the highest tendencies for moral disengagement. A possible explanation for this pattern of relationships is that some employees have perceived a threat to their well-being because they have been subjected to negative treatment, and have prepared themselves to accept the necessity to harm others (i.e. lowered their threshold for moral disengagement) as a way of dealing with the threat. However, this explanation would suggest that the tendency for moral disengagement may change from situation to situation and that it is essentially a post-hoc rationalization of harmful behaviour, rather than a causal factor that regulates harmful behaviour towards others.

Alternately, and consistent with SCT, it may be that moral disengagement regulates harmful behav-

ious towards others and that those with a greater tendency for moral disengagement are in fact more likely to harm others. This explanation would account for the relationship between being accused of harassment and scores on moral disengagement. In addition, those with a greater tendency for moral disengagement may have a tendency to interpret ambiguous situations as harassment in order to support their tendency to justify harmful behaviours toward others. That is, labelling ambiguous behaviour as harassment could serve as justification for retaliation for those who have a high tendency for moral disengagement; however, labelling ambiguous situations as harassment would not justify harming another person among employees who have a low tendency for moral disengagement. That is, ambiguous behaviours, even if interpreted as harassment, are unlikely to be severe enough to provoke retaliation by a person who has a low tendency for moral disengagement. However, ambiguous behaviour that is labelled as harassment may be enough to allow retaliation by a person with a high tendency for moral disengagement. Some preliminary support for the explanation presented here can be found in recent research on negative reciprocity beliefs (the belief that retaliation in kind is an acceptable response to perceived mistreatment; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). Similar to moral disengagement, individuals with strong negative reciprocity beliefs believe that it is sometimes justifiable to behave in a manner that harms others.

Limitations and directions for future research

The methodology of the study does not allow the specification of the causal connections between moral disengagement, being accused of harassment, perceiving oneself as a victim of harassment by others, and the tendency to see ambiguous situations as harassment. Nevertheless the results of this study have advanced the understanding of harassment in two important ways. First, empirical evidence was found that supported the predicted relationships between harassment and several workplace characteristics. Second, support was found for the applicability of SCT to the explanation of how (i.e. the mechanisms) work characteristics relate to harassment.

Limitations

As with any single research project, confidence in the conclusions drawn based on the results of this study must be qualified. First, the sample was made up of faculty and staff employed in a university setting. It will be important to conduct similar studies with other samples to evaluate the extent to which the results obtained in this study can be replicated in other work environments and with other types of jobs. This may become particularly important if education or variables related to education levels (e.g. socio-economic status) are found to relate to the occurrence of harassment. In addition, the University environment and culture may differ in important ways from other work environments. For example, the tenure system and the concept of academic freedom, which tend not to be present in other organizations, both may substantially affect a university's culture and the consequences that result from conflict between employees. Nevertheless, at this point there is no reason to believe that the relationships found among variables in this study would change as a result of the nature of the sample or their workplace.

A second concern relates to the psychometric properties of several of the scales used. Both job characteristics scales had reliabilities of less than 0.70 which, though adequate in this preliminary investigation, will need to be improved upon. There is little evidence regarding the validity of the measures of moral disengagement (the MMDS) and of tendencies to label ambiguous situations as harassment (the IWS). The measure of moral disengagement was adapted from a scale developed and validated with children (Bandura et al., 1996), and has since been successful in predicting socially sanctioned adult behaviour that is nevertheless harmful to others among executioners and soldiers (Osofsky et al., 2005). This study's finding that the moral disengagement scale is able to predict how often participants reported harassing another person adds to the evidence supporting the validity of this scale and of Bandura's model.

The measure of the tendency to interpret behaviour as harassment, the IWS (Claybourn et al., 2004) is a newly developed measure based on an extensive review of definitions and policies used in research and social institutions (Claybourn, 2003) but there is little information on its validity. Based

on ratings by 160 participants, the three scenarios in the IWS were chosen because participants showed the least consensus on whether or not they reflected situations where harassment was occurring (Claybourn et al., 2004). Thus, the scale is reliable (as evidenced by the levels of internal consistency observed in this and a previous study), has a sound conceptual foundation, and it has been empirically tested to examine the extent that the scenarios described on the scale are consistent with individuals' internal representations of harassment. The finding in this study that the IWS correlates with the measure of moral disengagement also provides some preliminary evidence for its validity.

Directions for future research

Personal attributes are an important group of variables that warrant further exploration in order to better understand harassment, although the results of past research that evaluated the role of individual difference variables in the understanding of workplace harassment have tended to be ambiguous or contradictory (e.g. Drory, 1993; Griffin, 2001; Gunter and Furnham, 1996; O'Connor and Morrison, 2001; Parker et al., 1995). Research that further explores and clarifies the role that individual difference variables may have in the occurrence of harassment will be important for advancing a more complete understanding of why and when harassment occurs. A key issue that will need to be addressed to understand the role of personal attributes in harassment will be distinguishing between types of attributes. For example, researchers have tended to include how employees perceive their workplace as work characteristics whereas it may be that such perceptions are more appropriately considered as personal attributes. From a practical perspective, harassment is a problem that occurs within interpersonal interactions so a better understanding of the individual difference variables that contribute to problematic interpersonal interactions may assist in preventing its occurrence.

Although, work characteristics were examined in this study, the work characteristics that were examined do not represent a comprehensive list of situational variables that could be examined.

Researchers have examined a variety of other work characteristics (e.g. role ambiguity, role conflict, workload, autonomy, job variety, influence in job and job importance/challenge) and workplace characteristics (e.g. number of employees, hierarchical structure, formalization, and centralization) to evaluate the extent to which they influence employee general behaviour (Latham and Budworth, 2007), but few of these characteristics have been examined for their relationship to harassment. Although, the work characteristics evaluated in this study share a significant amount of variability with job satisfaction, moral disengagement and harassment, a lot of variability remains unexplained. Future research that examines the work characteristics related to harassment might examine such variables as the organizational culture (the implicit and explicit values of the organization) and organizational policies (e.g. stated guidelines for workplace behaviour; the presence and effectiveness of current harassment policies).

Conclusions

Workplace violence, harassment and other negative interpersonal interactions among employees in workplaces are problems of growing frequency and concern in Canada (French and Morgan, 1999) and beyond. The costs associated with harassment and other problem behaviours of the sorts described above can clearly result in deleterious effects on the functioning of organizations and individuals. The growing frequency and costs of harassment highlight the importance of studies such as this one.

This results of this study indicated that work characteristics, satisfaction and moral disengagement are related to harassment. A practical implication of this relationship is that the results of this study provide guidance for how interventions might be effectively administered to prevent or reduce harassment. For example, modification of organizational characteristics (e.g. structure, policies, and employee programs) to improve employees' opinions of their work is likely to be useful for reducing experiences of harassment. It could also prove to be effective to provide intervention to specific employees or groups of employees. Such interventions might take the form of education about what sorts of behaviour constitute harassment,

how harassment affects employees, and their organizations and how to effectively prevent or deal with harassment at an individual and/or organizational level. Arguably, the most effective strategy would be to provide both types of intervention. Except for the potential inefficient use of resources, it is unlikely that interventions aimed at both improving organizational climate and reducing/preventing harassment would be harmful.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the development of a comprehensive model of harassment and of effective strategies to deal with harassment. With an effective assessment protocol the unique features of particular organizations that are contributing to workplace harassment (employee perceptions, work characteristics) can be identified. If a comprehensive and organization-specific assessment has been done, then strategies for interventions to prevent harassment can be tailored to meet the precise needs of a particular organization (rather than a generic approach for dealing with harassment).

Note

¹ The Sobel (1982) test determines the statistical significance of the indirect effect of a mediator by testing whether there is a difference in the prediction of a criterion when a mediator is included in analysis compared to when it is not. To use the Sobel test, the raw regression coefficient representing the relationship between predictor and criterion (in this instance, workplace characteristics and job satisfaction) was divided by the standard error of the indirect effect to obtain a ratio that was compared to the value from normal distribution corresponding to an alpha of 0.05.

Appendix I: IWS

Instructions

Listed below are three 'workplace scenarios' – descriptions of interactions that might be likely to occur in a workplace. Please read each scenario and then respond to the questions that follow it. The questions ask for your opinions about what occurred in the scenario you just read. The purpose of asking these questions is to see how different people describe and react to the same description. There are no 'right' or

'wrong' answers to these questions. The best answer is the one that represents how you think and feel about the description. Feel free to refer to each scenario as often as you need to answer the questions that follow it.

Scenario 1

Jean and Darcy work at desks across from each other in the same workplace. On several occasions just after lunch was over, Jean glared at Darcy for no particular reason. Darcy noticed Jean glaring and believed that it was an attempt to make things uncomfortable. As a result of Jean's behaviour, Darcy was concerned about personal safety and felt threatened.

Scenario 2

Jesse and Dale are co-workers at the same organization. Their offices are not really all that close to each other, yet on several occasions, Jesse and Dale collided just as Dale left the office. Jesse did not know when Dale usually left the office but did end up outside Dale's office door in Dale's path. Dale believed that the collisions were intentional, in other words, that Jesse did it on purpose. As a result of Jesse's behaviour, Dale was late for a scheduled appointment which resulted in a formal reprimand and fine.

Scenario 3

Terry and Bailey are co-workers at the same organization. At the end of several different shifts, there were notes addressed to Terry. Bailey delivered these notes in the lockers or desks of Terry and others on several occasions with the intention of informing them about work-related events. However, as a result of finding the notes in the locker (to which only Terry knows the combination). Terry became very afraid that someone at work intended to do harm. Terry missed a lot of work trying to find out who wrote the note.

References

- Appelberg, K., K. Romanov, M. Honkasalo and M. Koskenvuo: 1991, 'Interpersonal Conflicts at Work and Psychosocial Characteristics of Employees', *Social Science Medicine* **32**, 1051–1056.
- Bacharach, S. and P. Bamberger: 1992, 'Causal Models of Role Stressor Antecedents and Consequences: The

- Importance of Occupational Differences', *Journal of Vocational Behavior* **41**, 13–34.
- Bandura, A.: 1986, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ).
- Bandura, A.: 1991, 'Social Cognitive Theory or Moral Thought and Action', in W. M. Kurtines and J. L. Gewirtz (eds.), *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development: Theory, Research and Applications* (Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ), vol. 1, pp. 71–129.
- Bandura, A.: 2002, 'Selective Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency', *Journal of Moral Education* **31**(2), 101–119.
- Bandura, A., C. Barbaranelli, G. V. Caprara and C. Pastorelli: 1996, 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* **71**(2), 364–374.
- Baron, R. A. and J. H. Neuman: 1996, 'Workplace Violence and Workplace Aggression: Evidence on Their Relative Frequency and Potential Causes', *Aggressive Behavior* **22**, 161–173.
- Bowling, N. A. and T. A. Beehr: 2006, 'Workplace Harassment from the Victim's Perspective: A Theoretical Model and Meta-Analysis', *Journal of Applied Psychology* **91**(5), 998–1012.
- Brief, A. P. and S. J. Motowild: 1986, 'Prosocial Organizational Behaviors', *Academy of Management Review* **11**(4), 710–725.
- Brodsky, C. M.: 1976, *The Harassed Worker* (Lexington Books, Toronto).
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada: 1998 with 2000, 2002 and 2005 Amendments, *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Public Works and Government Services Canada, Ottawa).
- Claybourn, M.: 2003, 'Harassment in the Workplace: Developing a Definition from a Research Perspective', Unpublished Manuscript, University of New Brunswick.
- Claybourn, M., B. Spinner, J. Anthony and S. Clowater: 2004, Harassment in the Workplace: Examining Workplace Scenarios. Poster presented at the Annual Convention of the Canadian Psychological Association, St. John's, Newfoundland.
- Cohrs, J. C., A. E. Abele and D. E. Dette: 2006, 'Integrating Situational and Dispositional Determinants of Job Satisfaction: Findings from Three Samples of Professionals', *The Journal of Psychology* **140**(4), 363–395.
- Crawshaw, L.: 2009, 'Workplace Bullying? Mobbing? Harassment? Distraction by a Thousand Definitions', *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* **61**(2), 263–267.
- Detert, J. R., L. K. Treviño and V. L. Sweitzer: 2008, 'Moral Disengagement in Ethical Decision Making: A Study of Antecedents and Outcomes', *Journal of Applied Psychology* **93**(2), 374–391.
- Drory, A.: 1993, 'Perceived Political Climate and Job Attitudes', *Organization Studies* **14**(1), 59–71.
- Einarsen, S.: 2000, 'Harassment and Bullying at Work: A Review of the Scandinavian Approach', *Aggression and Violent Behavior* **5**(4), 379–401.
- Einarsen, S. and B. Raknes: 1997, 'Harassment in the Workplace and the Victimization of Men', *Violence and Victims* **12**(3), 247–263.
- Einarsen, S., B. Raknes and S. B. Matthiesen: 1994, 'Bullying and Harassment at Work and Their Relationships to Work Environment Quality: An Exploratory Study', *European Work and Organizational Psychologist* **4**(4), 381–401.
- Einarsen, S. and A. Skogstad: 1996, 'Bullying at Work: Epidemiological Findings in Public and Private Organizations', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* **5**(2), 185–201.
- Ferris, G. R. and K. M. Kacmar: 1992, 'Perceptions of Organizational Politics', *Journal of Management* **18**(1), 93–116.
- French, G. R. and P. Morgan: 1999, *The Financial Risks of Workplace Violence*. Retrieved November 16, 2010 from <http://www.emirrorsolutions.ca/workplaceviolence/research/hr-reporter.pdf>.
- Griffin, M. L.: 2001, 'Job Satisfaction Among Detention Officers: Assessing the Relative Contribution of Organizational Climate Variables', *Journal of Criminal Justice* **29**, 219–232.
- Gunter, B. and A. Furnham: 1996, 'Biographical and Climate Predictors of Job Satisfaction and Pride in Organization', *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* **130**(2), 193–208.
- Hemingway, M. A. and C. S. Smith: 1999, 'Organizational Climate and Occupational Stressors as Predictors of Withdrawal Behaviours and Injuries in Nurses', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* **72**, 285–299.
- Hershcovis, M. S., N. Turner, J. Barling, K. A. Arnold, K. E. Dupré, M. Inness, M. LeBlanc and N. Sivanathan: 2007, 'Predicting Workplace Aggression: A Meta-Analysis', *Journal of Applied Psychology* **92**(1), 228–238.
- Howard, J. L.: 2002, 'Workplace Violence in Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Organizational Prevention Techniques', *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* **13**(2), 57–75.
- Jackofsky, E. F. and J. W. Slocum: 1988, 'A Longitudinal Study of Climates', *Journal of Organizational Behavior* **9**, 319–334.

- Kacmar, K. M., D. P. Bozeman, D. S. Carlson and W. P. Anthony: 1999, 'An Examination of the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Model: Replication and Extension', *Human Relations* **52**(3), 383–416.
- Keashly, L., V. Trott and L. M. MacLean: 1994, 'Abusive Behavior in the Workplace: A Preliminary Investigation', *Violence and Victims* **9**(4), 341–357.
- Kline, T. J. and J. E. Boyd: 1991, 'Organizational Structure, Context, and Climate: Their Relationships to Job Satisfaction at Three Managerial Levels', *The Journal of General Psychology* **118**(4), 305–316.
- Latham, G. P. and M.-H. Budworth: 2007, 'The Study of Work Motivation in the 20th Century', in L. Koppes (ed.), *The History of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (Laurence Erlbaum Associates Inc., New Jersey).
- LeBlanc, M. M. and E. K. Kelloway: 2002, 'Predictors and Outcomes of Workplace Violence and Aggression', *Journal of Applied Psychology* **87**(3), 444–453.
- Leiter, M. P. and C. Maslach: 1988, 'The Impact of Interpersonal Environment on Burnout and Organizational Commitment', *Journal of Organizational Behavior* **9**(4), 297–308.
- Leymann, H.: 1990, 'Mobbing and Psychological Terror at Workplaces', *Violence and Victims* **5**(2), 119–126.
- Leymann, H.: 1996, 'The Content and Development of Bullying at Work', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* **5**(2), 165–184.
- Lim, S. and L. M. Cortina: 2005, 'Interpersonal Mistreatment in the Workplace: The Interface and Impact of General Incivility and Sexual Harassment', *Journal of Applied Psychology* **90**(3), 483–496.
- Lyons, H. Z. and K. M. O'Brien: 2006, 'The Role of Person-Environment Fit in the Job Satisfaction and Tenure Intentions of African American Employees', *Journal of Counseling Psychology* **53**(4), 387–396.
- Matthiesen, S. B. and S. Einarsen: 2001, 'MMPI-2 Configurations Among Victims of Bullying at Work', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* **10**(4), 467–484.
- McAlister, A. L., A. Bandura and S. V. Owen: 2006, 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in Support of Military Force: The Impact of Sept. 11', *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* **25**(2), 141–165.
- McFarlane-Shore, L., L. A. Newton and G. C. Thornton: 1990, 'Job and Organizational Attitudes in Relation to Employee Behavioural Intentions', *Journal of Organizational Behavior* **11**, 57–67.
- Mikkelsen, E. G. and S. Einarsen: 2001, 'Bullying in Danish Work-Life: Prevalence and Health Correlates', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* **10**(4), 393–413.
- Miller, R. L., M. A. Griffin and P. M. Hart: 1999, 'Personality and Organizational Health: The Role of Conscientiousness', *Work & Stress* **13**(1), 7–19.
- Mitchell, M. S. and M. L. Ambrose: 2007, 'Abusive Supervision and Workplace Deviance and the Moderating Effects of Negative Reciprocity Beliefs', *Journal of Applied Psychology* **92**(4), 1159–1168.
- Moore, C.: 2008, 'Moral Disengagement in Processes of Organizational Corruption', *Journal of Business Ethics* **80**(1), 129–139.
- Mulki, J. P., F. Jaramillo and W. B. Locander: 2006, 'Effects of Ethical Climate and Supervisory Trust on Salesperson's Job Attitudes and Intentions to Quit', *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* **26**(1), 19–26.
- O'Connor, W. E. and T. G. Morrison: 2001, 'A Comparison of Situational and Dispositional Predictors of Perceptions of Organizational Politics', *The Journal of Psychology* **135**(3), 301–312.
- Oldham, G. R. and J. R. Hackman: 1981, 'Relationships Between Organizational Structure and Employee Reactions: Comparing Alternative Frameworks', *Administrative Science Quarterly* **26**, 66–83.
- Osofsky, M. J., A. Bandura and P. G. Zimbardo: 2005, 'The Role of Moral Disengagement in the Execution Process', *Law and Human Behavior* **29**(4), 371–393.
- Ostroff, C.: 1992, 'The Relationship Between Satisfaction, Attitudes, and Performance: An Organizational Level Analysis', *Journal of Applied Psychology* **77**(6), 963–974.
- Parker, C. P., R. L. Dipboye and S. L. Jackson: 1995, 'Perceptions of Organizational Politics: An Investigation of Antecedents and Consequences', *Journal of Management* **21**(5), 891–912.
- Preacher, K. J. and A. F. Hayes: 2004, 'SPSS and SAS Procedures for Estimating Indirect Effects in Simple Mediation Models', *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers* **36**(4), 717–731.
- Rayner, C.: 1997, 'The Incidence of Workplace Bullying', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* **7**, 199–208.
- Schat, A. C. H. and E. K. Kelloway: 2003, 'Reducing the Adverse Consequences of Workplace Aggression and Violence: The Buffering Effects of Organizational Support', *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* **8**(2), 386–402.
- Sims, H. P., A. D. Szilagyi and R. T. Keller: 1976, 'The Measurement of Job Characteristics', *Academy of Management Journal* **19**(2), 195–212.
- Smith, C. A., D. W. Organ and J. P. Near: 1983, 'Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: Its Nature and Antecedents', *Journal of Applied Psychology* **68**(4), 653–663.

- Sobel, M. E.: 1982, 'Asymptotic Confidence Intervals for Indirect Effects in Structural Equation Models', in S. Leinhardt (ed.), *Sociological Methodology* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco), pp. 290–312.
- South, C. R. and J. Wood: 2006, 'Bullying in Prisons: The Importance of Perceived Social Status, Prisonization, and Moral Disengagement', *Aggressive Behavior* **32**(5), 490–501.
- Sturman, E. D., M. Mongrain and P. M. Kohn: 2006, 'Attributional Style as a Predictor of Hopelessness Depression', *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly* **20**(4), 447–458.
- Touslon, P. and M. Smith: 1994, 'The Relationship Between Organizational Climate and Employee Perceptions of Personnel Management Practices', *Public Personnel Management* **23**(3), 453–468.
- Vartia, M.: 1996, 'The Sources of Bullying – Psychological Work Environment and Organizational Climate', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* **5**, 203–214.
- Zapf, D., C. Knorz and M. Kulla: 1996, 'On the Relationships Between Mobbing Factors, and Job Content, Social Work Environment and Health Outcomes', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* **5**, 215–238.

Department of Psychology,
St. Thomas University,
51 Dineen Drive, Fredericton,
NB E3B 5G3, Canada
E-mail: marvinc@stu.ca