Journal of Applied Psychology
2016, Vol. 101, No. 8, 1082–1096

0021-9010/16/$12.00 http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/apl0000111

Relaxing Moral Reasoning to Win: How Organizational Identification Relates to Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior

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Drawing on social identity theory and social–cognitive theory, we hypothesize that organizational identification predicts unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) through the mediation of moral disengagement. We further propose that competitive interorganizational relations enhance the hypothesized relationships. Three studies conducted in China and the United States using both survey and vignette methodologies provided convergent support for our model. Study 1 revealed that higher organizational identifiers engaged in more UPB, and that this effect was mediated by moral disengagement. Study 2 found that organizational identification once again predicted UPB through the mediation of moral disengagement, and that the mediation relationship was stronger when employees perceived a higher level of industry competition. Finally, Study 3 replicated the above findings using a vignette experiment to provide stronger evidence of causality. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: organizational identification, social identity theory, moral disengagement, interorganizational competition, unethical pro-organizational behavior

Unethical conduct in the workplace, defined as behavior contrary to the accepted moral norms of society (Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006), has received increased attention from scholars in recent years (Martin, Kish-Gephart, & Detert, 2014), especially the question of what gives rise to such behavior. In addressing this question, prior studies have identified numerous individual- (e.g., trait-based, cognitive, affective), interpersonal- (e.g., peer, leadership), and organization-level factors (e.g., organizational ethical infrastructures) that help explain why employees behave unethically, thereby advancing our understanding of behavioral ethics considerably (for recent reviews, see Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014). Interestingly, however, most such work has focused on behaviors undertaken to benefit the self (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Moore & Gino, 2013; Thau, Derfler-Rozin, Pitesa, Mitchell, & Pillutla, 2015; Treviño et al., 2014), implicitly suggesting that unethical behaviors are driven primarily by self-interest. Meanwhile, this same work has generally assumed that prosocial behaviors are ethical, driven by benevolent motives to help others as individuals or as a collectivity.

While these assumptions may be understandable, recent research has begun to cast doubt on them, showing that in fact, employees commonly engage in unethical behaviors intended to serve the interests of their organization (e.g., destroying incriminating files to protect an organization's reputation; disclosing false or exaggerated information to the public; Gino & Pierce, 2009; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010), creating moral hazards not only for employers, but for society as a whole (Cialdini, Petrova, & Goldstein, 2004). Consequently, a growing number of organizational scholars have begun to systematically investigate and theorize about the phenomenon of unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB; Gino, Ayal, & Ariely, 2013; May, Chang, & Shao, 2015; Miao, Newman, Yu, & Xu, 2013; Thau et al., 2015; Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Indeed, there is an emergent field of business ethics research that now focuses squarely on the moral challenges of positive constructs, including beliefs, values, and behaviors, traditionally regarded as purely prosocial and altruistic (e.g., Levine & Schweitzer, 2014). This emergent literature greatly expands the extant business ethics research by not only enhancing our understanding of antecedents of unethical behavior, but also broadening our theoretical perspectives for understanding such behavior.

In an effort to contribute to this emergent field, we conducted three studies in China and the United States designed to further our understanding of factors that give rise to UPB in the workplace. In our first two studies involving surveys of Chinese employees, we examined whether there exists a positive relationship between organizational identification and UPB, due in part to moral disengagement among higher identifiers. We also examined the potential role of a key moderator predicted by social identity theory: interorganizational competition. In our third study, we sought to replicate these findings in the United States as well as to establish

This article was published Online First April 21, 2016.

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We acknowledge support from National Science Foundation of China (Projects 71222201 & 71172125) to the first author. The authors thank Lilian Eby for helpful suggestions throughout the review process.

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the causal effects of organizational identification and interfirm competition via an experiment.

Our theoretical perspective and empirical findings make three contributions to the existing organizational literature. First, prior research has showcased the positive side of organizational identification (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Umphress & Bingham, 2011), largely to the neglect of its dark side. Our research is among the first to generate evidence for the link between organizational identification and unethical behavior, drawing attention to the ethical challenges of social identities in the workplace (Leavitt & Sluss, 2015). Second, we contribute to the emergent research on UPB by shedding light on a key psychological mechanism, moral disengagement.[1] At present, considerable work shows that moral disengagement mediates egocentric antecedents of unethical behavior, such as locus of control, moral identity, empathy, trait cynicism, and envy (Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008; Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012; McFerran, Aquino, & Duffy, 2010; Shepherd, Patzelt, & Baron, 2013). However, whether it likewise mediates the effects of more *prosocial* antecedents, such as organizational identification, remains an open question. While a similar mechanism (labeled *moral neutralization*) appeared in Umphress and Bingham's (2011) early theoretical model, subsequent empirical research has focused predominantly on distal antecedents, paying less attention to underlying psychological processes (May et al., 2015; Miao et al., 2013; Thau et al., 2015; Umphress et al., 2010). Our research provides the first empirical evidence for Umphress and Bingham's (2011) contention that moral disengagement underpins not only proself but also UPB.

Last and most importantly, we make our own *theoretical* contribution to the UPB literature by bringing back the intergroup perspective that is an integral part of the original theory of social identity (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Specifically, we hypothesize and test the idea that intergroup competition, in the form of competitive interfirm relations, is a factor that not only stimulates UPB, but also enhances the link between organizational identification and moral disengagement. This contextual factor of intergroup (or interfirm) competition may help explain why organizational identification sometimes fails to predict UPB (Umphress et al., 2010) and, more importantly, adds a key boundary condition to Umphress and Bingham's (2011) theoretical model, which includes organizational and individual level moderators, but neglects interorganizational contexts. Taken together, exploring the effects of a key underlying mechanism as well as a key boundary condition of UPB broadens the scope of research on unethical behavior in the workplace and deepens our current understanding of why and how employees engage in UPB (Treviño et al., 2014; Umphress & Bingham, 2011).

Theory and Hypotheses

Organizational Identification and Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior

UPB refers to "actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct" (Umphress & Bingham, 2011, p. 622). For example, employees may sometimes fabricate or exaggerate the accomplishments of their employing company to boost its reputation or to maintain its competitive advantage over a rival company (Cialdini et al., 2004). Essential to this definition are the dual qualifications that the act be undertaken with the intention to help the employing organization and yet be in violation of hyper moral standards of society. Because many such acts do bring some benefit to the organization, they are viewed more favorably than egocentric behaviors (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005) based on organizational norms or a narrow interpretation of utilitarianism (Audi, 2007). However, according to the above definition of UPB, neither the local ethical norms nor the utilitarian criterion are adequate (Umphress et al., 2010). For a pro-organizational act to be truly ethical, it must also meet ethical standards at the societal level, referred to as "hyper norms" (Warren, 2003). The construct of UPB therefore opens up existing business ethics research by directing attention to ethical challenges posed by otherwise positive values, motives, and behaviors.

In this article, we study organizational identification as an antecedent of UPB, building upon prior theorizing by Umphress and Bingham (2011). Organizational identification refers to "the perception of oneness or belongingness with the organization" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) or "the psychological merging of self and organization" in which employees see "the self as similar to other members of the collective . . . [ascribe] group-defining characteristics to the self and take the collective's interests to heart" (van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006, p. 572; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). While prior research has shown organizational identification to be a powerful predictor of organizational attitudes and behaviors (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Riketta, 2005) including group cohesion (Hogg, Cooper-Shaw, & Holzworth, 1993) and organizational citizenship behavior (Ashforth et al., 2008; Riketta, 2005), its potential impact on unethical behavior in the workplace has thus far received little empirical attention. This is so, despite prior warnings that pro-organizational cognitions, motives, and attitudes have the potential to lead to unethical acts (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Randall, 1987; Vadera & Pratt, 2013).

Umphress and Bingham (2011) laid a solid theoretical foundation for the idea that organizational identification may act as a key antecedent of UPB. In their model, they propose that organizational identification (as well as positive social exchange, which they contend is another key antecedent) can motivate employees to serve the organization's interests by all means available, including by discarding individual and societal moral standards in favor of unethical acts aimed at helping the organization. Specifically, when faced with organizational challenges (e.g., intense industrial competition, law suits against the organization, stringent regulatory policies), employees with stronger organizational identification are more likely to perceive threat to their organization's material and reputational status and be more willing to seek out and take all means necessary to satisfy the competitive needs of the

[1] In Umphress and Bingham's (2011) original model, moral neutralization is used instead of moral disengagement. However, the two terms are conceptually very similar (see Ribeaud & Eisner, 2010, for a discussion). Following Bandura and colleagues (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996) and other researchers (Detert et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2012), we adopted the term moral disengagement in the current study.

organization (Balliet, Wu, & De Dreu, 2014; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Fiske, 2002; Leavitt & Sluss, 2015; Wildschut, Pinter, Vevea, Insko, & Schopler, 2003; Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010). In this way, identification with the ingroup for its internal integration and external competition can push higher organizational identifiers into moral gray areas, areas in which pro-organizational behaviors are performed and justified by ingroup serving instincts and reasons incompatible with the superordinate moral standards of society. On this basis, we thus hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Organizational identification is positively related to UPB.

Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement

According to social–cognitive theory, moral disengagement comprises a set of cognitive justification mechanisms that allow an individual to commit unethical acts while disengaging from the moral norms and self-sanctions that ordinarily inhibit such acts (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Detert et al., 2008). In particular, Bandura and colleagues (1996) identified three broad cognitive mechanisms through which moral disengagement occurs. The first is to reconstrue unethical acts so as to make them appear amoral, less immoral or even respectable. The second is to obscure or distort both responsibility for and the consequences of such conduct. And the third is to devalue the target of unethical conduct. Because these different mechanisms all aim to justify morally suspect acts, researchers have operationalized moral disengagement as a single overarching concept (Bandura et al., 1996; Detert et al., 2008; Duffy et al., 2012).

A few points are worth noting about the moral disengagement theory (Bandura et al., 1996) before applying it to the relationship between organizational identification and UPB. The theory is based on the assumption that most moral transgressors are not inherently or globally immoral people. Rather, like all others, they hold self-regulatory standards that are largely consistent with societal norms. Unethical conduct occurs when self-regulatory moral standards get disengaged, that is, when transgressors find ways of justifying their unethical behaviors. Furthermore, moral disengagement is theorized as a pretransgression justification rather than posttransgression rationalization, even though the latter is also possible (Ribeaud & Eisner, 2010). This pretransgression conceptualization makes moral disengagement a potent mediator between more distant antecedents and unethical behavior. Consistent with the above two viewpoints, recent research shows that various situations (e.g., incentive systems) can activate moral disengagement in turn leading to immoral acts (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Martin, 2014), though prior work also shows that there exists a general predisposition to morally disengage (Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012).

Drawing upon moral disengagement theory, we contend that when employees face moral dilemmas in which the organization's interests are at stake, organizational identification can lead to UPB by activating moral disengagement, which in turn eliminates self-deterrents to harmful behavior and encourages self-approval of the unethical conduct (Brief, Buttram, & Dukerich, 2001). All three mechanisms of moral disengagement noted above help explain how moral disengagement more generally might mediate the effect of organizational identification on UPB. First, people with stronger organizational identification are more likely to reframe UPB as a necessary and even righteous act that serves the greater good of the organization (Umphress & Bingham, 2011), hence making it personally or socially acceptable (Bandura et al., 1996; Detert et al., 2008; Duffy et al., 2012). This may be seen in people's explicit justification of otherwise unethical acts as necessary to protect their group's or organization's interests, or in their use of euphemistic language that masks the unethicality of lying by framing it as strategic information presentation (i.e., a "tactic" to protect company reputation; Duffy et al., 2012). Second, organizational identification allows people to blur the accountability boundary of individual and organization and establishes the shield of anonymity for employees who violate moral principles in the name of the company (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Specifically, the stronger the organizational identification, due to greater oneness of the self and organization, the more diffuse the responsibility for the unethical behavior (Wildschut, Insko, & Gaertner, 2002). Lastly, social identification entails a process of depersonalization that reduces one's perceived social and moral obligation for ensuring the welfare of the outgroup (Bandura, 1999; Tajfel, 1982). To the extent that the perception of a shared identity causes intragroup cohesion and out-group hostility (Dutton et al., 1994; Haslam, 2006; Hogg, 2006), people with stronger organizational identification are more likely to appeal to intergroup competition as a way of justifying UPB.

Taken together, the above observations thus lead us to predict that to protect organizational interests, people with stronger organizational identification are more prone to resort to moral disengagement for preact justification of UPB, due to the relative ease with which moral disengagement is activated. That is, we contend that moral disengagement provides people higher in organizational identification with more justifications for conducting UPB by reframing their unethical behaviors as serving the greater good, diffusing their sense of moral responsibility, and making more palatable harmful consequences to outgroup members. We therefore hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: Moral disengagement mediates the positive relationship between organizational identification and UPB.

Moderating Effect of Interorganizational Competition

In their theoretical model of UPB, Umphress and Bingham (2011) proposed organizational- (e.g., amoral culture) and individual-level (e.g., moral development) factors that should moderate the effect of organizational identification on moral neutralization (here, moral disengagement) and UPB. What is absent from their model, however, is the intergroup context within which UPB often takes place. One defining characteristic of social identity is that it motivates both identification with the ingroup and competition and bias against the outgroup (Balliet et al., 2014; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). In the present research, we examine the potential moderating effect of one specific form of intergroup competitive relations, that is, interorganizational competition, on people's likelihood of engaging in UPB. Intergroup competition is an integral part of social identity theory and has been explicitly researched in numerous studies of intergroup relationships (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Hogg, 2006; Messick & Mackie, 1989; Tajfel, 1982). According to social identity the-

ory, groups regularly compete with each other over status or prestige, even under circumstances where there is no explicit or institutionalized competition (Tajfel, 1982). When material and social resources become scarcer, organizations often institutionalize competitive strategies and tactics (Barney, 1991). In situations of greater competition, we propose that people with stronger organizational identification will be even more motivated to engage in UPB because the survival and well-being of their organization is at even greater stake, making justifications for engaging in UPB even more compelling. For example, when competition with another company grows more intense, employees who identify more strongly with the employing company will be more convinced that a given act of UPB is critical for their company to win to stay in business, that the rival company is merciless and therefore deserves no merciful treatment, and that the "do or die" situation reasonably overrides personal and societal considerations of morality. On this basis, we thus hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: The indirect positive relationship between organizational identification and UPB through moral disengagement is stronger when interorganization competition is more intense.

Overview of Studies

We conducted three studies to test the preceding hypotheses. Studies 1 and 2 were conducted in China, with working employees in retail companies. Specifically, Study 1 was conducted to test the basic relationships between organizational identification, moral disengagement, and UPB. Study 2 was conducted to replicate the results of Study 1 and to further test the moderating role of interorganizational competition. Study 3 was conducted in the United States with a diverse sample recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011) to, on the one hand, replicate our model in a western culture and, on the other, to provide stronger evidence of causality. Together, the three studies provide a test of our theoretical model using both field and experimental vignette methodologies, thus strengthening both the ecological and internal validity of our conclusions.

Study 1

Participants and Design

For this study, we gained access to a large Chinese pharmacy chain company, which owns over 100 franchise stores within an eastern province of the country. These franchise stores are autonomously operated, for example, in terms of marketing and human resources (HR) management. Seventy-eight stores accepted our invitation to participate in what we labeled an interstore "knowledge and skills" contest, which we designed to test our hypotheses. One member from each store was randomly selected to compete on behalf of their store, with the final sample consisting of 73 representatives (female = 88%; M_{age} = 31–40 years; $M_{work\ exp.}$ = 4.0 years; managers = 37%). We operationalized the dependent variable, UPB, in this first study as cheating behavior in the context of this contest. Because participants encountered the opportunity to cheat during an interstore contest for prestige and financial prizes, we deemed it an appropriate measure of UPB.

Contest and Procedure

The contest in question was introduced to participants as an interstore competition to see which store would score highest on a set of two tasks. It was announced that three prizes, each of ¥1,200 (equivalent to US$200), would be awarded to the three highest scoring stores. Importantly, our instructions also made clear that the awards were for the represented stores, rather than for the winning individuals. The contest involved two parts: (a) an initial knowledge task and (b) a subsequent matrix ("skills") task. The knowledge task, consisting of questions about pharmacy store management, was designed to familiarize participants with the contest procedure, encourage engagement, and mask the research purpose of the second task. The second task was adopted from Mazar, Amir, and Ariely's (2008) matrix task, which has been used widely in prior behavioral ethics research to study cheating behavior (e.g., Shu & Gino, 2012; Welsh & Ordonez, 2014).

In the knowledge task component of the contest, each participant received a sheet with 15 questions about pharmacy store management to be completed in 10 min. Participants were asked to write down their store name on the sheet before answering the questions. Upon completion, participants handed over their answers to the facilitator and received a supposedly confidential, but in fact uniform, piece of positive feedback that stated, "Congratulations. Your unit score is the highest on this first task. Keep up your great work and best wishes for next task." In the matrix task part of the contest, each participant received a test sheet with 20 matrices and a separate collection slip (which included an example matrix on one side) on which to later report their performance. Each of the 20 matrices on the test sheet included a different set of 12 three-digit numbers. Participants were given 5 min to find two numbers per matrix that added up to 10. Once the 5 min was up, they were asked to count the number of matrices they had solved correctly, recycle their test sheet (using the recycling box in the room), and then fill out their collection slips by writing down their store name and the number of correctly solved matrices. All participants received the same set of matrices to solve in the 5-min time period, except for a single number embedded in one of the 20 matrices that was unique for each participant. This unique number matched one of the three-digit numbers in the example matrix on the back of each participants' collection slip, thus allowing us to match participants' test worksheet with their collection slip at the end of the study and compute the difference between self-reported and actual performance. This difference score served as our measure of UPB for this study.

Measures

Except for our measure of UPB, we used 5-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) for all key variables in this study. All measures, which we collected concurrently with the matrix task (along with demographic information, including participants' age, gender, education, tenure, and position), were presented in Chinese. The original English scales were translated into Chinese using translation and back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1986).

Store identification (a proxy for organizational identification in this study) was assessed with the six-item scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992), but adapted to a store context (α = .75). Sample items are, "When someone criticizes (name of store), it

feels like a personal insult" and "I am very interested in what others think about (name of store)."

Moral disengagement was assessed with the eight-item scale developed by Moore et al. (2012) ($\alpha = .83$). Sample items are, "It is okay to spread rumors to defend those you care about" and "People shouldn't be held accountable for doing questionable things when they were just doing what an authority figure told them to do."

A confirmatory factor analysis conducted on our key variables (i.e., organizational identification, moral disengagement) revealed that the data fit our overall model reasonably well ($\chi^2 = 96.77$, $df = 76$, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .06, comparative fit index [CFI] = .97, incremental fit index [IFI] = .97). The alternative model (combining organizational identification and moral disengagement into one factor) exhibited significantly worse fit than the baseline model ($\chi^2 = 262.33$, $df = 77$, RMSEA = .18, CFI = .76, IFI =.77). The change in chi-square was significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 165.56$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Thus, results of the confirmatory factor analysis provide support for the distinctiveness of organizational identification and moral disengagement in this study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for all Study 1 variables. Demographic variables (participant age, gender, education, organizational tenure, and position) failed to qualify any of the results of either this study or Study 2, and hence were excluded from all analyses in the article.

As shown in Table 2, regression analyses revealed that organizational identification was positively related to both moral disengagement ($B = .42$, $SE = .14$, $p < .01$, Model 1) and UPB ($B = 1.38$, $SE = .56$, $p = .02$, Model 2). We also found that moral disengagement was positively related to UPB ($B = 1.76$, $SE = .44$, $p < .01$, Model 3), and that when both organizational identification and moral disengagement were included in the model (Model 4), the effect of moral disengagement remained significant ($B = 1.56$, $SE = .47$, $p = .01$) while that of organizational identification did not ($B = .73$, $SE = .56$, *ns*). Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were thus supported.

Although the three-step procedure described above (proposed by Baron & Kenny, 1986) is one common method of assessing statistical mediation, indirect effects tests require the calculation of compound coefficients, which are not normally distributed (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). To account for nonnormal sampling distributions of indirect relations, we thus reexamined the predicted linkages (organizational identification → moral disengagement → UPB) using the bootstrapping approach for testing indirect effects (5,000 resamples; Mackinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). Consistent with our first test, results of this follow-up test indicated that the indirect effect of organizational identification on UPB via moral disengagement was significant ($B = .65$, $SE = .31$, 95% bias-corrected confidence interval [CI] [.19, 1.45], excluding zero), suggesting that moral disengagement fully mediated the relationship between organizational identification and UPB.

Finally, to address potential concerns about reverse causality, we tested the alternative account that participants justified their actions not in advance of cheating (as predicted by moral disengagement theory), but only *after* having cheated, via a post hoc rationalization. Speaking against such an account, however, an analysis of the reverse causal model revealed a weaker mediation effect ($B = .12$, $SE = .06$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.03, .29]). Moreover, after controlling for UPB, organizational identification was still significantly related to moral disengagement ($B = .30$, $SE = .13$, $p = .03$). Taken together, the above analyses testing Hypothesis 2 thus provide strong initial support for our contention that moral disengagement plays a key role in explaining the relationship between organizational identification and UPB.

In this first study, we embedded our tasks and measure of UPB in an interstore competitive context (thus holding intergroup competition constant and high) and found that higher store identifiers were more likely to overreport performance so that their store might win the competition. Furthermore, we found evidence suggesting that this positive relationship between store identification and UPB was mediated by moral disengagement. Although Study 1 provides preliminary behavioral evidence that employees with stronger organizational identification are more likely to engage in UPB via moral disengagement, it is important to note that our findings here are limited to cheating. While we assume that the observed cheating was pro-organizationally motivated given that it occurred during an interunit competition, this is nevertheless an assumption. We thus sought to address this limitation in Study 2, in which we attempted not only to generalize our Study 1 results to a wider range of UPBs, but also, to explicitly measure and directly test the hypothesized effect of interorganizational competition.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Estimates (Study 1)

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Unethical pro-organizational behavior	7.11	2.70	—		
2. Moral disengagement	2.27	.66	.43**	(.83)	
3. Organizational identification	3.97	.55	.28**	.35**	(.75)

Note. $N = 73$. Coefficient alphas are given in parentheses on the diagonal.
** $p < .01$, two-tailed tests.

Study 2

Participants and Procedure

In this study, we collected two waves of survey data, 4 weeks apart from each other, from a single set of employees of a retail company located in an eastern province of China. This retail company sells many different types of commodities (e.g., cosmetic, food, liquor, herbs, and clothes) from a wide range of industries and employees are generally responsible only for specific types of products from a given industry. This allowed us to test the moderating effect of industrial competition as perceived by the sales people, who had substantial interaction with clients and regularly conducted business on behalf of their company in the course of their daily work. The employees, who were assured that their individual responses would be confidential and for academic research only, filled out the surveys at their workplace, either

Table 2
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses With Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior and Moral Disengagement (Study 1)

	Moral disengagement		Unethical pro-organizational behavior					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Organizational identification	.42**	.14	1.38*	.56			.73	.56
Moral disengagement					1.76**	.44	1.56**	.47
F	9.61**		6.01*		16.21**		9.04**	
R^2	.12		.08		.19		.21	
ΔR^2					.11**		.13**	

Note. $N = 73$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

before starting or after finishing their work. They then returned their completed surveys directly to the first author. The temporal separation of 4 weeks was intended to reduce common method variance (Doty & Glick, 1998) by reducing biases in participants' retrieval and reporting of responses (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In the first survey (Wave 1), participants responded to questions assessing their level of organizational identification (our independent variable) and moral disengagement (our mediator variable), as well as the level of interorganizational competition they perceived in their industry (our proposed moderator). We also measured a set of control variables at this time. In the second, follow-up survey (Wave 2), respondents were asked to report their willingness to engage in various forms of UPB (our dependent variable).

Two hundred seventy-eight employees were contacted by the first author and all completed the first of the two surveys. Of these employees, 240 also completed the second survey, resulting in a response rate of 86.3% (female = 90%; M_{age} = 31–40 years; $M_{work\ exp.}$ = 2.9 years; managers = 15%).

Measures

We used 5-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) for all substantive variables measured in both waves of this study. In addition, in each wave, we collected the same demographic background variables as collected in Study 1. As in Study 1, all materials were presented in Chinese, and were translated from their original English versions using translation and back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1986).

Organizational identification was assessed using the same six-item scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) as used in Study 1 (α = .73). *Interorganizational competition* was measured using a four-item scale developed by Birkinshaw, Hood, and Jonsson (1998) for assessing perceived industry competition (α = .75). Sample items are, "Our organizational unit has relatively strong competitors," and "Competition in our local market is extremely high."

Moral Disengagement. For this study, as well as for Study 3, we created and used a three-item moral disengagement scale, which assessed participants' desire to protect their organization's interests as a moral justification for unethical behavior. This modification was necessary because, as proposed by Kish-Gephart et al. (2014), specific situational features often call for specific disengagement techniques. Unlike in Study 1, where the dependent measure was cheating and the pro-organizational rationale was implicit, in Studies 2 and 3, our focus was on predicting unethical behavior with the explicit motive of protecting organizational interests. To construct this situation-specific measure of moral disengagement, we adopted one moral justification item from Moore et al.'s (2012) measure and added two more items that likewise reflected the underlying theme of pro-organization justification (α = .88). The three items comprising this scale were, "It would be ok to be misleading to protect [my company's] interests," "It would be ok to withhold potentially damaging information to protect [my company's] interests," and "It would be ok to be less than fully truthful to protect [my company's] interests."

Finally, UPB was assessed using the six-item measure developed by Umphress et al. (2010; α = .79). Sample items are, "If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good," and "If it would help my organization, I would exaggerate the truth about my company's products or services to customers and clients."

Control Variables. To account for participants' tendency to respond in a socially desirable way when answering sensitive self-report items in this study (i.e., our UPB measure; Thau et al., 2015; Umphress et al., 2010), we measured participants' impression management bias using a subscale from Steenkamp, De Long, and Baumgartner's (2010) social desirability bias scale (α = .82). Additionally, we assessed and controlled for participants' organizational affective commitment to their company, using the eight-item scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) (α = .78). This was done because some researchers (e.g., O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986) have construed organizational identification as one of the bases upon which organizational commitment is built. We contend that the two concepts are distinct in that the former is a self-conception involving the merging of self and organization, whereas the latter is a positive attitude toward one's organization which may or may not involve identification (van Knippenberg, & Sleebos, 2006). Nevertheless, because affective organizational commitment may also act as an alternate, perhaps dominant, cause of UPB,

controlling for it here would provide increased confidence in the predictive power of organizational identification.[2]

Results and Discussion

Confirmatory factor analyses. Prior to hypotheses testing, we conducted a series of confirmatory procedures to examine the discriminant validity of the study's key measures: organizational identification, perceived interorganizational competition, moral disengagement, and UPB (see Table 3). The proposed measurement model (Model 1) was tested against five other alternative measurement models (i.e., Models 2–6). As shown in Table 3, the data fit Model 1 best among all models we investigated (χ^2 = 338.36, *df* = 146, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .90, IFI = .90). The standardized loadings of all indicators on their specific constructs were significant at the .01 level. The alternative models exhibited significantly worse fit than the baseline model, as seen from the chi-square difference tests and model fit indices. Thus, the results provided support for the distinctiveness of the key measures in this study.

Hypotheses testing. Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for the variables in this study.

Regression analyses were conducted to Test Hypotheses 1 and 2. As shown in Table 5, after accounting for the control variables, organizational identification was positively related to moral disengagement (B = .25, SE = .12, p = .04, Model 2) and also positively related to UPB (B = .23, SE = .10, p = .03, Model 5). To test for mediation (Hypothesis 2), we again followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure for testing mediated relationships. Consistent with our second hypothesis, the results revealed that when both organizational identification and moral disengagement were included as predictors, moral disengagement was significantly related to UPB (B = .36, SE = .05, $p < .01$, Model 6, Table 5), but organizational identification was not (B = .14, SE = .10, *ns,* Model 6, Table 5). Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were thus supported.

As in Study 1, we also sought to address the violation of the normal distribution assumption by performing a bootstrapping analysis (5,000 resamples). Results of this follow up analysis indicated that the indirect effect of organizational identification on UPB through moral disengagement was significant (B = .17, SE = .04, 95% bias-corrected CI [.09, .27], excluding zero; see Table 6). This additional analysis thus lends further support to Hypothesis 2, indicating that moral disengagement fully mediated the relationship between organizational identification and UPB.

Finally, to test our hypothesis that interorganizational competition moderates the above mediation effects, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis via the following steps. First, we tested for and found a significant interaction between organizational identification and perceived competition on moral disengagement (B = .30, SE = .11, $p < .01$, Model 3, Table 5). We used Aiken and West's (1991) approach of plotting 1 *SD* above and below the mean to probe this and other interactions in the study. As depicted in Figure 1, the relationship between organizational identification and moral disengagement was stronger in the high competition group than that in the low competition group. Next, we tested for and found a significant interaction between these same two variables on our main dependent variable of UPB (B = .41, SE = .09, $p < .01$, Model 7, Table 5). As illustrated in Figure 2, the relationship between organizational identification and UPB was stronger in the high competition group than in the low competition group. Additionally, when entering moral disengagement into Model 7, we found that the effect of the interaction term was weakened (B = .31, SE = .09, $p < .01$, Model 8) and the effect of moral disengagement was significant (B = .33, SE = .05, $p < .01$, Model 8). Third, employing the bootstrapping-based analytic approach via Mplus 7 (Liu, Zhang, & Wang, 2012; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007), we found that perceived competition enhanced the positive effect of organizational identification on UPB via the mediation of moral disengagement. As can be seen in Table 6, the indirect effect of organizational identification on UPB via moral disengagement was stronger under higher perceived interorganizational competition (B = .21, SE = .05, 95% bias-corrected CI [.12, .33], excluding zero) than under lower perceived interorganizational competition (B = .07, SE = .04, 95% bias-corrected CI [–.00, .17], including zero). The difference between the indirect relationships under the two perceived competition conditions was significant (B_{diff} = .14, SE = .05, 95% bias-corrected CI [.04, .26], excluding zero, see Table 6). Taken together, the above results thus provide support for Hypothesis 3.

Although Studies 1 and 2 provide consistent support for our theoretical model in different contexts and with different samples, it is nevertheless important to note some key limitations of both. First, neither of these two field studies establishes a causal relationship between organizational identification and UPB because organizational identification in each was measured, rather than manipulated, making the results correlational. Second, organizational identification is a construct that should affect UPB regardless of differences in national and cultural identities, yet we only tested our model in a single culture. Whether the observed relationships replicate in a different culture remains an open question. We thus conducted one additional study in the U.S. to address these limitations. To that end, we moved away from the previous survey methodology, opting instead to conduct a vignette-based experiment in which we directly manipulated our two key independent variables (organizational identification and interorganizational competition).

Study 3

For this third study, we recruited a sample of U.S.-based Amazon Mechanical Turk workers and placed them in managerial decision-making scenario, which offered them an opportunity to engage in UPB. For half of the participants, the company at which they worked was described so as to induce higher organizational

[2] As goal commitment may also serve as potential influence on UPB (Randall, 1987), we collected goal commitment data in Study 2 as well, using a scale adapted from Hollenbeck, Williams, and Klein (1989; α = .84). The scale consisted of three items: "I take my organization's goals very seriously"; "I am strongly committed to pursuing my organization's goal"; and "Quite frankly, I don't care if my organization's goals are achieved or not" (reverse scored). Because goal commitment is highly correlated with affective commitment, r = .58, $p < .01$, we only include affective commitment as a control variable. However, using goal commitment instead of affective commitment as a control variable, we reran our various analyses for hypotheses testing. The results showed that organizational identification remained significant after controlling for goal commitment, again providing support for our hypotheses.

Table 3
Comparison of Measurement Models (Study 2)

Model	Descriptions	χ^2	*df*	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	CFI	IFI
Model 1	Four factors: Organizational identification, moral disengagement, perceived industrial competition, and unethical pro-organizational behavior	338.36	146		.07	.90	.90
Model 2	Three factors: Organizational identification and moral disengagement were combined into one factor.	610.59	149	272.23***	.11	.74	.74
Model 3	Three factors: Organizational identification and perceived industrial competition were combined into one factor.	544.68	149	206.32***	.10	.78	.78
Model 4	Three factors: Moral disengagement and unethical pro-organizational behavior were combined into one factor.	505.27	149	166.91***	.10	.80	.80
Model 5	Two factors: Organizational identification, moral disengagement, and perceived industrial competition were combined into one factor.	859.59	151	521.23***	.14	.60	.60
Model 6	One factor: Organizational identification, moral disengagement, perceived industrial competition, and unethical pro-organizational behavior were combined into one factor.	1,011.19	152	672.83***	.15	.51	.52

Note. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index.
*** $p < .001$.

identification, whereas for the remaining half, this same company was described so as to induce lower organizational identification. All participants then read that in their role at this company, they presently faced a challenging work-related dilemma: whether or not to mislead an HR manager from another company, who was considering hiring a consistently low-performing employee from the participant's company, but first wanted the participant's candid evaluation. By providing this HR manager with a glowing recommendation letter (i.e., lying), they could ensure that the employee became this other company's problem. To manipulate interorganizational competition, we embedded this decision in one of two interorganizational contexts (competitive vs. cooperative), in one case describing the inquiring HR manager as being from a rival retail company and in the other case, describing this manager as being from an alliance company. Finally, all participants indicated their likelihood of writing such a letter, as well as their likely level of moral disengagement in the scenario. We predicted that organizational identification would be positively linked to participants' likelihood of writing the letter, and that as in Studies 1 and 2, this relationship would be mediated by moral disengagement.

Participants and Design

Participants were 191 U.S.-based Amazon Mechanical Turk workers (male = 49.2%; M_{age} = 31–40 years; $M_{work\ exp.}$ = 16.2 years) who completed the study in exchange for payment. However, eight were dropped due to incorrectly answering a simple attention check item included in the study, leaving a final sample of 183 participants. Of these participants, 62% reported having managerial experience on a postscenario survey item inquiring whether they had ever managed others in their career (1 = yes, I have managed others, 0 = no, I have not managed others). The study employed a 2 (Organizational Identification: high vs. low) × 2 (Interorganizational Relationship: cooperative vs. competitive) between-subjects design.

Procedure

Upon agreeing to participate, participants were asked to adopt the role of marketing director at a large retail company at which they had worked for 3 years. In the course of describing the company, we randomly assigned participants to one of two levels of an organizational identification manipulation adapted from van Knippenberg, Martin, and Tyler (2006). Specifically, half (those in the high organizational identification condition) read that over the past 3 years, it had become clear that this company was "a good fit" for them. In addition to the fact that they and their coworkers held "very similar attitudes about the direction of and vision for the company," they had "considerable personal interaction with other people at the company, outside of their direct reports." The remaining participants (i.e., those assigned to the low organizational identification condition) read the opposite. Namely, that it had become clear that the company was "a poor fit," that their coworkers held "very different attitudes about the direction of and vision

Table 4
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Estimates (Study 2)

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Unethical pro-organizational behavior (T2)	3.36	.68	(.79)					
2. Moral disengagement (T1)	3.45	.79	.48**	(.88)				
3. Organizational identification (T1)	4.13	.50	.25**	.29**	(.73)			
4. Perceived industrial competition (T1)	3.82	.69	.17**	.23**	.30**	(.75)		
5. Impressive management bias (T1)	3.91	.50	.25**	.25**	.40**	.39**	(.82)	
6. Affective commitment (T1)	3.75	.55	.18**	.28**	.52**	.15*	.35**	(.78)

Note. N = 240; T = Time. Coefficient alphas are given in parentheses on the diagonal.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed tests.

Table 5
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses With Moral Disengagement and Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior (Study 2)

	DV = Moral disengagement						DV = Unethical pro-organizational behavior									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
Variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Impressive management bias	.27*	.11	.21	.11	.13	.11	.29**	.09	.23*	.09	.16	.09	.20*	.10	.15	.09
Affective commitment	.32**	.10	.22*	.11	.23*	.10	.13	.08	.05	.09	–.04	.09	.05	.09	–.03	.08
Organizational identification			.25*	.12	.26*	.12			.23*	.10	.14	.10	.27**	.10	.19*	.09
Perceived competition					.14	.08							.04	.07	–.00	.06
Organizational Identification × Perceived Competition					.30**	.11							.41**	.09	.31**	.09
Moral disengagement											.36**	.05			.33**	.05
F	13.36**		10.56**		8.97**		9.00**		7.73**		19.64**		9.11**		15.82**	
R^2	.10		.12		.16		.07		.09		.25		.16		.29	
ΔR^2			.02*		.04**				.02*		.16**		.07**		.13**	

Note. $N = 240$. DV = dependent variable. The ΔR^2 in Model 8 was calculated based on the change from Model 7 to Model 8.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

for the company," and that they had "very little personal interaction with other people at the company, outside of their direct reports."

All then went on to read about a challenging work situation they presently faced involving their lowest performing direct report, Tom, who consistently failed to improve, despite repeated help and feedback. Given that this employee's performance had begun to harm both their team and the company, it had become clear that they would soon need to fire him. However, a second option had also recently presented itself. Namely, an HR manager from another company had recently contacted them, indicating that this same employee had applied for a job and that they were prepared to hire him, but first wanted to get the participant's candid personal evaluation.

The participant thus faced a difficult choice. He or she could either give this HR manager a (honest) negative evaluation, effectively ensuring that Tom would not be hired. Or, the participant could provide this HR manager with a (dishonest) glowing recommendation, thereby ensuring that Tom became this other company's problem. This ethical dilemma was adapted from one of the 6 original UPB dilemmas included in Umphress et al.'s (2010) scale of UPB, which we employed in the Study 2.

To manipulate the level of competitiveness characterizing the choice context described above, we designed the vignette such that half the participants (those randomly assigned to the cooperative interorganizational relationship condition) read that over the years, their company and the company of the HR manager seeking their evaluation of Tom, the low performing employee, had "developed a very cooperative relationship." Additionally, they read that, "In fact, the two companies are currently in the process of forming an alliance to jointly explore the international market." The remaining half of participants (those randomly assigned to the competitive interorganizational relationship condition) read that over the years, these same two companies had "been competing fiercely for market share. In fact, the two companies are well known rivals in the industry."

After reading the vignette, participants completed a posttask questionnaire containing the study's dependent measures.

Measures

The measures included measures of participants' reported organizational identification with their company and the reported relationship between the two companies in the scenario

Table 6
Results of Indirect and Conditional Indirect Relationships (Study 2)

Organizational identification → Moral disengagement → UPB			
Relationships	*B*	*SE*	95% bias-corrected CI
Indirect relationship	.17	.04	[.09, .27]
Conditional indirect relationships			
Higher level of competition (+1 *SD*)	.21	.05	[.12, .33]
Lower level of competition (–1 *SD*)	.07	.04	[–.00, .17]
Difference	.14	.05	[.04, .26]

Note. $N = 240$. UPB = unethical pro-organizational behavior; CI = confidence interval. The indirect effect and conditional indirect effect tests were based on 5,000 bootstrapping resamples.

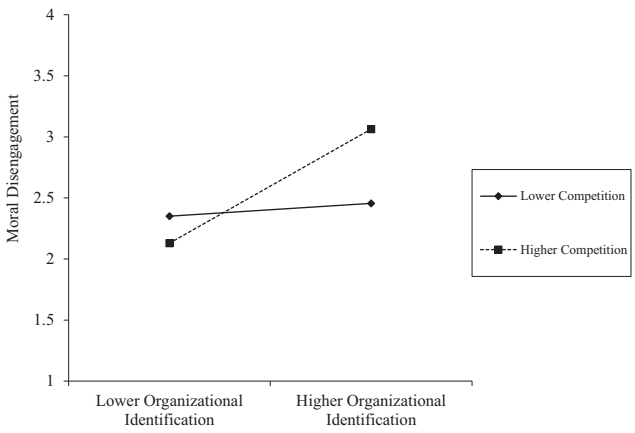

Figure 1. Interaction between organizational identification and interorganizational competition on moral disengagement (Study 2).

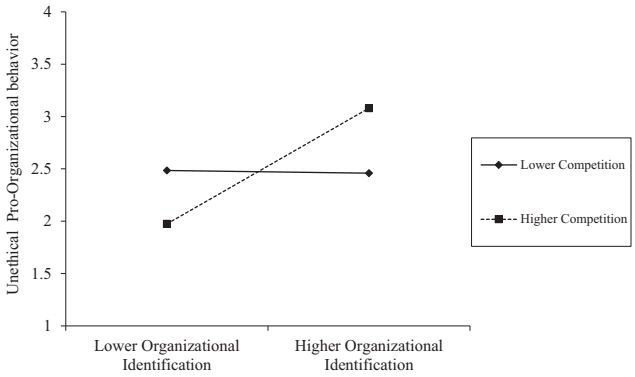

Figure 2. Interaction between organizational identification and interorganizational competition on unethical pro-organizational behavior (Study 2).

(i.e., manipulation checks), participants' likelihood of engaging in the UPB described in the scenario, and their reported moral disengagement.

To check that participants responded to our two manipulations as intended, we first asked them to rate their agreement with the statements, "I would feel strongly identified with" and "I would feel a part of" the company in the scenario (7-point Likert scales; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), which we collapsed to form a single scale of reported organizational identification (α = .92). We then had participants respond to the following question assessing the perceived relationship between the two companies in the scenario: "Based on the scenario you just read, how would you describe the business relationship between your company and the company which is seeking your evaluation of Tom?" (1 = *cooperative*; 2 = *competitive*). To assess participants' likelihood of engaging in UPB, we had them respond to a single item inquiring, "How likely would you be to write a glowing recommendation letter for Tom?" (7-point Likert scales; 1 = *not at all likely*, 7 = *very likely*). Finally, to assess their anticipated level of moral disengagement, participants completed the same context-specific three-item adapted scale of moral disengagement as used in Study 2 (7-point Likert scales; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; α = .92).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation check. Our manipulations of organizational identification and interorganizational relations worked. An independent samples *t* test revealed that participants assigned to the high organizational identification condition reported significantly higher identification with their company (M = 6.16, SD = .89) than those in the low organizational identification condition (M = 4.20, SD = 1.51), $t(181) = -10.72$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, a chi-square test showed participants were largely accurate in reporting the actual relationship described as existing between the two companies in their assigned scenario (95% accurate in cooperative relationship condition and 96% accurate in the competitive relationship condition), $\chi^2 = 148.79$, $p < .001$.

Hypotheses testing. Table 7 presents the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for the variables in this study.

Table 7
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Internal Consistency Estimates (Study 3)

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Unethical pro-organizational behavior	4.07	2.07			
2. Moral disengagement	3.76	1.62	.64**	(.92)	
3. Organizational identification[a]	1.50	.50	.14*	.03	(.92)
4. Interorganizational relations[b]	1.50	.50	.24**	.27**	–.03

Note. N = 183. Coefficient alphas are given in parentheses on the diagonal.
[a] Organizational identification was coded: 1 = low level, 2 = high level. [b] Inter-organizational relations was coded: 1 = cooperation condition, 2 = competition condition.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed tests.

To test our main hypotheses, we conducted an ANOVA of participants' likelihood of engaging in UPB in the scenario. As in previous studies, this analysis revealed a main effect of organizational identification. Participants high in organizational identification reported being more likely to engage in UPB (M = 4.36, SD = 2.10) than those lower in organizational identification (M = 3.77, SD = 1.99), $t(181) = -1.94$, p = .04, $F(1, 181) = 3.78$, p = .05. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was again supported. The ANOVA likewise revealed a main effect of interorganizational relationship on UPB (cooperative: M = 3.57, SD = 2.02 vs. competitive: M = 4.55, SD = 2.00), $t(181) = -3.57$, $p < .01$, $F(1, 181) = 10.91$, $p < .01$, and more importantly, the predicted organizational identification × relationship interaction, $F(1, 179) = 3.70$, p = .05. As shown in Figure 3, when the interorganizational relationship was competitive, highly identified participants reported being more likely (M = 5.16, SD = 1.88) than those lower in identification (M = 3.98, SD = 1.96) to engage in UPB, $t(90) = -2.93$, $p < .01$. However, when it was cooperative, no such difference emerged. That is, when the interorganizational context was described as cooperative, regardless of their level of organizational identification, participants reported similar intentions (and on average less inclination) to behave unethically on behalf of their organization (M = 3.60, SD = 2.04 vs. M =

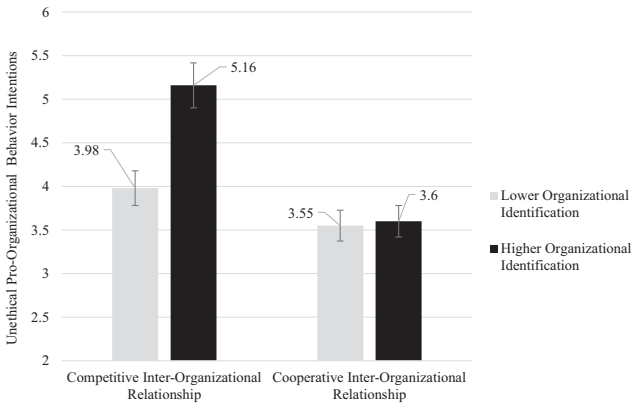

Figure 3. Interaction between organizational identification and interorganizational relationship on unethical pro-organizational behavior intentions (Study 3).

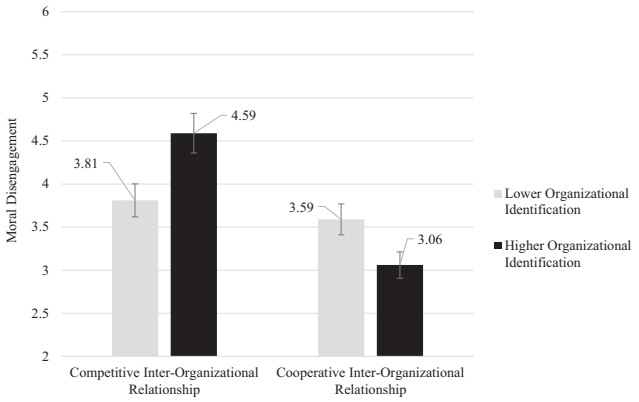

Figure 4. Interaction between organizational identification and interorganizational relationship on moral disengagement (Study 3).

3.55, $SD = 2.03$), $t(89) = -.12$, *ns*. This last finding supports our proposition that UPB is in part an intergroup phenomenon.

Finally, we tested whether moral disengagement mediated the above moderating effect of interorganizational relationship by performing a moderated mediation analyses (Preacher et al., 2007). Specifically, we first tested (via an ANOVA) whether organizational identification and interorganizational relationship interacted to significantly affect UPB intentions, and as already reported, found that they did. Second, we performed an ANOVA on moral disengagement and found that organizational identification and interorganizational relationship also interacted to affect participants' moral disengagement, $F(1, 179) = 8.39$, $p < .01$. As can be seen in Figure 4, when the interorganizational relationship was competitive, highly identified participants showed higher moral disengagement ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.51$) than less highly identified participants ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.46$), $t(90) = -2.53$, $p = .01$. However, when it was cooperative, no such difference emerged ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.54$ vs. $M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.65$), $t(89) = 1.60$, *ns*. Third, to test whether moral disengagement mediated the above interaction effect on UPB intentions, we regressed participants' reported likelihood of engaging in UPB on organizational identification, interorganizational relationship, the interaction term, and moral disengagement. Upon doing so, we found that the relationship between disengagement and UPB intentions remained significant ($B = .78$, $SE = .08$), $t(182) = 10.26$, $p < .01$, while the interaction term did not ($B = .09$, $SE = .48$), $t(182) = .20$, $p = .85$. More importantly, as can be seen in Table 8, a subsequent bootstrapping analysis (5,000 random samples) showed that the indirect effect of organizational identification on UPB via moral disengagement was stronger in the competitive relationship condition ($B = .64$, $SE = .26$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.15, 1.17], excluding zero) than in the cooperative relationship condition ($B = -.43$, $SE = .28$, 95% bias-corrected CI [–.97, .10], including zero). The difference between the indirect relationships was significant ($B_{diff} = 1.07$, $SE = .39$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.38, 1.86], excluding zero). Taken together, the above results thus provide support for our entire model.

General Discussion

In this research, we explored the process by which organizational identification influences UPB, along with a key boundary condition. Results across three studies provided empirical evidence that organizational identification is related to UPB, in part due to moral disengagement, and that a competitive interorganizational relationship further enhances this effect. Below, we discuss theoretical and practical implications, along with some limitations of the present work.

Theoretical Implications

This research makes several theoretical contributions. As noted at the outset, prior organizational research has focused overwhelmingly on unethical behaviors motivated by self-interest (Greenberg, 2002; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Reynolds, 2006; Thau et al., 2015), implicitly assuming that selfish motives and behaviors are the major source of unethical conduct. However, as part of the emergent literature on ethical challenges of pro-organizational motives and behaviors (e.g., Thau et al., 2015; Umphress et al., 2010), the present work demonstrates that organizational identification can likewise be a powerful motivator of unethical behavior. That pro-organizational motives and behaviors have a dark side is not surprising given that social identity theory and research have long established the dark side of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Nevertheless, in view of the growing influence of work organizations in people's lives and on their well-being, it is important to explore how social psychological identification with an organization can lead to negative consequences, including social and moral hazards.

At the same time, our research also sheds light on the specific psychological mechanism through which organizational identification relates to UPB. Establishing the mediating mechanism is important, as it helps explain the paradoxical phenomenon of benign (moral) intentions leading to unethical conduct. Our research shows that it is not identification per se, but moral reasoning that is associated with UPB when employees face dilemmas between advancing their company's interests and adhering to societal moral standards. Although organizational identification is positively related to moral disengagement, we do not suggest that this relationship exists prior to or outside of the particular moral dilemmas on which we focus here. Rather, it is prompted when organizational members are confronted with a trade-off dilemma

Table 8
Results of Conditional Indirect Relationships (Study 3)

Organizational identification → Moral disengagement → UPB			
Relationships	*B*	*SE*	95% bias-corrected CI
Conditional indirect relationships			
Competition condition	.64	.26	[.15, 1.17]
Cooperation condition	–.43	.28	[–.97, .10]
Difference	1.07	.39	[.38, 1.86]

Note. $N = 183$. UPB = unethical pro-organizational behavior; CI = confidence interval. The conditional indirect effect tests were based on 5,000 bootstrapping resamples.

in which a choice must be made between defending the pragmatic interests of their organization and adhering to societal moral values. Moral disengagement provides a rationale for those who feel strongly identified with the organization to stand by their organizational interests versus the hyper-norms of society—one that can be either temporally induced for a specific dilemma or competitive situation, as evidenced in our vignette study, or alternatively, routinely used to justify unethical pro-organizational activities, as evidenced by our survey studies.

Finally, we contribute to UPB research itself by bringing back the original intergroup dynamics perspective of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). In particular, we argue and provide evidence suggesting that the intergroup perspective is an important addition to Umphress and Bingham's (2011) theoretical model, which theorized about various conditions that lead to moral disengagement (neutralization) and identified potential moderators of UPB (e.g., organizational culture, individual moral development), but largely neglected the phenomenon's intergroup nature. The (competitive) nature of intergroup relationships, in our view, is a condition that exerts not only a main effect on moral disengagement, but also a moderating effect on the relationship between organizational identification and moral disengagement. Highlighting the role of intergroup relations therefore enriches and expands the theory of UPB.

Managerial Implications

In addition to these theoretical contributions, it is also worth briefly touching upon some implications of the present research for managerial practice. Unethical behaviors have proven costly for organizations (Cialdini et al., 2004), especially those behaviors conducted in the name of the organization, which are more likely to undermine stakeholders' organizational trust or even cause the collapse of an organization. In view of the dark side of organizational identification, managers should be aware of blind allegiance and loyalty to the organization among their employees and instead emphasize the importance of social responsibility and caring for all stakeholders. The linkage between organizational identification and moral disengagement we document here suggests that loyal organizational members are under greater pressure to relax their moral reasoning to execute their citizenship behavior, especially when stakes are high in a competitive environment. To counterbalance the tendency toward moral disengagement, organizations and managers need to clearly highlight the importance of hyper ethical values in organizational policies and practices and integrate such ethical standards into managerial decision-making. At the same time, organizations should strive to create a culture of social responsibility so as to reduce UPB (May et al., 2015) and reinforce *ethical* pro-organizational behavior.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Last but not least, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge a few limitations of the present work worth addressing in future research. First, although we employed two country samples in this research, we did not explore the impact of culture or cultural differences on UPB. While not our focus in the present research, cultural value differences could exert either main or moderating effects on UPB or moral disengagement. For example, research has identified individualism as a major factor underlying interpersonally focused opportunistic behaviors, whereas collectivism can drive intergroup or interfirm opportunistic behaviors (Chen, Peng, & Saparito, 2002). Investigating if and how the cultural value dimension of individualism-collectivism might shape UPB would thus be a fruitful endeavor.

Another limitation of this research lies in our operationalization of the construct of UPB. Across our three studies, we operationalized this construct in a number of ways, namely, through an objective observation of lying on behalf of one's organization (store), a general measure of self-reported UPB, and self-reported behavioral intentions of engaging in UPB. However, UPB can be measured on two bases: the types of hyper moral norms being violated or the types of pro-organizational behaviors that violate given hyper norms. Our studies did not clearly distinguish the two, focusing instead primarily on the latter. For future research, a comprehensive typology of UPB would greatly expand the list of potential UPB antecedents and processes.

Third, there was inconsistency in our operationalization of interorganizational relations. In the survey study (Study 2), we operationalized it as the level of perceived industry competition, but in the vignette study (Study 3), we operationalized it as a competitive versus cooperative relationship between participants' firm and another firm. Study 3 thus raises the possibility that cooperative relationships may weaken the link between organizational identification and UPB, just as competitive relationships strengthen the link. Future research could be designed to tease out different moderating effects of competition as opposed to cooperation. Relatedly, while our primary focus in this study was on the exacerbating effect of a specific moderator, future research might likewise investigate potential intraorganizational mitigating factors, such as ethical leadership (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005), moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002), or moral identification (May et al., 2015), and whether such factors may curb the influence of moral disengagement.

Finally, it is worth noting that our participants in studies 1 and 2 were predominantly female (approximately 90%). While this was not the case in Study 3, future search might nevertheless draw upon samples more balanced in gender so as to examine the potential influence of gender on UPB.

Conclusion

In closing, using field and vignette methods, we found converging evidence that organizational identification encourages UPB through the mechanism of moral disengagement. We also found that this effect is stronger when the interorganizational context is competitive as opposed to cooperative. Our results thus extend knowledge of UPB by highlighting the intergroup perspective, and open up new avenues of research on the ethical challenges of prosocial motives, attitudes, and behaviors.

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Received March 5, 2015
Revision received March 8, 2016
Accepted March 10, 2016 ■