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Running Head: MORAL DISENGAGEMENT IN SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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Abstract

Sexual harassment represents aggressive behavior that is often enacted instrumentally, in response to a threatened sense of masculinity and male identity. To date, however, theoretical attention to the social cognitive processes that regulate workplace harassment is scant. This article presents the development and preliminary validation of the Moral Disengagement in Sexual Harassment Scale (MDiSH); a self-report measure of moral disengagement in the context of hostile work environment harassment. Three studies (total N = 797) document the excellent psychometric properties of this new scale. Male U.K. university students (Study 1: N = 322) and U.S. working males (Studies 2 and 3: N = 475) completed the MDiSH and an array of measures for construct validation. The MDiSH exhibited positive correlations with sexual harassment myth acceptance, male gender identification, and hostile sexism. In Study 3, participants were exposed to a fictitious case of hostile work environment harassment. The MDiSH attenuated moral judgment, negative emotions (guilt, shame, and anger), sympathy, and endorsement of prosocial behavioral intentions (support for restitution) associated with the harassment case. Conversely, the MDiSH increased positive affect (happiness) about the harassment and attribution of blame to the female complainant. Implications for practice and future research avenues are discussed.

Keywords: moral disengagement, sexual harassment, cognition, attitudes, measurement

“It Was Only Harmless Banter!” The Development and Preliminary Validation of the Moral  
Disengagement in Sexual Harassment Scale

Sexual harassment remains a pervasive social phenomenon that is widespread across industries, occupations, and geographical regions (see McDonald, 2012; O’Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, & Lean, 2009 for reviews). Recent survey findings report that “one in two (55%) women in the European Union have been a victim of sexual harassment since the age of 15 and 21% in the last year before the survey” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2014, p.98). The deleterious consequences of sexual harassment for victims (e.g., decreased job satisfaction; posttraumatic stress disorder) and organizations (e.g., increased absenteeism; greater employee turnover) are well documented (Chan, Lam, Chow, & Cheung, 2008; Dionisi, Barling, & Dupre, 2012; Fitzgerald, Collinsworth, & Lawson, 2013; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Larsen & Fitzgerald, 2010; Pina & Gannon, 2012).

The tripartite model (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995) explicates that sexually harassing behavior is categorized into the broad domains of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Gender harassment is the most prevalent type of sexual harassment (Leskinen, Cortina, & Kabat, 2011; Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003). This category encompasses verbal, physical, and symbolic behavior such as sexist jokes, sexual epithets, and display of sexually explicit materials, all intending to insult and derogate women rather than being an expression of sexual or romantic desire (Konik & Cortina, 2008). Unwanted sexual attention consists of sexual and romantic overtures (e.g., sexual comments; pressure for dates) that are perceived by the recipient as unwanted, unreciprocated, and offensive. Sexual coercion, in contrast, represents the exploitation of social power in order to elicit sexual cooperation.

Recently, the categories of unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion have been subsumed under the umbrella term “sexual-advance harassment” (Holland & Cortina, 2013; Leskinen et al., 2011; Leskinen & Cortina, 2014) which is aligned with the legal expression “hostile work environment harassment” (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Paetzold & O’Leary-Kelly, 1994); the social-

sexual misconduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive to adversely alter the conditions of the victim's employment and creates an intimidating, hostile, and abusive working environment (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014; Wiener et al., 2010).

Although researchers have endeavored to identify the characteristics of male sexual harassers (e.g., Begany & Milburn, 2002; Krings & Facchin, 2009; Luthar & Luthar, 2008; Pryor, 1987; Stillman, White, Yamawaki, Ridge, & Copley, 2009), there has been a dearth of research attending to the social-cognitive mechanisms and self-regulatory processes that inhibit or facilitate sexually harassing behavior. Indeed, many scholars now postulate that sexual harassment is a moral transgression (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1996, 1999; O'Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001; Vaux, 1993) and an act of goal-directed aggression (Farley, 1978; Fitzgerald, 1993; Kelly, 1988; O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000; Page & Pina, 2015; Quina, 1990; Schweinle, Cofer, & Schatz, 2009) usually motivated by sexist antipathy toward women as a subordinate out-group rather than arising from a need for sexual gratification (e.g., Maass, & Cadinu, 2006; Hitlan, Pryor, Hesson-McInnis, & Olson, 2009; Holland & Cortina, 2013). This poses important questions that warrant further theoretical and empirical attention: How can law abiding, otherwise considerate people engage in sexually harassing acts despite recognition that their conduct is likely to be socially sanctioned and considered offensive by the recipient and bystanders? Are there social-cognitive strategies that people employ to neutralize and justify sexually harassing behavior?

Relevant to these questions, sexual harassment arises from reciprocal interaction between individual predisposition to harass and favorable contextual factors (DeCoster, Estes, & Mueller, 1999; Dekker & Barling, 1998; O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998; Perry, Schmidtke, & Kulik, 1998; Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993; Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995; Pryor & Whalen, 1997). Thus, individuals with a chronic predisposition to harass will usually only engage in harassing behavior when exposed to local social and management norms that are viewed as condoning and permissive of it. On this basis, social-cognitive theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986) provides a useful framework for understanding the factors that inhibit or facilitate sexual harassment (Page & Pina, 2015). SCT explains human behavior as resulting from reciprocal interactions between: (1) cognitive and personal factors, (2) behavioral factors, and (3) environmental events. According to Bandura, prosocial and

antisocial behavior is self-regulated through the ongoing exercise of moral agency that is either inhibitive (i.e., a person's ability to refrain from behaving inhumanely) or proactive (i.e., a person's ability to behave humanely). However, cognitive dissonance arises when individuals seek to gain valuable benefits that result from immoral behavior. To reduce dissonant cognitions, Bandura argued that people employ various mechanisms to subjectively restructure their harmful conduct. Collectively, these strategies are known as "mechanisms of moral disengagement" (Bandura, 1990, 1999). In this paper, we postulate that mechanisms of moral disengagement represent important social cognitions that function to facilitate and perpetuate male sexual harassment of women<sup>1</sup>.

#### The role of moral disengagement in sexual harassment perpetration

The notion of "cognitive dissonance" (Festinger, 1957) represents the need of individuals to maintain consistency between their valuing of moral principles and perception of their behavior as upholding moral standards. A person's perception of their behavior as incongruent with their moral principles evokes a state of dissonance. This dissonance can occur anticipatorily when an individual contemplates committing an immoral act (Festinger, 1964). However, cognitive dissonance is also produced after immoral behavior when people become aware of their violation of moral standards. Thus, dissonance occurs when a person's immoral actions are inconsistent with their positive self-concept of being good and moral. In attenuating the dissonant cognitions that result from these competing motivations, people employ cognitive strategies to justify immoral behavior. This was demonstrated in a classic experiment conducted by Festinger and Carlsmith (1959). These researchers paid participants either \$1 or \$20 to lie to another participant about how interesting a boring task was. Those participants who were paid \$1 experienced cognitive dissonance because they believed the task was boring but had lied to another participant that it was interesting. To eliminate cognitive dissonance and justify their unethical behavior (i.e., lying to another person without good cause) these participants modified their attitude toward the task, convincing themselves that the task was actually interesting and hence they were not really lying about it.

In resolving dissonant cognitions, SCT explains that people continuously self-regulate their thoughts, emotions, and actions by evaluating their own behavior according to their internal moral

standards (Bandura, 1990, 1999). These moral standards usually inhibit immoral conduct by protecting against negative emotions (e.g., guilt and shame) that arise when standards are violated. However, when motivated to engage in detrimental behavior (such as sexual harassment) that conflicts with their moral self-concept, people subconsciously employ various moral disengagement strategies to eradicate any cognitive dissonance arising from this internal moral conflict.

There are eight mechanisms that operate at four distinct loci within the self-regulatory system (Bandura, 1990, 1999). At the behavior locus, people cognitively restructure detrimental behavior as being socially or morally acceptable (moral justification). For example, gender harassing acts such as sexist joke-telling serve the social function of strengthening male in-group cohesion and solidarity (Thomae & Pina, 2015). Additionally, harassing behavior such as “girl watching” (see Quinn, 2002) fulfills the social purpose of building a collective masculine identity among members of male peer groups, and promoting loyalty and adherence to masculine gender norms (Quinn, 2002; Saunders & Easta, 2013). Euphemistic labeling, on the other hand, involves the use of sanitizing language to cognitively disguise the appearance and meaning of harmful behavior. This occurs when harassers protest that their actions were only “harmless fun” (Kelly, 1988), “flirting,” “banter,” “joking” (Tata, 2000) or a “prank” (Bill & Naus, 1992) when confronted with the act. Advantageous comparison involves comparing transgressive conduct to behavior that is considered worse and more flagrant. In this context, people may compare milder acts of harassment such as making sexual comments to a female co-worker against severer behaviors such as physical attempts at sexual touching, thus trivializing the original action.

Mechanisms operating at the agency locus allow people to obscure and minimize feelings of personal responsibility by externally attributing the causes of detrimental behavior to social pressures or the dictates of legitimate authority (displacement of responsibility) or by diffusing their personal contribution to immoral behavior committed within a group context (diffusion of responsibility). For example, people displace responsibility for harassment onto workplace management perceived to be permissive of the behavior (see Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003; Pryor et al., 1995). Alternatively, when misconduct is enacted by multiple perpetrators within a hostile work environment (Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003) or within smaller male peer groups (Quinn, 2002; Saunders & Easta, 2013), it can

be seen as a form of collective action and group decision-making that will obscure feelings of personal accountability through ascribing responsibility for harassment to other members of the organization or social group. At the outcome locus, people cognitively avoid, distort, or minimize the harmful effects of harassing actions, thus further weakening internal moral control. The invisibility of any suffering or a perceived lack of protest from the victim enables people to distort the negative consequences of sexually harassing behavior as pleasurable or flattering. Also, a lack of intervention from bystanders and other group members may contribute to the cognitive avoidance of harmful effects evoked from harassment.

Finally, at the recipient locus, people vilify the victim of injurious behavior as being blameworthy (attribution of blame) and a sub-human object (dehumanization), thereby eliminating any remorse and empathic concern. Dehumanization occurs when women are implicitly associated with animals (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004; Rudman & Mescher, 2012), or perceived as sexual objects (Galdi, Maass, & Cadinu, 2013; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, & Puvia, 2011; Rudman & Mescher, 2012), thus placing them at a greater risk of victimization for sexual harassment (see Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Recent research also found that victims of hostile work environment harassment receive greater blame from males who are higher in self-reported proclivity (i.e., likelihood) to sexually harass (Key & Ridge, 2011). Consequently, through these eight mechanisms, immoral behavior such as harassment can be cognitively reconstructed by the individual as innocuous and justified through removal of its moral content. See Figure 1 for presentation of the eight mechanisms of moral disengagement within the self-regulatory system.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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### Sexual harassment myth acceptance

Recent research assessing social cognitions that facilitate harassment has focused on sexual harassment myth acceptance (SHMA; Diehl, Rees, & Bohner, 2012; Diehl, Glaser, & Bohner, 2014; Herrera, Herrera, & Exposito, 2014; Lonsway, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Vanselow, Bohner, Becher, & Siebler, 2010). Sexual harassment myths encompass societal beliefs that: (1) women invite unwanted sexual behavior, (2) sexual conduct at work is normal, natural, and/or inevitable, and (3) that sexually harassing acts are harmless and pleasurable (Lonsway et al., 2008). Empirical studies document that SHMA is positively correlated with sexism and hostility toward women, but negatively correlated with ideological support for feminism (Lonsway et al., 2008). SHMA correlates positively with men's self-reported proclivity to sexually harass (Vanselow et al., 2010) and predicts actual sexually harassing behavior toward a computer simulated female chat partner (Diehl et al., 2012). Furthermore, SHMA has been observed to mediate the link between hostile sexism and gender harassment (operationalized as the sending of sexist jokes). As such, hostile sexist men who sexually harassed a female target over the Internet appeared to use harassment myths to excuse and justify their behavior (Diehl et al., 2012).

Bandura (1986) proposed that mechanisms of moral disengagement are embodied within rape myths that serve to blame the victim and exonerate the rapist. This notion may also extend to myths surrounding sexual harassment. Thus, moral disengagement mechanisms and sexual harassment myths exhibit conceptual proximity in terms of their common aim; to deny personal responsibility for harassing behavior, downplay its harmful consequences, and blame the victim. However, in elaborating on the construct of sexual harassment myths, we assert that the framework of moral disengagement provides further elucidation of the social cognitive mechanisms that facilitate sexual harassment. The development of an empirical instrument to measure moral disengagement strategies in this context will enable researchers to test additional exonerating strategies that enable harassing behavior to be rationalized and justified within the work environment.

### Measurement of moral disengagement

Using the Moral Disengagement Scale (MDS), Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) tested a conceptual model of the paths of influence through which moral disengagement affects behavior. Bandura et al. observed that moral disengagement was positively correlated with aggressive behavior and inversely related to prosocial behavior among Italian elementary and high school students. High moral disengagers were more inclined to engage in delinquent behavior, exhibited higher levels of aggression, and displayed reduced guilt and prosocial orientation relative to those individuals who were least susceptible to moral disengagement. As a theoretical construct, moral disengagement has been measured and tested across diverse behavioral contexts. For example, it is a positive predictor of juvenile offending (Shulman, Cauffman, Piquero, & Fagan, 2011) aggression and delinquency (Bandura et al., 1996; Caprara et al., 2014; Pelton, Gound, Forehand, & Brody, 2004; White-Ajmani & Bursik, 2014), corporate crime (e.g., Bandura, Caprara, & Zsolnai, 2000; Detert, Sweitzer, & Trevino, 2008), dishonest academic behavior (e.g., Shu, Gino, & Bazerman, 2011), anti-social conduct in sport (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007; Tractlet, Moret, Ohl, & Clemence, 2015), and civic offenses such as vandalism (e.g., Caprara, Fida, Vecchione, Tramantano, & Barbaranelli, 2009). However, as previously stated, the construct of moral disengagement has received almost no empirical or theoretical application to the context of sexual violence. Fairly recently, moral disengagement was proposed to facilitate wartime rape committed by male soldiers (Henry, Ward, & Hirschberg, 2004). More recent research conducted in the U.S. also found that moral disengagement positively predicted stronger rape supportive attitudes among young males belonging to college fraternities (Carroll, 2009).

Researchers have developed context-specific instruments to measure moral disengagement and have reported different factor structures of these measures. Self-report scales measuring moral disengagement in the realms of interpersonal aggression (Bandura et al., 1996; Caprara et al., 2014; Pelton et al., 2004), and violation of civic obligations (Caprara et al., 2009) have reported a unidimensional factor structure. In contrast, measurement of moral disengagement in the context of capital punishment (Osofsky, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2005) has resulted in a four-factor structure. These four factors correspond to the four theoretical loci of moral disengagement that lie at the core of

Bandura's (1990, 1999) conceptual model. Collectively, these findings suggest that measurement of moral disengagement may be context- dependent.

#### The Moral Disengagement in Sexual Harassment Scale (MDiSH)

The primary objective of the present research was to develop and validate the Moral Disengagement in Sexual Harassment Scale (MDiSH); a self-report instrument designed to measure mechanisms of moral disengagement in the behavioral context of sexual harassment. The items contained in the MDiSH reflect an array of social-sexual behavior that broadly map on to the two superordinate categories of gender harassment and sexual-advance harassment; both of which create a hostile work environment (Holland & Cortina, 2013; Leskinen et al., 2011; Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). Based on our conceptual framework and a comprehensive literature review of moral disengagement, items were generated to represent each of the eight mechanisms. Examples of social-sexual behavior represented in the MDiSH include the display of sexual materials, sexual jokes, and sexual gestures (examples of gender harassment); sexual comments and sexual demands (examples of sexual-advance harassment).

These items were reviewed by three subject matter experts with research expertise directly related to the domains of sexual harassment and moral disengagement. This ensured that: (1) items sufficiently represent the mechanism they are intended to measure, (2) items are balanced to reflect the two superordinate categories of sexual harassment (gender harassment and sexual-advance harassment), and (3) items are clearly worded, concise and unambiguous. Items were re-evaluated and amended on the basis of this feedback, resulting in a final set of 32 items that were considered to have acceptable content and face validity. Parallel to other self-report measures of moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007; Caprara et al., 2009) each mechanism was represented by a subset of four items. All items were presented with a Likert-type response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Although social-sexual behavior that constitutes gender harassment and sexual-advance harassment is prevalent in a wide range of work environments such as the military (e.g., Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999; Leskinen et al., 2011; Pryor et al., 1995; Williams, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1999), firefighting (e.g., Baigent, 2005) and police (e.g., de

Haas & Timmerman, 2010), the MDiSH items are situated in the general work context in order to capture a wider array of employment sectors.

#### Assessing convergent and discriminant validity of the MDiSH

To establish the concurrent construct validity of the MDiSH, it was administered alongside theoretically meaningful constructs across three studies. As initial evidence of convergent validity in Studies 1 and 2, we hypothesized that the MDiSH would display a strong positive correlation with SHMA (measured using the ISHMA scale; Lonsway et al., 2008). However, despite their conceptually similar function, we expected the MDiSH to be empirically separable from SHMA due to the distinct content domains that structure these theoretical constructs. Thus, through exploratory factor analyses (EFA) of the combined items of both measures, it was predicted that the MDiSH would reveal preliminary evidence of discriminant validity.

It must also be noted that mechanisms of moral disengagement do not exclusively serve to self-regulate an individual's own transgressive behavior. Importantly, moral disengagement also influences how immoral actions of others are perceived, especially of those who share a common group identity with the perpetrators of the misconduct (Bandura et al., 1996; Castano, 2008; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). As further evidence of convergent validity in Study 3, we therefore predicted that the MDiSH would be positively correlated with male gender identification. Experimental studies report that males who self-report stronger gender identification engage in more gender harassing behavior toward a female target that is perceived to violate traditional gender roles (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Maass & Cadinu, 2006; Maass et al., 2003; Siebler et al., 2008). Men who self-report stronger gender identification also express attitudes that are conducive to the sexual harassment of women (Wade, 2001; Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001). It is, therefore, plausible to predict that stronger male gender identification will positively relate to the use of exonerating strategies serving to deny, downplay, and justify harassing behavior in the work arena.

Leach et al. (2008) postulated that group identification is composed of cognitive and affective elements that fit within two hierarchical components: (1) self-investment- the value and emotional significance attached to the group, including the chronic salience and importance of this group membership, and (2) self-definition- defined as the perception of similarity and commonality

within the group and between group members. Studies have shown that people with stronger self-investment in a group employ exonerating cognitions to legitimize and justify immoral behavior committed by fellow in-group members (e.g., Leach et al., 2008; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006). It was anticipated, on this basis, that greater self-investment would be positively related to the use of moral disengagement mechanisms in the legitimization and justification of male social-sexual misconduct. It was also predicted that stronger self-definition would be positively correlated with the MDiSH. The integration of women into traditionally masculine occupations such as the military may pose a social identity threat because the presence of women decreases the perceived cohesiveness, prototypicality, and homogeneity of men within this type of masculine work environment.

Alongside gender identification, it was predicted that the ideological variables of hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS) toward women (Glick & Fiske, 1996) would be differentially correlated with the MDiSH. Studies consistently document that men who are higher in HS (but not BS) evaluate ambiguous social-sexual misconduct as less indicative of hostile work environment harassment when using the “reasonable person” legal standard (see Wiener & Hurt, 2000; Wiener, Hurt, Russell, Mannen, & Gasper, 1997; Wiener et al., 2010). It has also been reported that HS (but not BS) positively predicts greater tolerance of sexual harassment (Russell & Trigg, 2004). Consequently, it was predicted that the MDiSH would be highly positively correlated with HS but would be either moderately positively correlated with BS or uncorrelated with BS.

The MDiSH was predicted to buffer negative group-based emotions experienced in association with an ambiguous case of hostile work environment harassment. A wealth of studies document that people experience the negative emotions of guilt, shame, and anger in connection with the immoral actions of in-group members even when they bear no personal responsibility for these actions (e.g., Leach et al., 2008; Lickel, Steele, & Schmader, 2011; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Schmader & Lickel, 2006). These negative emotions arise when people appraise in-group members as responsible for committing a salient illegitimate action (Shepherd, Spears, & Manstead, 2013a, 2013b). In-group directed anger, in particular, is an “other focused” emotion that is experienced when people attend to the victims of negative in-group behavior (e.g., Gordijn, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, & Dumont, 2006; Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007). Similarly, sympathy is

an “other-focused” emotion that is felt when people focus on the victim’s plight (Iyer et al., 2003). However, exposure to negative in-group behavior may, in fact, enhance positive affect. Maitner, Mackie, and Smith (2007), for example, found that people experience increased satisfaction about aggressive in-group actions following the use of exonerating cognitions to excuse and justify this behavior. Numerous studies report that individual moral disengagement strategies such as attribution of blame (e.g., Doosje & Branscombe, 2003; Roccas et al., 2006) and dehumanization (e.g., Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Leidner et al., 2010) are frequently used to inhibit or attenuate negative group-based emotions. Thus, based on previous empirical findings, it was predicted that the MDiSH would be negatively correlated or uncorrelated with group-based guilt, shame, anger, and sympathy but would be positively correlated with positive affect (measured as happiness) about an ambiguous case of hostile work environment harassment.

As stated earlier, moral disengagement is positively associated with aggressive and delinquent behavior but is inversely related to prosocial behavior (Bandura et al., 1996). The MDiSH was therefore predicted to correlate negatively with judgments of support for prosocial behavioral intentions in the form of restitution (e.g., apology; compensation) being afforded to a female complainant of hostile work environment harassment. It was also predicted that the MDiSH would correlate positively with support for avoidance strategies in the form of physical and psychological distancing from the negative consequences of hostile work environment harassment (e.g., support of the perpetrators in denying and ignoring the behavior).

Carroll (2009) found that moral disengagement (as measured by the MDS) in male college fraternity members was negatively correlated with moral judgment and positively associated with rape supportive attitudes, including greater attribution of blame to a female victim of ambiguous acquaintance rape. Given consensus among many researchers that sexually harassing behavior lies along a continuum of sexual aggression (e.g., Begany & Milburn, 2002; Kelly, 1988; Lonsway et al., 2008; Pina et al., 2009; Quina, 1990), it is feasible to expect this correlational pattern to replicate when moral disengagement (measured by the MDiSH) is tested in the context of an ambiguous case of hostile work environment harassment. Thus, in Study 3, we predicted that the MDiSH would display a negative correlation with moral judgment (operationalized as the perceived moral

acceptability of hostile work environment harassment) and a positive correlation with attribution of blame to the female complainant. In Studies 2 and 3, an impression management (IM) scale was administered in order to assess whether the MDiSH and the other measures used for construct validation were independent of social desirability response bias.

## Method

We present data from three studies conducted to develop and validate the MDiSH scale. We first describe the methodology and sample characteristics of each study before presenting the results and discussion of findings. Studies 1 and 2 were conducted to investigate the general psychometric properties of the MDiSH, obtaining preliminary evidence of the new measure's internal consistency and dimensionality. Based on previous research that tested moral disengagement in the domain of interpersonal aggression (Bandura et al., 1996; Caprara et al., 2014; Pelton et al., 2004) we predicted that the MDiSH will be unidimensional. Therefore, all items representing the eight disengagement mechanisms may be inextricably linked to a common latent trait or cognitive orientation that makes people more or less susceptible to moral disengagement. A further aim of Studies 1 and 2 was to perform an initial assessment of the convergent and discriminant construct validity of the MDiSH in respect to SHMA. Study 3 was conducted to provide more extensive evidence of the new scale's convergent and discriminant validity. In total, 865 participants took part in the three studies, which used varied recruitment procedures as described below. To enhance clarity of presentation, the results are amalgamated by the specific empirical and theoretical issues being examined, rather than on an individual study basis.

## Study 1

Three hundred and thirty eight male students at a University in Southern England volunteered to complete an online survey on “gender relations.” The majority of participants self-identified as White British (78%,  $n = 251$ ) and were aged between 18 and 76 years ( $M = 23.6$ ,  $SD = 8.7$ ). Participants reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual (88.8%,  $n = 302$ ), homosexual (4.3%,  $n = 14$ ), bisexual (4.3%,  $n = 14$ ), and ‘Other’ (0.6%,  $n = 2$ ). Six participants (1.9%) did not disclose their sexual orientation. As the forms of social-sexual behavior represented in the MDiSH were not considered to provide a meaningful behavioral template for homosexual participants, those individuals who stated a homosexual orientation or ‘Other’ category were removed. This resulted in a final sample of 322 participants who were retained for data analysis. Study 1 was conducted online as an Internet survey. Flyers advertising the study were distributed across the University campus. Various University departments were individually contacted and asked to distribute a web link to students’ email accounts. Participants were either entered into a prize draw or received course credit. The study was approved by the University ethics committee. All participants first gave written informed consent and provided certain demographic information. They were then instructed to complete the 32 items of the newly developed MDiSH and the ISHMA scale.

The ISHMA scale (Lonsway et al., 2008) is a 20-item self-report measure of individual differences in sexual harassment myth acceptance. It is a multidimensional scale composed of four distinct facets: (1) Fabrication/Exaggeration (FE; e.g., “Women who claim that they have been sexually harassed are usually exaggerating”), (2) Ulterior Motives (UM; e.g., “Sometimes women make up allegations of sexual harassment to extort money from their employer”), (3) Natural Heterosexuality (NH; e.g., “Women shouldn’t be so quick to take offense when a man at work expresses sexual interest”), and (4) Woman’s Responsibility (WR; e.g., “Women can usually stop unwanted sexual attention by simply telling the man that his behavior is not appreciated”). Previous research has established excellent reliability and validity of the ISHMA scale. For example, the ISHMA is negatively correlated with trait empathy (Diehl et al., 2014) and is positively correlated with sexism and hostility toward women (Lonsway et al., 2008). The ISHMA is also a positive predictor of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention over the Internet (Diehl et al., 2012).



Participants indicate their agreement with items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). In the current research, the ISHMA displayed excellent internal consistency as a global construct (Study 1:  $\alpha = .92$ ; Study 2:  $\alpha = .94$ ) and for its individual subscales (FE: Study 1  $\alpha = .88$ ; Study 2  $\alpha = .91$ ; UM: Study 1  $\alpha = .79$ ; Study 2  $\alpha = .83$ ; NH: Study 1  $\alpha = .79$ ; Study 2  $\alpha = .80$ ; WR: Study 1  $\alpha = .77$ ; Study 2  $\alpha = .77$ ). The MDiSH also displayed excellent internal consistency (Study 1:  $\alpha = .95$ ; Study 2:  $\alpha = .97$ ; Study 3:  $\alpha = .98$ ). Composite mean scores were therefore computed for each participant by averaging across the relevant items of each scale. Participants were fully debriefed in writing upon completion of the study.

## Study 2

As the sample of Study 1 consisted exclusively of university students, it was necessary to examine the psychometric properties of the MDiSH in more diverse samples of the general male population. The second sample consisted of three hundred and thirty two male participants who were recruited online through the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)<sup>2</sup> crowd sourcing platform. All participants in this study were residents of the U.S.A and were paid \$0.70 USD in exchange for their participation. The majority of participants self-identified as American (93.4%,  $n = 303$ ), and were aged between 18 and 72 years ( $M = 30.5$ ,  $SD = 9.8$ ). A high proportion of the sample was single (40.1%,  $n = 133$ ), in a relationship (28%,  $n = 93$ ), or married (27.1%,  $n = 90$ ). In terms of employment status, participants reported being employed (69%,  $n = 229$ ), self-employed (9.3%,  $n = 31$ ), unemployed (6.3%,  $n = 21$ ), students (13.6%,  $n = 45$ ), home-makers (0.9%,  $n = 3$ ), retired (0.6%,  $n = 2$ ) and unable to work (0.3%,  $n = 1$ ). The sample was predominantly employed full-time (69.4%,  $n = 227$ ) and the remaining participants reported being employed either part-time (20.5%,  $n = 67$ ) or through an employment agency (3.1%,  $n = 10$ ). Participants reported working in a broad range of occupations and employment sectors that included; financial services, administration, sales, marketing, healthcare, education, and Information Technology. The measures and procedure were identical to those employed in Study 1 with one exception. All participants were asked to complete the Impression Management (IM) scale of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1988, 1991). This scale consists of 20 items that measure an individual's tendency for self-

presentation in a socially desirable manner. Example items include, “I never swear” and “I sometimes tell lies if I have to.” Participants respond to items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The IM scale displayed excellent internal consistency in this study ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Composite mean scores for each measure were computed by averaging across the relevant items.

### Study 3

The third sample consisted of one hundred and ninety five male participants who were recruited online through the Amazon MTurk crowd sourcing platform. After excluding 37 participants who reported being female, 10 participants who had previously taken part in Study 2, and 5 participants who failed the attention check, 143 participants were retained for data analysis. The majority of the sample self-identified as having American nationality (95.8%,  $n = 137$ ) and were aged between 18 and 72 years ( $M = 32.2$ ,  $SD = 11.5$ ). A high proportion of the sample was single (42.7%,  $n = 61$ ), with the remaining participants being in a relationship (27.3%,  $n = 39$ ), or married (25.2%,  $n = 36$ ). Participants reported being employed (51.7%,  $n = 74$ ), self-employed (18.9%,  $n = 27$ ), unemployed (11.9%,  $n = 17$ ), students (10.5%,  $n = 15$ ), home-makers (0.7%,  $n = 1$ ), retired (1.4%,  $n = 2$ ), unable to work (2.8%,  $n = 4$ ) or did not disclose (2.1%,  $n = 3$ ). The sample was predominantly employed full-time (67.9%,  $n = 76$ ), with the remaining participants being employed part-time (22.3%,  $n = 25$ ), through an employment agency (3.6%,  $n = 4$ ), or did not disclose (6.3%,  $n = 7$ ). All participants in this study were residents of the U.S.A and were paid \$0.70 USD in exchange for their participation.

Participants were informed that the study was examining their responses to recent news events. After providing written informed consent, participants read a fictitious newspaper article<sup>3</sup> depicting an alleged case of hostile work environment harassment in the U.S. military. The excerpt described how a female soldier (Sarah Williams) alleged that a group of male soldiers created a hostile work environment by persistently telling sexual jokes about women, displaying and distributing sexually explicit materials, and making sexual comments in her presence. Sarah Williams repeatedly informed the male soldiers that she was offended by their behavior but it continued

regularly. A 30 second timer was used to ensure that participants paid sufficient attention to the article before completing the MDiSH and the following measures for construct validation:

#### Gender identification

The Leach et al. (2008) 14-item identity scale was adapted to refer explicitly to gender. Self-investment was assessed using 10 items, such as “Being a man is an important part of how I see myself” and “I am glad to be a man” ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Self-definition was assessed using 4 items, such as “I am similar to the average man” and “Men have a lot in common with each other” ( $\alpha = .85$ ). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Composite mean scores of self-investment and self-definition were computed by combining the relevant items. The mean of the self-investment subscale ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) was significantly greater than the scale midpoint (4),  $t(142) = 12.50$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that, overall, participants did identify on this dimension. Likewise, the mean of the self-definition subscale ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) was also significantly greater than the scale midpoint (4),  $t(142) = 7.19$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that participants identified on this dimension of male gender identification.

#### Hostile and benevolent sexism

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) was used to measure hostile and benevolent sexism toward women. Hostile sexism is measured using 11 items, such as “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men” and “Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist” ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Benevolent sexism is measured using 11 items, such as “Women should be cherished and protected by men” and “Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess” ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Participants responded to items of the ASI on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = disagree strongly, 6 = agree strongly). Composite mean scores of hostile and benevolent sexism were computed by averaging across the relevant items.

#### Moral judgment

Thirteen items were used to measure an evaluation of the male soldiers’ conduct as morally wrong. Participants were asked to what extent they considered the behavior of the male soldiers to be

fair (recoded), harmless (recoded), innocent (recoded), unjustified, prejudicial, bad, negative, harsh, wrong, inappropriate, serious, intentional, and immoral. A factor analysis of these thirteen items produced one factor (eigenvalue = 7.59) with factor loadings ranging between .54 and .91. These items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and were reliable ( $\alpha = .94$ ). A composite mean score of moral judgment was computed by averaging across the thirteen items. After reverse coding, higher scores indicate that the behavior of the male soldiers was viewed as being morally unacceptable. The mean of this measure ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) was significantly greater than the scale midpoint (4),  $t(142) = 3.73$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that, overall, participants considered the conduct of the male soldiers to be morally wrong.

#### Group-based emotions

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they felt anger (angry, irritated, outraged), guilt (guilty, regretful, remorseful), shame (ashamed, disgraced, humiliated), sympathy (sympathetic, compassionate, empathetic) and happiness (happy, pleased, amused) in response to the behavior of the male soldiers. These emotion items were adapted from Gordijn et al. (2006) and were interspersed with three filler negative emotions (disgust, fear, sadness) not of primary theoretical interest. A 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) accompanied all emotion items. The 15 emotion items were submitted to EFA using oblique (direct oblimin) rotation and five factors were imposed. Oblique rotation was selected for this analysis because the emotion items were expected to correlate. The rotated solution did not confirm the presence of five distinguishable factors as expected. Factor 1 was identified as negative affect (eigenvalue = 7.38) with nine loadings; “angry”, “irritated”, “outraged”, “guilty”, “regretful”, “remorseful”, “ashamed”, “disgraced”, “humiliated” ( $\alpha = .95$ ) that ranged from .61 to .95 and accounted for 49.19% of the total variance. Factor 2 was identified as happiness with three loadings; “happy”, “pleased”, “amused” ( $\alpha = .85$ ) that ranged from .61 to .92 and accounted for 16.37% of the variance. Factor 3 was identified as sympathy with three loadings; “sympathetic”, “compassionate”, “empathetic” ( $\alpha = .86$ ) that ranged from .67 to .86 and accounted for 9.33% of the variance.

### Support for behavioral intentions

Support for restitution was measured using 7-items such as “The male soldiers should do something to make amends with Sarah” and “The male soldiers should apologize to Sarah.” Support for avoidance was assessed using 7-items that include; “The male soldiers should try to avoid having any further contact with Sarah” and “The male soldiers should do nothing about the situation with Sarah.” A factor analysis of these fourteen items produced two factors. Factor 1 was identified as ‘support for restitution’ (eigenvalue = 6.99) with seven loadings that ranged from .58 to .83. Factor 2 was identified as ‘support for avoidance’ (eigenvalue = 2.25) which also displayed seven loadings (ranging from .53 to .83). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and were reliable for both the restitution ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and avoidance ( $\alpha = .89$ ) subscales. Composite mean scores of support for restitution and avoidance were computed by averaging across the relevant items of each subscale.

### Attribution of blame

The following item assessed the extent to which participants held the female soldier (Sarah Williams) responsible for the events depicted in the article: “How much is Sarah Williams to blame for the incidents that took place?” This was accompanied by a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = completely or totally).

### Impression management

The IM scale was used to measure impression management ( $\alpha = .84$ ). A composite mean score of IM was computed for each participant by averaging across the relevant items.

## Results

### Item analyses

Across Studies 1-3, item analyses were conducted to assess the normality of the MDiSH items through inspection of item means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis. All skewness values for individual scale items were below 2.0 and kurtosis values did not exceed 7.0 (see West, Finch, & Curran, 1995) in each of the three studies, thereby revealing no items of the MDiSH to display evidence of substantial skewness or kurtosis. This is also supported by the non-significant results of the Kolmogoroff-Smirnov test in Study 1 (0.31,  $df = 322$ ,  $p = .20$ ), and Study 3 (0.63,  $df = 143$ ,  $p = .20$ ) thus revealing the MDiSH to display a close to symmetrical normal distribution.

### Exploratory factor analyses

To assess dimensionality, EFA of the 32 MDiSH items was conducted across the three studies. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy was acceptable: Study 1: .95; Study 2: .97; Study 3: .96. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity attained statistical significance in each of the three studies (all  $p$ 's  $< .001$ ). The 32 items of the MDiSH were therefore suitable for factor analyses. EFAs were performed using maximum likelihood estimation and oblique (direct oblimin) rotation. The use of oblique rotation is highly recommended in psychological research (Costello & Osborne, 2005) and was selected for these analyses because the eight mechanisms of moral disengagement are theoretically related and were therefore expected to correlate. This consistently resulted in the retention of one factor across Studies 1-3, accounting for 40.5% (Study 1), 52% (Study 2), and 56% (Study 3) of the total variance, respectively. A more precise quantitative estimate for the number of interpretable factors to extract was computed using parallel analysis<sup>4</sup> (Horn, 1965) which also resulted in the retention of one factor in each of the studies. The results of these analyses were further corroborated by an inspection of the scree plot of initial eigenvalues. The first five eigenvalues were,

Study 1: 12.95, 1.55, 1.37, 1.16, and 1.04; Study 2: 17.05, 1.75, 1.06, .91, and .81; and Study 3: 17.78, 1.52, 1.34, 1.02 and .87, therefore consistently demonstrating a sharp decline after the first factor. See Table 1 for the standardized factor loadings and scale items.

Across the three studies, EFA of the 32 MDiSH items revealed notable differences in the proportion of variance explained in these solutions. Relative to Studies 2 and 3, much less variance in the MDiSH was accounted for in the first study. This is inevitably the outcome of certain sampling issues. Although the use of a student sample in Study 1 provided access to a large sample on which to conduct preliminary psychometric assessment of the MDiSH, it inevitably resulted in certain biases and limitations that warrant consideration. For example, university students are well educated and can be considered to hold attitudes toward inappropriate sexual behavior that are more politically correct (see Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007 for a similar discussion concerning rape myth acceptance). In contrast to the general male population, university students may hold stronger egalitarian attitudes and beliefs, especially those concerning appropriate working relationships between men and women. Compared to the diverse samples of Studies 2 and 3 in which participants were predominantly in full-time employment, the student sample in Study 1 had more restricted work experience. As a consequence, the social-sexual behavior represented in the MDiSH might have been less salient and applicable to these men which could have further contributed to the observed differences in variance explained across the three samples.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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#### Confirmatory factor analysis

Based on the results of EFA and parallel analysis, it was predicted that the MDiSH possesses a unidimensional factor structure. CFA was employed in Study 2 to test the fit of a unidimensional measurement model. The CFA was performed using AMOS 20 software. The model test was based

on the covariance matrix using maximum likelihood estimation. All 32 items of the MDiSH were specified as indicators of a single latent factor of moral disengagement and no item errors were permitted to correlate. Following current methodological guidelines (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Jackson, Purc-Stephenson, & Gillaspay, 2009; Kline, 2011), the adequacy of the unidimensional model was evaluated by inspecting the Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistic<sup>5</sup> (with its associated degrees of freedom and significance), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). A CFI value that exceeds 0.90 is indicative of mediocre fit, but greater than 0.95 is evidence of good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011). However, the RMSEA is widely considered to be one of the most informative indices of absolute model fit due to its insensitivity to sample size, model misspecification, and parameter estimates. The RMSEA also produces greater measurement precision by constructing confidence intervals around its value (Byrne, 2010; Hooper et al., 2008). Mediocre fit is indicated when the RMSEA lies between 0.08 and 0.10 (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996) but is close to 0.06 in a well-fitting model (Hu & Bentler, 1999). A lower limit of the RMSEA confidence interval (CI) that is near 0, and an upper limit below 0.08 is further evidence of good fit (see Hooper et al., 2008). CFA revealed that the unidimensional model fitted our observed data adequately ( $\chi^2 = 1101.08$ ,  $df = 463$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .868; RMSEA = .066 (90% CI = .061, .071)). Although the CFI was lower than optimal (.868), the RMSEA (.066) and its narrow confidence interval suggest that the unidimensional model had an acceptable fit to the observed data. Overall, given the high number of scale items and complexity of the model being tested, we consider these results to provide good support for the unidimensional structure of the MDiSH previously identified in EFA and parallel analysis.

#### Reliability and scoring of the MDiSH

The 32 items of the MDiSH yielded excellent internal consistencies: Study 1:  $\alpha = .95$ , Study 2:  $\alpha = .97$ , and Study 3:  $\alpha = .98$ . Therefore, composite mean scores of MDiSH were computed by averaging across the 32 items. Higher scores indicate greater susceptibility to moral disengagement. As suggested by Hinkin (1998), strong factor loadings are evidenced when items load at least .40 or



above on the expected factor. Using this guideline, the ranges of standardized item loadings were all deemed acceptable: Study 1: .44 to .78; Study 2: .44 to .82; and Study 3: .50 to .87. The ranges of corrected item-total correlations were also acceptable: Study 1: .43 to .75; Study 2: .46 to .80; and Study 3: .50 to .84. As all factor loadings and corrected item-total correlations exceeded the minimum value of .40 for inclusion, it was decided that all items were sufficiently robust to be retained in the final version of the scale.

### Convergent and discriminant validity of the MDiSH

#### Relationship of the MDiSH to sexual harassment myth acceptance

Convergent validity was assessed in Studies 1 and 2 through the bivariate correlations between the MDiSH and the ISHMA scale. Due to their conceptual proximity, it was predicted that both measures would be highly positively correlated. As expected, the MDiSH was highly positively correlated with the ISHMA in Study 1 ( $r = .80, p < .01$ ) and Study 2 ( $r = .77, p < .01$ ). In Study 2, a partial correlation revealed the MDiSH to remain positively correlated with the ISHMA after any possible effects of IM had been controlled ( $r = .76, p < .01$ ). The magnitude of these correlations reflect the overlapping function of both constructs as types of self-exonerating cognitions that serve to deny, downplay, and justify male sexual harassment of women in the workplace. Preliminary evidence of discriminant validity was obtained through EFA and parallel analysis of the 52 combined items of both measures. In Study 1, four factors were extracted using maximum likelihood estimation and Oblique (direct oblimin) rotation. The first factor was loaded by the 32 items of the MDiSH. It accounted for 21% of the total variance, and standardized item loadings ranged between .41 and .74. The second factor was identified as the Fabrication/Exaggeration ISHMA subscale. It accounted for 13% of the variance, and the eight factor loadings ranged between .41 and .76. The third factor was identified as Ulterior Motives. It accounted for 6% of the variance, and the five factor loadings ranged between .48 and .74. The fourth factor was loaded by the combined items of the Natural Heterosexuality and *Woman's Responsibility* ISHMA subscales. These seven items accounted for 5% of the total variance, and the seven factor loadings ranged between .41 and .61.

In Study 2, EFA of the combined MDiSH and ISHMA scales using maximum likelihood estimation and oblique (direct oblimin) rotation resulted in the retention of three factors. Parallel analysis also extracted three factors. The first factor was loaded by the 32 items of the MDiSH. It accounted for 30% of the total variance, and the standardized item loadings ranged between .49 and .88. The second factor was loaded by 19 items of the ISHMA scale. It accounted for 17% of the variance, and the standardized item loadings ranged between .41 and .75. The third factor was loaded only by ISHMA item 1 (“As long as a woman doesn’t lose her job, her claim of sexual harassment shouldn’t be taken too seriously”) of the Fabrication/Exaggeration subscale. It accounted for 6% of the total variance and the standardized item loading was .56.

#### The MDiSH and impression management (IM)

In Study 2, a significant negative correlation emerged between the ISHMA and the IM scale ( $r = -.12, p < .05$ ). The MDiSH and the IM scale also yielded a significant negative correlation ( $r = -.17, p < .01$ ). It is reassuring, however, that the MDiSH ( $r = .03, ns$ ) and the other measures administered for construct validation were uncorrelated with IM in Study 3 (see Table 2). These findings are tentative and could indicate that participants’ responses to the MDiSH and ISHMA scales are not fully resistant to social desirability response biases across samples.

#### The MDiSH and judgments of hostile work environment harassment

As expected in Study 3, the MDiSH displayed a moderate positive correlation with attribution of blame to the female complainant of hostile work environment harassment ( $r = .58$ ). Those men who scored highly on MDiSH perceived the conduct of the male soldiers as being less morally wrong ( $r = -.55$ ). The MDiSH was also positively correlated with both dimensions of male gender identification; self-investment ( $r = .20$ ) and self-definition ( $r = .28$ ). The MDiSH was highly positively correlated with HS ( $r = .63$ ) but was uncorrelated with BS ( $r = .14, ns$ ), thus providing further evidence of discriminant validity. Furthermore, the MDiSH was uncorrelated with negative affect ( $r = -.10, ns$ ) and sympathy ( $r = .05, ns$ ) but displayed a moderate positive correlation with happiness ( $r = .42$ ) in response to the alleged case of hostile work environment harassment. With

regards to endorsement of behavioral intentions, it was revealed that men who scored highly on MDiSH supported less restitution ( $r = -.45$ ) and instead supported greater avoidance ( $r = .79$ ) by the male soldiers. These correlations provide strong evidence for the convergent and discriminant validity of the MDiSH (see Table 2 for the correlation matrix).

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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### Discussion

The purpose of the current research was to develop the 32-item Moral Disengagement in Sexual Harassment Scale (MDiSH); a new self-report instrument designed to measure moral disengagement within the behavioral context of workplace sexual harassment. The scale depicts an array of social-sexual behavior which is broadly equivalent to the categories of gender harassment and sexual-advance harassment (Holland & Cortina, 2013; Leskinen et al., 2011; Leskinen & Cortina, 2014); both of which create a hostile work environment. In three studies (using varied recruitment procedures), the MDiSH displayed excellent psychometric properties, high levels of internal consistency, and correlational analyses demonstrated strong evidence for the new measure's convergent and discriminant construct validity. Study 1 provided a preliminary psychometric assessment of the MDiSH using a student sample. These findings replicated closely in Studies 2 and 3 using more diverse male samples in which participants were predominantly in full-time employment. Across the three studies, factor analysis repeatedly confirmed the unidimensional structure of the MDiSH. These findings parallel previous research (Bandura et al., 1996; Caprara et al., 2009, 2014; Pelton et al., 2004) that also documented self-report measures of moral disengagement to be unidimensional. Thus, the items of the MDiSH measuring the eight moral disengagement strategies

may be inextricably linked to a common latent trait or cognitive orientation that makes people more or less prone to use these social cognitions to justify harassing behavior.

The construct validity of the MDiSH was established by examining concurrent correlations of the scale with an array of theoretically meaningful constructs. As preliminary evidence of convergent validity in Studies 1 and 2, the MDiSH was highly positively correlated with the ISHMA scale, an established measure of SHMA (Lonsway et al., 2008). The magnitude of this positive correlation was expected given the conceptual proximity of these constructs in terms of their function (i.e., to deny, downplay, and justify male sexual harassment of women in the workplace). Nevertheless, despite the strong positive association of both measures, we assert that the MDiSH is complementary to the construct of SHMA. This is supported by parallel analysis which consistently attested to the discriminant validity of the MDiSH in respect to SHMA. The MDiSH therefore measures additional exonerating strategies that men use to deny, downplay, and justify harassing conduct in the work environment. As such, the MDiSH provides researchers with a broadened conceptualization of the social cognitive mechanisms that neutralize and justify sexually harassing behavior. This finding is important when considering Bandura's (1986) proposition that moral disengagement mechanisms are embodied within rape myths that serve to blame the victim and absolve the perpetrator. Extending this notion to the context of sexual harassment, we assert that assessment of moral disengagement expands on the theoretical construct of SHMA and research concerning attitudes and beliefs that exacerbate sexual harassment (e.g., Kenig & Ryan, 1986; Lott, Reilly, & Howard, 1982; Mazer & Percival, 1989; Reilly, Lott, & Gallogly, 1986; Wade, 2001; Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001). Thus, use of the MDiSH to measure moral disengagement enables researchers to further assess the techniques that people use to disengage from the negative consequences of sexually harassing behavior. This would include an examination of how individuals rationalize their own behavioral inclinations to harass but also their denial and justification of harassing acts committed by those with whom they share a group affiliation.

As further evidence of construct validity in Study 3, the MDiSH was positively correlated with cognitive and affective dimensions of male gender identification (self-definition and self-investment; see Leach et al., 2008) and strongly positively correlated with HS toward women. These

findings corroborate previous research documenting that constructs related to masculinity and sexist ideology are positively associated with attitudes and beliefs that facilitate sexual harassment (e.g., Russell & Trigg, 2004; Wade, 2001; Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001). BS, in contrast, was uncorrelated with the MDiSH, thus, providing further evidence of discriminant validity. This finding may be due, in part, to the hostile nature of the social-sexual behavior represented by the MDiSH. The MDiSH depicts an array of behavior that, when enacted repeatedly, eventually culminate in a legally actionable hostile work environment. These actions are instrumental to the individual in creating a disparaging and humiliating climate for female workers who are perceived to violate traditional gender ideals and encroach on male territory (e.g., by being seen to take on a man's job). Moreover, our findings support extant research reporting that males high (versus low) in HS evaluate ambiguous social-sexual misconduct as less indicative of hostile work environment harassment (Wiener & Hurt, 2000; Wiener et al., 1997; Wiener et al., 2010). As BS encompasses attitudes toward women that are subjectively positive in tone and comparatively more chivalrous (albeit sexist in terms of viewing women in restricted social and economic roles) than HS, it is understandable that BS should correlate with the MDiSH at a smaller magnitude or indeed be unrelated.

In addition, the correlates of the MDiSH provide further evidence of construct validity on the basis of how men judged and responded to an ambiguous case of hostile work environment harassment. Based on SCT and previous research (e.g., Doosje & Branscombe, 2003; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Leidner et al., 2010), it was postulated that individuals would use moral disengagement strategies to inhibit or attenuate negative group-based emotions associated with a salient moral transgression (i.e., exposure to a case of hostile work environment harassment) of the male in-group. Congruent with our predictions, the MDiSH was uncorrelated with the negative group-based emotions of guilt, shame, and anger, and also with the emotion of sympathy. Conversely, the MDiSH yielded a moderate positive correlation with positive affect (i.e., happiness) associated with exposure to the case of hostile work environment harassment. The MDiSH appears to act as a buffer to negative group-based emotions that are experienced when people share the gender identity group of the perpetrators of hostile work environment harassment. These results are also in line with the findings of Maitner et al. (2007) who reported that the greater use of exonerating cognitions to justify

aggressive in-group behavior actually resulted in individuals reporting stronger feelings of satisfaction about the moral infractions of their fellow in-group members.

As stated previously, moral disengagement is positively correlated with aggressive and delinquent behavior, and negatively associated with prosocial behavior (Bandura et al., 1996). It was predicted, on this basis, that the MDiSH scale would correlate negatively with support for restitution (e.g., apology; compensation) being provided to a female complainant of hostile work environment harassment. It was also expected that the MDiSH would be positively related to endorsement of avoidance strategies in the form of physical and psychological distancing (e.g., denying or ignoring the behavior) from the negative consequences of hostile work environment harassment. Indeed, the data of our third study fully supports both hypotheses. As expected, higher scores on the MDiSH mitigated support for prosocial behavioral intentions and enhanced support for avoidant responses. The MDiSH also exhibited a moderate negative correlation with moral judgment about the alleged harassment and was moderately positively correlated with attribution of blame to the female complainant. In other words, those individuals who were more susceptible to moral disengagement judged the conduct of the male soldiers as being less morally wrong and held the female complainant as more responsible for the events that took place. Overall, the MDiSH exhibited a theoretically meaningful pattern of correlations across the three studies that support the convergent and discriminant validity of the new scale. It is essential, however, that future studies continue to validate the MDiSH by assessing the scale's relationships with other theoretically related constructs within its nomological network.

#### Limitations and Future Directions

Despite these promising findings, the present studies have several limitations. Firstly, it is important to recognize that convenience samples were used in each of the three studies. The first sample used in the development of the MDiSH consisted exclusively of university students. In Studies 2 and 3, more diverse male samples were recruited using the Amazon MTurk crowd sourcing platform. Although recruitment of university students enabled access to a large sample on which to conduct an initial psychometric assessment of the MDiSH, it is inevitably associated with certain methodological issues. As noted previously, these include gender-related attitudes and beliefs that are

potentially more egalitarian among male students than in the wider population and restricted experience of the work environment. Nevertheless, it is certainly reassuring that the strong psychometric properties of the MDiSH replicated precisely in two demographically diverse samples of the general male population. More importantly, the use of MTurk granted access to large heterogeneous male samples that were predominantly in full-time employment across a broad array of professions and industries including; financial services, administration, sales, marketing, healthcare, education, and Information Technology. These samples bolster the external validity and generalizability of our findings, also lending greater support to extant research that supports MTurk as a reliable and valid sampling method (see Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2012; Mason & Suri, 2012; Rand, 2011).

Another limitation pertains to the use of self-report measures that may have introduced bias due to common method variance. Future studies would benefit from attempting to validate the MDiSH using implicit methods such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003) in tandem with self-report measures. A potentially problematic issue also concerns the weak albeit significant negative correlations between the MDiSH and ISHMA scales and IM in Study 2. Although tentative, this finding could suggest that the MDiSH is not fully resistant to social desirability response biases across samples. It is certainly promising, however, that the MDiSH and the remaining measures administered for construct validation were uncorrelated with IM in Study 3. Due to these inconsistent findings, it is expected that a more comprehensive assessment of whether the discriminant validity of the MDiSH is affected by IM biases will be provided in future studies testing this scale.

As previously emphasized, researchers have developed context-specific measures of moral disengagement across various behavioral domains such as interpersonal aggression (Bandura et al., 1996), organizational deviance (Detert et al., 2008), anti-social conduct in sport (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007) and violation of civic obligations (Caprara et al., 2009). Yet the current research program represents the very first endeavor to create an empirical measure of moral disengagement for the specific context of sexual harassment and the broader domain of sexual aggression. The aggregated findings of the three studies demonstrate the robust psychometric properties of the

MDiSH. Nonetheless, assessment of the reliability and construct validity of the scale should continue in future research employing cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. Although the MDiSH consistently displays excellent internal consistency, it would be advantageous for researchers to determine the temporal stability of this measure by computing its test-retest reliability. It would also be useful to test for gender differences on the MDiSH. Previous research documents that moral disengagement is more prevalent among males than females (Bandura et al., 1996; Caprara et al., 2009, 2014; Elliott & Rhinehart, 1995; Pelton et al., 2004). Thus, gender differences on this measure are expected to emerge when the MDiSH is administered to both men and women. Researchers could also use multi-sample analyses to test the invariance of the factor structure of the MDiSH across gender and cultural groups. Although the MDiSH is currently situated in the context of male-perpetrated harassment of women, we invite researchers to adapt the scale accordingly for other gender dyads in which sexual harassment is prevalent (such as female-on-male or male-on-male harassment; see Berdahl, 2007; Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996; Stockdale, Visio, & Batra, 1999; Waldo, Berdahl, & Fitzgerald, 1998). Additionally, it would be worthwhile for researchers to modify the MDiSH for other social environments (e.g., educational settings), in which harassing behavior is expressed.

An essential next step for research using the MDiSH scale is to experimentally investigate the disinhibiting effects of moral disengagement on sexual harassment perpetration. As a starting point in addressing this important issue, recent research conducted in our laboratory has begun to test the predictive link between the MDiSH and men's behavioral tendencies to sexually harass. In these preliminary studies, male participants completed a scenario based measure of sexual harassment proclivity. We subsequently asked these men to rate the moral emotions (guilt and shame) and positive affect (happiness) they experienced when imagining themselves as the harassment perpetrator in the vignette. The results of these studies are highly encouraging. As predicted, those men who scored higher on MDiSH self-reported stronger behavioral inclinations to harass. However, emotions demonstrated a mediating influence on the predictive link observed between MDiSH and harassment proclivity. That is, men's higher scores on the MDiSH scale predicted a reduction in the experience of these moral emotions, which, in turn, predicted stronger proclivities for sexual harassment. Positive



affect also had a mediating effect on this relationship. Specifically, men's higher scores on the MDiSH predicted stronger feelings of happiness about the harassment incident which subsequently predicted a greater proclivity to harass.

In further corroborating the predictive validity of the MDiSH scale, it is necessary for researchers to investigate whether MDiSH is predictive of actual sexually harassing behavior. Such endeavors, within ethical boundaries, will be fruitful in conducting a behavioral assessment of the MDiSH beyond a dependence on self-report methods and proclivity based measures. Using a similar experimental methodology to the 'computer harassment paradigm' (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Diehl et al., 2012; Maass et al., 2003; Siebler et al., 2008) it would be interesting for researchers to explore whether men who score high (versus low) on MDiSH engage in more gender harassing and sexually advancing behavior toward a computer- simulated female target who is perceived to violate traditional gender roles. Further still, it would be advantageous to test various psychological mechanisms (e.g., moral emotions; moral judgment), and personality traits that could mediate or moderate these behavioral effects of moral disengagement. Another exciting possibility would be to explore whether moral disengagement (measured by the MDiSH) is exacerbated by various situational factors in fostering sexually harassing behavior.

#### Practical Implications

The current research highlights the need for an expansion in sexual harassment awareness training and educational programs to include further discussion of SHMA and moral disengagement as important theoretical constructs. In addition to assisting employees in recognizing gender harassment and sexual-advance harassment, it is essential that employees are better educated about the attitudes and social cognitions that perpetuate harassing behavior in the work environment. It is particularly important, however, that employers educate their workforces on how the use of moral disengagement mechanisms adversely influences people's judgments of harassing events, reducing support for prosocial behavioral responses (e.g., reporting harassment; confronting the perpetrator/s) to harassment witnessed at work. Participation in these training programs is expected to be beneficial in reducing a person's SHMA and use of moral disengagement strategies to justify sexual harassment perpetration. Lonsway et al. (2008), for example, reported a negative correlation between previous

participation in sexual harassment awareness training and overall endorsement of SHMA. More recently, experimental research found that exposure to the negative consequences of sexual harassment attenuated SHMA among men and women, and even lowered men's self-reported proclivity to harass (Diehl et al., 2014). Given the conceptual proximity of moral disengagement and SHMA in terms of their function, it is expected that participation in training will exert similar positive effects in reducing moral disengagement and its adverse influence on harassment judgments and perpetration of harassing behavior. Additionally, when employers recognize that moral disengagement mechanisms might also be expressed by employees as post-hoc justifications for previous harassing acts, it could further aid organizational and legal responses to allegations of harassment processed by practitioners such as managers, human resource personnel, and lawyers. A greater understanding of moral disengagement and its role in fostering harassing behavior by organizations will undoubtedly assist in ensuring that complaints of workplace harassment are handled effectively; that perpetrators are held more accountable for their actions and sanctioned appropriately by employers and the courts.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Although men and women can be both perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment (Berdahl, 2007; Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996; Stockdale, Visio, & Batra, 1999; Waldo, Berdahl, & Fitzgerald, 1998) our conceptual framework is situated within the context of male perpetrated harassment of women as it is statistically the most frequent pattern of sexual harassment (see McDonald, 2012; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2009).

<sup>2</sup> An accumulating body of research demonstrates that Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) offers considerable advantages for researchers. Recent studies indicate that MTurk is a source of inexpensive and high quality data that possesses evidence of strong internal and external validity (see



Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2012; Mason & Suri, 2012; Rand, 2011). A distinct advantage of MTurk is that workers are from very diverse backgrounds, covering a wide spectrum of age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, education, and country of origin. Furthermore, demographic analyses report that MTurk workers are at least as diverse and representative of the general U.S. population as Internet participant pools and traditional samples (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling (2011) also report that MTurk workers are significantly more demographically diverse than standard samples of U.S. college students. Thus, MTurk significantly broadens the external validity of studies beyond the undergraduate student population (Mason & Suri, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> The news article was pilot tested using a separate sample of male U.S. MTurk workers ( $n = 100$ ). Male participants rated the behavior depicted in the article on several dimensions (e.g., unwelcome, offensive) that meet the legal definition of hostile work environment harassment specified by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1980) under Title VII of the U.S. Civil Rights Act 1964. This included an item requiring participants to provide their overall judgment of whether the behavior of the male soldiers constituted hostile work environment harassment. These items were rated on 7-point scales (e.g., from 1 = not at all unwelcome/offensive, 7 = very unwelcome/offensive). The mean of this ratings measure ( $M = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) was significantly greater than the scale midpoint (4),  $t(99) = 17.00$ ,  $p < .001$ , revealing that the sample evaluated the behavior as representative of hostile work environment harassment. The MDiSH was negatively correlated with this ratings measure ( $r = -.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those participants who scored highly on the MDiSH evaluated the behavior of the male soldiers as being less indicative of hostile work environment sexual harassment.

<sup>4</sup> Parallel analysis compares the size of eigenvalues from the original data with those obtained from random datasets of identical sample size and number of variables. Factors are retained when the original eigenvalue is larger than the eigenvalue produced by the random data (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006)

<sup>5</sup> The Chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ) is the traditional method of assessing model fit in confirmatory factor analysis. In a well-fitting model,  $\chi^2$  would produce a non-significant  $p$  value at a 0.05 threshold for significance. It must be noted, however, that  $\chi^2$  is very sensitive to sample size.  $\chi^2$  nearly always results in the rejection of a model when large samples are used. Small samples also cause  $\chi^2$  to lack statistical power in discriminating between good and poor fitting models. The CFI and RMSEA are therefore more useful for judging the absolute and incremental fit of a model (Hooper et al., 2008).