Running head: *Moral disengagement in sexual harassment*

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is recognized as a widespread form of aggressive behavior with severe consequences for victims and organizations. Yet, contemporary research and theory focusing on the motives and cognition of sexual harassment perpetrators continues to be sparse and underdeveloped. This review examines the motivations that underlie sexual harassment and the self-exonerating cognitions and behavioral techniques employed by perpetrators of sexual harassment. In this paper, we emphasize the need to understand the cognitive processes that disinhibit motivated individuals to sexually harass. Utilizing social cognitive theory as a foundation, we propose that cognitive mechanisms of moral disengagement are likely to have an important etiological role in the facilitation and reinforcement of sexually harassing behavior. A preliminary conceptual framework is presented, suggesting novel ways in which each of the various moral disengagement mechanisms may contribute to sexual harassment perpetration.

Contents:

1. Introduction

Sexual harassment continues to be a widespread social phenomenon (Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003; see McDonald, 2012 for a review) prevalent in both employment (e.g., Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996) and educational settings (e.g., Paludi, 1990). The negative and severe consequences of sexual harassment for victims and organizations are well documented and include poor physical and mental health, decreased job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (e.g., Chan, Chow, Lam, & Cheung, 2008; Nielsen, Bjorkelo, Notelaers, & Einarsen, 2010; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007).

Moreover, there is a widely held consensus that sexual harassment represents an array of behaviors that lie within three distinct categories. As presented within the tripartite classification model (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995), sexually harassing behaviors can be classified into the domains of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. In short, gender harassment is the most prevalent form of sexual harassment (Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003; USMSPB, 1995) and has the purpose of creating an intimidating, offensive or hostile environment (Berdahl, 2007). This category of sexual harassment is composed of verbal and non-verbal acts, such as sexist jokes and display of pornographic material, which intends to insult and derogate women rather than being an expression of sexual attraction. Sexual coercion refers to an individual's attempts to exercise his or her social power over a subordinate in order to obtain sexual cooperation. Unwanted sexual attention, by comparison, consists of verbal and non-verbal behaviors (e.g., sexual comments) that are perceived by the target as unwelcome, unreciprocated, and offensive acts of sexual interest (for a review see Pina & Gannon, 2012).

It is apparent, therefore, that sexually harassing acts may convey hostility rather than being innocent expressions of sexual interest. Sexual harassers constitute a heterogeneous

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population (Lucero, Allen, & Middleton, 2006; Lucero, Middleton, Finch, & Valentine, 2003) and, therefore, differ in their motivations, characteristics, cognition, and behavioral repertoires. 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, Yamawaki, Ridge, White, & Copley, 2009), less research has examined the motives driving sexual harassment. And almost no research has focused on the *cognition* of the sexual harassment perpetrator and the self-regulatory processes which inhibit and facilitate harassing behavior. These shortcomings pose some interesting questions that require further theoretical and empirical investigation. How can people engage in sexually harassing acts despite recognizing that their behavior is likely to be socially unacceptable, offensive and counter-normative? What are the cognitive strategies that harassers employ to neutralize and justify their actions?

At the heart of this article is our argument that sexual harassment may be facilitated and reinforced through the self-regulatory process of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1990, 1999). Moral disengagement has previously been revealed to facilitate aggression and delinquency (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Pelton, Gound, Forehand, & Brody, 2004) and, as a theoretical framework, has seen an upsurge of popularity and research interest in recent years. Mechanisms of moral disengagement acting as self-serving cognitions may thus assist in the exoneration of harassing acts that conflict with the perpetrator's moral beliefs and self-concept of being a generally decent and rule abiding individual.

We begin our review by examining available research on motives for sexual harassment, and present the theoretical perspective of sexual harassment as goal motivated behavior. Then, we provide an overview of cognitive and behavioral techniques employed by sexual harassers to rationalize and neutralize their actions. This leads us to present a

preliminary conceptualization of how mechanisms of moral disengagement may contribute to sexual harassment perpetration. Although we appreciate that sexual harassment is multidimensional in nature (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gelfand et al., 1995), our ideas are informed by a broad body of literature that is not restricted to any specific category of sexual harassment. Also, we recognize that sexual harassment may be enacted by female perpetrators and members of the victim's own sex (Berdahl, 2007; Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996; Stockdale, Visio, & Batra, 1999). However, our paper is situated within the context of male-perpetrated sexual harassment of women as this is statistically the most frequent type of harassment and has received the greatest research attention to date (Gutek, 1985; McDonald, 2012; O'Donohue, Downs, & Yeater, 1995; Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009).

2. Motivation for Sexual Harassment

2.1. Sexual Motives

Traditionally, sexual harassment was conceived to be predominantly motivated by sexual interest and attraction (Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982; Tangri & Hayes, 1997). Thus, proponents of evolutionary and natural-biological theories of sexual harassment (Browne, 2006; Studd & Gattiker, 1991; Tangri et al., 1982) proposed such behavior to be a natural expression of male sexual desire and the need for sexual gratification. Men are, therefore, argued to engage in sexual harassment because they are biologically predisposed to be promiscuous and sexually aggressive toward women (Studd & Gattiker, 1991). From these perspectives, harassing acts are simply a natural by-product of heterosexual interaction that seeks to enhance mate-seeking and male reproductive success.

Indirect support for evolutionary and natural-biological theories of sexual harassment has been offered through research on sexual misperception biases (Perilloux, Easton, & Buss, 2012; Stockdale, 1993). An array of studies found that some men possess tendencies to

overperceive sexual interest from women during ambiguous heterosexual interaction (Perilloux et al., 2012). For example, after observing videotaped scenarios displaying heterosexual interaction across work-related settings, males were found to misperceive women's friendly and outgoing behaviors as conveying sexual interest (e.g., Abbey, 1982, 1987; Abbey & Melby, 1986; Johnson, Stockdale, & Saal, 1991; Shotland & Craig, 1988). Despite these findings, however, the empirical link between sexual over-perception biases and sexual harassment perpetration remains unclear and in need of further research attention.

2.2. Hostile Motives

It has been widely postulated that many acts of sexual harassment may be motivated by sexist antipathy rather than sexual attraction (e.g., Berdahl, 2007; Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Farley, 1978; Galdi, Maass, & Cadinu, 2013; Gutek, 1985; Kelly, 1988; Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003; MacKinnon, 1979). Sociocultural theorists maintain that sexual harassment serves to perpetuate patriarchal gender relations through the sexual exploitation and oppression of women (Farley, 1978; Gutek, 1985; MacKinnon, 1979). Similarly, it is widely documented that sexually harassing behaviors (in particular, gender harassment) are often targeted at women who are perceived to violate traditional gender stereotypes and threaten male social identity (Berdahl, 2007; Galdi et al., 2013; Maass & Cadinu, 2006).

Indeed, it has been proposed that gender harassment is an expression of male hostility toward women as an outgroup (Pryor & Whalen, 1997) and its greater prevalence within traditionally masculine occupations, such as the military (e.g., Bastian, Lancaster, & Reyst, 1996) and police (e.g., Martin, 1990), may be due to the desire of certain men to assert their authority and keep women in subordinate positions (Gruber, 1992; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982). In fact, experimental research employing the computer harassment paradigm (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999; Galdi et al., 2013; Maass et al., 2003; Siebler, Sabelus, & Bohner, 2008) has

consistently found that gender harassment appears to be motivated by masculinity threat. These studies demonstrate that men will engage in greater online distribution of harassing materials (i.e., sending pornographic images and sexist jokes) when interacting with a virtual female chat partner who poses a threat to traditional gender stereotypes (e.g., being described as occupying a management position and expressing egalitarian gender role attitudes) and outperforming them on a traditionally masculine task (Dall'Ara & Maass, 1999).

Further research supports the notion that gender harassment is motivated by masculinity threat. Hitlan, Pryor, Hesson-McInnis, and Olson (2009) observed that male college students engaged in greater gender harassing behavior (i.e., asking sexist questions) during a mock job interview when informed that the female candidate had outperformed them on a masculine task. As noted earlier, Berdahl (2007) had found that assertive women in male-dominated jobs with masculine personality traits were more likely than men and other women in these jobs to experience gender harassment. Hence, in this view, gender harassment is an expression of hostility and retaliation against "uppity women" who threaten the legitimacy of male dominance in the work arena. These findings are interesting in view of the high prevalence of hostile environment harassment (Bastian et al., 1996; Gutek, 1985; Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003; USMSPB, 1995). Behaviors, such as unwanted and persistent sexual touching, repeated requests for dates, sexual comments, jokes, and materials, create an abusive and hostile work environment (Berdahl, 2007) which is not necessarily aimed at eliciting sexual contact. Rather, these behaviors are actually intended to make women feel unwelcome in the workplace on the basis of their gender.

Recently, Berdahl (2007) presented an alternative perspective on threat-based motivation for sexual harassment. It was proposed that the primary motivator underlying all harassing behavior is the need to protect social status against threat. Thus, sexual harassers are postulated to derogate others on the basis of gender in order to protect and enhance their

own social status within the gendered hierarchy of the workplace. This is not confined to the constellation of male perpetrated harassment of women. Instead, threat to social status is argued to account for all patterns of sexual harassment and types of perpetrator (e.g., female perpetrators). Hence, from this perspective, sexual harassment is always regarded as instrumental to the perpetrator in protecting and enhancing their gender-based social status.

Additionally, experimental research has made an empirical distinction between sexual and hostile motives in the prediction of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention (Diehl, Rees, & Bohner, 2012). Using a modified version of the computer harassment paradigm, Diehl et al. (2012) recently found that sexual motives (measured as short-term mating orientation; Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007) predicted unwanted sexual attention (the sending of offensive personal remarks) toward a virtual female target over the internet. Intriguingly, however, hostile motives (measured as hostile sexism; Glick & Fiske, 1996) predicted *both* gender harassment (the sending of sexist jokes) and unwanted sexual attention. These findings appear to contradict any preconception that unwanted sexual attention is exclusively aimed at achieving sexual contact. Rather, this data supports the view that unwanted sexual attention may actually be instrumental to the harasser in creating a disparaging, hostile and humiliating climate for female workers.

3. Sexual Harassment as Goal Motivated Behavior

Many scholars argue that sexual harassment is a form of aggressive and violent behavior (e.g., Farley, 1978; Fitzgerald, 1993; Kelly, 1988; Krings & Facchin, 2009; O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000; Quina, 1990; Schweinle, Cofer, & Schatz, 2009). Lin Farley (1978) noted that sexual harassment is an act of aggression at any stage of its expression. Similarly, Kelly (1988) proposed that sexually harassing behavior is representative of physical violence as it conveys to women an implicit or explicit threat of further assault. Thus, according to Kelly, sexual harassment constitutes unwanted intrusions

into women's personal space which threaten their sense of safety and heighten their perceived vulnerability to physical sexual assault. Additionally, it has been suggested that sexual harassment shares commonalities with other forms of sexual violence and functions as an agent of social control, intending to keep women subordinate both socially and economically (Fitzgerald, 1993).

O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, and Griffin (2000) constructed an aggression model of sexual harassment. The central premise of the model is that sexual harassment represents goal-motivated behavior in which harassers are rational actors, consciously engaging in harassing acts in pursuit of valued personal or professional outcomes. According to O'Leary-Kelly et al., sexual harassment is motivated through two primary goal categories: (1) *Emotional Goals*- in which sexually harassing acts are chosen as they elicit positive emotions in the perpetrator following an adverse experience (e.g., disrespectful treatment by a work supervisor), and (2) *Instrumental Goals*- in which sexual harassment is motivated by anticipated future benefits to the perpetrator (e.g., obtaining sexual contact). In addition, it is proposed that harassers may be motivated through sub-goals of *retributive justice* (i.e., punishment and retaliation against perceived injustice in the workplace) and *self-presentation* (i.e., construction and maintenance of a valued social identity).

The aggression model states that following goal selection, sexual harassers develop behavioral repertoires leading them to successful goal accomplishment (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000). Accordingly, perpetrators continuously modify their goal choices and behavioral repertoires through their perceptions of the target's response (e.g., whether the target's actions appear to support or block the goal). Hence, it was concluded that there is no single motive or goal category regulating sexual harassment. Instead, harassers are conceived to be motivated by an array of personal and professional goals that continuously develop over time.

Although O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2000) did not empirically validate the aggression model; recent research appears to offer indirect support. Krings and Facchin (2009) distinguished between expressive and instrumental motives for sexual harassment on the basis of employees' perceptions of organizational justice. These researchers posit that sexual harassment that is triggered by organizational injustice (e.g., disrespectful treatment by work supervisor or co-workers) may fulfil either an instrumental motive (e.g., restoration of justice through retributive action) or an expressive motive (e.g., venting or alleviating negative affect such as anger).

Krings and Facchin (2009) tested the moderation of individual difference variables related to personality (agreeableness; conscientiousness; neuroticism) and hostile sexism on the relationship between perceptions of organizational justice (e.g., fair and respectful treatment by work supervisor) and males' self-reported proclivity to sexually harass and a significant negative correlation was found between perceptions of organizational justice and the LSH construct (Pryor, 1987). Thus, it was concluded that male employees who felt unfairly and disrespectfully treated by their work supervisor expressed greater self-reported proclivity to sexually harass. Sexual harassment was, therefore, posited to serve as a form of displaced aggression resulting from organizational injustice. Moreover, the observed negative correlation between perceptions of organizational justice and sexual harassment was found to be stronger in males who indicated greater hostile sexism and lower levels of agreeableness. A noteworthy limitation of the study, however, is that it is cross-sectional and relied exclusively on self-report data. The distinction between different motives for sexual harassment is also lacking clarity as expressive and instrumental motives were not operationalized and tested.

4. Exonerating Techniques of the Sexual Harasser

4.1. The Outrage Management Model (Scott & Martin, 2006)

Research on the self-serving cognitions that might facilitate and reinforce sexually harassing behavior continues to be sparse (e.g., Diehl et al., 2012; Lonsway, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; McDonald, Graham, & Martin, 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). Recently, however, the Outrage Management model was developed in order to outline some of the core exonerative techniques employed by male perpetrators of sexual harassment (McDonald, 2012; McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). This framework rests on the premise that immoral and aggressive acts (such as sexual harassment) have the potential to inadvertently backfire upon the perpetrator when such behaviors are exposed to a receptive audience. Scott and Martin (2006) propose that in order for sexual harassment to backfire on the perpetrator, the behavior must be exposed and perceived by others as morally unjust. The perceived moral injustice of sexual harassment thus has the potential to generate outrage (i.e., a negative public reception to the behavior) that could ultimately lead to negative repercussions for the harasser. Scott and Martin (2006) presented five techniques that sexual harassers use to both prevent and minimize potential outrage that may arise from exposure of their actions. These techniques are presented below:

4.2. Cover-up

Cover-up is reinforced by the secrecy in which sexual harassment perpetrators will often attempt to act. This is emphasized by the covert nature of many harassing incidents (particularly quid pro quo harassment) which often cannot be directly observed by witnesses and bystanders (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). This technique may also be reinforced by targets' responses and coping strategies for sexual harassment (Pina & Gannon, 2012). For example, it is evident from existing research that targets of sexual harassment will often prefer to adopt passive and avoidant coping strategies such as avoiding the perpetrator and seeking social support from friends and co-workers (e.g., Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer,

1995). Cover up is further reinforced by the reluctance of organizations to publicize cases of sexual harassment. Rather than perceiving the benefits of exposure in deterring potential harassers, senior managers and organizational officials are instead fearful of negative publicity for bringing sexual harassment to public attention (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; McDonald et al., 2010).

4.3. Devaluation

Perpetrators of sexual harassment may attempt to devalue the targets of their behavior thus enabling further self-exoneration (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). This technique is illustrated effectively by Kelly (1988) who states that male harassers are often able to justify their actions by defining women as being an "easy lay," "loose," and "fair game." Such derogatory labeling and rumor spreading creates and sustains an undesirable reputation of women within the work environment, thereby facilitating repeated harassing behavior (Farley, 1978; Kelly, 1988). Also, sexual harassers may apply a variety of derogatory labels to non-compliant female targets, naming these women as "sluts," "poor sports," "frigid," "humorless" and "hypersensitive" (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). Further devaluation may occur through harassers' efforts to undermine the professionalism of the target. They may claim, for instance, that the target's work performance is poor, and that they are dishonest or incompetent (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). In addition, devaluation is implicitly reflected in widely endorsed sexual harassment myths that serve to blame the victim and exonerate the harasser (Lonsway et al., 2008). Taken together, these methods of devaluation may enable sexual harassers to undermine the credibility of the target, hence reducing the likelihood that complaints of sexual harassment will be acted upon seriously or invoke an official investigation.

4.4. Reinterpretation

Sexual harassers may use reinterpretation to deny responsibility for their behavior, negate its severity, reconstruct harassing acts to make them appear innocent and benign, as well as attributing blame to the target and other contextual factors (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). When confronted, harassers will frequently protest that their actions have been misinterpreted and misunderstood. They will insist that they were either "just being friendly" or that their behavior was only "harmless fun" (Kelly, 1988). Perpetrators may also insist that their actions were reciprocated and encouraged by the target. They may reinterpret the target's refusal as consent, and that "no" really means "yes." Reinterpretation therefore enables perpetrators to reconstruct harassing acts as normal, socially acceptable and innocuous behavior (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006).

4.5. Official Channels

Official channels include grievance procedures, courts, reports to senior officials, and appeals to organizational boards (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). Although these channels are important in responding to a complaint of sexual harassment and give the appearance of moral justice, in actuality, they may prevent negative repercussions for the harasser. Scott and Martin (2006) posit that official channels are associated with certain inadequacies which could prevent harassers being sanctioned appropriately and brought to justice. For example, channels, such as court cases and grievance procedures, may be highly expensive, procedural, and slow in responding to a complaint. Weaknesses, such as these, are argued by Scott and Martin to act in the interests of the perpetrator rather than the target by protecting the harasser from public exposure and confronting the negative consequences of their actions.

4.6. Intimidation and Bribery

Sexual harassers often use threats and bribes to encourage cover-up and discourage targets and witnesses from challenging and intervening in sexual harassment (McDonald et

al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). These techniques are usually manifested in "quid pro quo" cases of sexual harassment in which perpetrators offer job-related rewards, such as promotions, pay increases, and favorable job assignments, in exchange for sexual cooperation from the target. Conversely, harassers may threaten reprisals, such as poor employment references, demotion, unwelcome job assignments, and dismissal, if the target refuses to comply sexually (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). Hence, the use of intimidation and bribery prevents the detection and exposure of sexual harassment, as it discourages the target from making a formal complaint.

The Outrage Management model (Scott & Martin, 2006) offers an interesting and innovative portrayal of the cognitive and behavioral strategies employed by male perpetrators of sexual harassment. Despite the novelty of the framework, however, there remains neither correlational nor experimental testing of these five exonerative techniques. In fact, the only empirical support that Scott and Martin (2006) provided for their model originates from a grounded theory analysis of a single, highly prolific case of sexual harassment documented in the media (*Anita Hill v Clarence Thomas)*. More recently, the Outrage Management model has been extended to incorporate a set of five victim counter techniques (McDonald et al., 2010). These counter techniques purportedly increase the likelihood that sexually harassing behavior will eventually result in negative consequences for the perpetrator. These strategies consist of: (1) *exposure* (i.e., empowerment of targets to expose harassment to others such as friends, co-workers, and managers), (2) *validation* (i.e., demonstration of the target's moral character, ethical behavior and good work performance), (3) *reframing* (i.e., establishment of the credibility of alleged sexual harassment), (4) *mobilization of support* (i.e., targets must use a wider range of support systems such as personal contacts, support groups, and media publicity), and (5) *resistance* (i.e., persistence of the target in attempting to challenge harassing conduct and expose the harasser's threats and bribes).

McDonald et al (2010) conducted an archival study to identify perpetrator techniques and target counter techniques in 23 Australian cases of sexual harassment as revealed in judicial decisions. Using grounded theory analysis, McDonald et al. found that all five perpetrator strategies were utilized frequently across the sample of 23 cases. Their findings revealed that at least one technique was used in each case and a minimum of three techniques were evident in 22 of the 23 cases. Evidence for all five perpetrator techniques was found in eight cases (35%) with cover up being the most frequently used technique (identified in all 23 cases) followed closely by reinterpretation (revealed in 21 cases). Across the judicial decisions, it was also found that target counter techniques were less frequently utilized than perpetrator techniques. In fact, only two cases displayed no evidence of counter techniques and in thirteen cases (57%) at least three counter techniques were identified. Exposure (19 cases) and reframing (13 cases) were observed to be the most widely employed counter techniques, with resistance constituting the least preferred strategy (identified in only eight cases).

Unlike previous analysis of a single case study, a key strength of this research lies in the identification of perpetrator techniques and target counter techniques using a much broader sample of cases. Nevertheless, a methodological shortcoming of this research pertains to the exclusive use of judicial decisions as a method for identifying such strategies, at the exclusion of other sources of useful information such as the original claim documents and grievance reports (McDonald et al., 2010). Also, this research had only analyzed cases of sexual harassment adjudicated in court rather than the workplace. Despite these limitations, however, the Outrage Management model does offer an innovative conceptual framework, bolstering our understanding of how perpetrators of sexual harassment may rationalize and justify their behavior, consequently, absolving themselves of blame and responsibility.

It is important, therefore, that researchers endeavor to better understand the self-serving cognitive mechanisms and disinhibitory processes that lead a motivated individual to sexually harass. Scott and Martin (2006) note that the perpetrator techniques explicated in their model share some conceptual proximity with exonerating strategies presented in alternative theoretical frameworks such as "techniques of neutralization" (Sykes & Matza, 1957) and "mechanisms of moral disengagement" (Bandura, 1990, 1999). Expanding on the Outrage Management model, we postulate that mechanisms of moral disengagement provide a stronger elucidation of the *cognitive* mechanisms that people use to deny, downplay, and justify sexually harassing conduct in the work environment. The theoretical framework of moral disengagement can bolster understanding of sexual harassment perpetration by explicating a self-regulatory process that is inhibitive or facilitative of such behavior. As a self-regulatory process, mechanisms of moral disengagement might explain how a perpetrator's moral restraints against engaging in sexually harassing actions become gradually disinhibited over time. More specifically, we posit that internal inhibitions against sexual harassment perpetration in the form of moral self-sanctions (i.e., emotions of guilt or shame) may be selectively disengaged by the perpetrator through the use of self-serving cognitive mechanisms that reconstruct harassing behavior as socially acceptable and justified. Through the self-regulatory process of moral disengagement, we suggest that sexual harassment perpetrators eliminate cognitive dissonance arising from the conflicting motivation to harass with the simultaneous need to behave in accordance with common moral principles. We propose that once moral self-sanctions have been successfully disengaged, the actor may proceed to commit a sexually harassing act provided they are unconstrained by situational factors.

5. Theory of Moral Disengagement

Within social cognitive theory, Bandura (1990, 1999) argued that people continuously self-regulate their thoughts and actions through evaluating their behavior in accordance with their internal moral standards. As highlighted above, these moral standards act as inhibitors against immoral conduct, preventing the activation of self-sanctions, such as emotions of guilt and shame, which arise when these standards are violated. It is argued, however, that moral standards do not function as fixed internal regulators of conduct. Instead, self-sanctions do not operate unless they are activated and there are various psychosocial strategies that enable people to selectively disengage moral self-regulation when engaging in detrimental conduct. These techniques are collectively known as mechanisms of "moral disengagement" (Bandura, 1990, 1999).

Moral disengagement is postulated to serve as a cognitive process that enables people to convince themselves that moral principles do not apply to them in a particular context, thus creating a version of reality in which detrimental behavior becomes socially and morally acceptable. These mechanisms explain how people can engage in behavior conflicting with their moral beliefs and principles without experiencing self-reproach. The eight mechanisms of moral disengagement are theoretically posited to operate at four distinct loci within the self-regulatory system (Bandura, 1990, 1999). Mechanisms operating at the *behavior locus* enable people to reconstruct detrimental conduct by portraying it as being socially or morally acceptable (moral justification), using sanitizing language to disguise the potential meaning of the behavior (euphemistic labeling), or by comparing their conduct to behavior that is considered worse and more flagrant (advantageous comparison). Mechanisms operating at the *agency locus* allow people to obscure and minimize feelings of personal responsibility by externally attributing the causes of detrimental conduct to social pressures or the dictates of legitimate authority (displacement of responsibility) or by diffusing their sense of personal contribution to immoral behavior committed within a group context (diffusion of

responsibility). At the *outcome locus,* people can cognitively avoid, distort or minimize the harmful effects of their actions (distortion of consequences). Finally, two mechanisms at the *recipient locus* vilify the victim of harmful conduct as being blameworthy (attribution of blame) and less than human (dehumanization), thereby eliminating any empathic concern felt by the perpetrator. Consequently, people can reconstruct immoral acts so that they become moral or otherwise irrelevant to moral concerns.

Empirical research on moral disengagement was pioneered by Bandura et al. (1996) using 'The Moral Disengagement Scale (MDS).' The MDS is a self-report measure of stable individual differences in moral disengagement tendencies. Recent years have witnessed a flourish of research attention on moral disengagement across diverse behavioral contexts. Researchers have documented moral disengagement to predict bullying in *schools* (e.g., Pornari & Wood, 2010) and *prisons* (e.g., South & Wood, 2006); *corporate crime* (e.g., Bandura, Caprara, & Zsolnai, 2000; Detert, Sweitzer, & Trevino, 2008), *academic cheating* (e.g., Shu, Gino, & Bazerman, 2011), *anti-social conduct in sport* (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011), and *civic offending* such as vandalism and theft (e.g., Caprara, Fida, Vecchione, Tramontano, & Barbaranelli, 2009).

6. The Role of Moral Disenagement in Sexual Harassment Perpetration

Bandura (1986) originally noted that mechanisms of moral disengagement may be embodied within rape myths that serve to blame the victim and exonerate the rapist. Yet, despite recognition of its etiological relevance to sexual violence, there has been almost no theoretical or empirical application of moral disengagement to this behavioral context to date. Currently, mechanisms of moral disengagement have been theoretically proposed as facilitators of wartime rape committed by male soldiers (Henry, Ward, & Hirshberg, 2004). More recently, higher levels of moral disengagement were shown to predict stronger rape

supportive attitudes among young males belonging to college fraternities (Carroll, 2009). However the influence of moral disengagement on males' behavioral tendencies (e.g., proclivity to rape) has not been empirically determined.

As stated earlier, sexual harassment has been conceptualized as aggressive and immoral conduct. Moral disengagement may, therefore, serve as an important self-regulatory process that is conductive to sexually harassing behavior. It, thus, warrants greater attention by researchers so that potential theoretical advancements can arise from this area. In the following subsections, the eight mechanisms of moral disengagement within the self-regulatory system are presented. Using a broad body of research and theory to inform our ideas, we now present a *preliminary conceptualization* of how these eight theoretical mechanisms may explain sexual harassment perpetration.

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6.1. Moral Justification

Bandura (1990, 1999) proposed that when engaging in detrimental conduct, people need to justify to themselves the social acceptability and morality of their actions. Individuals may, therefore, attempt to justify engaging in sexually harassing behavior on the basis of 'moral foundations' (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Leidner & Castano, 2012). These moral foundations include, for example, principles related to loyalty, authority, and fairness. According to the Social Intuitionist Model of morality (Haidt & Graham, 2007), moral foundations guide the moral interpretation and evaluation of an event or behavior committed

by an individual or members of their social group. The moral foundation of loyalty, for example, reflects an individual's tendency to perceive a specific behavior or event as moral to the extent that it is advantageous to the in-group (Leidner & Castano, 2012). Using this theoretical reasoning, we would argue that perpetrators of sexual harassment may attempt to reinterpret and justify their actions on the basis of the moral foundation of loyalty. This can be illustrated effectively through a form of gender harassing behavior referred to as "girl watching" (Quinn, 2002). Quinn described girl watching as a social practice whereby men engage in sexual evaluation of women in the presence of other men.

According to Quinn (2002), girl watching is a powerful source of gendered social action which serves to strengthen male social bonding and build collective masculine identities. As argued by Quinn, the benefits of this behavior are that it enables heterosexual men to establish solidarity, pride, and intimacy among themselves, thus promoting adherence to masculine gender norms (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000; Quinn, 2002; Welsh, 1999). Moreover, the need to conform to masculine gender norms may necessitate a "narrowing of the moral self" (Schwalbe, 1992). In other words, men are posited to suppress empathic concern and justify a woman's suffering in order to effectively adhere to prescribed masculine norms and protect a collective masculine identity (Quinn, 2002).

6.2. Euphemistic Labeling

The appearance and potential meaning of behavior can be disguised and reframed through language (Bandura, 1990, 1999). Euphemistic language would enable sexually harassing acts to be reconstructed as innocuous and benign, while simultaneously reducing perpetrators' feelings of personal responsibility. Bandura (1999) originally provided several examples of sanitized language. For example, soldiers can be described as "wasting" people rather than killing them. Bombing missions can be described as "servicing the target" with civilians killed in bomb attacks being referred to as "collateral damage."

Similarly, we argue that people may use sanitized euphemistic labeling to describe and justify sexually harassing behavior as either "being friendly" or "harmless fun" (Kelly, 1988) when confronted with their act. They may insist their actions were only "play," a "game" (Quinn, 2002), or simply innocent "flirting," "banter," "joking" (Tata, 2000) or a "prank" (Bill & Naus, 1992). The use of humor may also disguise the harm inherent in sexually harassing behavior. Bill and Naus (1992), for instance, found that the more humorous a series of hypothetical sexist scenarios were rated by male participants, the less likely these individuals were to perceive the scenarios as sexist, and the more accepting and approving they were of sexist behavior. The use of humor may even provide a moral amnesty enabling sexual harassers to deny responsibility for their actions, dismissing any harm or hostility conveyed by their behavior as "kidding around" or a "joke" (Tata, 2000). Acts of gender harassment, such as sexist language, may also be deemed "harmless ironic fun" (Coy & Horvath, 2010; Horvath, Hegarty, Tyler, & Mansfield, 2012). Hence, using this reasoning, sexual harassment can be cognitively restructured by perpetrators as innocuous behavior through a variety of sanitized euphemistic labels. These euphemisms would, therefore, serve as a powerful and convenient linguistic device aiding the facilitation and reinforcement of sexual harassing behavior. Clearly, euphemistic labeling is implicitly conveyed in the Outrage Management model (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006) through the cognitive strategy of reinterpretation. As such, the use of euphemistic language enables the perpetrator to reinterpret their behavior as benign and protest that their actions have been misperceived by the target.

6.3. Advantageous Comparison

A person's perception of their injurious actions can be affected by what they are compared against (Bandura, 1990, 1999). Detrimental conduct can be made benevolent when it is contrasted with transgressive activities considered worse and more flagrant. It has

already been stated that sexual harassment is often viewed along a continuum of behaviors (e.g., Begany & Milburn, 2002; Kelly, 1988; Pina et al., 2009; Quina, 1990) that can range from being relatively mild and offensive (e.g., sexist remarks), to potentially culminating in physical sexual assault (i.e., rape) at the most extreme end of the spectrum. As noted earlier, there is widespread consensus among researchers that sexual harassment represents a multidimensional construct composed of distinct behavioral categories (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gelfand et al., 1995). On this basis, we argue that people may engage in exonerating comparison of potentially offensive social-sexual acts within and across different behavioral domains. For example, persistent sexual comments (an example of both gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention) directed at an individual woman may be perceived by the perpetrator as trivial and benevolent when favorably compared with attempts at sexually touching that female.

The same exonerating effects may occur, for example, when personalized sexual remarks given to a female target are compared against sexually coercive attempts at obtaining sexual contact from that person (e.g., through offering bribes for sexual compliance and issuing threats for sexual non-cooperation). Alternatively, inappropriate sexualized behavior may be positively compared against other forms of misconduct deemed by the individual to be more serious and detrimental within the organization. An example of this could be when the sending of sexually explicit emails or pornographic images to a female co-worker over the internet (an example of gender harassment; Maass et al., 2003) is compared against other deviant organizational behaviors (for example, committing fraud). Collectively, the cognitive reconstruction of detrimental conduct through moral justification, euphemistic language, and advantageous comparison are theoretically proposed to constitute the most effective mechanisms for disengaging internal moral control (Bandura, 1990, 1999). Consequently,

these three disengagement mechanisms may exert a strong facilitative influence on the perpetration of sexual harassment.

6.4. Displacement of Responsibility

The second set of disengagement mechanisms is theorized to operate by obscuring or minimizing the perpetrator's sense of personal agency in causing detrimental behavior. In fitting with Bandura's (1990, 1999) theoretical framework, we propose that individuals engaging in sexually harassing acts may choose to displace responsibility for their conduct onto legitimate authority (e.g., workplace management). Indeed, the plausibility of our conception can be empirically supported. Pryor, Giedd, and Williams (1995) reported studies conducted with military personnel and found that the extent of women's self-reported experiences of sexual harassment were related to the extent to which men in their workgroup perceived the local commander as being tolerant and condoning of such behavior. Similarly, Williams, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow (1999) observed that an organizational climate of tolerance for sexual harassment directly contributed to greater prevalence of harassing behavior among samples of U.S. military personnel.

Over the years, researchers have consistently demonstrated that tolerance of the organizational climate is one of the most critical antecedents of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Hulin et al., 1996; Pryor & Meyers, 2000; Willness et al., 2007), thus, providing opportunities for repeated harassing behavior. The reciprocal interplay of individual and organizational factors has been clearly conveyed in a person x situation model (Pryor et al., 1993; Pryor et al., 1995; Pryor & Whalen, 1997) in which individuals with a chronic predisposition to harass will usually only proceed to engage in sexually harassing acts when exposed to local social and management norms that are perceived as condoning and permissive of the behavior. Conversely, individuals with such proclivities may be externally inhibited from committing a harassing act when situational and

environmental conditions (e.g., available and enforced anti-harassment policies and sanctions) exercise powerful and over-riding constraints on their behavior (DeCoster, Estes, & Mueller, 1999; Dekker & Barling, 1998; O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998; Perry, Schmidtke, & Kulik, 1998; Pryor et al., 1993).When these situational constraints are weak, however, personal factors will presumably emerge as the predominant determinants of sexual harassment. This social climate develops from managerial attitudes and practices, implying that organizational leadership has an important facilitative role in creating and sustaining sexually harassing behavior (Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003).

6.5. Diffusion of Responsibility

An individual's sense of personal agency in causing sexual harassment may be weakened further through social diffusion of responsibility. This notion is plausible considering that harassing acts often occur within a collective context (i.e., within employment and educational settings). Elaborating on this further, it is apparent that repeated social-sexual behavior may ultimately lead to the creation and maintenance of an abusive and hostile working environment (Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003) adversely affecting both direct targets of the offensive behavior as well as witnesses and bystanders to the act (Glomb et al., 1997). The high prevalence of hostile environment harassment (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003), particularly within traditionally masculine occupations (e.g., Bastian et al., 1996; Martin, 1990; Ragins & Scandura, 1995) could be partially the outcome of diffused responsibility due to collective action. In other words, certain perpetrators may be exposed to other individuals engaging in similar social-sexual activities within their environment. Through providing anonymity in a group-based context (Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope, & Hodson, 2008), their inhibitions not to sexually harass would be gradually reduced through weakened moral control. Diffusion of responsibility may, however, operate

further through group decision-making. This could occur when harassing acts are enacted collectively by members of smaller peer groups (Quinn, 2002). Hence, through collective action, perpetrators may hold themselves as less personally accountable for their behavior through largely ascribing responsibility to the other group members.

6.6. Disregard or Distortion of Consequences

Moral self-sanctions may be further disengaged through denying, minimizing, disregarding, or distorting the harmful effects of injurious conduct (Bandura, 1990, 1999). The enactment of harassing acts as motivated by the need to accomplish specific goals (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000) may lead perpetrators to cognitively minimize, ignore, distort, or disbelieve the harmful consequences of their actions. As such, there is little reason for self-censure to be activated. Similar to the exonerating function of sexual harassment myths, perpetrators may reinterpret the effects of their conduct as being pleasurable and flattering for the target. The invisibility of any suffering evoked through their harassing behavior may facilitate repeated offending. This may be reinforced through the reluctance of targets to make formal or informal complaints about sexual harassment (e.g., USMSPB, 1995) and through the adoption of passive coping responses (e.g., Cortina & Wasti, 2005). Sexual harassers may, therefore, distort the consequences of their actions through attending to a lack of protest from the target. This lack of protest may incorrectly signal to the perpetrator that the target actually welcomed and enjoyed the behavior directed at them.

Additionally, passivity and lack of intervention from bystanders and other perpetrators may contribute to the cognitive avoidance of harmful effects resulting from sexual harassment, thus enabling further moral neutralization. This may occur through reducing the perceived moral relevance and moral intensity surrounding the harassing act (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Bowes Sperry & Powell, 1996, 1999; O'Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001). Hence, perpetrators will be able to rationalize and justify harassing

behavior as moral if bystanders do not react to the behavior, or express disapproval, or if they show support to the perpetrator. These disinhibitory processes may contribute to reducing empathic concern being felt for the target (Bartling & Eisenman, 1993; Pryor, 1987) which would further perpetuate sexual harassment. Disregard and distortion of the harmful consequences of sexual harassment has close correspondence with the Outrage Management technique of reinterpretation (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). This disengagement mechanism thus allows the harasser to reinterpret the effects of their conduct as being pleasurable and flattering for the target, maintaining their perception of the behavior as trivial and socially acceptable.

6.7. Dehumanization

Bandura (1990, 1999) postulated that moral self-censure for harmful conduct can be disengaged through divesting people of human qualities. Through dehumanization, empathic concern for victims is gradually diminished leading them to be perceived as sub-human objects rather than individuals with feelings, hopes and concerns. Interestingly, sexual harassment and other manifestations of gender-based discrimination have been commonly associated with women's biological nature (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004). Paradoxically, women may be simultaneously perceived as "beasts" and "beauties" (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004). Indeed, it has been proposed that in contrast to men, women are typically viewed as governed by their physical bodies, sensations, and emotions, and consequently may be seen as being closer to the status of other animals. Conversely, when women are held in high esteem they tend to be removed of their natural qualities, becoming purified as "objects" of beauty or worship (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004).

Sexual objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997) is considered to strip women of their connection to nature thus perpetuating gender inequality and sexual violence (Galdi et al., 2013; Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, & Puvia, 2011; Rudman & Mescher, 2012).

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Objectification occurs when a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated from her person, being reduced to the status of mere instruments (Bartky, 1990). Sexual objectification may thus constitute a form of dehumanization when women's bodies are represented in pornography or used for sex trade (Bandura, 1986; Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004; Haslam, 2006). Thus, the dehumanization of women through pornographic representation and cultural practices is seen to remove them from complete moral consideration and legitimizes sexual assault (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Haslam, 2006; Nussbaum, 1999).

Recently, researchers have begun to experimentally investigate the dehumanization of women through sexual objectification (e.g., Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Heflick et al., 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010; Rudman & Borgida, 1995; Vaes, Paladino, & Puvia, 2011). When induced to objectify women by focusing on their physical appearance, men have been found to perceive objectified women as being lower in warmth, competence, and morality (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Heflick et al., 2011). An experimental study requiring men to complete a single-category implicit association test (SC-IAT; Karpinski & Steinman, 2006), also found that only objectified women were implicitly associated more with animal related words (rather than human related words) thereby further supporting the link between sexual objectification and dehumanization (Vaes et al., 2011). Moreover, sexually objectified women have also been associated with lesser attribution of mind and moral status, consequently becoming depersonalized through denial of their humanness or personhood (Loughnan et al., 2010).

The dehumanization of women has also been examined in relation to behavioral outcomes related to sexual aggression (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Across two experimental studies employing the IAT, male participants were instructed to attribute human and animal related words to a series of male and female targets. It was found that men who implicitly

associated women with animal words (e.g., animals, nature, bodies) more than human words (e.g., culture, society, mind) indicated greater proclivities for rape and sexual harassment, as well as reporting more negative attitudes toward female rape victims (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). A follow up study included objectification (measured using words such as object, tool, and device) as an additional measure of dehumanization alongside the measure of animalization tested previously. Both forms of dehumanization were found to have a stronger implicit association with female targets rather than male targets. Further still, dehumanization of women through objectification was correlated positively with greater male rape proclivity. Based on these findings, then, Rudman and Mescher (2012) concluded that when men dehumanize women by associating them with animals or perceiving them as objects, they place women at an increased risk of sexual victimization.

Similarly, additional experimental research has found that mere exposure to sexually objectifying television programs (Galdi et al., 2013) and video games (Yao, Mahood, & Linz, 2010) can predict sexual harassment. Galdi et al. (2013) investigated whether male viewing of television programs that stereotypically portray women as sexual and decorative objects would lead them to express greater proclivities for sexual coercion and engagement in gender harassing behavior. After viewing a series of television clips depicting objectified women, men reported a higher intention to engage in sexual coercion (measured using the LSH scale; Pryor, 1987) and gender harassment (measured as the sending of sexist/sexual jokes to a virtual female chat partner) relative to women depicted in professional roles (female professionals condition) and a control condition. It was also found that objectified women were perceived as less competent than women depicted in the professional category. A follow-up study revealed that exposure to objectifying television increased men's conformity to traditional masculine norms concerning non-relational attitudes toward sex, dominance and

aggression. Collectively, these findings are intriguing and provide greater empirical evidence that sexual objectification has a causal role in producing sexual harassment.

6.8. Attribution of Blame

Bandura (1990, 1999) proposed that moral self-censure for detrimental conduct may be weakened further through attribution of blame. Attributing blame to the victims of harmful behavior serves self-exonerative purposes, with people perceiving themselves as faultless victims driven to injurious conduct by forcible provocation. Victims are, therefore, not entirely faultless and through their own actions can be blamed in some way for bringing suffering upon themselves. As noted earlier, Bandura (1986) suggested that the various moral disengagement mechanisms may be embodied within rape myths that serve to blame the victim. Arguably this notion would extend to myths surrounding sexual harassment (Diehl et al., 2012; Lonsway et al., 2008). Sexual harassment myths encompass attitudes and beliefs holding victims responsible for inviting unwanted sexual interest through inappropriate clothing and behavior, and also through their failure to discourage the perpetrator. Moreover, endorsement of rape and sexual harassment myths is predictive of harassing behavior (e.g., Begany & Milburn, 2002; Diehl et al., 2012; Pryor, 1987). Yet, only a few studies to date have directly examined blame attribution in response to sexual harassment (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Key & Ridge, 2011; Valentine-French & Radtke, 1989). The available research has documented, in particular, that targets of sexual harassment are more likely to be blamed by employees rather than students (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001), and by those holding more traditional sex role beliefs (Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Valentine-French & Radtke, 1989), and sexist attitudes (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). Most recently, however, researchers have now demonstrated that attribution of blame to targets of sexual harassment is associated with greater male proclivity to sexually harass (Key & Ridge, 2011).

Key and Ridge (2011) instructed male college students to self-report their proclivity to engage in hostile environment sexual harassment (measured via the Sexual Harassment Proclivities Scale; Bartling & Eisenman, 1993). Participants were later presented with a series of hypothetical scenarios depicting various harassing behaviors. They were then asked to indicate their level of self-identification with the hypothetical harasser and their attributions of blame to both the male perpetrator and female victim in each scenario. The findings of the study reveal that males self-reporting greater proclivity to sexually harass perceived the hypothetical harassers as being more personally relevant to them. As a result, these individuals blamed the harassers less and their victims more relative to males lower in sexual harassment proclivity. Interpretation of these findings led Key and Ridge to suggest that high proclivity males may have experienced greater social identification with the hypothetical harassers. This potentially high level of identification could have resulted in greater ingroup favoritism (i.e., attributing less blame to the harassers) and outgroup derogation (i.e., attributing more blame to the victims). It is clear, furthermore, that attribution of blame bears conceptual resemblance to the notion of devaluation in the Outrage Management model. As already mentioned, perpetrators of sexual harassment have been proposed to use derogatory language and rumor spreading as methods that devalue the targets of their behavior, contributing to the creation of an undesirable professional reputation of the target (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). These strategies of devaluation, therefore, seek to blame and undermine the credibility of the target, consequently protecting the harasser from the negative repercussions of their actions.

7. Conclusion

In this review, we have focused on research and theoretical approaches pertaining to the roles of motivation and cognition in sexual harassment perpetration. It is clear from the extant literature that a dichotomy exists in which motives for sexually harassing behaviors are

conceived to be based either on sexual attraction (e.g., Browne, 2006), or hostility (e.g., Berdahl, 2007). As highlighted in this paper, it is important to understand why an individual may choose to sexually harass. Therefore, further research is warranted in order to shed more light on these underlying motivational processes. It is also extremely important, however, that greater research attention is given to examining the cognitive mechanisms that disinhibit a motivated individual to sexually harass. At the center of this article is the question of how motivated harassers eliminate cognitive dissonance that may arise from conflicting motivations to commit a sexually harassing act with the simultaneous need to preserve a moral self-concept of being generally decent and rule abiding. This is relevant to ask when considering that the majority of sexual harassment perpetrators are likely to be ordinary individuals who usually comply with common moral standards.

As a starting point in addressing this question, we have argued that the cognitive process of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1990, 1999) has an important role to play in disinhibiting motivated individuals to sexually harass. Mechanisms of moral disengagement have been previously noted to display conceptual overlap with perpetrator techniques of Outrage Management (McDonald et al., 2010; Scott & Martin, 2006). Indeed, many of the disengagement mechanisms correspond with the strategies of reinterpretation and devaluation introduced by Scott and Martin (2006). These techniques share a common aim; to cognitively restructure harassing behavior, deny responsibility, distort its harmful consequences, and blame the victim. Contrary to the Outrage Management model, however, we assert that the theoretical framework of moral disengagement provides a broadened conceptualization of the *cognitive* strategies that people use to disengage from the negative consequences of sexually harassing behavior. More importantly, we argue that moral disengagement provides a stronger theoretical explication of the self-regulatory process that underlies sexual harassment perpetration. The gradual reduction of self-censure through moral disengagement could

explain why some individuals engage in sexual harassment repeatedly given permissive situational factors. Also, moral disengagement could account for why sexual harassment has the potential to escalate in severity and frequency over time. The neutralization and self-justification of sexual harassment through the ongoing use of moral disengagement mechanisms may account for why a small proportion of perpetrators progress from committing relatively benign and milder acts of sexual harassment, such as inappropriate sexual comments, to eventually engaging in physical sexual assault (i.e., rape) at the most extreme end of the behavioral continuum.

As emphasized in this review, there has been almost no empirical or theoretical application of moral disengagement to explaining sexual violence to date. However, using a broad body of research and theory to inform our ideas, we have presented a preliminary conceptualization of how each of Bandura's (1990, 1999) mechanisms of moral disengagement may operate in the perpetration of sexually harassing behavior. It, therefore, offers an extension to the Outrage Management model through presenting additional exonerating strategies that may be used by sexual harassment perpetrators and which are represented as a self-regulatory process. We hope these ideas will serve as a useful framework for researchers interested in examining self-serving cognitions of the sexual harasser. Nevertheless, we recognize that clarification of these eight mechanisms of moral disengagement will require potential further amendment and must be subject to empirical testing in order to determine causal processes. Guided by our conceptual framework, however, we have addressed this need through beginning to develop and validate a new scale to measure the use of moral disengagement mechanisms in male-perpetrated sexual harassment of women. There is no reason though, why moral disengagement cannot be separately tested in relation to other constellations of sexual harassment such as female perpetrated harassment of men. Overall, we conclude that moral disengagement offers a

promising framework to bolster understanding of the cognitive processes that facilitate and maintain sexually harassing behavior.

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Table 1

A summary of mechanisms of moral disengagement and their function in sexual harassment perpetration

Moral disengagement mechanism	Theoretical description	Application to sexual harassment perpetration
Moral Justification	Cognitive reconstruction of detrimental behavior as socially or morally acceptable	Moral foundations such as loyalty guide evaluation of behavior (Leidner & Castano, 2012) Loyalty: Behavior is perceived as moral when it is considered advantageous to a social group. Gender harassment such as "girl watching" benefits men as it strengthens male bonding and creates a collective masculine identity (Quinn, 2002)
Euphemistic Labeling	Sanitizing language used to disguise the appearance and potential meaning of behavior	Language to describe sexual harassment as "flirting," "banter," "joking," "prank," "being friendly" or "harmless fun" (Kelly, 1988)
Advantageous Comparison	Harmful conduct is compared favorably against behaviors perceived as worse and more flagrant	Comparison of behaviors within and across different categories of sexual harassment (e.g., personal remarks compared to sexual touching) Sexually harassing behaviors compared to other forms of organizational misconduct
Displacement of Responsibility	Perception of detrimental behavior as caused by social pressures or the dictates of legitimate authority	Responsibility displaced onto workplace management High prevalence of sexual harassment in military when local commander is viewed as tolerant and condoning (Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995) Importance of organizational leadership in facilitating sexual harassment (Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003)
Diffusion of Responsibility	The minimization of a person's perception of their individual responsibility for decision making and wrongful behavior committed within a group context	Hostile work environment harassment Disinhibition through observing others engaging in sexually harassing behaviors. Group decision-making for harassing behavior within smaller peer groups (Quinn, 2002)
Distortion of Consequences	The cognitive avoidance, distortion or minimization of the harmful effects of behavior through the disregard and distortion of its consequences	Reinterpretation of behavior as pleasurable and flattering for the victim Lack of victim protest and bystander intervention enables cognitive avoidance of harmful effects
Dehumanization	The perception of the victim of detrimental behavior as being a sub-human object	Sexual objectification as a form of dehumanization predicts greater male proclivities for rape and sexual harassment (Galdi, Maass, & Cadinu, 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2012)
Attribution of Blame	The perception of the victim of detrimental behavior as being blameworthy by bringing suffering upon themselves.	Victims are more likely to be blamed by those holding traditional sex role beliefs (e.g., Jensen & Gutek, 1982) and sexist attitudes (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). Greater attribution of victim blame among males higher in self-reported proclivity to sexually harass (Key & Ridge, 2011)