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ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpos20

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To cite this article: Philip E. Holmes & Matt C. Howard (2022): The duplicitous effect of organizational identification: applying social identity theory to identify joint relations with workplace social courage and unethical pro-organizational behaviors, The Journal of Positive Psychology, DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2022.2109199

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2022.2109199

Published online: 05 Aug 2022.

THE JOURNAL OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY
https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2022.2109199

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The duplicitous effect of organizational identification: applying social identity theory to identify joint relations with workplace social courage and unethical pro-organizational behaviors

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ABSTRACT

The value of courage has been discussed for over two millennia; however, courage remains understudied in empirical research relative to its potential workplace influence. The current article applies social identity theory (SIT) to hypothesize that antecedents of social courage do not only relate to overtly beneficial outcomes. Specifically, we hypothesize that organizational identification and moral identity not only relate to social courage, but also to unethical pro-organizational behaviors. We also use SIT to hypothesize that moral identity moderates these relations. Our study supports each of these proposals, with the exception of the moderating influence of moral identity on the relation of organizational identification and workplace social courage. The results demonstrate that SIT is a viable lens to understand courage, broadening the theoretical scope surrounding the construct. We also demonstrate that some antecedents of courage may produce duplicitous effects, and practitioners should not assume that courage's antecedents are always beneficial.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 18 October 2021
Accepted 9 May 2022

KEYWORDS
Social identity theory (SIT); organizational identification; moral identity; workplace social courage; unethical pro-organizational behavior

Introduction

Mencius, an ancient Chinese philosopher, believed that courageous actions are rooted in ethics and righteousness despite wrongful opposition (Van Norden, 2008), and many modern definitions of courage refer to ethics in the face of opposition just as Mencius did. The most widely accepted scholarly definition of courage (Rate, 2010; Rate et al., 2007) includes these components and defines courage as, '(a) a willing, intentional act, (b) involving substantial danger, difficulty, or risk to the actor, (c) primarily motivated to bring about a noble good or morally worthy purpose' (Rate, 2010, p. 47). We likewise adopt this definition and consider courage to be an (a) intentional act involving (b) risk and (c) prosocial desires.

Although the conceptual importance of courage has been touted since the writings of Plato and Mencius (Cooper & Hutchinson, 1997), courage within the workplace has received relatively little conceptual and empirical attention (Detert & Bruno, 2017). Howard et al. (2017) argued that this dearth of research was, in part, due to uncertainties regarding the dimensions of courage and their relevance to the workplace. To address this issue, the authors identified a dimension of courage with notable importance to the workplace, social courage, that they defined as a 'courageous behavior in which the risks involved could damage the actor's esteem in the eyes of others' (Howard et al., 2017, p. 675), which closely adheres to the Pury and Starkey (2010, 2007) definition of general courage. Representative actions of social courage include those that risk the actor's relationships and/or image to benefit others, including individuals (both ingroup and outgroup members), teams, or organizations as a whole.

Because the literature on workplace courage is still in a stage of nascency, much remains unknown regarding the nature of courage. Notably, most research addressing the antecedents of workplace courage has been conceptual (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Pury & Starkey, 2010; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007), and only a handful of studies have found empirical support for antecedents of workplace courage (Howard & Cogswell, 2019; Koerner, 2014; Palanski et al., 2015). Additionally, a more nuanced understanding of workplace courage antecedents is necessary to provide fuller understanding of the entire courage process and practical applications in business. Several authors have called for investigations that assess the broader consequences of courage's antecedent effects (Detert & Bruno, 2017), stressing that certain

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antecedents may simultaneously motivate both courageous and deviant behaviors (Pury et al., 2015). For example, Pury et al. (2015) cautions those who attempt to facilitate courage by stating, 'if you help people build their courage, they might not always use it in ways you would like' (p. 386). Therefore, more studies are needed not only to better understand how workplace courage originates within individuals, but also to better understand the potential ethical implications of fostering courage behaviors.

To provide these nuanced insights, the current research draws on social identity theory (SIT; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998) to identify antecedents of workplace social courage and their potential duplicitous effects. According to SIT, an individual's social identifications and personal identity provide a source of motivation for workplace behaviors (Van Knippenberg, 2000). We argue that organizational identification and moral identity directly and interactionally relate to workplace social courage as well as unethical pro-organizational behaviors (UPB). UPB is defined as, 'actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct' (Umphress & Bingham, 2011, p. 622). UPB includes prosocial intentions towards the organization, but these actions come at a steep ethical price. We hypothesize that organizational identification may produce duplicitous effects because it may relate positively to both workplace social courage as well as UPB; however, moral identity may intensify the beneficial effects and temper the negative effects of organizational identification.

The model tested in the current article (Figure 1) provides many implications for both research and practice. First, previously untested antecedents of social courage are assessed, providing a more nuanced understanding of the facilitation of courage in the workplace. Second, we illustrate that antecedents of social courage may not solely relate to positive outcomes, but they can also produce duplicitous effects by relating to negative outcomes. Previously, the antecedents of courage were largely limited to overtly positive constructs that almost entirely relate to beneficial outcomes, but the current results can support that courage is also related to more ambiguous antecedents that are associated with both beneficial and detrimental outcomes – broadening the nomological net of courage. Third, we empirically test a model of workplace courage derived from SIT. To the knowledge of the current authors, no prior quantitative study has assessed the association of workplace courage with the tenets of SIT. If supported, our results could demonstrate that SIT is a viable lens to understand courage, broadening the theoretical scope surrounding the construct and opening many avenues for future research. The current work expands both the nomological and theoretical scope of social courage, which we then utilize to identify avenues for future research in our discussion.

Literature review and hypotheses

Social identity theory

SIT describes an individual's self-concept as comprised of two primary components – one's *social identity* (comprised of various social identifications) and *personal identity* (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An individual's *social identification* describes how much an individual ascribes his or her relationship with another person or entity as being a part of their own identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998). Social identification can occur with classifications (e.g., manager/line worker, male/female,

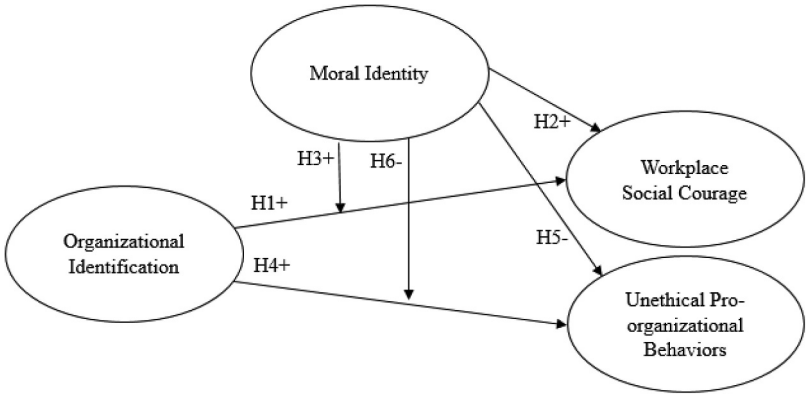

Figure 1. The hypothesized model illustrating how organizational identification and moral identity may directly and interactionally influence both ethical and unethical courageous workplace behavior.

socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, nationality, race, etc.) and entities/organizations (e.g., religious institutions, work organizations, professional affiliations, etc.). Alternatively, *personal identity* describes values that are original to an individual, such as characteristics, values, beliefs, attitudes, or traits (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998). While Ashforth and Mael (1989) posit that personal identity is strictly idiosyncratic, others propose that personal identity cannot and should not be completely siloed from the social aspect of one's self concept. For example, Hitlin (2003) describes personal identity as the 'core of the self, experienced as unique but subject to social patterning through the concept of values.' We agree that although external factors such as culture or religion may shape one's characteristics, values, beliefs, attitudes, or traits to a degree, these events do not negate the internalized values that one has adopted as their own.

Social identification and personal identity are contributors to workplace courage in a myriad of courage process models (Hannah et al., 2007; Hutchinson Rate et al., 2007; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007). Hannah et al. (2007) proposed that social identifications and personal values are pressures that reduce the perception of risk and fear which in turn facilitates courageous behaviors. Likewise, Hutchinson et al. (2015) suggest that individual differences (e.g., moral character and values) and social mediators influence leaders' ability to perform morally courageous actions. According to Sekerka and Bagozzi (2007), automatic self-regulations (e.g., personal values, traits, and virtues) and social identifications influence whether an individual moves from a desire-to-act to a decision to act courageously.

A qualitative research approach in the form of a case study or ethnography is often used to capture the level of complexity required to holistically assess social identity and personal identity (Kreiner et al., 2006; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Watson, 2008). Our goal, however, is to provide quantitative support for the direct and interactional effects of SIT constructs on workplace social courage and UPB. To do this, we assess organizational identification as one aspect of social identity and internalized moral identity as one aspect of personal identity. Organizational identification describes the extent to which individuals believe that their own identity is interlaced with their organization's identity, whereas moral identity is described as 'a self-conception organized around a set of moral traits' (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 1,424; Cole & Bruch, 2006; Aquino & Reed, 2002). These two constructs were chosen to represent social identity and personal identity due to their high relevance to workplace behaviors and close relationships to proposed workplace courage process models (Hutchinson et al., 2015; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007). We investigate potential duplicitous effects of these antecedents by assessing how they directly and interactionally relate to both social courage and UPB. Because moral identity and social identity are distinct fields of research, their integration is a unique contribution of this article.

Organizational identification, moral identity, and workplace social courage

The term 'noble' in Rate's (2010) definition is often considered synonymous with the term 'prosocial' (Howard et al., 2017), and empirical support exists throughout the social identity literature that organizational identification leads to prosocial behaviors. For example, O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) found that both organizational commitment and organizational identification were positively related to prosocial extra-role behaviors. They also found support that organizational identification was a large predictor of monetary donations to a fundraiser campaign. Tidwell (2005) found that both organizational commitment and prosocial behaviors increased with higher levels of organizational identification. Just as organizational identification has consistently shown itself to be positively related to prosocial behaviors, we expect it to positively relate to behavior derived from prosocial motivations (i.e., social courage).

Courage also involves risk (Rate, 2010), and courage process models often conceptualize this aspect of courage as an individual's 'motivation to persist' through difficulty or dangers (Hutchinson et al., 2015). While social identifications are generally described as a source of motivation in which the actor strives to maintain a positive relationship with the social entity (Dutton et al., 1994; Van Knippenberg, 2000), the actor is also motivated to take these actions despite fear resulting from other social forces. For example, Knoll and van Dick (2013) found that organizational identification drastically decreased employee quiescent silence (silence due to fear), and Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) found that organizational identification strengthened an individual's propensity to voice concerns about work-related issues. Thus, organizational identification may relate to the tendency to persist through dangers, which is an important component of the courage process. These findings are consistent with the motivations proposed by SIT in that employees who identify with the organization are more willing to perform both prosocial and risky behaviors (Van Knippenberg, 2000). We hypothesize the following relation:

Hypothesis 1: Organizational identification is positively related to workplace social courage behaviors.

Moral identity is 'a commitment consistent with one's sense of self to lines of action that promote or protect the welfare of others' (Hart et al., 1998, p. 515), and an individual's traits are a primary factor that makes up their moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Prior research has illustrated the importance of moral identity on moral action. For example, moral identity has been found to limit the occurrence of in-group partisanship, as those who exhibited high moral identity were more likely to donate monetarily to out-group members (Reed & Aquino, 2003). Reed et al. (2007) also found that individuals with high moral identity were more likely to give charitably of their time and money, and moral identity has also been associated with more principled ethical ideology (deontological philosophy; McFerran et al., 2010). Similarly, Winterich et al. (2013) found that individuals' willingness to volunteer was bolstered by their moral identity. Due to this association with prosocial behaviors, we expect moral identity to positively relate to workplace social courage.

Hypothesis 2: Moral identity is positively related to workplace social courage behaviors.

According to SIT, social identifications and personal identities often interact. These interactions must be managed by the actor and can influence the actor's motivations and ultimately their behavior (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Pratt, 1998). Moral identity has been found to intensify the effect of antecedents on prosocial behaviors. For example, moral identity strengthens the positive relationship of corporate social responsibility with job performance and helping behaviors (W. Wang et al., 2017). Likewise, Grover (2014) found that employee moral identity strengthened the relationship between leader truthfulness and employee satisfaction. In turn, higher employee satisfaction is positively related to employee helping behaviors. Rupp et al. (2013) found that moral identity strengthened the relation between corporate social responsibility perceptions and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). In each of these instances, those higher in moral identity were more motivated to take actions that reinforced their self-concept, causing them to move from the desire to act to actually performing the action. These studies indicate that high moral identity may cause those with organizational identification to more strongly value actions with prosocial implications, leading to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Moral identity moderates the relationship between organizational identification and workplace social courage behaviors in that higher levels of moral identity will facilitate increasing levels of socially courageous actions.

Organizational identification, moral identity, and UPB

In addition to social identifications promoting the maintenance of positive social relationships (Hogg & Abrams, 1993; Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel, 1974), researchers have proposed that social entities could accept actions that run counter to group accepted norms, provided that the actions allow the group to increase its prestige (Hogg & Terry, 2000). This supports the notion that individuals high in organizational identification may be willing to perform 'actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization' (Umphress & Bingham, 2011, p. 622), even if such actions are deviant. Because UPB are nonnormative actions that allow the group to increase its prestige, SIT would suggest that organizational identification positively influences UPB.

In addition to theoretical support, researchers have also found empirical support for the relation between organizational identification and UPB. Umphress et al. (2010) found that this relationship was significant when accounting for the strength of individuals' reciprocity beliefs. In a separate study, Umphress and Bingham (2011) found that organizational identification was positively related to UPB, and moral disengagement mediates this relationship. This mediated model has since been tested in multiple experiments, and researchers continually conclude that organizational identification is positively related to UPB (Chen et al., 2016; Kong, 2016). We therefore hypothesize that organizational identification is positively related to UPB.

Hypothesis 4: Organizational identification is positively related to UPB.

Moral identity is an important factor in ethical decision making, and SIT suggests that individuals avoid actions that run counter to their personal identity. One meta-analysis found moral identity to be a consistent predictor of moral behavior (Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). Moral identity also positively relates to self-regulation and negatively relates to both moral disengagement and rule-breaking (Hardy et al., 2015). McFerran et al. (2010) found that moral identity positively relates to a more principled-based decision-making process that, in turn, encourages higher OCBs and a decreased propensity for the individual to become morally

disengaged. Because these studies provide support that individuals high in moral identity are less likely to perform unethical action, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 5: Moral identity is negatively related to UPB.

Just as moral identity relates to an increase in prosocial behaviors, it also mitigates the desire to perform unethical behaviors. SIT proposes that individuals purposefully manage their actions in a way that reinforces their identity, thus creating internal continuity for the actor's self-concept (Dutton et al., 1994; Van Knippenberg, 2000). For instance, Skarlicki et al. (2008) found that high moral identity repressed the desire of individuals to commit sabotage after experiences of interpersonal injustice, and Greenbaum et al. (2013) found that the relationship between supervisor abuse and organizational deviance was weaker in individuals with higher moral identity. Likewise, high quality social exchanges between employees and the organization positively relates to UPB, but moral identity suppresses this relation (T. Wang et al., 2019). Moral identity also mitigates the positive relation between affective commitment and UPB (Matherne & Litchfield, 2012). Finally, Johnson and Umphress (2019) found that organizational identification positively relates to unethical pro-supervisor behaviors, but that high moral identity mitigates these unethical behaviors. Based on these studies, we hypothesize the following relation:

Hypothesis 6: Moral identity moderates the relationship between organizational identification and UPB in that higher levels of moral identity will facilitate diminishing levels of UPB.

Method

Sample and procedure

To test our hypotheses, we utilized the services of Qualtrics, a panel aggregator that works with over 20 market research panel providers. To reduce common method bias, the independent variables and dependent variables were collected at two time points (Podsakoff et al., 2012). We also removed participants with completion times less than one-third the average and/or failed any attention checks (e.g., 'To show that you are paying attention, please select number 4 for this entry.'). We utilized statistical power tables to estimate appropriate sample sizes for tests of moderation – our analysis with the greatest sample size demands. Shieh (2009), endorsed by Dawson (2014), indicates that a sample size of 255 can provide a statistical power of .95 across most conditions, which is significantly more than the standard power cutoff of .80. In conducting our study, we thus wanted to ensure that our final sample size was at least 255 participants. Because participant payment for time 1 was not contingent on completing time 2, a 40% to 50% attrition rate was expected; thus, we aimed to complete time 1 with a minimum of 500 participants.

An initial 998 individuals from the market research panels expressed interest in being a part of the research project. When questioned about their employment status, 99 participants were eliminated from the study for being unemployed. Of the remaining 899 participants, 274 were removed for either completing the first survey too quickly or failing an attention check. Finally, 100 surveys containing over 30% missing data were removed (Hair et al., 2010). This resulted in 525 participants that completed the first survey.

The 525 respondents were re-contacted after two weeks to complete a second survey. Three hundred and ninety-six individuals logged in to take the second survey. After reading the consent form, 17 participants chose to opt out of the study. When questioned about their employment status, an additional 6 participants were eliminated from the study due to loss of employment. Of the remaining 373 participants, 38 were removed for failing an attention check. Finally, respondents with surveys that contained over 30% missing data (an additional 38) were removed (Hair et al., 2010). The second survey concluded with 297 quality complete respondents (53% female; 87% Caucasian; 73% fulltime employment; $Age_{mean} = 58.2$, $s = 11.3$). The final sample was comprised of individuals from various industries including, real estate, food and hospitality, education, health services, transportation, legal, finance/insurance, and others.

Measures

We measured organizational identification and moral identity at Time 1, whereas we measured workplace social courage and UPB at Time 2.

Organizational identification

To measure participants' organizational identification, we utilized Mael and Ashforth's (1992) 6-item, 5-point scale. An example item is: 'When someone criticizes [my organization], it feels like a personal insult.' The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .98.

Moral identity

Mael and Ashforth (1992) created the self-importance of moral identity scale containing two dimensions, internalization of moral identity and symbolization of moral identity. The internalization dimension represents the importance of morality as a personal value, and the symbolization dimension reflects how individuals *outwardly* connect based on their internalized value. Because this research is aimed at understanding how the personal value of moral identity interacts with a social component (organizational identification), we utilized only the 5-item, 7-point internalization of moral identity dimension to represent a part of individuals' internalized personal identity, as viewed by SIT.

This scale measures internalized moral identity by listing several personal values involving moral action (e.g., compassionate, generous, and honest) and asks participants to rate how important these descriptors are to their self-concept through questions such as, 'Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am.' Although one's internalization of moral identity may have been influence by external social ties and cultural factors, this does not negate internalized personal values from representing personal identity (Hitlin, 2003). The Cronbach's alpha for the internalization dimension was .82.

Workplace social courage

Howard et al. (2017) created and validated the 11-item, 7-point workplace social courage scale (WSCS). The scale is composed of a single factor that measures one's willingness to perform workplace courageous actions in the face of risks to their personal relationships and personal image (e.g., 'Although it may completely ruin our friendship, I would give a coworker an honest performance appraisal.'). The Cronbach's alpha for the social courage scale was .88.

Unethical pro-organizational behavior

To measure UPB, we used the 6-item, 5-point scale developed by Umphress et al. (2010). The scale is comprised of a single factor that measures participants' willingness to perform 'everyday' unethical actions on the behalf of the organization. This was assessed through questions such as, 'If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good.' The Cronbach's alpha was .91.

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics, correlations, and Cronbach's Alphas. We hypothesized direct relationships of organizational identification (H_1+) and moral identity (H_2+) with behavioral social courage. The results indicate the relationship between organizational identification and social courage is positive and significant ($r = .33$, $p < .001$), providing support for H_1. Moral identity was also positively and significantly related to social courage ($r = .27$, $p < .001$), supporting H_2. We also hypothesized direct relationships of organizational identification (H_4+) and internalized moral identity (H_5-) with UPB. The hypothesized positive relationship between organizational identification and UPB is positive and significant ($r = .16$, $p < .001$), supporting H_4. We also found support for a direct negative relationship between internalized moral identity and UPB ($r = -.23$, $p < .001$), supporting H_5. Each of these direct effects were still statistically significant when assessing the impact of organizational identification and moral identity simultaneously via regression (Table 2), and therefore these results are consistent whether the effects are assessed independently or together.

To test H_3 and H_6, we performed two-step moderated regression analyses, which we repeated for each dependent variable (Table 2) until all hypothesized paths were assessed (Figure 2). For social courage, the interaction term was not significant in the second step of our regression analysis ($\beta = .01$, $p = .81$), failing to support H_3. Regarding UPB, the interaction term was negative and significant ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .02$), indicating that higher levels of internalized moral identity mitigate the positive relationship between organizational identification and unethical pro-organizational behaviors. That is, as moral identity increases, individuals exhibiting higher organizational identity are less likely to engage in UPB (Figure 3). In our simple slopes analysis, the relation of organizational identity and UPB was positive and statistically significant when moral identity was one standard deviation below its mean ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$), whereas the relation of organizational identity and UPB was not

Table 1. Bivariate correlations (beta coefficients)[a] and scale Cronbach's Alphas[b].

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1) Organizational Identification	3.41	.88	.98			
2) Moral Identity	6.30	.83	.25**	.82		
3) Social Courage	5.36	.87	.33**	.27**	.88	
4) Unethical Pro-org Behaviors	1.75	.77	.16**	−.23**	−.24**	.91

[a]When bivariate regression is executed, the beta coefficients indicating the relationship between the single independent variable (IV) and the single dependent variable (DV) are also correlation coefficients.
[b]The Cronbach's alphas are presented along the diagonal.

Table 2. Moderated regression results predicting workplace social courage and unethical pro-organizational behaviors.

Workplace Social Courage						
	Step 1			Step 2		
	β	Std. Error	t	β	Std. Error	t
Constant		.37	8.42**		.39	7.97**
(1) Org. Identification	.28	.06	4.99**	.28	.06	4.99**
2.) Moral Identity	.20	.06	3.57**	.20	.06	3.52**
4.) OI x MI				.01	.05	.25
ΔR^2			.14			.00
Unethical Pro-organizational Behaviors						
	Step 1			Step 2		
	β	Std. Error	t	β	Std. Error	t
Constant		.34	8.06**		.35	8.49**
(1) Org. Identification	.23	.05	4.04**	.22	.05	3.86**
2.) Moral Identity	−.28	.05	−4.95**	−.32	.05	−5.43**
4.) OI x MI				−.14	.05	−2.45*
ΔR^2			.10			.02

OI = Organizational Identification; MI = Internalized Moral Identity; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

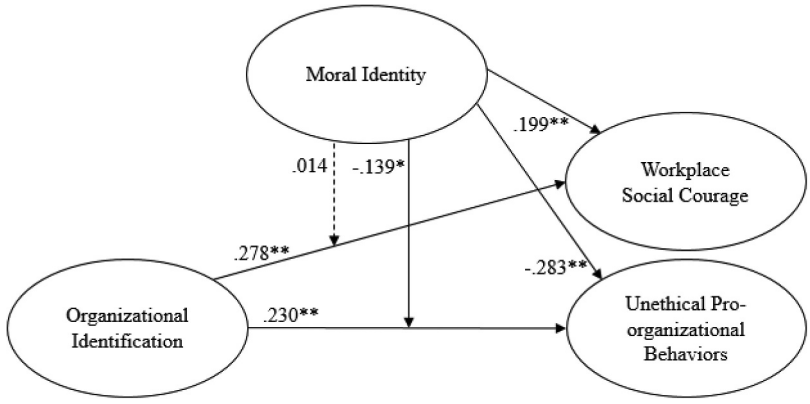

Figure 2. Moderated regression results of the hypothesized direct effects (step 1) and interactional effects (step 2) of organizational identification and moral identity on both ethical and unethical courageous workplace behavior. Note: The standardized results are provided; ** indicates $p < .01$; * indicates $p < .05$

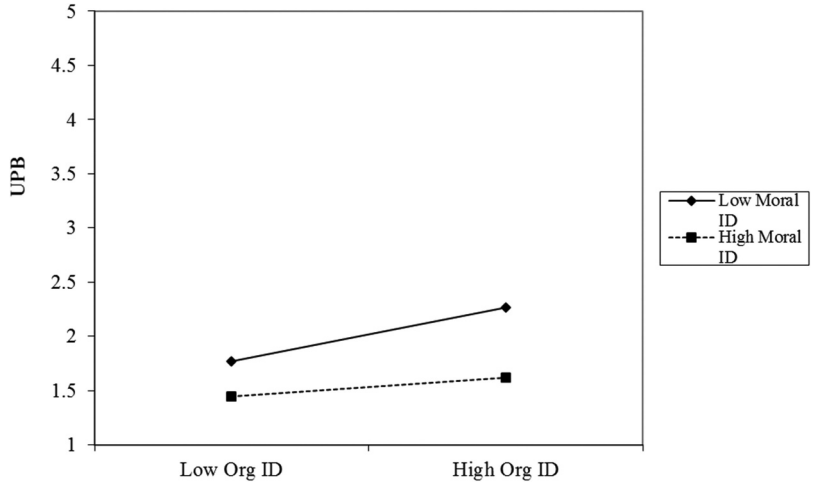

Figure 3. Simple slope analysis of the moderating effect of moral identity on the relationship between organizational identification and unethical pro-organizational behavior.

statistically significant when moral identity was one standard deviation above the mean (β = .10, p = .09). Therefore, we found support for H_6.

Discussion

This research aimed to (1) assess untested antecedents of social courage, (2) illustrate that antecedents of social courage may produce duplicitous effects by relating to negative outcomes, (3) empirically test a portion of theorized process models of courage, and (4) assess the capability of SIT to elucidate the relations surrounding workplace courage and its antecedent effects. As suggested by theoretical models that represent courage as a process (Hutchinson et al., 2015; Koerner, 2014; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007), both social and personal values are integral to the courage process. Organizational identification and moral identity were related to workplace courage, and, to our knowledge, this provides the first quantitative, empirical support for the relationships among social identifications, personal identity, and workplace courage.

Further, we observed a duplicitous effect of organizational identification. Organizational identification positively related to both workplace social courage *and* UPB. In other words, individuals who highly identify with their organization are not only more likely to perform ethical courageous actions but are also more likely to perform unethical acts on behalf of the organization. While our methods do not establish causality, Koerner (2014) provides qualitative support for causality among these variables. This duplicitous relationship illustrates how organizational identification, a variable often associated with positive outcomes, could be a double-edged sword in the process model for courageous actions. The facilitation of ethical workplace courage behaviors does not preclude the simultaneous facilitation of unethical behaviors, providing support for the warnings of Pury et al. (2015).

It is important to note, though, that the mean of UPB was a mere 1.75 out of 5.00 (S.D. = .77), indicating that individuals may be naturally reluctant to perform UPB. Although low, this mean is similar to previous studies utilizing the UPB scale (Fehr et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2019; Umphress et al., 2010). This suggests that organizational identification may not actively promote UPB, but rather makes individuals less reluctant to perform such behaviors. Although the low mean could indicate that social desirability may have influenced participants responses for UPB, we agree with Umphress et al. (2010) that our collection process (i.e., online survey) minimized these effects by eliminating the prospect of negative outcomes occurring as a result of admission. Prior research has also shown that our applied UPB scale produces a small relation with indicators of social desirability (Shaw & Liao, 2021; Umphress et al., 2010), further addressing concerns with social desirability biases skewing our results.

Moral identity was positively related to social courage yet negatively related to UPB, suggesting that, while some antecedents of courage produce duplicitous effects, others may produce more consistent beneficial outcomes. Our results are therefore not a radical departure from prior research on courage that have generally shown that antecedents of courage tend to predict beneficial outcomes more broadly (Howard & Cogswell, 2019; Koerner, 2014; Palanski et al., 2015), which provides support for the ability of our present findings to be integrated with the prior literature. The consistency of our findings with prior results provides assurances that our novel observations are substantive effects rather than idiosyncratic results that have little correspondence to the broader understanding of courage and its relations.

Moral identity did moderate the relationship between organizational identification and UPB. Greater self-importance of moral identity caused employees to be less likely to perform UPB as a result of organizational identification (Figure 3). This result suggests that individuals' various social identifications and personal identities can conflict, causing individuals to choose a behavior that may reinforces one identity while running counter to another. However, moral identity did not moderate the relationship between organizational identification and social courage, which coincides with some prior research on courage. Specifically, Howard and Holmes (2019) found that none of their three proposed effects significantly moderated the relations of courage, causing the authors to proclaim the resiliency of courage's relations to outside influences. The current results provide further support for this argument, such that the antecedent effects of courage may too be resilient to moderating effects.

Lastly, because most of our proposed relations were supported, the current results likewise support the ability of SIT to elucidate the relations of courage. SIT should therefore be seen as an appropriate lens to understand and study the relations surrounding courage, which produces several of the theoretical implications discussed below.

Theoretical implications

The results of this study present three primary theoretical implications. First, the existing literature is deficient in its quantitative assessment of the workplace courage process. Aside from a few studies (e.g., Howard &

Cogswell, 2019; Palanski et al., 2015), proposed variables within courage process models remain untested and research on workplace courage antecedents has been largely negligible. Personal and social factors have been proposed to incur complex influences on the decision-making process of performing workplace courage behaviors (Hutchinson et al., 2015; Koerner, 2014; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007), which cannot be understood without ample research investigating these intricate relations. The current study takes a nuanced look at the courage process by simultaneously incorporating proposed social and personal antecedents in our assessment and utilizing SIT to explain how different parts of one's self-concept influence workplace courage behavior. Our study therefore represents a pivotal initial step in understanding the complex network of courage antecedent effects, as we supported that both personal and social factors indeed predict workplace social courage.

Second, research mentioning the potential perils of the antecedents to workplace courage is scant. To our knowledge, our study is the first to quantitatively assess the duplicitous effects of workplace courage antecedents, giving credence to warnings of Pury et al. (2015). The duplicitous effects found in this research indicate that the courage process and the process of performing unethical behavior potentially overlap to a degree. This finding poses the possible implication that prior models and frameworks of unethical behaviors may also be applicable to studying workplace courage. Future research is certainly needed before this notion can be reliably applied, but, if true, such theoretical generalizability could greatly expand the applicable theoretical perspectives to understand workplace courage and significantly advance the sophistication and progress of modern courage research. Moore and Gino's (2015) psychological process framework of unethical behavior, Zuber's (2015) framework of the spread of unethical behavior through social networks, and Pendse's (2012) framework of motive, means, and opportunity as an 'ethical hazard' may prove particularly insightful in understanding workplace courage.

Third, now that a link between SIT and workplace courage has been established, the broader theoretical scope of SIT can be applied to understand workplace courage. Notably, SIT provides explanatory provisions for individual, group, and intergroup behaviors in which individuals take actions based on maintaining or building individual status within the group *and* group status among different groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1974). SIT can therefore be used to determine when and why employees will perform courageous behaviors in their workplaces, both for their own status as well as the status of their organization. Thus, this study provides a new theoretical foundation to assess antecedents and outcomes of workplace courage.

Future research

Future research should focus on further duplicitous effects of the antecedents to courage. For example, prosocial rule-breaking and counterproductive work behaviors have been found to be negatively correlated with workplace social courage (Howard et al., 2017), but these negative correlations do not address the possibility that they may share the same or similar antecedents. In doing so, future research should also determine how managers can mitigate unethical behaviors while still encouraging courage within the workplace. Assessing the effects of goals within the organization in relation to organizational/subgroup culture and policies may be fruitful. Likewise, research incorporating organizational ethical climate, codified corporate policies, corporate ethical leadership, authentic leadership may be fruitful as it would expand the scope of the current model beyond the individual.

Pury et al. (2015) and Detert and Bruno (2017) partially attribute the possible duplicitous effects of courage's antecedents to perspective issues between the actor and observer. That is, an action may be highly unethical to an observer, such as UPB, but seen as less unethical, or perhaps even ethical to the actor. It is possible that this is the case with UPB. Outsiders may see these actions as unethical as they are not members of the organization, but employees may see these actions as more ethical because they see the benefits of their behaviors firsthand. Future research should therefore extend the present findings by investigating the cognitive mechanisms that occur during the courage process. Specifically, researchers should conduct field experiments in which in-group and out-group participants take periodic surveys regarding their unethical behaviors and ethical justifications associated with these behaviors.

Additionally, understanding the cognitive processes that mediate these relationships may also be fruitful vein of research. While prior research has assessed various mediators unique to the respective constructs of workplace social courage and UPB (Chen et al., 2016; Howard & Cogswell, 2019; Naseer et al., 2020), future research could take a more nuanced look at mediators for the potentially overlapping process models of workplace social courage and UPB, thus identifying both shared and unique mediators. Perceived organizational, group, and personal benefits; boosts in generalized risk-taking;

and employee belongingness may be meaningful mediators in the process models. By testing these effects, future research could provide empirical support to the claims of Pury et al. (2015) and Detert and Bruno (2017), which could both encourage broader applications of their assertions as well as produce refined models of the cognitive processes underlying courage.

The current study further bridges the gap between SIT and workplace courage research, enabling future researchers to analyze the role of courage within the SIT framework. SIT readily lends itself to multilevel models detailing the association between employees (e.g., personal identity) and their broader organizations (e.g., social identity), and researchers could use multilevel approaches to assess how workplace courage instigates at both the individual and group levels. Additionally, outcomes and behaviors included in SIT-based models could be studied in conjunction with workplace courage. For example, a broad list of outcomes associated with organizational identification are readily available in meta-analyses (Riketta, 2005) and review pieces (He & Brown, 2013). He and Brown (2013) identified the outcomes of employee performance (Van Knippenberg, 2000), creativity (Madjar et al., 2011), financial performance (Wieseke et al., 2009), and others. Studies using SIT have also assessed in-group/out-group prejudice, intragroup/intergroup conflicts, emotions, and various employee behaviors such as commitment and turnover intentions (He & Brown, 2013; Riketta, 2005). Future researchers can test the association of workplace courage with these identified areas as understood by SIT, perhaps by applying multilevel research approaches to assess higher-level associations.

Additionally, because one's self-concept is always in flux due to personal changes and interactions with social entities and environments (Koerner, 2014; Kreiner et al., 2006). Future research should assess changes in workplace courage over time as roles and self-conceptualizations change over time. SIT would suggest, for instance, that individuals may be more likely to perform workplace courageous behaviors as they become more entrenched within their organization, as their social identification would strengthen. Alternatively, workplace social courage, rather than its antecedents, could actually be the factor that drives shifts in one's self-concepts (Koerner, 2014). These shifts in self-concept can occur from various sources, such as social identification changes or personal identity changes. Future research should assess how these various sources of change in self-concept differentially strengthen or weaken workplace courage, but it is also possible that these changes in self-concept shift individuals' perspective of *what* is actually considered courageous – again demonstrating a need for research on perceptions and cognitions surrounding courageous behaviors.

Some research on SIT has also differentiated whether interactions are interpersonal or intergroup (Diehl, 1988; Ellison, 2016; Schmitt et al., 2000). As mentioned, social courage can benefit individuals, teams, or organizations, whereas UPB benefit the organization. Our applied operationalization of social courage, the WSCS (Howard et al., 2017), includes benefits towards the organization in each item – in addition to possible benefits for others (e.g., coworkers, supervisors). Because our operationalizations of both social courage and UPB includes benefits towards the organization, we believe that differences in our observed relations are due to the inherent nature of the two constructs rather than artifacts of the operationalization. Future research, however, should perform more focused investigations into the dynamics of interpersonal vs. intergroup behaviors regarding social courage. While the WSCS produces a replicated unidimensional factor structure (Howard et al., 2017), individual items may produce somewhat differing relations based on the benefiter. For instance, some items are more oriented towards benefitting coworkers than others, and variables associated with coworker relations may have a stronger effect on these items. Further, SIT may be ideal to study these effects. The different benefiters in the WSCS items may cause differing schemas associated with group membership to activate, causing the respondent to think more about their in-group vs. out-group categorization based on the benefiter. SIT could be used to differentiate these multiple layers of in-group identification, such as being a member of a work team and organization, and then assess how these group memberships differ based on the benefiter (e.g., coworker, team, organization). Therefore, the current investigation should be one of many integrating SIT with social courage.

Practical implications

Our results support that courageous actions can occur for reasons other than internal characteristics. Individuals' strengths of social identifications are influenced by their perpetual interactions with the entity, and actions of the organization could either strengthen or weaken the level of one's identification with it (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kreiner et al., 2006). Organizations could enact policies or create a culture in which behavioral courage is facilitated. Likewise,

management could take actions that would prime individuals to perform workplace courage more frequently. Those with otherwise low propensities to perform courageous behaviors could be encouraged to step up and act courageously on behalf of the organization and peers.

Our results also indicate that both ethical and unethical actions may be facilitated by the same motivating factor, which stresses the importance of organizational and managerial awareness. Although upper management and direct supervisors may take actions with the intent of motivating prosocial actions, they may be unintentionally creating a situation in which they are simultaneously encouraging unethical behaviors. The 2016 scandal of Wells Fargo provides an illustration. Branch managers and employees were tasked with impossible quotas of cross-selling products and creating new accounts. Even if these quotas and the resulting compensation were not intended by upper management to foster the unethical behaviors, employees performed daily unethical behaviors for the benefit of the organization and themselves at the expense of customers and shareholders. Management may combat the potential negative effects of antecedents with duplicitous effects through reasonable goals paired with ethics training, clearly defined codes of conduct, and/or ethical leadership practices to create ethical workplace cultures.

Limitations

The data in this study was collected from a single source. Although single source bias is a possibility, the data was collected using the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2012). While collecting the independent and dependent variables at different time periods reduces single-source bias, future studies could utilize different collection methods (such as other-reported data) to confirm these findings. Also, this study utilized online participants through third-party, research-pool affiliations of Qualtrics. However, research supports the quality and validity of online data (Walter et al., 2019).

The current study was sufficiently powered to detect our effects of interest, and we interpreted our null effects as substantive findings throughout our results and discussion sections. It is possible, however, that our analyses were underpowered to reliably detect a very small moderating effect, and our null findings may instead represent very small effects. For this reason, future research should replicate the current results with larger sample sizes.

While we purposely chose to collect data from participants across all industries with the intent of making the findings generalizable to employees across various industries; in doing so, possible industry differences between the relationships in this study may be masked. Future research could address this limitation by addressing these relationships within industry specific contexts. For example, some industries or companies may require more or less of particular types of courage, such as physical rather than social. Thus, future research should also assess multiple types of courage in these different industries.

Lastly, this was a correlational study from survey data. Therefore, the observed correlations cannot provide robust support for casual effects. While qualitative support was provided by Koerner (2014) for the potential of causality between these variables, future researchers should replicate the current results using research designs that can better identify causality and change, such as intensive longitudinal designs and panel studies.

Conclusion

This study drew from SIT to illustrate how social identification and personal identity directly and interactionally effect workplace courage actions. We found support that organizational identification is positively related to both ethical and unethical behaviors (social courage and UPB, respectively) in the workplace. We also found support that moral identity is positively related to workplace social courage and negatively related to UPB. Moral identity further mitigated the positive relationship between organizational identification and UPB. Ultimately, the data showed that components of SIT are related to behavioral courage and that both ethical and unethical actions could be facilitated simultaneously by the same variable.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Informed consent

Informed consent from participants was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Within the consent form, participants were made aware that a publication may result using their anonymous responses. The wording of this consent form was approved by the University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB), Mobile, Alabama (Board Reference Number: 19-392.

Data availability statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2022.2109199.

Open scholarship

This article has earned the Center for Open Science badges for Open Data and Open Materials through Open Practices Disclosure. The data and materials are openly accessible at https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2022.2109199.

Research involving human participants and/or animals

Approvals for the consent form, questionnaire, and study were obtained from the University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB), Mobile, Alabama (Board Reference Number: 19-392.

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