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An Empirical Investigation of the Relationship Among Forms of Workplace Mistreatment

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Organizational researchers argue that workplace mistreatment scholarship is hampered because of the wide variety of constructs studied. To investigate this concern, we conducted an item-level analysis of the relationship among workplace mistreatment experiences to assess construct overlap. Employed students reported how similar 17 mistreatment experiences were to one another (i.e., from measures of sexual harassment, generalized harassment, and incivility) and subject matter experts indicated the degree to which each experience represented several dimensions including Buss's (1961) dimensions (i.e., verbal/physical, active/passive, and direct/indirect) and others (i.e., sexual/nonsexual and intentional/accidental). Nonsexual forms of mistreatment (i.e., generalized harassment and incivility) were perceived similarly despite their different conceptual definitions, whereas sexual harassment experiences were relatively distinct. Implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: workplace mistreatment; workplace aggression; sexual harassment; generalized harassment; workplace incivility

As anyone who has ever worked is well aware, the workplace is as likely as any other context to breed harmful interpersonal behaviors. From bullying (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002), mobbing (Zapf, 1999), sexual harassment (Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997), incivility (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001), and so on, researchers have differentiated among numerous types of workplace mistreatment. Forms of mistreatment are often conceptualized and studied separately from one another, but several researchers have discussed the relationship among various forms of such misbehavior and the problems associated with the myriad construct labels (e.g., Aquino & Thau, 2009; Barling, Dupré, & Kelloway, 2009; Jex, Geimer, Clark, Guidroz, & Yugo, 2010; O'Leary-Kelly, Duffy, & Griffin, 2000; Raver & Barling, 2008; Spector & Fox, 2005).

Despite these theoretical discussions, there exists only minimal empirical work exploring how these behaviors are related (i.e., Hershcovis, 2011). Hershcovis (2011) conducted a meta-analysis to assess the differential effects of several forms of mistreatment on outcomes, and results suggested that effects did not differ significantly across constructs. We build on

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Hershcovis' findings by empirically assessing the relationship among forms of mistreatment, but we do so with a different methodology that offers novel information. With data collected from two sources, we used multidimensional scaling (MDS) to conduct an item-level analysis of the relationship among items from validated measures of three forms of workplace mistreatment experiences: sexual harassment, generalized harassment, and workplace incivility.

In doing so, we provide two contributions to the workplace mistreatment literature. First, although Hershcovis (2011) empirically demonstrated the nature of the problem at the *construct* level, our assessment goes a level deeper in an *item-by-item* analysis. In doing so, we demonstrate that items used to tap different constructs of a nonsexual nature (generalized harassment and incivility), which likewise have different conceptual definitions, are actually perceived by survey respondents to be quite similar. Second, prior research investigating construct overlap (e.g., Hershcovis, 2011) has not considered sexual harassment despite explicit calls to better understand how sexual harassment and nonsexual mistreatment are related (Barling et al., 2009) and arguments that research in these domains has largely occurred separately (Dionisi, Barling, & Dupré, 2012). In the following section, we outline the rationale for this study and describe the focal constructs of interest and the reason for their selection.

THE PROBLEM AND THE NEED FOR EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

Various organizational researchers have acknowledged the overlap in conceptual and operational definitions of workplace mistreatment constructs. For instance, Spector and Fox (2005) noted the similarity among a series of items designed to assess perpetration of three separate forms of workplace mistreatment: aggression, deviance, and retaliation. Although the conceptual definitions of these three constructs vary, cross-construct overlap necessarily exists, given the overlapping item-level operationalizations. These measurement concerns were also pointed out by Hershcovis (2011). Indeed, the variety of mistreatment constructs and the potential overlap among forms has led to "construct confusion" as described by O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2000, p. 277). Neuman and Baron (2005) also argued "there is a real danger that this fragmentation will impede the advancement of theory and practice" (p. 14). Authors of reviews on workplace victimization (Aquino & Thau, 2009) and aggression (Barling et al., 2009) have identified similar concerns.

Despite these conceptual arguments regarding overlap across mistreatment constructs, the empirical evidence justifying these arguments is limited. Given this reality, we sought to take a data-driven approach using MDS to explore these concerns. The MDS techniques proposed in the present work are useful to assess perceptions of the similarity/dissimilarity of a set of experiences at the item level—rather than explicitly at the level of the construct—and identify dimensions that are useful in distinguishing among mistreatment experiences (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). Results from these analyses can provide unique information and potentially a richer picture of the relationship among mistreatment experiences compared to a qualitative assessment of the items (e.g., Spector & Fox, 2005), which is more subjective, and related quantitative methods such as factor analyses. Whereas factor analysis is commonly used for the purposes of data reduction and several assumptions about the data must be met (e.g., multivariate normal distributions), MDS makes no assumptions about the data and results demonstrate visually the relationship among a set of objects, allowing for dimensional interpretations (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). These results are literally helpful for visualizing how items used to capture different constructs are related to one another. MDS solutions also are often more interpretable than factor analysis, as the number of

dimensions obtained in MDS is generally lower than the number of factors obtained through factor analysis (Davison, 1983; Shepard, 1972). Thus, we expected that findings from this study would enable researchers to better understand conceptual similarities and dissimilarities among different workplace mistreatment experiences.

CONSTRUCT SELECTION

We considered several issues in determining which constructs to include and our choices were strategic in nature. In this process, we sought to maximize the use of the findings and the number of constructs studied, but we also attempted to keep the number of mistreatment experiences per construct to a manageable level. Specifically, we chose to study constructs that incorporate a diverse range of experiences because variability in experiences helps to maximize the generalizability of the findings to other mistreatment constructs. We also sought to include commonly studied constructs that have been conceptually and empirically linked to one another, because we reasoned that findings pertaining to these constructs would likely be of the most interest to organizational researchers. Ultimately, we included mistreatment experiences from three constructs: generalized workplace harassment, sexual harassment, and workplace incivility.

The first construct examined is generalized workplace harassment. Generalized harassment includes "any negative workplace interpersonal interaction that affects the terms, conditions, or employment decisions related to an individual's job, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment, but is *not* based on any legally protected characteristic" (Rospenda & Richman, 2004, pp. 221–222). Rospenda and Richman (2004) identified a four-factor structure for generalized harassment. Verbal hostility includes hostile verbal expressions such as yelling or swearing at an employee, whereas covert hostility is characterized by exclusionary behaviors such as being ignored by one's coworkers. The third factor, manipulation, includes actions that are intended to institute control over another employee with threats or bribes. Finally, physical hostility includes forms of physical aggression such as hitting or pushing another employee.

Generalized harassment was explicitly conceptualized to be broad in nature, an overarching construct intended to subsume other forms of nonsexual workplace mistreatment (Rospenda & Richman, 2004). Rospenda, Richman, Ehmke, and Zlatoper (2005) argue that the construct includes experiences characterized as bullying, aggression, emotional abuse, and incivility. Consequently, we felt that generalized harassment represented a meaningful benchmark construct by which the experiences drawn from other constructs and measures could be compared. Moreover, the inclusion of generalized harassment enabled us to maximize coverage of specific mistreatment experiences while studying fewer constructs overall.

Furthermore, one construct that has been the focus of considerable research is workplace incivility. *Workplace incivility* is defined as "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Incivility is characterized by disrespectful behaviors such as being rude, ignoring another employee, being condescending, and making demeaning remarks to another individual (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Caza & Cortina, 2007; Cortina & Magley, 2009; Cortina et al., 2001).

Whereas generalized harassment is conceptualized as a broad umbrella mistreatment construct (Rospenda et al., 2005), incivility researchers assert that the construct is unique in several ways. Theoretically, the distinguishing features of workplace incivility relative

to other, similar forms of mistreatment are its low intensity and ambiguous nature. That is, a clear understanding by the target that an uncivil experience was meant to cause harm is lacking because the experiences are conceptualized as subtle in nature (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001). Nonetheless, what is assessed by incivility researchers is the frequency with which one is the target of uncivil comments or behaviors, regardless of whether intent to harm was clear or vague. That is, perceived intent is not typically assessed (Hershcovis, 2011). Consequently, the inclusion of uncivil experiences is important to examine their relationship with forms of mistreatment which make no mention of intent.

The final construct examined is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment includes any unwanted verbal or physical actions of a sexual nature (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997). Sexual harassment is examined primarily with regard to Fitzgerald, Hulin, and Drasgow's (1992; 1995) theoretical model, which outlines three forms of sexually harassing behavior: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Gender harassment refers to comments, gestures, or the placement of derogatory materials wherein the primary intent is the degradation of women. Unwanted sexual attention includes sexually charged unwanted comments or physical actions such as touching, continued requests for dates, and sexual assault. Finally, sexual coercion refers to being subtly or overtly coerced into complying with sexual requests.

Sexual harassment was important to include in this study for several reasons. First, it is one of the most widely studied constructs with several meta-analyses having been carried out to examine predictors and consequences of sexual harassment (e.g., Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Second, including sexual harassment experiences helps to expand the breadth of experiences included in the study. Finally, researchers have explicitly called for more research to understand how sexual harassment relates to mistreatment that is not sexualized (Barling et al., 2009). Studying sexual harassment experiences directly responds to this call for empirical research.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present work focused on clarifying the relationship among experiences of generalized harassment, sexual harassment, and incivility using MDS. Because of the exploratory nature of MDS, it was difficult to make predictions about the relationship among specific experiences. Nonetheless, we expected to observe some overlap among the constructs given the similarity in items used to assess target experiences. In particular, we expected to see the greatest overlap among generalized harassment and workplace incivility given that both represent nonsexual forms of mistreatment.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure: Sample 1 (Employed Students)

The primary group of participants in the study included 138 employed undergraduate students from a medium-sized Northeastern university in the United States. The sample was primarily female (63.2%) and had a mean age of 18.7 years (SD = 1.04). The sample was 86.8% European American, 5.7% Asian American, 3.8% Latino, 1.9% African American, and 1.9% biracial/multiracial. Participants reported working an average of 23.7 hours each week (SD = 11.8). Recruitment was achieved through the psychology department undergraduate participant pool and participants received partial course credit. Participants first read and signed

informed consent agreements prior to the study and then completed a series of item comparisons and an experiences section. Finally, participants completed a series of items to collect demographic information. All information was collected via MediaLab v2006.2 software.

Item Selection

Items were selected based on factor loadings identified from the initial scale development articles designed to assess each construct. Factor loadings represent an item's correlation with a specific factor with higher correlations representing a stronger relationship between an item and a factor. Items with the highest factor loadings best represent their respective construct, so items with the highest loadings—from the single scale for incivility and the subscales for generalized and sexual harassment—were selected.[1] Seven items were chosen to represent generalized harassment, six items were chosen to represent sexual harassment, and four items were chosen to represent incivility. All items were derived from previously published and widely used measures of each construct. Please see Table 1 for a listing of the items.

Measures

Generalized Harassment. Seven items from the 29-item Generalized Workplace Harassment Questionnaire (GWHQ; Rospenda & Richman, 2004) were selected to assess general harassing behaviors. The GWHQ is composed of four subscales: verbal hostility, covert hostility, manipulation, and physical hostility. One item was chosen from the manipulation subscale and two items were chosen from each of the remaining subscales. In this study, the seven GWHQ items were sufficiently reliable ($\alpha = .70$).

Workplace Incivility. Four items from the 7-item Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001) were selected to assess uncivil workplace behaviors. The internal consistency of the four WIS items in this study was $\alpha = .84$.

Sexual Harassment. Six items from the 19-item Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995) were selected to assess sexually harassing behaviors. Two items each were chosen to represent gender harassment, three items were selected for unwanted sexual attention, and a single item was chosen to represent sexual coercion. The six SEQ items were internally consistent ($\alpha = .81$).

Survey Design

Participants were first presented with the following instructions: "In this section you will be asked to compare negative workplace experiences. Some pairs of experiences may seem similar to one another, whereas others may seem different from one another. You will be presented with two experiences on each page. Do not worry about keeping track of your responses as you proceed through the comparisons." Participants were then asked to familiarize themselves with the 17 experiences before making paired comparisons.

The combination of the 17 experiences into all possible paired comparisons resulted in 136 comparisons made by each participant. The total number of experiences was chosen in an attempt to adequately sample the constructs of interest and the domain of workplace mistreatment experiences while also minimizing participant strain. Comparisons were randomized using Ross (1934) ordering, which allowed for balance of order and position. Because of the large number of comparisons, fatigue effects were of concern. To ensure that comparisons were being reliably made, 8 original comparisons were included at the end of the paired comparisons for reliability analyses, resulting in 144 paired comparisons. Participants were

TABLE 1. Mistreatment Experiences and Corresponding Item Labels

Item Label	Mistreatment Experiences
	Sexual Harassment Experiences
GH1	Habitually told suggestive stories or offensive jokes to you (gender harassment)
GH2	Made crude and offensive sexual remarks to you, either publicly, or privately (gender harassment)
USA1	Gave you unwanted sexual attention (unwanted sexual attention)
USA2	Attempted to establish a romantic or sexual relationship despite your efforts to discourage him/her (unwanted sexual attention)
USA3	Made unwanted attempts to stroke or fondle you (unwanted sexual attention)
SC	Made you feel like you were being subtly bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behavior (sexual coercion)
	Generalized Harassment Experiences
VH1	Humiliated or belittled you in front of others (verbal hostility)
VH2	Yelled or screamed at you (verbal hostility)
CH1	Took credit for your work or ideas (covert hostility)
CH2	Ignored you or your work contributions (covert hostility)
M	Threatened that they would "get back at you" if you resisted doing something that you thought was wrong, or if you challenged things about the workplace (manipulation)
PH1	Hit you physically (physical hostility)
PH2	Pushed you or grabbed you (physical hostility)
	Workplace Incivility Experiences
IV1	Put you down or were condescending to you
IC1	Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion
IV2	Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you
IV3	Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately

Note. Factor names are in parentheses, where applicable.

asked to evaluate each pair of experiences on a 9-point dissimilarity scale ranging from 1 (*very similar*) to 9 (*very dissimilar*). Following paired comparisons, participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which they had experienced each of the 17 behaviors from coworkers or supervisors in their current place of work. Participants evaluated each behavior on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*).

Participants and Procedure: Sample 2 (Subject Matter Experts)

In addition to the dissimilarity ratings collected from participants, unidimensional ratings were solicited from a sample of 25 subject matter experts (SMEs) who had PhDs and

active research programs in the area of workplace mistreatment. Of the 25 SMEs who were contacted, 12 SMEs provided unidimensional ratings (48% response rate). These unidimensional ratings were captured to provide a second source of data to help make sense of the criteria (dimensions) used by Sample 1 participants to differentiate among the experiences. Several dimensions were evaluated by SMEs, including the dimensions described by Buss (1961; i.e., verbal, physical, active, passive, direct, and indirect), as well as sexual and nonsexual dimensions. Because of the concern of mistreatment researchers with respect to the perceived intentionality of various mistreatment experiences (e.g., in incivility research; Andersson & Pearson, 1999), items were also evaluated on the extent to which they were perceived as intentional and accidental. Specifically, SMEs rated the extent to which each experience represented each of the dimensions on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very*). For instance, for the verbal dimension, SMEs evaluated all experiences on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all verbal*) to 9 (*very verbal*).

RESULTS

Before describing the analyses, we note that Tables 2 and 3 outline the frequencies with which participants experienced each form of mistreatment. The descriptive statistics show that participants had been the targets of a wide range of mistreatment experiences, making them reasonable candidates for comparing the focal experiences.

Data Cleaning

Prior to analyses, data were examined to identify participants whose paired comparisons demonstrated insufficient effort in responding (i.e., little or no variability). Response frequencies for the paired comparisons were computed separately for each respondent, and any respondent who used less than half of the response options was further scrutinized. Twenty-five participants were removed because they relied almost exclusively on one response, with the primary response being "9" (*very dissimilar*).

We assessed the reliability of responses made by the remaining participants as an additional data quality screen. Recall that eight duplicate paired comparisons were included in the survey to assess reliability. To identify unreliable responses, Euclidean distances were computed between each of the eight identical paired comparisons for each respondent, and then mean within-respondent Euclidean distances were calculated. The mean Euclidean distances were transformed into Z scores, and respondents whose score exceeded the critical value of 1.96 were removed. An additional seven participants were removed based on this criterion, leaving data from 106 participants.

Nonmetric Multidimensional Scaling Analysis

Nonmetric MDS was used to empirically assess the relationship among mistreatment experiences. In nonmetric MDS, the dissimilarity judgments made by participants are transformed into Euclidean distances, and a final solution is calculated, which most closely approximates the dissimilarity judgments. In results from the nonmetric MDS, experiences that are close in the configuration were regarded as similar, whereas experiences that are far apart were perceived as different.

An aggregate dissimilarity matrix was computed and data were analyzed with ALSCAL in SPSS 11.0. Multiple solutions including one-, two-, and three-dimensional configurations were assessed and multiple criteria were used to assess model fit including model

TABLE 2. Frequencies of Mistreatment Experiences ($n = 106$)

Experience	Never	Once or Twice	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Habitually told suggestive stories or offensive jokes to you (sexual harassment)	28.3%	30.2%	28.3%	9.4%	3.8%
Made crude and offensive sexual remarks to you, either publicly, or privately (sexual harassment)	48.1%	26.4%	17.9%	6.6%	0.9%
Gave you unwanted sexual attention (sexual harassment)	63.2%	19.8%	8.5%	5.7%	2.8%
Attempted to establish a romantic or sexual relationship despite your efforts to discourage him/her (sexual harassment)	80.2%	8.5%	1.9%	5.7%	3.8%
Made unwanted attempts to stroke or fondle you (sexual harassment)	83.0%	10.4%	3.8%	1.9%	0.9%
Made you feel like you were being subtly bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behavior (sexual harassment)	95.3%	2.8%	0.9%	0.9%	0.0%
Humiliated or belittled you in front of others (generalized harassment)	41.5%	37.7%	14.2%	5.7%	0.9%
Yelled or screamed at you (generalized harassment)	49.1%	29.2%	14.2%	5.7%	1.9%
Took credit for your work or ideas (generalized harassment)	55.7%	29.2%	9.4%	4.7%	0.9%
Ignored you or your work contributions (generalized harassment)	34.9%	34.9%	20.8%	6.6%	2.8%
Threatened that they would "get back at you" if you resisted doing something that you thought was wrong, or if you challenged things about the workplace (generalized harassment)	87.7%	9.4%	1.9%	0.9%	0.0%
Hit you physically (generalized harassment)	98.1%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Pushed you or grabbed you (generalized harassment)	91.5%	8.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Put you down or were condescending to you (incivility)	37.7%	38.7%	13.2%	9.4%	0.9%
Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion (incivility)	31.1%	43.4%	16.0%	7.5%	1.9%
Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you (incivility)	62.3%	23.6%	9.4%	3.8%	0.9%
Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately (incivility)	44.3%	30.2%	16.0%	8.5%	0.9%

TABLE 3. Percentage of Respondents Reporting at Least One Experience of Each Form of Mistreatment: Overall and by Sex (n = 106)

Experience	Females	Males	Overall
Habitually told suggestive stories or offensive jokes to you (sexual harassment)	68.7%	76.9%	71.7%
Made crude and offensive sexual remarks to you, either publicly, or privately (sexual harassment)	47.8%	59.0%	51.9%
Gave you unwanted sexual attention (sexual harassment)	46.3%	20.5%	36.8%
Attempted to establish a romantic or sexual relationship despite your efforts to discourage him/her (sexual harassment)	25.4%	10.3%	19.8%
Made unwanted attempts to stroke or fondle you (sexual harassment)	22.4%	7.7%	17.0%
Made you feel like you were being subtly bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behavior (sexual harassment)	4.5%	5.1%	4.7%
Humiliated or belittled you in front of others (generalized harassment)	49.3%	74.4%	58.5%
Yelled or screamed at you (generalized harassment)	40.3%	69.2%	50.9%
Took credit for your work or ideas (generalized harassment)	43.3%	46.2%	44.3%
Ignored you or your work contributions (generalized harassment)	70.1%	56.4%	65.1%
Threatened that they would "get back at you" if you resisted doing something that you thought was wrong, or if you challenged things about the workplace (generalized harassment)	6.0%	23.1%	12.3%
Hit you physically (generalized harassment)	0.0%	5.1%	1.9%
Pushed you or grabbed you (generalized harassment)	3.0%	17.9%	8.5%
Put you down or were condescending to you (incivility)	56.7%	71.8%	62.3%
Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion (incivility)	65.7%	74.4%	68.9%
Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you (incivility)	34.3%	43.6%	37.7%
Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately (incivility)	52.2%	61.5%	55.7%

stress (stress formula 1), variance accounted for (R^2), and interpretability (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). Stress is an indication of how poorly the modeled distances fit the actual data, thus it is more appropriately coined a badness-of-fit index (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). With 17 items, Sturrock and Rocha (2000) suggest that stress values less than the following cutoffs are indicative of appropriate fitting models: 0.42 for one dimension, 0.25 for two dimensions, and 0.16 for three dimensions.

TABLE 4. Stress and Variance Accounted for (R^2) in Nonmetric Multidimensional Scaling Solutions

Solution	Stress	R^2
One dimension	0.35	64.85%
Two dimensions	0.15	87.04%
Three dimensions	0.11	90.93%

Table 4 displays values for stress and R^2 by solution. Based on the fit indices and interpretability, the two-dimensional solution was retained (see Figure 1). To aid interpretation, the results from hierarchical cluster analyses (using complete linkage and average-distance-between-groups linkage methods of combining clusters) conducted on the dissimilarity matrix were superimposed on the configuration. Multiple clustering methods were used to aid interpretability, and four clusters emerged. Moving from left to right in Figure 1, the first cluster was composed of covert forms of mistreatment, including the two covert hostility items and the covert incivility item. The second cluster included forms of verbal mistreatment, with verbal forms of incivility and the verbal

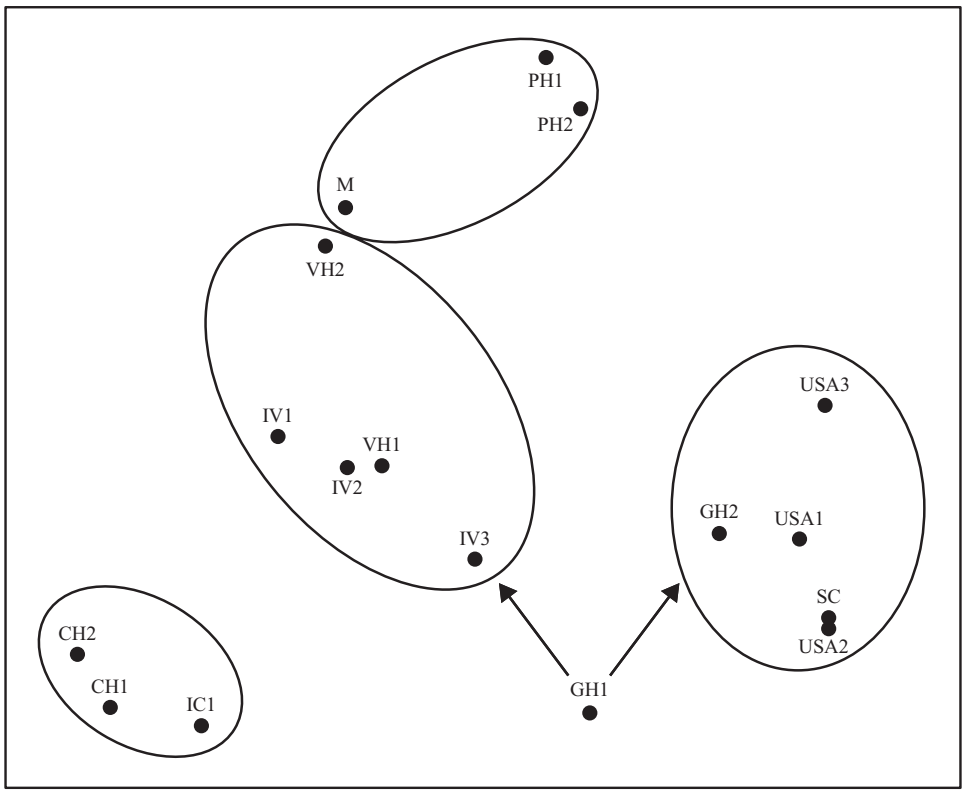

Figure 1. Two-dimensional nonmetric MDS configuration. See Table 1 for item labels.

hostility items in the cluster. Third, the physical hostility items clustered with the single item assessing manipulation. The final cluster was composed explicitly of sexual harassment experiences.

With respect to overlap across the three general constructs of interest, sexual harassment experiences appear to be the most distinct. Interestingly, GH1 ("Habitually told suggestive stories or offensive jokes to you") clustered either with sexual harassment or the verbal incivility and hostility cluster (i.e., IV1, IV2, IV3, and VH1), depending on the clustering method chosen. Figure 1 displays this finding with two arrows projecting from GH1 toward either cluster. Generalized harassment clearly represents a diverse range of mistreatment experiences as the items are scattered throughout the configuration. Of greater interest, however, is the overlap observed among incivility and generalized harassment experiences. Specifically, both verbal hostility items (e.g., VH2; "Yelled or screamed at you") clustered with three items assessing verbal forms of incivility (e.g., IV1; "Put you down or were condescending to you"), and the covert hostility items (e.g., CH1; "Took credit for your work or ideas") shared a cluster with the single covert incivility item (i.e., IC1; "Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion"). In general, these results suggest that sexual harassment was perceived as relatively distinct; however, substantial construct overlap was observed between generalized harassment and incivility. The next analytic step was to use the SME unidimensional ratings to help infer the criteria (dimensions) used by raters to distinguish among mistreatment experiences.

Projection of Unidimensional Ratings

SME unidimensional ratings were used to provide empirical support for the interpretation of the criteria used by Sample 1 participants to distinguish among mistreatment experiences, following the procedure outlined in Kruskal and Wish (1978). Each standardized unidimensional rating was regressed onto the coordinates from the multidimensional space. Then, the standardized regression coefficients and multiple correlation coefficients from the regression analyses were used to calculate the endpoints of the unidimensional vectors, as projected from the origin of the configuration (Table 5 reports the formula for calculating the vector endpoints). As suggested by Kruskal and Wish (1978), only unidimensional ratings with multiple correlations significant at $p < .01$ were used to interpret the space. Figure 2 displays the configuration with the projected unidimensional vectors.[2]

Experiences were distinguished first and foremost by their sexual versus nonsexual nature. Interestingly, virtually identical information was derived from the projection of (a) physical, active, and direct and (b) passive and indirect. That is, participants perceived physical experiences (e.g., PH1; "Hit you physically") to be active and direct, whereas passive experiences (e.g., CH2; "Ignored you or your work contributions") were also perceived as indirect. It is also worthwhile to highlight that there was no support for projection of the verbal unidimensional vector. Whereas physical experiences were somewhat isolated in the configuration, verbal experiences were scattered throughout. This suggests that verbal experiences are more varied and additional criteria are needed to distinguish among forms of verbal mistreatment. Mistreatment experiences were also distinguished by the perceived intentionality of the behavior, with the overt physical hostility and manipulation items (e.g., M; "Threatened that they would 'get back at you' if you resisted doing something that you thought was wrong, or if you challenged things about the workplace") perceived as the experiences that were most intentional.

TABLE 5. Regressions Yielding Unidimensional Vector Projections

Dimension	R^2	β_1	β_2	Constant	Vector
Verbal	.078	−.079	−.261	1.023	(−.081, −.267)
Physical	.692*	.466	.651	1.039	(.484, .677)
Active	.650*	.442	.638	1.038	(.459, .663)
Passive	.696*	−.562	−.570	1.042	(−.586, −.594)
Direct	.711*	.548	.596	1.041	(.571, .621)
Indirect	.821*	−.556	−.670	1.041	(−.579, −.697)
Sexual	.924*	.925	−.350	0.972	(.899, −.340)
Nonsexual	.924*	−.919	.368	0.971	(−.892, .357)
Intentional	.696*	−.006	.835	0.999	(−.006, .834)
Accidental	.429	−.217	−.600	1.027	(−.223, −.616)

Note. Constant = $R/\sqrt{(\beta_1^2 + \beta_2^2)}$, with vector endpoints at coordinates $(c\beta_1, c\beta_2)$.
* $p < .01$.

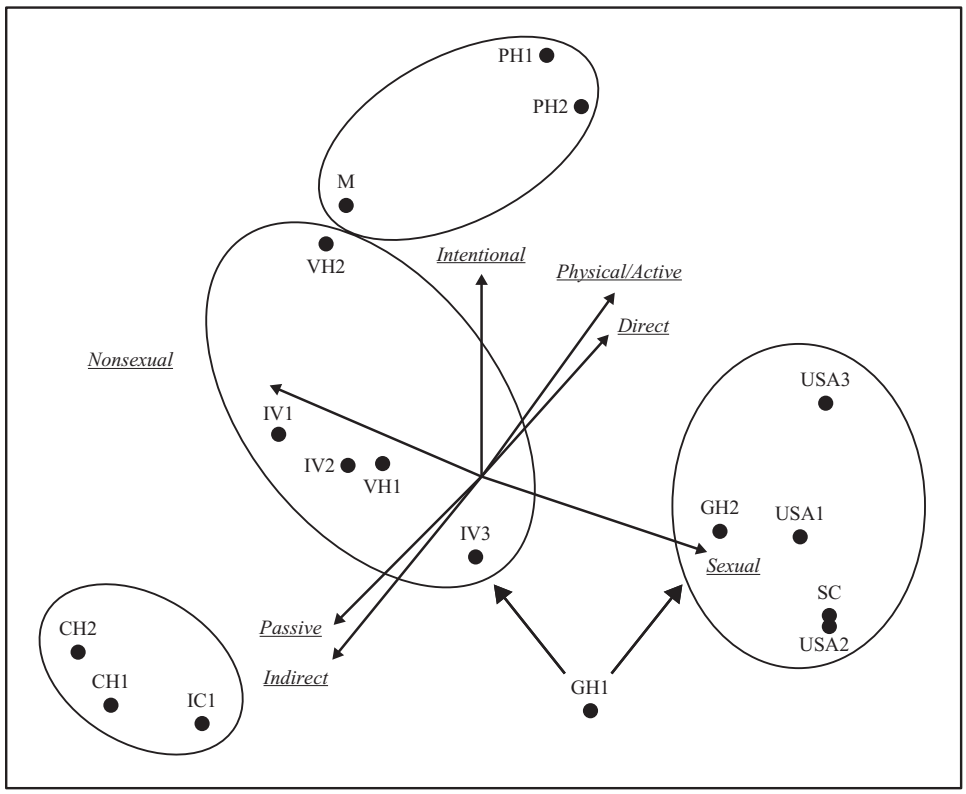

Figure 2. Two-dimensional nonmetric MDS configuration with projected unidimensional ratings. See Table 1 for item labels.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to conduct an empirical investigation into the relationship among workplace mistreatment experiences. Four clusters of mistreatment experiences were identified, with some clusters composed of experiences that cross traditional construct boundaries. Covert, passive forms of generalized harassment and incivility clustered with one another. Likewise, verbal forms of generalized harassment and incivility formed a cluster of their own. These results provide empirical support for arguments made by researchers who have suggested that items of different measures are highly similar in nature (e.g., Aquino & Thau, 2009; Barling et al., 2009; Hershcovis, 2011; Jex et al., 2010; Neuman & Baron, 2005; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000; Spector & Fox, 2005).

Although workplace incivility may be conceptualized as a unique construct, results suggest that items used to assess incivility are comparable to the mistreatment experiences captured in other constructs, given that generalized harassment is an umbrella construct that spans the domain of mistreatment experiences (Rospenda et al., 2005). This calls into question several of the defining characteristics of incivility such as the ambiguous intent and low intensity of the behavior. These assumptions are not readily assessed by researchers, and results show that the experiences described in the items do not enable respondents to discern incivility from generalized harassment or other constructs conceptualized by researchers. As Hershcovis (2011) recommends, perceived intent and intensity should be assessed separately by researchers rather than making assumptions about these characteristics based on the items used.

Findings also highlighted a distinction between sexual and nonsexual workplace mistreatment experiences. Sexual harassment experiences formed their own cluster; however, one form of gender harassment clustered either with sexual harassment experiences or the verbal mistreatment cluster, depending on the clustering solution chosen. This latter finding lends additional support to Lim and Cortina's (2005) assertion that gender harassment acts as a link between sexual harassment (e.g., unwanted sexual attention) and workplace incivility. Nevertheless, results indicate that sexual harassment experiences were perceived differently from nonsexual forms of workplace mistreatment. This conclusion is reinforced by the finding that the primary dimension used by participants to distinguish among items was the sexual–nonsexual dimension. The distinction is also consistent with Hershcovis and Barling's (2010) meta-analysis in which targets of sexual harassment made different attributions about the reason for their mistreatment when compared to targets of workplace aggression.

Implications for Research and Practice

The findings from this study have several implications for future research on workplace mistreatment. Given that participants perceive sexual harassment and nonsexual forms of workplace mistreatment to be different phenomena, we suggest that researchers avoid using scales which have items that capture both sexual harassment and nonsexual mistreatment experiences in the same measure. One widely used measure of workplace mistreatment, the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), includes items tapping various mistreatment experiences including sexual harassment. Modified versions of the NAQ also include questions which capture the extent to which respondents are targets of sexual harassment (e.g., Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001; Hoel, Faragher, & Cooper, 2004). Importantly, Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009) developed and validated a revised version of the NAQ (i.e., the NAQ-R), and the NAQ-R does not include

any questions to measure sexualized harassment. Because of the results presented here, we assert that researchers should use the NAQ-R instead of the NAQ, or another measure that explicitly captures mistreatment that is not sexualized in nature. When researchers are interested in studying both sexual harassment and nonsexual forms of mistreatment, we suggest that researchers use distinct measures of each construct.

Furthermore, because of the overlap observed between generalized harassment and incivility experiences, we recommend that researchers of a particular form of mistreatment (e.g., incivility) be more open to assessing a wider domain of mistreatment experiences in any particular study. This could be achieved if researchers use measures explicitly designed to capture a wide array of experiences such as the GWHQ (Rospenda & Richman, 2004), the Aggressive Experiences Scale (Glomb & Liao, 2003), or the NAQ-R (Einarsen et al., 2009). One long-term benefit of such research practices would be to help unify the fragmented study of workplace mistreatment, thereby creating a basis for examining a shared nomological network of harmful interpersonal experiences.

Because of the overlap among forms of (nonsexual) mistreatment seen in the present investigation, we agree with Hershcovis (2011) who recommends that researchers use a single label for the study of experiences of the range of hostile interpersonal behaviors. Hershcovis (2011) recommends that this label be "workplace aggression," but the term *aggression* is somewhat loaded in that it traditionally implies that the behavior is intended to cause harm (Neuman & Baron, 1998). In this study, only a few of the behaviors were seen as intentional, including items assessing physical hostility and manipulation, so we are hesitant to recommend the use of a term which carries assumptions about intent. Instead, we suggest that researchers use the label "workplace mistreatment," because this label is generic enough to encapsulate various constructs and behaviors studied, and it avoids the potential for preconceived notions about intent to harm (cf., Cortina & Magley, 2003).

Our findings also have implications for practice, including efforts to prevent workplace mistreatment. A common initiative recommended to prevent sexual and nonsexual workplace mistreatment is employee training (e.g., Gutek, 1997; Porath & Pearson, 2010). Organizations may be inclined to lump training on nonsexual mistreatment, such as incivility, and sexual harassment together to save time and resources. However, our results suggest that nonsexual and sexualized forms of mistreatment are perceived differently, so it follows that separate trainings should be conducted for these distinct forms of mistreatment. Such a practice would be consistent with the distinction made by participants in our research and potentially facilitate trainee's acquisition of knowledge unique to each type of behavior.

Study Limitations

Although we believe this study offers valuable information, it is not without its limitations. One potential limitation stems from the use of employed undergraduate students. However, the use of employed students was appropriate for the general goal of this study, which was to assess perceptions of the similarity/dissimilarity of a range of mistreatment experiences. The employed student participants in this study reported experiences of various forms of mistreatment as shown in Tables 2 and 3, so we feel that concerns that such young workers have not worked long enough to experience these kinds of behaviors in an organizational setting are minimized to some extent. In addition, similar studies using MDS techniques have also used student participants (e.g., Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

Perhaps more importantly, it is the assessment of perceptions that may limit conclusions drawn from this study. It is possible that perceptions of mistreatment experiences might not coincide with actual reports of experiences of perceptually similar behaviors. That is, the extent to which one perceives a group of experiences to be similar, and the extent to which one is the target of such perceptually similar experiences, may not coincide. This potential limitation should be kept in mind as the results from the present investigation are interpreted.

Finally, an additional limitation of this work pertains to the fact that only a small set of constructs were chosen for study from the pool of constructs in the field. The number of constructs and experiences was limited for practical reasons, namely the burden imposed on respondents in making paired comparisons. For this reason, a diverse range of experiences were collected to maximize generalizability to other, related groups of experiences, especially by including generalized workplace harassment, which is a broad construct (Rospenda & Richman, 2004; Rospenda et al., 2005). Nonetheless, future research may be needed to assess the extent of overlap across other commonly studied constructs.

NOTES

1. The fourth unwanted sexual coercion item selected is the only sexual harassment item of a physical nature. This item had a lower factor loading than the other unwanted sexual attention items selected; however, we felt it was important to include an item that represents physical sexual harassment in addition to verbal sexual harassment to maximize content validity.

2. Individual differences scaling (INDSCAL) was used to investigate the stability of the configuration as a function of participant sex and levels of mistreatment experiences. Findings suggested that similar perceptions were observed across male and female participants and individuals experiencing different levels of mistreatment. Details pertaining to these analyses are available upon request from the first author.

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