

**Employer reviews may say as much about the employee as they do the employer:**

**Online disclosures, organizational attachments, and unethical behavior**

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### **Abstract**

Employer/organizational review websites are increasingly common (e.g., Indeed.com, Glassdoor.com), but what do the reviews really speak to: The employer or the employee? This study tests the structural relationship between cognitive and affective organizational attachments and three outcomes: willingness to disclose one's workplace online, unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB), and reviews of one's workplace. Using a national sample of U.S. workers ( $N = 304$ ), we examine how organizational identification and commitment relate to publicly posting about one's organization. Self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) and organizational attachment (Riketta, 2005) are used to hypothesize how individuals selectively self-present organizational identities online. Structural equation modeling shows organizational identification and commitment lead to different outcomes: while identification positively predicts online disclosure and UPB, commitment has a buffering effect whereby it negatively predicts UPB and interacts with UPB to predict organizational reviews. Both antecedents are positively related to online review ratings. Findings illustrate that online reviews and disclosures of one's workplace may say as much about the worker as the workplace itself. The most genuine reviews of an organization seem to come from employees with higher commitment, competing attachments affect one's willingness to engage in unethical behavior and exaggerate when reviewing one's workplace.

*Keywords:* Online self-presentation, organizational reviews, organizational commitment, organizational identification, unethical pro-organizational behavior

**Employer reviews may say as much about the employee as they do the employer:****Online disclosures, organizational attachments, and unethical behavior**

How do individuals decide what to say about their employers online, or whether to disclose their employers at all? Online self-presentation is a complex process by which individuals portray their identities in mediated profiles and interactions. Social media users are able to make claims in profiles about political, personal, and organizational identities (Donath & boyd, 2004). While online identity claims can vary meaningfully from offline identity representations (Turkle, 2005), online identity claims often reflect strongly-held beliefs about oneself (Back et al., 2010; van Dijck, 2013). This paper examines the online connections between an individual and their organization by considering how online identity claims about one's workplace, willingness to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior, and public reviews of one's workplace relate to two forms of organizational attachment (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Specifically, we explore how one's identification with an organization and organizational commitment lead to selective identity portrayals, behaviors, and reviews of the organization within social media channels.

Though organizational *identification*—a sense of oneself as a part of the organization—is largely considered a boon for organizations, the downsides to high levels of attachment (e.g., excessive-, extreme-, or over-identification) remain underexplored (Ashforth, 2016). Similarly, organizational *commitment*—the desire to remain a part of the company—is generally beneficial (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005); but, online consequences of commitment remain underexplored. Evidence suggests identification with one's workplace is related to online behavior, including voluntarily serving as a company ambassador (van Zoonen et al., 2018) and interacting with the company's social media pages (Sias & Duncan, in press). In parallel, commitment is positively

associated with advocacy on behalf of the organization (Walden & Kingsley-Westerman, 2018). This paper helps reveal the motivations behind individuals' acknowledgment of and communication about their employer by first exploring the cognitive and affective self-presentational processes of publicly identifying one's workplace online, and then exploring how varied organizational attachments affect behavior and online statements about the organization. Selective self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) and organizational attachment (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005) are used to hypothesize and test how organizational identification and commitment translate into online selective-presentations. In addition, we test an interaction between both forms of attachment (i.e., commitment and identification) and unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) on ratings of the organization. Ultimately, this research helps reveal the complex individual-level variables that motivate individuals to communicate online about their organization and their affiliation with it.

### **Self-Presentation Online**

Many scholars use Goffman's (1959) framework to contend online identity depiction is a performance of the self. Broadly, Goffman draws on a theater metaphor to describe the front and back stage identity performances individuals engage in when presenting the self. Whereas back stage represents where an individual prepares roles and "drop[s] his [or her] front" (Goffman, 1959, p. 70), front stage performances are curated identity constructions which one uses to adapt to a given audience, like one's social media friends. In this view, webpages serve as a venue for constructing and performing front stage identities (Hällgren, 2019). Online, individuals gain "access to a variety of multimedia tools that enable the possibility for more controlled and more imaginative performances of identity..." (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 307).

Online identity performances even allow for feedback, or crowdsourcing, of identity portrayals (Hällgren, 2019). For instance, when announcing a new job via LinkedIn, one might receive paralinguistic “Likes,” linguistic comments, and other feedback to validate (or challenge) one’s identity claim. Thus, the online performance of identity is fundamentally a communicative process whereby identity claims made via media reinforce internalized perceptions of the self (Slater, 2007). This perspective, that identity manifests in identification performances, is consistent with longstanding communication research reflecting the relationship between identity and social actions (Scott, 2007; Scott et al., 1998). Restated, claims made on media profiles (e.g., “works for Opera House Coffee”) represent communicative acts that call identity into being and reinforce personal beliefs about identity.

Social media allows for presentation of a curated self relative to work and workplace, but also evokes tensions between personal and organizational identities including whether to make identities visible, publicly engage with work, and share aspects about work in and outside professional contexts (Gibbs et al., 2013). Social media users have varied motivations for including or excluding organizational affiliations online. Interpersonal self-presentation research suggests sharing information about oneself online is related to both cognitive associations with the target of identification and affective feelings toward the target (Johnson et al., 2012; Walther, 2007). We call on existing computer-mediated communication (CMC) research and evidence about organizational attachment to predict how individuals share information about their workplace online.

### **Selective Self-Presentations Online**

Much CMC research focuses on identity construction and portrayal (e.g., Walther’s [1996] hyperpersonal model). Constructing an online profile and interacting with others online

allows senders to selectively self-present. Given sufficient time, and in the absence of worrying about accidental information transmission, CMC users have opportunities to practice awareness, reflection, and cue-selection in their online self-presentations (Walther, 1996). Thus, in online fora users have the chance to selectively portray their identities (Carr & Hayes, 2015) and these identity portrayals reinforce offline beliefs about their selves (Slater, 2007).

Relative to other disclosures in one's profile, sharing one's workplace on social network sites (e.g., Facebook.com) is a distinct behavior (Nosko et al., 2010), which transmits selective presentations deemed worthwhile. This is because the choice to share about one's workplace online is motivated by competing personal and professional tensions (Gibbs et al., 2013). Walther (2007) contends, the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes users engage in online are associated with "affinity drives" which motivate strategic sharing (p. 2542). Below we explore cognitive associations (identification) and affective feelings (commitment) as two forms of attachment which logically relate to online presentation of the self (Johnson et al., 2012).

### **Organizational Attachment**

Organizational attachment broadly refers to one's connection with their workplace (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005; Scott et al., 1998). The two most important forms of attachment are identification and commitment. *Organizational identification* is a strong feeling of unity with one's organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Identification is marked by perceptions of oneness or belonging with an organization, and allows individuals to make sense of the social world, organize their thoughts, take action, and understand the self (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987). Identification, when enacted, moves from cognition to communication, and may manifest communicatively via online disclosures about one's workplace (van Zoonen et al., 2018).

In contrast, *organizational commitment* is similar to identification, but distinguishes the self and organization as separate. As Ricketta (2005) explains, though commitment has been defined as strong identification, commitment is, instead “(1) acceptance of the organization’s goals and values; (2) willingness to work hard for the organization; and (3) a strong desire to remain in the organization” (p. 361). Commitment represents an attitudinal orientation toward the organization. Thus, organizational *identification* is the “perceptual cognitive” aspect of one’s organizational attachment, whereas *commitment* represents affective attachment to one’s workplace (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). As Cheney and Tompkins (1987) carefully delineate, identification represents “the substance” of the individual and organizational relationship while commitment is “the form” (p. 1).

### **Organizational Attachments and Self-Presentation Online**

Organizational identification and organizational commitment are both meaningful indicators of organizational attachment, influencing the way we communicate with and about our organizations (Cheney et al., 2014; Scott et al., 1998). Internalizing one’s work and dedicating oneself to the workplace are actionable means of attachment. Indeed, greater identification often manifests as a stronger incorporation of the organization into one’s sense of self, greater conformity to group norms, higher sense of belongingness, and investment in the organization’s image and reputation (Scott, 2007). Greater organizational commitment similarly coincides with increased convergence with organizational attitudes and values and intent to continue as an organizational member (Sass & Canary, 1991). Consequently, though organizational identification and commitment may be psychological constructs, both are generated and expressed via communicative acts.

Organizational identification is generally considered a positive force for organizations, and has been related to job involvement, job satisfaction, intra- and extra-role behaviors (Riketta, 2005). Communication scholars (Scott et al., 1998) add that identification serves as a cognitive structure guiding identity-performances. Scott and Stephens (2009) contend the process of enacting identity is “fundamentally communicative” (pp. 372-373), as individuals create, maintain, and alter their connections and senses of oneness with collectives, including organizations. This communicative lens of organizational identification manifests in online behaviors of workplace members including interacting with the organization via social media and advocating for one’s organization online (Sias & Duncan, in press; van Zoonen et al., 2018). As individuals consider and edit identity signals to selectively self-present (Gibbs et al., 2013; Walther, 2007), we predict identification with one’s workplace leads to increased willingness to publicly share one’s workplace on social media. Formally:

**H1:** Organizational identification positively predicts willingness to disclose one’s workplace on social media.

Commitment is an affective manifestation of attachment to one’s work, and is likely related to online disclosures about the workplace (Johnson et al., 2012). As Ashforth and colleagues (2008) explain, “Commitment represents a positive attitude toward the organization” (p. 333). As a measure of attachment, identification captures the overlap in one’s identity with one’s workplace, whereas commitment focuses on feelings, desires, goals, and ambitions with regard to the workplace (Riketta, 2005). Coupling this view of attachment with evidence that selective self-presentation has both cognitive and affective components (Walther, 2007), affective feelings about one’s organization are also expected to drive self-presentations. While identification is a personal and cognitive experience, commitment is a feeling of obligation to



take actions consistent with one's feelings about the organization (Riketta, 2005). In line with the affective dimension of self-presentation (Walther, 1996; Walther, 2007), we expect commitment to one's workplace is predictive of willingness to disclose one's workplace on social media:

**H2:** Organizational commitment positively predicts willingness to disclose one's workplace on social media.

### **Attachments and Self-Presentation in Organizational Reviews**

Beyond sharing in one's profile, attachment likely manifest in other online self-presentation behaviors. As individuals identify with the organization, they are inclined to prioritize organizational interests (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987) at times above their own (Ashforth, 2016). For example, organizational identification has been positively associated with advocating on behalf of the organization online (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Commitment to one's workplace has been positively related to advocacy on behalf of the organization (Walden & Kingsley-Westerman, 2018). Effective relational development within the organization has been shown to promote "word of mouth support to outside audiences" (Walden & Kingsley-Westerman, 2018, p. 605). Online venues allow users additional channels to shape the reputation of their organization through online behavior (Dreher, 2014). Thus, we hypothesize organizational members' attachment will be positively associated with public evaluations of the organization:

**H3:** Organizational identification positively predicts online evaluations of the organization.

**H4:** Organizational commitment positively predicts online evaluations of the organization.

### **High Levels of Attachment and Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior**

Organizational attachment—both identification and commitment—is generally considered a manifestation of a healthy relationship between employees and organizations. As Cheney et al. (2014) explain, across disciplines “identification is typically deemed unequivocally desirable by both individuals and organizations” (p. 706). Because identification prompts an individual communicate in ways that value the wellbeing of the organization, it also has the potential to elicit behavior which favors the source of identification (Ashforth, 2016; Ashforth et al., 2008). High levels of identification (sometimes called *over-identification*) is proposed to lead to a variety of issues including trusting others too much, reduced individual thinking, dissent suppression, decreased organizational learning, and even ethically questionable behavior (Dukerich et al., 1998). High levels of identification also enhance of one’s sense of belongingness to a group (Cheney et al., 2014). Social identity theory posits workers identify with others “to provide the basis for thinking of themselves in a positive light” (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 335). Thus, while high levels of identification can be beneficial to individuals and organizations, high levels of identification can also prompt individuals to engage in behavior detrimental to both parties.

High levels of identification have been linked to *unethical pro-organizational behaviors* (UPBs). UPBs are defined as actions “intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members (e.g., leaders) [which] violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct” (Umphress & Bingham, 2011, p. 622). For instance, individuals may misrepresent the organization to outsiders by withholding negative aspects of the organization or exaggerating positive aspects. Highly identified “individuals may perceive that benefitting the organization also benefits themselves” (Umphress et al., 2010, p. 770). Chen and colleagues (2016) add, “employees may sometimes fabricate or exaggerate the accomplishments

of their employing company to boost its reputation or to maintain its competitive advantage over a rival company” (p. 1082). Highly attached individuals are willing to pursue organizational interest with less regard to external stakeholders, their own wellbeing, and ethical standards (Matherne & Litchfield, 2012; Kong, 2016). Thus, we predict:

**H5:** Higher organizational identification will positively predict UPB.

High levels of organizational commitment can prompt individuals to transcend role-based job duties (Matherne & Litchfield, 2012). These behaviors offer substantial benefits to organizations (e.g., reduced turnover, increased productivity; Lee et al., 2004). However, many forms of pro-organizational behavior are not sanctioned by superiors (Umphress et al., 2010). At times, behaviors which benefit the organization may be perceived as unethical by society.

Thus, when a person is affectively attached to an organization it may also encourage public displays of values, beliefs, and norms that align with the organization, displays of commitment (Riketta, 2005). Restated, when individuals chose to share aspects of their workplace online, they likely engage in other online behaviors that are attitude-consistent. Therefore, strong commitment to an organization may likewise increase an employee’s willingness to accentuate organizational values or benefits. It would be inconsistent for an individual to feel commitment, yet not show commitment to one’s workplace. To avoid such cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) it is likely that those who are highly committed to their workplace also express a willingness to engage in UPBs. Therefore, we predict:

**H6:** Higher organizational commitment will positively predict UPB.

### **Interaction Between Attachment and UPB in Online Reviews**

In the context of online presentations of the self (and the organization), the opportunity to misrepresent the organization comes in the form of generating online reviews. In fact, Aral

(2014) suggests online product reviews magnify biases. Reviews of organizations seem to be conditioned by one's relationship to the organization, voluntary reviews are biased bimodally by highly-satisfied and -dissatisfied reviewers (Marinescu et al., 2018). This relationship likely persists both in terms of one's willingness to engage in unethical behavior on behalf of the organization and one's attachment to the organization. Thus, we predict that the attachment-UPB relationship translates into employee-generated reviews. Specifically, we hypothesize an interaction between both forms of attachment and UPB in predicting ratings:

**H7:** UPB moderates the relationship between organizational identification and online evaluations of the organization such that higher levels of UPB are associated with a stronger relationship between organizational identification and online ratings.

**H8:** UPB moderates the relationship between organizational commitment and online evaluations of the organization such that higher levels of UPB are associated with a stronger relationship between organizational commitment and online ratings.

The hypothesized relationships are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers ( $N = 309$ ) who (1) worked more than 31 hours per week, (2) had been employed at least six months, (3) resided in the United States, and (4) agreed to answer question about their employer participated in this study. MTurk workers frequently participate in academic surveys, and their response reliability is high, sampling cost is relatively low, and data are of similar or better quality than samples collected from students or from a single organization (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Kees et al., 2017). Response quality is

improved, without bias, by using screening or attention check questions (Thomas & Clifford, 2017). We included three attention check questions (e.g., “I am paying attention to this question, so I will select disagree”) and excluded participants who missed two or more attention check question ( $n = 5$ ). The final sample included 304 MTurk workers, listwise exclusion was used for any missing data.

Participants ranged in age between 20 and 72 ( $M = 35.81$ ,  $SD = 9.07$ ). More participants identified as male ( $n = 180$ , 60.4%) than female ( $n = 118$ , 39.6%). Most participants considered themselves white ( $n = 260$ , 87.2%). Most participants were not currently looking for a job ( $n = 189$ , 63.4%); though 48 (16.1%) were uncertain, and 61 (20.5%) were actively job searching. Participants had worked a variety of time at their job: 6 months – 1 year, ( $n = 12$ , 3.9%); 1 – 5 years, ( $n = 148$ , 48.7%); 5 – 10 years ( $n = 94$ , 30.9%); more than 10 years ( $n = 50$ , 16.4%).

Measures were presented in a random order, then we asked participants to provide a rating and write a review of their workplace. We strategically ordered measures so the organizational rating came last to avoid conditioning the quantitative measures. We instructed participants to “Imagine you are writing a review of your workplace for Glassdoor.com, Indeed.com, or another review website.” Finally, the survey solicited demographic information. These data were collected as part of a larger research project, participants were compensated \$2.00 USD.

### **Measures**

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were computed for each scale. Unless otherwise noted, all scales used 7-point Likert-type statements of agreement ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and bivariate

correlations among measures outlined here. The results section presents the full measurement and structural models.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

***Organizational identification.*** Mael and Ashforth's (1992) 6-item scale was used to measure organizational identification. Items include “When someone criticizes my organization, it feels like a personal insult” and “If a story in the media criticized my organization, I would feel embarrassed.” This scale was reliable,  $\alpha = 0.93$ . The CFA was improved by allowing covariances between the two sample items shown above. The model fit was acceptable:  $\chi^2 (8) = 18.10, p = .021, RMSEA = .07, 90\% CI [.02, .11], SRMR = .02, CFI = 1.00$ .

***Organizational commitment.*** Organizational commitment was measured using the commitment dimension of Rusbult and Farrell's (1983) organizational investment scale. This scale uses four unique semantic differential-anchored items. Questions include: “How long would you like to stay at your current job? (A short time | A long period of time)” and “How attached are you to your current job? (Not at all attached | Extremely attached).” This scale was highly reliable,  $\alpha = 0.89$ . The CFA yielded an acceptable fit estimate with no modifications:  $\chi^2 (2) = 0.53, p = .767, RMSEA = .00, 90\% CI [.00, .08], SRMR = .01, CFI = 1.00$ .

***Unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB).*** Umphress et al.'s (2010) 6-item UPB scale was used. It is ethically difficult and costly to collect actual unethical behavior. Consistent with the majority of research involving ethical behaviors, this scale focuses on intention to behave unethically (for a discussion, see Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). Items included: “If it would help my organization, I would exaggerate the truth about my company or its products from customers and clients,” and “If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good.” Because there is potential social bias in answering behaviors

about unethical behavior, the scale was examined for skewness (0.48,  $SE = 0.14$ ) and kurtosis (-0.67,  $SE = 0.28$ ), but responses were relatively normal,  $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ . This scale was reliable,  $\alpha = 0.91$ . The CFA yielded an acceptable estimate, but was improved by allowing the example items listed above to covary:  $\chi^2(8) = 10.19$ ,  $p = .252$ , RMSEA = .03, 90% CI [.00, .08], SRMR = .02, CFI = 1.00.

***Willingness to disclose workplace online.*** Participants responded to a checklist prompt: “Which platforms have OR would you use to share information about your workplace online?”<sup>1</sup> We chose this verbiage to capture the preparational and executed front-stage performances of identity (Goffman, 1959). Options included personal social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram,  $n = 151$ ), professional social media (e.g., LinkedIn, company intranet,  $n = 151$ ; 87 participants shared on both personal and professional sites), and “I would not disclose my workplace on social media” (reverse-coded,  $n = 69$ ). Sixty-nine participants (22.7%) said they would not share their workplace online at all. A three-item CFA is just-identified so it does not yield interpretable fit statistics. The three-item index summing willingness to disclose was reliable: Spearman-Brown coefficient = .83, Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.63$ .

***Online reviews of organization.*** Two outcomes were used to examine how individuals publicly reviewed their workplace: a star rating and net promoter score. Participants were asked to provide a star rating based on their overall impression of the organization. Ratings ranged from 1 to 5 stars ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). Star ratings were chosen because they are common across review contexts (e.g., Glassdoor.com, Indeed.com, etc.). A second metric, *net promoter score*, was chosen to mirror both review websites and standard industry questionnaires. When asked of consumers, net promoter score has been statistically linked to organization growth (Keiningham et al., 2008). Participants were asked “How likely are you to recommend your

place of employment to a friend?" on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, ( $M = 6.78$ ,  $SD = 2.93$ ). The two measures were highly correlated ( $R^2 = .89$ ), and formed the online rating construct. It is not possible to compute a CFA for two items.

## Results

The R package lavaan 0.6-3 (Rosseel, 2012) was used to compute CFAs reported above and the SEMs below. Diagonally Weighted Least Squares (DWLS) estimation, which is suitable for ordinal measures, was employed (Brown, 2006; DiStefano & Morgan, 2014). Lavaan was programmed to mimic MPlus results to facilitate reanalysis. Because lavaan does not support latent variable moderation, MPlus 7.31 was used to test moderation (i.e., H7 and H8). Prior to conducting the structural model, we tested all variables for issues with multicollinearity using the criteria outlined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). Since no issues were present, we proceeded with analysis. Results for this structural model are presented in Figure 1.

Because the measurement model allows latent covariance and the structural model replaces each covariance with a hypothesized relationship, fit is the same between measurement and hypothesized models. The full structural model fit acceptably well (e.g., Brown, 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999):  $\chi^2(177) = 207.22$ ,  $p = .060$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.17$ , RMSEA = .02, 90% CI[.00, .04], SRMR = .05, CFI = 1.00. Though the hypothesized model had an acceptable fit, not all relationships were as predicted. Since theory does not present any clear alternative model, none were tested (Brown, 2006). Analyses proceeded with the hypothesized model, reported below.

**Willingness to disclose workplace online.** The first set of hypotheses (H1 and H2) predicted cognitive (identification) and affective (commitment) orientations toward workplace would predict willingness to disclose about one's workplace online. Identification significantly predicted disclosure:  $B = 0.47$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ , supporting H1. H2, that commitment



would be positively related to willingness to disclose about one's workplace, was not supported ( $B = -0.02$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p = .83$ .) The model explained a moderate amount of variance in willingness to share one's workplace online ( $R^2 = .13$ ).

**Online reviews.** The second set of hypotheses (H3 and H4) predicted that online review ratings of workplace would be associated with cognitive and affective attitudes toward the organization. Specifically, review ratings of organization hypothesized be positively related to both (H3) organizational identification and (H4) organizational commitment.

Online review rating was positively predicted by organizational identification ( $B = 0.26$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p = .004$ .) and commitment ( $B = 1.84$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $\beta = 0.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, H3 and H4 were supported indicating both cognitive and affective attachment explained a large proportion of the variance in online ratings of one's workplace ( $R^2 = .78$ ).

**Unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB).** The third set of hypotheses predicted UPB. Specifically, H5 proposed those with higher levels of identification would demonstrate higher levels of UPB, H6 predicted the same for commitment. Identification positively predicted UPB ( $B = 0.52$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $\beta = 0.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ) while commitment negatively predicted UPB ( $B = -0.21$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $\beta = -0.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, H5 was supported, demonstrating higher levels of organizational identification predicted UPB. H6 was not supported. In fact, in this structural framework higher levels of commitment negatively related to UPB.<sup>2</sup> Overall, about 15% of the variance in UPB was explained by these attachments ( $R^2 = .15$ ).

**Interactions.** Lastly, H7 proposed a moderating effect of UPB on the relationship between organizational identification and ratings of the organization, such that higher UPB ratings would strengthen the relationship between the variables. In parallel, H8 predicted a moderating effect of UPB on the relationship between organizational commitment and ratings of

the organization, such that higher UPB ratings would increase the propensity of those with greater commitment to present even more exaggerated organizational reviews. Latent moderated structural equations (LMS) are only available in MPlus. MPlus 7.31 was used to estimate two LMS equations (Maslowsky et al., 2015).

The first LMS was computed to test for a moderating effect of UPB on the relationship between identification and online ratings of one's workplace. LMS does not yield fit indices, but the model converged with a log-likelihood of -6845.99, AIC = 13785.98. This model tested the relationship between identification and review rating ( $B = 0.75$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ), UPB and review ( $B = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = 0.906$ ), and the interaction between identification and UPB and review (identification\*UPB,  $B = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = .149$ ). Thus, H7 was not supported. UPB did not moderate the effect of organizational identification on review ratings.

To test H8, a second LMS with commitment, UPB, and the interaction (commitment\*UPB) was conducted. This model also converged, (LL = -5722.73, AIC = 11527.45). Review ratings were predicted by organizational commitment ( $B = 1.66$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ), UPB ( $B = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p = .004$ ), and the moderating interaction term (commitment\*UPB,  $B = -0.39$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as presented in the statistical diagram in Figure 2. This relationship was also modeled using +/-1 SD above and below the means (right side of Figure 2). H8 was therefore supported, higher levels of UPB led to greater discrepancy between commitment and organizational review rating.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

### Discussion

This research sought to understand employees' online disclosures about their workplace in profiles and reviews as identity performances. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) self-presentation

framework, we considered social media and employer reviews as frontstage presentations. Additionally, this work considered UPB as a mechanism by which individuals may present their organization inconsistent with their actual internal beliefs about it. In line with hypotheses, organizational identification was a strong predictor for willingness to disclose one's workplace online, review ratings, and UPB. Identification positively predicted UPB while the path from commitment was negative in this structural framework, signaling a suppression effect. Finally, commitment was a strong predictor of reviews of one's workplace, and this relationship was moderated by UPB. Below we explore the practical implications for organizations, review websites, and individuals and offer theoretical implications of these findings, concluding with directions for future research.

### **Practical Implications**

**For organizations.** Though the effects for UPB are moderate in magnitude (i.e.,  $R^2 = .15$ ), at scale (i.e., across numerous reviews and online review sites) such behaviors present significant implications for job seekers, organizations, and employees. Online spaces have increasingly become the way for stakeholders to verify and extend understanding about companies (Spence et al., 2015). The validity of electronic, and presumably offline, word-of-mouth is likely affected by varied forms of attachment (i.e., identification and commitment), which lead to differentiated UPB. Internalizing one's organizational identification (i.e., adopting a "we" orientation toward the workplace), increases one's desire to help the organization regardless of the costs. This could include lying to a client about a project, covering up a mistake that ought to be reported, or failing to address other issues which could harm the organization. To this end, a highly identified employee likely communicates in ways that flatter the company (e.g., leave a glowing review of a less-than-ideal workplace online).

**Ethical culture and leadership.** Though past evidence links organizational identification and UPB (Chen et al., 2016; Umphress et al., 2010), we demonstrate that organizational commitment may *buffer* or *reduce* UPB. Our results suggest that while identification prompts UPB, feelings towards (as opposed to identification with) one's workplace may be an important mitigator of unethical behavior. In practical terms, identification is healthier when partnered with a long-term affective attachment to the well-being of the company. Internalizing the company as part of one's identity competes with a commitment to remain at the organization and see to the company's future. Employers might consider directly discussing commitment to bolster company well-being. A (lack of) commitment to ethical behavior can create a (vicious or) virtuous cycle, exacerbated by higher levels of group identification (see moral licensing theory, Kouchaki, 2011). Future research may consider how job satisfaction, communicative relationships (i.e., leader-member exchange), and various targets of identification (Scott & Stephens, 2009) and commitment might affect UPB.

Ethical climates are positively related to job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to stay (Schwepker, 2001). Further, the combination of ethical and pro-organizational behavior can predict organizational profits and successes (Chun et al., 2013). Thus, organizations should be attuned to how attachment is encouraged and made manifest. Though many organizations value team-building and encourage we-mentality, organizations should focus on both cognitive and affective attachments (Johnson et al., 2012). These results suggest attending to commitment processes (i.e., emphasizing shared goals, values, desire to work hard, and intent to persist; Riketta, 2005) may reduce the detrimental consequences of UPB. Certainly, communication is central to creating ethical climates and promoting ethical individual behavior (Bisel, 2018).

Thus, we recommend that managers and employees consider how their language (including in online self-presentations) positions themselves in relation to the organization.

Leaders should work on fostering members' healthy attachment to the organization, but ought to do so with consideration of potentially problematic outcomes. Our results indicate high levels of organizational identification may increase UPB, and other research suggests identification can lead individuals to commit to a failing project (e.g., Haslam et al., 2006). Brown and Starkey's (2000) organizational learning model might provide an ideal framework in this regard. Brown and Starkey (2000) contend successful "willingness to explore ego-threatening matters is a pre-requisite for developing" an adaptive learning organization (p. 113). Organizational efforts to guide members' healthy attachment could include identity-balance (e.g., "We're strong because of what we do at work and in our community") and fostering healthy commitments (e.g., "What's best for the company may not be easy"). Organizations can teach members to acknowledge the importance of challenging identity for the sake of healthy organizational attachment.

**For organizational review websites.** Organizational review websites might benefit from priming users to think about a variety of attachments to avoid the moderating effect of UPB on reviews. Restated, this study shows that those with high levels of UPB are likely to provide inflated reviews of their workplace, especially at lower levels of commitment (see the right side of Figure 2). Since anonymous reviews posted online are often perceived as credible and influential sources of information (DeAndrea, 2014), it is important for review websites to consider how reviews are solicited. Websites like Glassdoor.com and Indeed.com might use a disclaimer like: "Because many people may use your review to make a decision about working

where you (have) work(ed), we want to encourage you to write an honest review that avoids exaggerating the best or worst aspects of your workplace.”

**For employees.** Finally, recent scholarship has emphasized how third-parties (e.g., employees writing reviews) are considered credible information sources (DeAndrea, 2014). Livingstone (2008) found that (youth) social media users varied significantly in their choice and disclosures of personal information in online profiles. Similarly, Nosko et al. (2010) found demographic differences in profile completion and sharing, such that older users shared less personal information overall. Still, offline relational attributes and characteristics are important predictors of online behavior, especially in profiles (see Lane et al., 2016). This study offers a reminder that both interactive communication (e.g., wall posting, messaging) processes and more static personal and professional profile portrayals are meaningful depictions of the self and the organization. Workers would do well to consider that while their identity claims reflect on the self and groups to which they associate, such claims ought to be also personally acceptable (e.g., ethically). When writing reviews employees might consider the implications of writing a genuine review for their own moral wellbeing and the good of others. Still, this social environment is complex, so future research may focus on positive or negative reinforcements associated with identity claims (e.g., an angry reaction to a new job, a comment of ‘boo’ in relation to an identity claim including an organizational disclosure).

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study offers support and domain extension of online self-presentation and organizational attachment. While we cannot speak to an offline-online comparison, this study shows that online presentations match some offline relational traits (e.g. identification and commitment both predict reviews, identification predicts willingness to disclose) when

portraying one's workplace online. Further, the mediating effect of UPB is important in demonstrating that some users exaggerate their organizational selves more than others.

**Hyperpersonal Model.** Considering how selective self-presentation functions in relation to organizational attachments raises additional questions about the other components of the hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996). For example, how does feedback on one's display of organizational affiliation reinforce their (organizational) identity? This evidence suggest identification uniformly relates to disclosure, UPB, and ratings; but it is unclear how other attributes of online communication like feedback, receiver effects, and particular channel features relate to presentations of the self as an organizational member. In other words, how do Likes, comments, upvotes, or other system cues affect one's proclivity to exaggerate anonymous or pseudonymous online portrayals. Further, this study demonstrates that identity claims focus not just on personal motivations, but also on what's perceived to be best for the relevant social group; thus, selective-self and selective-other presentation may both be at work. Below we explore how participants' willingness to disclose, UPB, and online ratings speak to selective self-presentation.

**Disclosure.** These findings have implications for understanding disclosures as identity markers. Online profile claims are motivated choices (Gibbs et al., 2013; Nosko et al., 2010). Profile claims are often used to indicate social categories or personal characteristics an individual deems particularly salient or central to their identity. This research extends selective self-presentation to online communication about one's self as a worker. Important moderators of workplace behavior affect how one self-presents. Our measure of disclosure includes both personal and professional social media, helping understand disclosures beyond a single platform or social context. Results showed attachment with one's workplace fosters public disclosures

online across social media platforms. The identification-disclosure relationship is strong, but commitment explains much of the variance (see Table 1 and Figure 1) in public review ratings of one's workplace.

Logically, there may be differences in disclosure of workplace between identified and anonymous social media sources (Carr & Hayes, 2015). For instance, for bloggers, being identifiable is associated with perceived risk in self-disclosure (Qian & Scott, 2007). Specifically, Qian and Scott propose identifiability is associated with less risky disclosure. If this finding translates into organizational self-disclosure, anonymity may afford greater risk-taking (e.g. willingness to engage in UPB) on behalf of the organization. Other social media affordances like network associations, persistence, and editability could also affect behavior in a given online context (for a discussion see, Fox & McEwan, 2017). Future research may benefit from exploring particular affordances, including anonymity, that affect the selective-self-presentation process especially as it relates to organizational disclosures.

**Selective-other presentation online.** CMC theories like warranting and hyperpersonal predict self-interested behavior in online contexts. This study meaningfully contributes a different positioning: selective-other presentation. To frame this in Goffman's (1959) nomenclature, beyond one's front- and back-stage performances, a social actor is concerned about implications for the overarching narrative. The rich organizational communication literature shows how individuals might be willing to share identity claims and review information for the good of the collective identity. Other instances might include when an instructor writes a recommendation for a student or a team member stays mum about issues with their group (Bisel, 2018). Future research ought to consider the competing dynamics of selective-self, -other, and -group presentation online.



**UPB and Ratings.** We found that various forms of attachment at the organizational level disparately motivate an employee's action on behalf of the organization. This motivation likely translates into everyday action individuals take when curating their own media profiles and when deciding to review their workplace or not. These findings are particularly interesting given the differential effects of attachment type on UPB. Unexpectedly, commitment was unrelated to willingness to disclose one's workplace online and negatively related to UPB in the structural framework. This finding reveals much about the variation between two distinct forms of attachment: cognitive and affective. While the more cognitive form of attachment, organizational identification, was a strong predictor of both online disclosures of workplace and UPB, commitment—the more affective form of attachment—buffered UPB. This is empirical evidence of the hypothesized effects of too-much-attachment (Ashforth, 2016). Future research may benefit from exploring the potential of commitment to buffer the potential negative outcomes associate with identification (Ashforth et al., 2008).

Further, against our hypotheses, the relationship between identification and online ratings was not moderated by UPB. But, UPB did moderate the commitment-rating relationship. As in past studies (e.g, Chen et al., 2016), strong identification is likely the source of UPB, but our findings add an important caveat to this understanding: commitment may reduce UPB. Two complementary relationships demonstrate the importance of commitment in reducing UPB: the negative relationship between commitment and UPB in the SEM, and the moderation effects of UPB and commitment. As shown in Figure 2, individuals with low levels of commitment are susceptible to review exaggerations based on UPB; however, reviews from those with high levels of commitment are less likely to be exaggerated based on UPB. Both researchers and practitioners should be concerned with finding ways to reduce unethical behavior.

### **Limitations and Future Work**

Despite the ecological validity of our study, asking people to write reviews is different from choosing to write a review online (Marinescu et al., 2018). Reviews may differ substantively by site based on the nature of the site, its expected audience, and the individual's own use of the site. Future work should continue to explore the specific valence and composition of online reviews—particularly with respect to the individual's organizational identity—to understand how reviews may manifest biased views, rather than simply attitude toward the organization.

A second limitation of this work is its consideration of UPB solely as an artifact of organizational attachment. As UPB has been associated with personality traits beyond self-concept (e.g., negatively related to mindfulness, positively to obsessive passion; Kong, 2016; reduced by moral identity; Matherne & Litchfield, 2012), future research may benefit from examining how other antecedents of UPB manifest in counterproductive work behaviors.

Third, respondents were Caucasian and male and are not representative of the U.S. population. Although care was taken to screen data and test theoretically-guided hypotheses, future research may benefit from the perspective of other demographics—both individual and organizational—to complement and contextualize these findings. Moreover, future work may consider the relationship between the individual- and organizational-level variables herein and organizational disclosures (including both acknowledging organizational affiliation and employer reviews) based on nationality, culture, or even type of social media. Beyond the common social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) or employer review sites (e.g., Glassdoor.com, Xing.com), how do posting behaviors manifest on counterinstitutional websites (e.g., RadioShackSucks.org; Gossett & Kilker, 2006) or on general discussion fora (e.g., Reddit)?

Likewise, do these effects differ by industry or job level (e.g., entry-level, upper-management), which were not represented in these data.

Fourth, though the directional relationships were hypothesized based on existing theory, and SEM is a powerful tool for demonstrating complex interrelationships among variables, we should be mindful not to infer causal relationships. It is possible online disclosures lead to increased attachments or that reviews affect attachment, such as when individuals commit to an identity following their public articulation of that identity (see Carr & Hayes, 2019; Scott et al., 1998). We randomized the variables and presented the review task at the end of the survey in an attempt to further increase confidence in the expected structural relationships among variables. However, the use of survey methods could leave open the possibility of alternative relationships. Additional studies will be useful in verifying the set of relationships identified here.

Finally, though comprehensive frameworks identifying identity threats and deceptive behaviors have been developed (see, Leavitt & Sluss, 2015), this study demonstrates both cognitive and affective workplace attachments are related to UPB. Further, though UPB is related to identification, it is both identification and commitment that ultimately drive review ratings. Ethical decision-making is marked by a “high degree of underlying complexity” (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010, p. 17). Additional research could benefit from exploring how competing attachments manifest qualitatively in reviews. In other words, are there differences in the language people use when they review their workplace? If the findings here hold, one might expect workers who are highly committed to their job to use both more intense and more distal/long-term oriented language to describe their workplace and to positively misrepresent the workplace more. In line with previous theorizing about identification, perhaps written reviews also include more instances of first-person plural pronouns, like “we” (Cheney et al., 2014).

### Conclusion

Competing forms of attachment to one's workplace contribute to online identity portrayals of the self and one's workplace. Results from this structural model suggest that when portraying their organization in their profile or in a review, workers implicitly ask 'How does my online communication reflect my identity and my commitment relative to my workplace?' This question is partially qualified by the employee's attachment to the organization and a willingness to engage in unethical behavior. For both researchers and practitioners our findings suggest how employees are attached to their workplace is important to their own self-concept and subsequent public self-presentation.

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<sup>1</sup> We purposefully asked about where people "would OR do" share information about their workplace online to emphasize both back stage preparation and front stage performance of selective self-presentation. However, in a different portion of the survey we also asked participants where they currently disclosed their workplace (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, 'Don't disclose'). This measure correlated highly with the self-presentational measure we report here ( $R = .61$ ). When this alternative variable is used in the structural model, the results are significant and in the same direction. This demonstrates the robustness of our findings, but we opt for the willingness (rather than actual) disclosure to be consistent with our theoretical framework.

<sup>2</sup>The correlation between commitment and UPB is positive (see Table 1). However, the structural relationship between commitment and UPB is negative. This is commonly called a suppression effect. In SEM the interpretation is that the combination of predictors differentially predict the outcome construct. As Kline (2011) explains "The 'surprising' results ... are due to controlling for other predictors" in the structural framework (p. 26). In short, the structural model demonstrates a strong positive relationship between identification and UPB which is reduced by higher levels of commitment.

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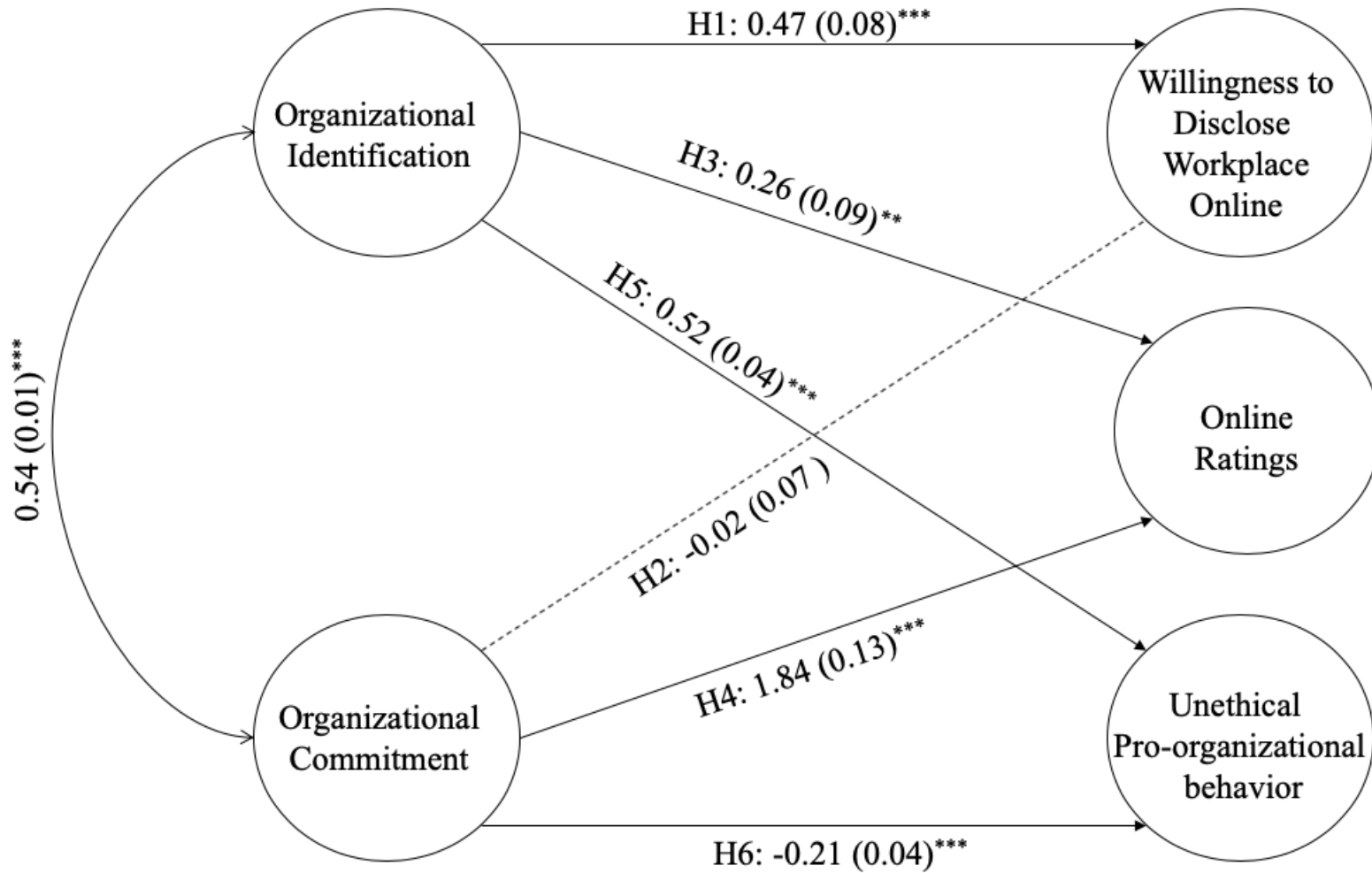
Table 1: Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables

| Variable                                    | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1.      | 2.      | 3.      | 4.     | 5.      | 6. |
|---|----------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|----|
| 1. Organizational Identification            | 4.25     | 1.57      | -       |         |         |        |         |    |
| 2. Organizational Commitment                | 4.63     | 1.69      | 0.58*** | -       |         |        |         |    |
| 3. Willingness to Disclose Workplace Online | 1.77     | 1.09      | 0.29*** | 0.20*** | -       |        |         |    |
| 4. Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior    | 2.75     | 1.37      | 0.31*** | 0.13*   | 0.25*** | -      |         |    |
| 5. Star Rating                              | 3.74     | 1.11      | 0.57*** | 0.76*** | 0.24*** | 0.16** | -       |    |
| 6. Net Promoter Score                       | 6.73     | 2.94      | 0.56*** | 0.78*** | 0.21*** | 0.17** | 0.89*** | -  |

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The *Mean* for Willingness to Disclose Workplace is the sum of a checklist comprised of willingness to disclose on personal social media, professional social media, and “I would not disclose my workplace online” (reverse coded). Thus, the scale ranges from 0 (would never disclose workplace online) to 3 (would disclose workplace on personal, professional, and other online venues).

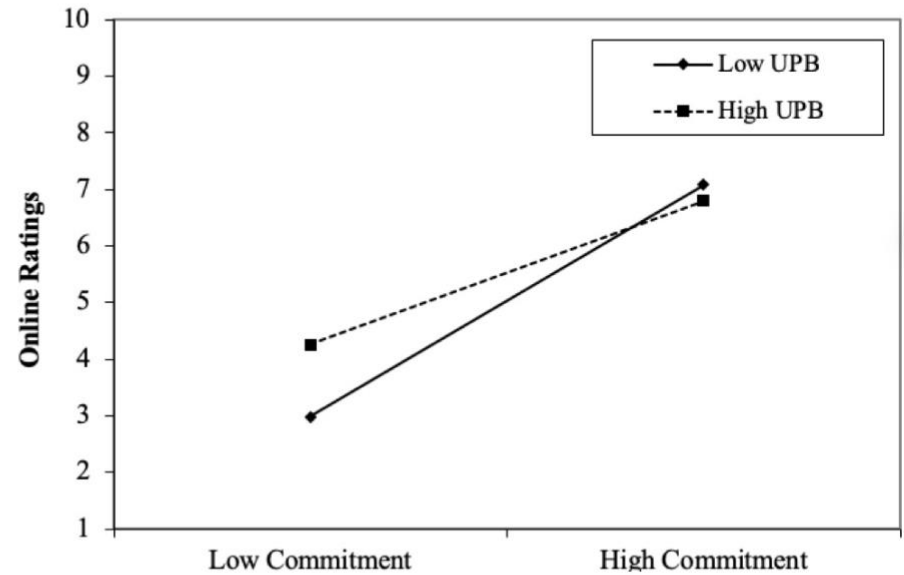
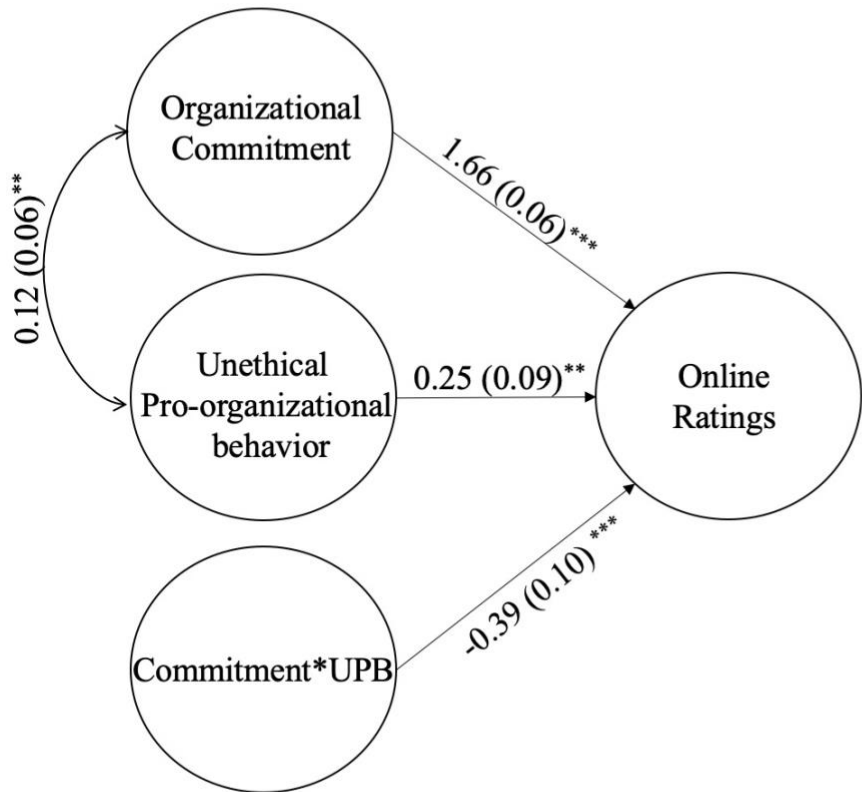
Figure 1: Structural Equation Model of Hypothesized Relationships



Note: Model computed using DWLS estimation. Model fit:  $\chi^2 (177) = 207.22, p = .060, \chi^2/df = 1.17, RMSEA = .02, 90\% CI [.00, .04], SRMR = .05, CFI = 1.00$ . The unweighted estimate is presented with SE in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Figure 2: Interaction between organizational commitment and UPB.





Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , Model computed using Mplus 7.31 MLS. The unweighted estimate is presented with SE in parentheses. The image on the right depicts commitment at +/- 1 SD above and below the mean. Moderation graphed using tools from (Dawson, 2014). Intercept in the image on the right is 5.28.