

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

## Supervisor Ostracism, LMX, Unethical Behavior at Work & Family: Moderated Mediation Model

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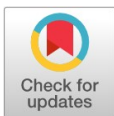
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**Abstract**— This study examines why and when workers become silent when they witness their managers shunning their colleagues. In this research, moral disengagement and leader-member exchange play the moderator roles, while the silent observer may act as a mediator. Two studies conducted among Morocco textile managers in Morocco are used to evaluate these hypotheses: A longitudinal survey ( $N=330$ ). The findings show that when workers observe their supervisors excluding other coworkers, they remain silent about unethical behavior. Employees with positive ties with their supervisor are likelier to experience the negative relationship between silence behavior and supervisor ostracism. In addition to establishing mediation moderation insights, this article explains how silence behavior mediates the relationship between a supervisor's ostracism with unethical pro-organizational behavior and unethical pro-family behavior. Also, LMX plays a moderating relationship in supervisor ostracism and silence behavior. Furthermore, moral disengagement moderates the relationship between silence behavior with unethical pro-organizational behavior and unethical pro-family behavior.

**Index Terms**— Supervisor ostracism, Moral disengagement, Silence behaviour, Leader-Member exchange, Unethical pro-organizational behaviour, Unethical pro-family behaviour

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### Introduction

Reports and incidents of unethical behavior in organizations persist despite efforts by organizations to create strict guidelines in their code of conduct (Al-Dhuhouri, Mohd-Shamsudin, & Bani-Melhem, 2024). At the same time, a growing body of research is being conducted to assist practitioners and legislators in discouraging and preventing unethical behavior by employees. According to research, workers may act in ways that benefit the organization (in other words, unethical pro-organizational behavior, or UPOB) or the family (in other words, unethical pro-family behavior, or UPFB) (Alqhaiwi, Koburtay, & Syed, 2024; Waheed & Jam, 2010). The majority of the research in this field has concentrated on ways to lower UPB employee involvement (Azeem, Haq, De Clercq, & Liu, 2024; R. Dong, Lu, Hu, & Ni, 2021; Kalyar, Usta, & Shafique, 2020). Scholars have urged for more research into the role of employees' moral standards and cognitive self-regulation processes in unethical behavior. However, they have also pointed out some limitations in exploring the antecedents of unethical behavior (Antunez, Ramalho, & Marques, 2024; Jam et al., 2011; Newman, Le, North-Samardzic, & Cohen, 2020).

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Ostracism at work can generate internal organizational disruptions, making workers feel neglected, socially alienated, and underappreciated for their efforts (Al-Dhuhouri et al., 2024). It also poses significant ethical issues for businesses. As a "form of passive, antisocial behavior is associated with several unfavorable outcomes, such as unethical behavior," ostracism is not only "common in workplaces around the world [with] ethical challenges to organizations" (Ji, Li, Lou, Liu, & Li, 2025) but it also "involves aversive experiences and unethical encounters" (Khalid, Malik, & Atta, 2024; Sarwar, Mahasbi, Zulfiqar, Sarwar, & Huo, 2025). Current studies on business ethics point to several predictors and consequences of this harmful type of workplace abuse. Employees who experience ethical leadership, for instance, are less likely to feel excluded (Khan, 2010; Saleem, 2021); nevertheless, they are more likely to experience this phenomenon if they are overqualified in comparison to their peers (Saifa, Khanb, Shaheenc, & Javidd, 2021). Consequently, ostracized workers show lower emotional loyalty (Saleem, 2021), helpful behavior (Yao et al., 2022), and innovativeness (Akhtar, Syed, Javed, & Husnain, 2020), as well as higher employee turnover (Azeem et al., 2024) and detrimental work behaviors (Ji et al., 2025; Khalid et al., 2024; Saifa et al., 2021).

Even though earlier conceptual studies on workplace ostracism have recognized these three important perspectives: victim, perpetrator, and observer (Azeem et al., 2024), the majority of current research only considers the victim's perspective in an attempt to determine the causes and effects of such ostracism for affected employees (Jam, Akhtar, Haq, Ahmad-U-Rehman, & Hijazi, 2010; Saifa et al., 2021). A few studies reflect offenders' viewpoints and clarify the outcomes and driving forces behind such harmful behaviors (Akhtar et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2025). Researchers aim to examine observers' behavioral and emotional responses to workplace ostracism, including others, to find ways to improve social interactions at work by establishing a more comprehensive and complicated issue. This is because the lack of understanding regarding how observers react to workplace ostracism has prompted calls for in-depth inquiries (Al-Dhuhouri et al., 2024; Yao et al., 2022).

The following are the specific contributions we aim to provide: First, we present research showing that workers may keep silent when they observe supervisors excluding staff members in response to demands to investigate third-party protective responses to observed ostracism (Saleem, 2021; Yao et al., 2022). Since witnesses may begin to feel ostracized for unethical consent to victims' suffering, this is a silent behavior. As a result, we demonstrate that Saifa et al. (2021) need-threat model of social ostracism, which examined how victims react to the perception of ostracism (Siddique, Siddique, & Siddique, 2020) also applies to ostracism that is observed as well as the actions and emotional responses of observers. Second, a significant contingency that reflects the relationship with the offender is identified by our study. Specifically, workers who see unethical behavior at work often react ambiguously, particularly if they have a relationship with the influential offender.

Third, workplaces must make ethical steps to guarantee equality, inclusion, and diversity. One relevant place to start when eradicating unethical work environments is learning how coworkers respond when they witness unfair supervisory treatment. Starting a productive conversation can occasionally be difficult for the offender and the victim due to the unpleasant and unclear character of professional ostracism (Osei, Ofori, Otsen, Adjei, & Odoom, 2022). The attitude and actions of an observer can significantly influence this interpersonal interaction. However, keeping silent does not help with interpersonal conflict resolution. Silence at work conflicts with preventative, promotional, and significant performance indicators (Pechorro, Bonfá-Araujo, Simões, Nunes, & DeLisi, 2024). Our study offers insights into how witnesses may and should respond by identifying witnessed supervisor ostracism as an antecedent of silence.

Fourth, these observations are especially pertinent in cultural situations characterized by collectivism and high power distance, two cultural norms that significantly impact how staff members interact with higher-ups (X. T. Dong & Chung, 2021; Shaukat & Khurshid, 2022). Our study focused on Morocco textile managers in Morocco, where cultural norms promote respect for authority and the preservation of interpersonal peace while emphasizing high power distance and collectivism. In such workplace traditions, managers might favor silence, whereas speaking up could be interpreted as challenging authority (Khalid et al., 2024). Additionally, to preserve positive working relationships, Morocco employees often suppress their emotions and avoid upsetting their supervisors (Osei et al., 2022; Saifa et al., 2021). However, organizations are unable to make the required changes when employee concerns are not addressed (Shaukat & Khurshid, 2022). Investigators and managers can better manage workplace relationships by using this study's detailed explanation of the implications of observed supervisor ostracism, employee silence, moral disengagement, unethical pro-organizational behavior, and unethical pro-family behavior.

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### Supervisor ostracism and employee silence

While the momentary need threat model does not explicitly mention observed ostracism, we examine its use to forecast observers' feelings and behavioral responses when supervisors ostracize others. Ostracism in the workplace can be hidden and confusing, making it difficult for victims to recognize (Al-Dhuhouri et al., 2024) and even harder for observers (Ji et al., 2025; Khalid et al., 2024). However, previous research also offers a counterargument: that people can recognize ostracism through their reflexive awareness, even if they only witness it

(Saleem, 2021). Employees' awareness of even the smallest indications of ostracism "is so strong that it is not limited to ostracism that is directly experienced from the ostracized target, but also extends to uninvolved others," as explained by (Akhtar et al., 2020). According to this latter perspective, some onlookers picture the victims' emotional states and indirectly suffer ostracism (Saifa et al., 2021). However, not everyone experiences this kind of vicarious ostracism; in certain situations, viewers may view the exclusion as justifiable retaliation or disregard it in favor of their basic needs (Sarwar et al., 2025). However, ostracism can compromise the basic needs of observers, like the demand for control or the need to belong (Al-Dhuhouri et al., 2024). Employees need to fit in may be hampered by witnessing supervisors shun their coworkers because they fear losing their social ties to the ostracized (the supervisor) or the shunned employee.

Drawing from COR theory Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, and Westman (2014), we further argue that observers may try to minimize the social costs of witnessing supervisors' ostracism to maintain their employment position. Past investigations of third-party responses to ostracism show that observers typically get back at the culprit, act in a deviation way or eliminate from the circumstance completely. Once observers may enter a reflective stage and use their available social indicators to decide how to cope perhaps by remaining silent. When workers remain silent, they avoid drawing attention to unethical or unlawful workplace practices that violate legal and ethical standards (Yao et al., 2022). Generally speaking, workers would rather not bring up topics that could humiliate managers or damage their working relationship (X. T. Dong & Chung, 2021; Khalid et al., 2024). Silence may also look like a reasonable reaction to circumstances that seem to be outside of the employee's personal authority or control (Osei et al., 2022). Silence may be especially valued in cultures with high collectivism and power distance because it appears to preserve social peace (Sarwar et al., 2025). Employees in such workplace environments additionally depend greatly on supervisors' acceptance and support (Al-Dhuhouri et al., 2024), which makes them less inclined to dispute such supervisors and alternatively more likely when exhibit silence in reaction to viewing supervisors' ostracism. Consequently,

H1: There is significant relationship between supervisor ostracism and silent behaviour.

### **Moderating role of LMX**

Employees try to maintain relationships with supervisor when those interactions are particularly valued, claims the COR (Westman, Hobfoll, Chen, Davidson, & Laski, 2004). Thus, we anticipate that the relationship between employee silence and supervisor ostracism will be strengthened by positive supervisors-employee connections. According to Ionescu and Iliescu (2021), leaders' member exchange can be classified as either in-group or outgroup members. Strong bonds of trust and benefit sharing underpin the ties that in-group members have with their leader (i.e., high LMX). According to them, managers understand and address their needs by offering practical and psychological assets like support and gratitude (Ji et al., 2025). According to Kaluza, Weber, van Dick, and Junker (2021), these workers experience mental dissonance and emotional unease when they discover that their supervisor defends some workers while shunning others, which in turn causes them to doubt their responses. Speaking up may seem right, but it could also be seen as a threat to their important connection with their supervisors (Kalyar et al., 2020). High LMX workers might be more inclined to keep silent than those with low LMX since it heightens worries about preserving the relationship. Employees with low LMX, on the other hand, are less likely to experience ambiguity or dissonance between thoughts since they don't connect or communicate closely with their managers (Saleem, 2021). Instead of being influenced by considerations about personal expense or gain, they view the events more objectively (Siddique et al., 2020).

Furthermore, because supervisors have more authority and a higher rank, observers may feel powerless to stop the exclusion (Tziner, Shkoler, & Fein, 2020). The presence of supervisor ostracism also probably indicates that there is dissatisfaction and discomfort in the workplace, which makes observers wary of endangering their own basic needs. According to the LMX theory, leaders with limited time and energy form close bonds with a select few group members. These bonds are marked by high levels of mutual trust, support, interaction, and various rewards, whereas outgroup members have more mediocre relationships with lower levels of these characteristics (Han & Bai, 2020; Yu, Yang, Wang, Sun, & Hu, 2021). High-quality LMX followers consistently enjoy several advantages and benefits not available to outgroup members Ionescu and Iliescu (2021), which distinguishes LMX within a team. Therefore, if an observer's LMX is high rather than low, they may be more inclined to take a safe stance and hide in silence in reaction to supervisor ostracism (Kaluza et al., 2021). We obtain two further hypotheses with the claim that LMX moderates the significant correlation between supervisor ostracism and Silent observations:

H2: There is a moderating impact of LMX on supervisor ostracism and silent behavior.

### **Mediating role of silent behavior**

According to Al-Dhuhouri et al. (2024), employee silence is the deliberate withholding of pertinent information by staff members to prevent discomfort or negative personal effects. However, the limited research on ostracism has focused on the target's silent treatment by the ostracizer (X. T. Dong & Chung, 2021; Khalid et al., 2024; Osei et al., 2022), with less attention paid to the victim's silence as

a possible behavioural reaction to perceived ostracism. Additionally, we take into account silence since it is one of the most probable results of felt exclusion from the workplace. Regarding (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004), the conservation of resources theory holds that employees value resources because they represent a significant value, whether they are ethereal (like organizational support) or tangible (like equipment). Employees are therefore urged to protect and preserve their valuable resources and take preventative measures to prevent future depletion of the current resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Organizational politics is one of the elements that scholars have identified as causing employee silence (X. T. Dong & Chung, 2021). However, not much is known about its interpersonal antecedents, such as workplace ostracism, which describes situations in which coworkers may not return greetings or salutations, disregard proposals made by colleagues during meetings, or decline invitations to lunch (Khalid et al., 2024). Given all the other pressures, these instances of workplace exclusion appear insignificant at first glance, such as when coworkers are not asked to lunch or omitted from specific company messages. According to Osei et al. (2022) and Saifa et al. (2021), ostracism at work can have even more detrimental effects than rudeness and aggressiveness. Particularly, intimidation, which can be continuous, overt, or covert, is not the same as ostracism (Ji et al., 2025; Khalid et al., 2024). Referring once more to COR theory, we contend that employees' silence in the face of perceived exclusion is a self-deprecating situation that undermines their sense of self, a vital asset they are keen to safeguard (Halbesleben et al., 2014). The silent observers may believe they are ostracized themselves, unworthy coworkers who lack the guts to step in and defend their peers. These arguments imply that silent behavior significantly influences and plays a crucial mediating role in observed supervisor ostracism, unethical pro-organizational behavior, and unethical pro-family behavior. Therefore, we suggest:

**H3:** There is a mediating impact of silent behavior between supervisor ostracism and unethical pro-organizational behavior.

**H4:** There is a mediating impact of silent behavior between supervisor ostracism and unethical pro-family behavior.

### **Moderating role of moral disengagement**

According to Paciello, Fida, Skovgaard-Smith, Barbaranelli, and Caprara (2023), people find it simpler to act unethically when they are morally disengaged. The idea of moral disengagement has been useful in explaining why people act violently, disruptively, and aggressively in the workplace Newman et al. (2020). Social psychology is the primary discipline that studies moral disengagement. Researchers have suggested how people respond to war and negotiate and resolve conflicts (Gini, Thornberg, & Pozzoli, 2020; Lo Cricchio, García-Poole, Te Brinke, Bianchi, & Menesini, 2021). Preferences toward moral disengagement have been linked in many research studies to unethical choices, negative behaviors, and unethical organizational behaviors (Lo Cricchio et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2020; Paciello et al., 2023; Pechorro et al., 2024; Qin & Zhang, 2022; Zhao & Yu, 2021). Researchers think that this relationship may be impacted by moral disengagement. Individual moral norms can direct and motivate them to act and stop them from acting negatively, according to COR theory (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). The rules for behavior are moral norms. People typically act in ways that align with their moral principles (Gini et al., 2020). People will engage in moral self-sanction when they transgress these norms.

According to Alqhaiwi et al. (2024), UPFB is defined as "an employee's actions that are intended to benefit his or her entire family or specific family members, but which violate societal and organizational moral rules, norms, standards, laws, or codes." UPFB is conceptualized in two halves, just like UPOB. First, it is "unethical" since it goes against the moral standards of the organization and society at large. Second, people who act unethically do so with the "intention" of helping their families (Antunez et al., 2024). UPFB is fairly prevalent in organizations and comes in a variety of forms. UPFB perpetrators may send household receipts to the organisation for repayment or pilfer funds from organisations to deal with family issues (R. Dong et al., 2021). Accordingly, UPFB is expensive for businesses and can undermine their financial situation, reputation, and organizational cohesion, which could jeopardize their existence and growth (Antunez et al., 2024). In the present investigation, we treat UPOB and UPFB as singular constructs referring to unethical behaviors carried out to benefit the organization or the family, drawing on other research (Alqhaiwi et al., 2024; Antunez et al., 2024; R. Dong et al., 2021).

In particular, people might create coping mechanisms to prevent moral self-sanction when participating in destructive activities (R. Dong et al., 2021). Moral disengagement is using moral self-regulation to justify and engage in actions contrary to their moral principles. Overall, researchers suggest that moral disengagement can predict harmful workplace behaviors for individuals (Lo Cricchio et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2020). Moral disengagement is a tactic workers use to justify harmful actions like stealing. By redistributing their responsibilities, they can skew the events' effects (R. Dong et al., 2021). Because they are less likely to be found silent, those skilled at defending unethical behavior typically engage in it regularly (Paciello et al., 2023). Therefore, those who exhibit a high degree of moral disengagement often justify the unfavorable outcomes they bring about. These arguments imply that moral disengagement plays a crucial moderating role in silent behavior, unethical pro-organizational behavior, and unethical pro-family behavior (Qin & Zhang, 2022; Zhao & Yu, 2021). Therefore, we suggest,

**H5:** There is a moderating impact of moral disengagement on silent behaviour and unethical pro-organizational behaviour.

**H6:** There is a moderating impact of moral disengagement on silent behaviour and unethical pro-family behaviour.

The expected correlations are shown in Figure 1. We carried out two investigations to examine the theories. First, we collect field data from Morocco textile managers. We then carry out a second study using a longitudinal technique, which offers a way to forecast

behaviours in real-world contexts, in order to confirm its findings and bolster the causal conclusions (Yao et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2021). The two studies' results are solid and have strong external validity.

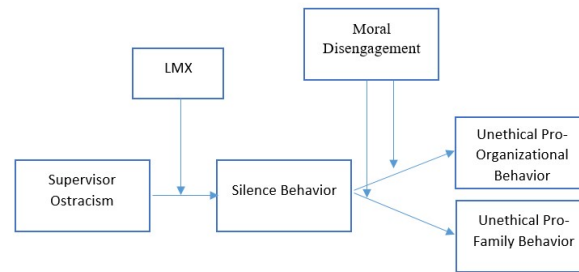


Fig. 1 Conceptual model

## Methods

### Participants and procedure

We employed a two-round, time-lagged methodology for our field survey in order to gather data from 330 employees of Morocco Textile Managers. These organizations work in a variety of textile areas and range in size from medium to large. By gathering information from the textile industry, we improve the findings' external validity. We asked the human resource departments of these companies for employee lists after obtaining permission to gather data from their leaders. We then chose respondents at random from these lists. In order to get the data, we first asked these organizations' Human Resources (HR) departments for assistance. To aid in the distribution and gathering of data, we also hired a research assistant. Participants received the questionnaires in sealed envelopes by internal mail at their places of employment. Participants were instructed to store the completed survey envelopes in a locked box in a secure location within their company so the research assistant could pick them up. Two measurement waves of data were gathered. In accordance with earlier studies (Hair, Sharma, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Liengard, 2024), we employed a one-month interval between survey waves. To lessen Common Method Variance (CMV) bias that can arise from the "salience of the predictor variable or its accessibility in memory," we employed the time lag. In addition, Cole suggested testing moderating paths for at least two waves. Participants in the first wave (T1) reacted to observer silence and supervisor exclusion. We gathered information on observer silence and unethical pro behaviours in the second wave (T2). We decided that self-report data was suitable for our investigation since moral identity and religiosity highlight people's inner states. Furthermore, earlier studies shown that self-report data are more reflective when they reflect unethical behaviour. The following ethical guidelines are followed. In order to obtain permission to conduct the study with their employees, we first described the purpose, nature, and participant rights of the study to the management of the participating organisations. Second, participants were invited via an informational statement that described the study to them once management gave their assent. Third, participants received information about their rights, such as the ability to decline to answer any questions or to stop participating at any point while completing the surveys. Lastly, participants received information about anonymity and the data's confidential usage. However, we instructed participants to write the last two digits of their own year of birth as well as the initials of their favourite teammates, emphasising that they should not write their own initials. As a result, the two waves' replies were identical. 330 respondents who finished both measuring waves made up the sample. Of those, 78% were men, and the sample's average age was 32 years old (SD=4.3). Nearly 73% of the group has completed their undergraduate studies.

### Measures

To measure these main constructs, we used slightly adapted versions of validated questionnaires on five-point Likert scales (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree).

#### Supervisor ostracism

In order measure employees' perceptions of supervisors excluding other employees, we adapted Yao et al. (2022) nine-item scale to fit our research context. "Your boss/supervisor ignores your colleagues at work" ( $\alpha=0.917$ ) was one such item.

#### LMX

We utilised a Six-item measure to determine how well employees felt about their connection with their supervisor (Tziner et al., 2020).

"My supervisor has enough faith in me that he/she would defend and justify my decisions if I were not present to do so" ( $\alpha=0.989$ ) was one of the examples it contained.

### **Silence behaviour**

Seven items from an employee silence scale created by Yao et al. (2022) and modified for our investigation of supervisor-directed silence are used to quantify employee silence. One example is: "I don't say anything because I don't want to offend my boss" ( $\alpha=0.849$ ).

### **Moral disengagement**

Eight items from an employee disengagement scale created by Pechorro et al. (2024). One Item is: "People who get mistreated have usually done something to bring it on themselves" ( $\alpha=0.888$ ).

### **Unethical pro-organizational behaviour**

Six items from an employee unethical behaviour scale created by Alqhaiwi et al. (2024). One Item is: "When needed, I concealed information from the public that could be damaging to my organization" ( $\alpha=0.912$ ).

### **Unethical pro-family behaviour**

Six items from an employee unethical behaviour scale created by Alqhaiwi et al. (2024). One Item is: "To help my family, I took company assets/supplies home for family use" ( $\alpha=0.856$ ).

### **Data analysis**

To verify and test our model, we employed SmartPLS-4's partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) feature. Because of its propensity for establishing soft distribution assumptions and its capacity to handle intricate models and interactions, PLS-SEM was judged suitable for this investigation (Hair et al., 2024). Along with other suggestions about the use of PLS-SEM when investigating a theoretical extension to accepted theories, we tested our model in two stages. First, reliability, discriminant validity, convergent validity, and factor loadings were tested in order to evaluate the measurement model. Second, we evaluated the structural model using the geometric mean as a technique for fit goodness, the path coefficients of the hypothesised relationships, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ). Finally, to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients, mediation, and moderated mediation, t-statistics and 95% CI were generated using a bootstrap sample of 10,000.

### **Common method variance**

This study minimized the threat of CMV in multiple ways. First, we used various response scales, employed multi-wave measurements, and ensured anonymity among respondents and data confidentiality. Since the removal of the indicator did not negate the significance of zero-order correlations, the dataset's CMV danger was deemed minimal. Additionally, the significant interactive effects confirm that these interactive effects were unaffected by the deflation of the CMV bias. Furthermore, according to Hair et al. (2024), the multi-collinearity test showed that all Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were below the cutoff point of 5, which was unimportant for our data (the highest VIF value was 3.15). As a result, multi-collinearity poses less concern.

## **Results**

### **Measurement model**

Table 1 displays the results of the measurement model. The reliability of the scales in this study was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values, which ranged from 0.887 to 0.932 and exceeded the 0.7 criterion. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and factor loadings were tested in order to evaluate convergent validity. Additionally, the AVE values, which ranged from 0.53 to 0.69, were higher than the cut-off value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2024).

Table I  
Measurement model

Construct and Items	Factor Loading
Supervisor Ostracism ( $\alpha=0.917$ ; $CR=0.932$ ; $AVE=0.632$ )	
Your boss ignores your colleagues at work.	0.768
Your boss does not answer greetings from your colleagues at work.	0.779
Your colleagues involuntarily sit alone in a crowded lunchroom at work.	0.752
Your boss avoids your colleagues at work.	0.796
Your boss does not look at your colleagues at work.	0.798
Your boss shuts your colleagues out of the conversation at work.	0.823
At work, your boss treats your colleagues as if they weren't there.	0.826
Your boss refuses to talk to your colleagues at work.	0.735
Your boss does not invite your colleagues or ask them if they want anything when they go out for a coffee break.	0.845
LMX ( $\alpha=0.863$ ; $CR=0.898$ ; $AVE=0.596$ )	
I usually know where I stand with my supervisor in knowing how satisfied my supervisor is with what I do.	0.718
My supervisor understands my problems and needs	0.787
My supervisor would be personally inclined to use his/her power to help me solve problems in my work	0.798
My supervisor recognizes my potential	0.827
I can count on my supervisor to "bail me out," even at his or her own expense, when I really need it	0.776
My supervisor has enough confidence in me that he/she would defend and justify my decisions if I were not present to do so.	0.719
Silence Behavior ( $\alpha=0.849$ ; $CR=0.887$ ; $AVE=0.532$ )	
I remain silent because nothing will change, anyway.	0.697
I remain silent to not be vulnerable to colleagues or superiors.	0.779
I remain silent because I fear disadvantages from speaking up.	0.834
I remain silent because my superiors are not open to proposals, concerns, or the like.	0.751
I remain silent because I do not want my supervisor to get into trouble.	0.805
I remain silent because I do not want to hurt the feelings of my supervisor.	0.694
I remain silent because of fear of negative consequences.	0.697
Moral Disengagement ( $\alpha=0.888$ ; $CR=0.911$ ; $AVE=0.563$ )	
People who get mistreated have usually done something to bring it on themselves.	0.794
Some people have to be treated roughly because they lack feelings that can be hurt.	0.841
Taking personal credit for ideas that were not your own is no big deal.	0.829
People cannot be blamed for doing things that are technically wrong when all their friends are doing it too.	0.750
People should not be held accountable for doing questionable things when they were just doing what an authority figure told them to do.	0.698
Considering the ways people grossly misrepresent themselves, it is hardly a sin to inflate your own credentials a bit.	0.754
Taking something without the owner's permission is okay as long as you are just borrowing it.	0.629
It is okay to spread rumors to defend those you care about.	0.681
Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior ( $\alpha=0.912$ ; $CR=0.932$ ; $AVE=0.696$ )	
When my organisation needed, I withheld issuing a refund to a customer or client accidentally overcharged.	0.794
When my organisation needed, I gave a good recommendation on the behalf of an incompetent employee in the hope that the person will become another organization's problem instead of my own.	0.834
To benefit my organization, I withheld negative information about my company or its products from customers and clients.	0.824
To help my organization, I exaggerated the truth about my company's products or services to customers and clients.	0.753
To help my organisation, I misrepresented the truth to make my organisation look good.	0.682
When needed, I concealed information from the public that could be damaging to my organization.	0.684
Unethical Pro-Family Behavior ( $\alpha=0.856$ ; $CR=0.893$ ; $AVE=0.584$ )	
I helped my family member get a job in my organization, even though I knew the family member was not qualified.	0.735
I took my family members to work to enjoy company resources and benefits that were intended for employees.	0.831
I took advantage of my position in the company to make things more convenient for my family.	0.867
To help my family, I submitted my family's household receipts (e.g., gas) to my company for reimbursement.	0.845
To help my family, I took company assets/supplies home for family use.	0.861
I disclosed confidential company information to my family members so that they can have advantages/benefits.	0.858

Note:  $\alpha$ =Cronbach's Alpha,  $CR$ =Composite reliability,  $AVE$ =Average variance extracted".

Finally, we used two techniques to evaluate the discriminant validity. First, as shown in Table 2, we used Fornell and Larcker (1981) technique to show that the square root of each construct's AVE value is greater than the construct's correlation with other constructs. Second, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was examined as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) ; Table 2 shows that HTMT values were less than the cut-of value of 0.85. Therefore, we came to the conclusion that the results of the measurement model provide evidence of adequate validity.

Table II  
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	LMX	MD	OS	SB	UPFB	UPOB
LMX						
MD	0.824					
OS	0.684	0.774				
SB	0.873	0.814	0.720			
UPFB	0.818	0.739	0.773	0.878		
UPOB	0.740	0.625	0.819	0.792	0.847	

### Structural model; Hypotheses testing

$R^2$  values for silence behaviour, UPFB, and UPOB were 0.61, 0.85, and 0.70, respectively, which we used to evaluate the structural model. Lastly, we computed the SRMR to verify the model design, as recommended by Hair et al. (2024) for PLS-SEM. According to Hair et al. (2024), the SRMR value was 0.074, which is below the cutoff of 0.08. We therefore came to the conclusion that our model is capable of testing and predicting the hypotheses. Our results showed a significant negative relationship among supervisor ostracism and silence behaviour ( $\beta = -0.307$ ,  $t = 5.610$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as shown in Table 3, and thus offered empirical support for H1. We used the bootstrapping method developed by Hair et al. (2024) to evaluate the mediating effects in our model. According to this method, a significant mediation is indicated by an indirect effect (ab) that is skewed away from zero. Our results showed a significant indirect mediating silence behaviour relationship between supervisor ostracism and unethical pro-family behaviour ( $\beta = -0.131$ ,  $t = 3.386$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and unethical pro-organizational behaviour ( $\beta = -0.140$ ,  $t = 3.818$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and thus offered empirical support for H2 and H3. Our results showed a significant indirect moderating effect of LMX relationship on supervisor ostracism and silence behaviour ( $\beta = 0.078$ ,  $t = 2.284$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and thus offered empirical support for H4. Our results showed a significant indirect moderating moral disengagement relationship between silence behaviour and unethical pro-family behaviour ( $\beta = 0.859$ ,  $t = 9.831$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and unethical pro-organizational behaviour ( $\beta = 0.734$ ,  $t = 12.992$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and thus offered empirical support for H5 and H6, see figure 2, 3 and 4.

Table III  
Structural model: hypotheses testing

	Path coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Mean ( $M$ )	SD	$T$ Values	$P$ Values
H1.OS→SB	-0.307	-0.309	0.055	5.610	0.000
Index of Mediation					
H3.OS→SB→UPFB	-0.131	-0.231	0.059	3.386	0.016
H3.OS→SB→UPOB	-0.140	-0.238	0.052	2.818	0.007
Index of Moderated					
H4.OS*LMX→SB	0.078	0.078	0.034	2.284	0.023
H5.SB*MD→UPFB	0.859	0.851	0.087	9.831	0.000
H6.SB*MD→UPOB	0.734	0.745	0.056	12.992	0.000

Convergent validity is established when items converge to measure the underlying construct in table 4 and the AVE value is greater than or equal to the suggested criterion of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2024). Convergent validity is thus validated.

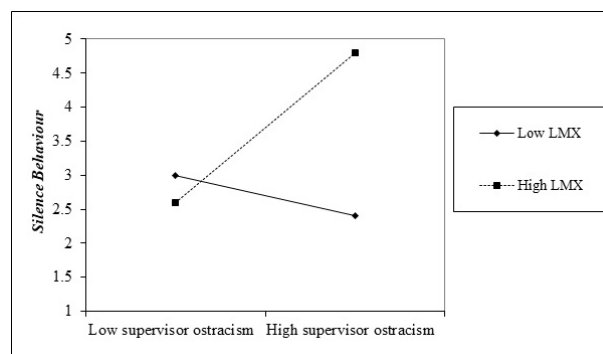


Fig. 2 Simple slope analysis of the indirect effect of LMX on supervisor ostracism through silence behavior



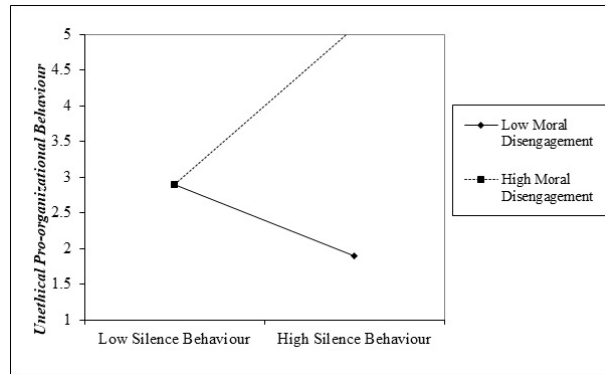


Fig. 3 Simple slope analysis of the indirect effect of moral disengagement on silence behaviour through UPFB

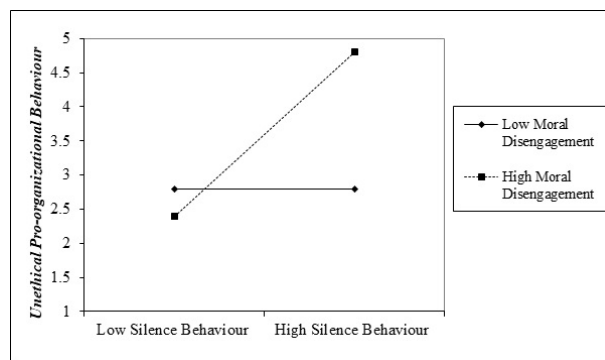


Fig. 4 Simple slope analysis of the indirect effect of moral disengagement on silence behaviour through UPOB

## Discussion

Even experiencing supervisor ostracism can have a negative impact on a silence behaviour and through UPOB with UPFB. The act of ostracism alone is enough to change how people perceive their surroundings, whether they are direct or indirect targets. As we demonstrate, those who supervise ostracism may react by removing themselves from the tense circumstance and remaining silent in order to prevent upsetting the offender. Employees' strong desire to preserve their relationship with their supervisor and their understanding that speaking up may come with more both personal and professional hazards and expenses than benefits are reflected in their silence and avoidance of conflict. Our research provides actual support for these factors in addition to theoretical justifications. The results are consistent with COR viewpoints: Observers can defend their silence by pointing to their reliance on supervisors as important resources for both their ongoing job and possibilities for promotion (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Given that criticizing the supervisor is probably outside the employee's purview, silence may seem like the sensible course of action for any employee witnessing supervisor ostracism. According to earlier studies, workers may respond passively that is, by remaining silent to unethical behaviours in order to preserve their remaining energy (Alqhaiwi et al., 2024). Employees silence to preserve their reputation among their managers is also reflected in a passive response to reports of exclusion. Previous research has shown that LMX can increase supervisor ostracism and silence behaviour (Khalid et al., 2024; Sarwar et al., 2025). We add subtlety to these discussions by recognizing instances where excellent LMX can actually promote silence. Workers believe that when their high LMX supervisors act in an ostracizing manner, it will be better for them if they remain silent. Conversely, poor LMX might play a useful role that was previously disregarded by shielding workers from the negative effects of shunning superiors. High LMX employees are more inclined to remain silent in the face of observed ostracism because they fear losing their valuable in-group position, but low LMX employees may be less likely to do so if they have no significant personal, social, or financial stakes.

### Implications

This study contributes a number of theoretical concepts to the body of literature on behavioral ethics. Prior research on employee silence and workplace exclusion emphasizes the gravely negative effects of these practices (Koay et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2020), but it mostly ignores how third parties react to these abuses. Continuing this line of inquiry, we explain why and when witnesses to supervisor ostracism engage in unethical behaviour by remaining silent about this abuse out of regret for not opposing the observed discrimination

and passively allowing victims to suffer. This study, which was carried out in Morocco Textile Managers from Morocco, a country with a highly collectivist, provides special insights on the abuse of power and unwanted behaviours in a setting where these behaviours are more common. The high power distance of their society and their strong reliance on their current jobs may make employees more prone to accept power imbalances and unethical supervision. Due to the significant financial and personal risks involved in keeping their positions, these workers may be more inclined to tolerate inequality of power and tolerate supervisors' abuse of their colleagues, as our findings highlight. In the context of LMX research, we pinpoint the ways in which the caliber of supervisory relationships can influence employee silence. Strong LMX connections may have a number of beneficial effects (Saleem, 2021), but we also point out the negative emotional effects and their deleterious moderating influence on workers' silence behaviour to perceived supervisor exclusion. We offer a distinct viewpoint on the social repercussions of LMX by elucidating this detrimental impact of high LMX in terms of promoting silence among employees. Lastly, this study adds to the growing body of research on the causes and effects of silence. In particular, our results show that ostracism observation plays a crucial part in encouraging subordinates to remain silent, particularly in high LMX situations. Silence's mediating function indicates self-defense mechanisms in response to rejection and unethical actions. Therefore, the current study examines the underlying mechanisms of silence as well as the influence of supervisors on unethical behaviors.

Since workplace ostracism is difficult to totally eradicate, this study offers a number of useful suggestions for addressing it. Those who experience ostracism may feel negative energy, social discomfort, and emotional distress (Saifa et al., 2021; Sarwar et al., 2025), but they also understand that speaking up could have detrimental effects on their professional development. But it doesn't help to keep silence. Our results make it clear that employees can enhance group cohesion, better negotiate challenging social circumstances, and preserve the unethical behaviour of their organisations by taking into account the silence behaviour that might result from their inaction. Additionally, many firms encourage employees to pursue high LMX relationships because of the beneficial effects they have on employee silence (Shaukat & Khurshid, 2022). However, they must also understand that strong LMX ties may encourage staff members to comply with supervisors' exclusion of others due to their sense of need to preserve this important relationship. Workers who experience ostracizing actions by superiors with whom they have a strong relationship ought to be informed of their moral disengagement. No manager should act disrespectfully towards staff members or members of perceived outsiders; doing so has negative effects on victims, observers, and the organisation as a whole. Strong deterrent measures against all forms of mistreatment, including ostracizing behaviour, must be implemented by organisations and human resource management. For consistent practices, long-term employee engagement, and trust in the company, leadership training programs should instill moral and ethical workplace behaviors in workers at all levels. However, companies should also provide private, anonymous avenues for staff members to voice complaints about their managers' ostracizing actions.

### Limitations and future research directions

This study has certain limitations in addition to its contributions to the body of existing literature. First, certain closely related, potentially influential variables and qualities were not examined. For instance, a specific leadership approach may promote greater silence or raise the frequency of ostracism. Researchers ought to define how various leadership philosophies might either energize or lessen the detrimental effects of observed exclusion. To find out if certain traits are more likely to result in negative consequences, they could also investigate at the dispositional traits of observers. Additionally, observer perceptions of ostracism as unethical or justified are not taken into consideration by our conceptual framework. Because observers' reactions and support for either the victim or the ostracizer are likely influenced by their perception of the underlying cause of the ostracism, this constraint creates a significant study opportunity. Other mechanisms driving moral behavior in the workplace could be taken into account by our research model. Examining whether ethical leadership or an ethical climate might interact with silence behaviour to predict ethical behaviours is an exciting addition to our study model, given the significance of environmental influences in behavioural ethics. Additionally, the current study has used silence behaviour to support people's moral identity and ethical behaviour. Moral detachment is one of the main causes of unethical behaviour, claims COR (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). As a result, future studies can focus on examining if silence behaviour can act as a mediator to reduce unethical behaviour of supervisors. Furthermore, we use field and experimental data to compile episodic observations of supervisor ostracism. Further studies could look into its long-term effects. Furthermore, studies that explore the intricate dynamics of observed ostracism at horizontal levels may provide important new understandings of observers' individual and group behaviors. Additionally, we carry out this analysis in the context of Morocco textile managers. Data for future studies may be gathered from textile managers in different nations. Lastly, the relationship between ostracism observations and unethical behavior may be explained by additional mediating and moderating factors. Moral identity, supervisor support, mental fatigue, and satisfaction are a few indicators.

### Conclusion

With this study, we improve the area of ostracism research to include the viewpoint of onlookers. We have suggested that ostracism causes social suffering to observers in addition to its immediate victims. Employees who witness supervisors excluding other staff members face

moral, ethical, and practical quandaries. They may feel compelled to step in, but their high LMX and moral disengagement may prevent them from doing so. As a result, they may disregard their morals and turn to a passive, silent coping mechanism. However, keeping silence has unsettling emotional repercussions for observers, such as unethical pro-family and pro-organizational behaviour.

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