



The role of idealized influence leadership in promoting workplace forgiveness[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We integrated research in psychology on employee responses to mistreatment with the leadership literature to examine whether leadership can promote forgiveness in the workplace. Drawing on these literatures, we theorized that leaders who heighten follower collective identity—those who display idealized influence—should facilitate forgiveness among employees. The results of an experimental study and a 2-part field survey support our theorizing. The field study also demonstrated that idealized influence leadership suppressed two employee antisocial responses (avoidance, revenge). Of note, whereas idealized influence leadership had the predicted effects, transactional leadership did not. This dissociation is consistent with our reasoning regarding the mediating role of follower collective identity in the relation between idealized influence leadership and employees responses to unfair events. Together, our findings suggest that idealized influence leaders may motivate employees to respond to instances of workplace mistreatment in ways that are beneficial to themselves, others, and the organization.

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“... During the performance appraisal [my boss] delivered his feedback, which was cynical and unconstructive, without editing or cushioning whatsoever. I found it very degrading, unfair and simply unkind...Even though I was upset and wanted to leave, my boss would not let me and continued the appraisal while I was visibly upset. At that point, if there had been anything constructive or positive said, I did not hear it...”

[Anonymous Participant (Study 2)]

“I had drafted a document for my management team to review, and one of the members...wrote some harshly-worded negative comments near the beginning of her feedback, before getting into more details and making specific suggestions for improvement. This feedback...was sent by e-mail and copied to the entire management team.”

[Anonymous Participant (Study 2)]

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Introduction

These comments are just two examples of interpersonal injustice that employees experience in the workplace. Unfortunately these experiences are not that uncommon. For example, the 2014 U.S. Survey on Workplace Bullying indicates that over one-quarter of adult Americans (27%) reported being interpersonally victimized at work in the last year; another 21% reported having witnessed others experience abusive conduct (Workplace Bullying Institute). Being victimized can have detrimental effects on victims' psychological well-being, such as decreased feelings of self-worth (e.g., Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012), increased anger (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1996), anxiety (Harlos & Pinder, 2000), and depression (Tepper, 2001).

Employees' coping responses toward workplace mistreatment vary greatly, from antisocial responses such as revenge and avoidance, to prosocial responses such as forgiveness. Revenge and avoidance responses are ultimately self-defeating for victims in that they can further damage victims' psychological well-being (e.g., Bono, McCullough, & Root, 2008; Toussaint & Friedman, 2009) and negatively impact the quality of the victim–offender relationship (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998). Revenge can also escalate conflict (e.g., Kim & Smith, 1993). In contrast, forgiveness responses enhance victims' psychological well-being (e.g., Cox, Bennett, Tripp, & Aquino, 2012; McCullough, 2001) and improve the quality of the victim–offender relationship (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Forgiveness has also been associated with greater employee morale and satisfaction (McCullough, Pargament, & Thorensen, 2000), and enhanced organizational productivity (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004).

Given the beneficial consequences of forgiveness for victims, offenders, and organizations more broadly, an important question arises: What organizational factors promote forgiveness in the workplace? In the present research, we aim to provide one answer to this question by integrating research in psychology on forgiveness and research in organizational sciences on leadership. As we explain in detail in the next section, there is good evidence in the psychology literature that people are more forgiving of mistreatment when their collective identity (i.e., sense of interconnectedness to others) is salient, or cognitively accessible. Importantly, leadership theorists have long argued for leaders' capacity to inspire attitudes and behaviors that promote group harmony by raising the accessibility of follower collective identity (e.g., Lord & Brown, 2004; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). One dimension of leadership that has been linked (both theoretically and empirically) to heightened follower collective identity is the idealized influence component of transformational leadership, which encapsulates leader behaviors that emphasize collective interests (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1993). Accordingly, we focus on idealized influence leadership in the present research. We theorized that leaders who raise the accessibility of follower collective identity—those who display idealized influence—should facilitate forgiveness among employees. We examined this idea in two studies—in one, we used an experimental design to maximize internal validity; in the second, we surveyed working adults to examine generalizability.

Study 2 had two additional goals. In addition to assessing idealized influence leadership, we measured an alternative leader style, transactional leadership, in an effort to provide discriminant validity evidence. In brief, unlike idealized influence leadership, transactional leadership is not associated with follower collective identity; therefore, we expected the former but not the latter to predict employee forgiveness. This dissociation as a function of leadership style would add credibility to our reasoning that what is essential in promoting forgiveness are leader behaviors that heighten the accessibility of follower collective identity, rather than any leader style. Second, although the primary focus of the current research is to examine whether idealized influence leadership promotes forgiveness, we extended our investigation in Study 2 to include two antisocial responses to mistreatment, namely avoidance and revenge. Our aim was to examine whether idealized influence not only facilitates responses such as forgiveness, which promote collective harmony, but also suppresses responses which harm group harmony such as revenge and avoidance. Doing so thus allows us to examine the relation between idealized influence leadership and employee responses to mistreatment more generally, in ways that both help and hinder group functioning.

Given the ubiquity of interpersonal conflict in organizations (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012), research examining the effect of leadership on employee forgiveness should be of importance to both organizational scholars and practicing managers. When damaged work relationships are left unattended by managers, the organization risks lowered performance and productivity among employees, and destructive responses such as revenge may ensue (e.g., Aquino, Grover, Goldman, & Folger, 2003). Thus, a key challenge is for leaders to manage interpersonal injury in a way that facilitates relationship repair and helps employees cope constructively with their feelings of injustice. Promoting employee forgiveness and reducing revenge and avoidance may help to meet this challenge. Until recently, organizational research has largely neglected the study of workplace forgiveness (Aquino et al., 2003; Barclay & Skarlicki, 2008; Bobocel, 2013; Bright & Exline, 2011; Fehr & Gelfand, 2012). Moreover, little research has examined how to reduce antisocial responses; instead, much of the research on mistreatment has focused on understanding factors that increase antisocial responses. Importantly, very little is known about leader behaviors that may promote employee forgiveness and reduce antisocial responses. Clearly, there is value in research that does so.

Background theory and hypotheses

Responses to mistreatment: The role of victim collective identity

As noted earlier, one of the most prosocial responses to mistreatment is forgiveness. Although various definitions of forgiveness have been proposed over the years, McCullough et al. (2000) observed that most share a critical assumption: “When people forgive, their responses toward (or, in other words, what they think of, feel about, want to do to, or actually do to) people who have offended or injured them become more positive and less negative” (p. 9). In other words, a fundamental feature of forgiveness is “intraindividual prosocial change toward a transgressor” (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003, p. 540).

In contrast, two antisocial responses to being wronged are revenge and avoidance. Revenge is commonly defined as an “action taken in response to a perceived harm or wrongdoing by another person that is intended to inflict harm, damage, discomfort or injury to the party judged responsible” (e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001, p. 53; see also Vidmar, 2001). Avoidance has been defined as the “motivation to avoid personal and psychological contact with the offender” (McCullough et al., 1998, p. 1587), which results in victim estrangement from the offender. Although forgiveness, revenge, and avoidance are clearly not the only possible responses to mistreatment, they arguably represent the most prosocial (forgiveness) and antisocial (revenge and avoidance) responses, and are most often examined in prior research (e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Aquino et al., 2001; Bobocel, 2013).

Given that a key feature of forgiveness is the overcoming of negative thoughts and feelings toward the offender, victims who report strong forgiveness motivation should also report low revenge and avoidance (e.g., McCullough et al., 2000). Consistent with this conceptualization, many studies in both the psychology and management literatures have reported negative associations between forgiveness, and revenge and avoidance (e.g., Aquino et al., 2001, 2006; Fincham, 2000; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005).

Research in psychology has identified numerous determinants of victims' forgiveness, revenge, and avoidance responses to transgressions (for comprehensive reviews, see Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; Mullet, Neto, & Rivière, 2005; Riek & Mania, 2012). Most important for the present purposes is research that has demonstrated the predictive power of victim collective identity. Broadly, *identity* refers to how one defines the self in relation to others (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Collective identity in particular refers to defining the self in terms of one's connection to social groups (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Turner et al., 1987). These connections to social groups do not require close personal attachment to any specific individual but to the group as a whole. According to many psychological theories, identity provides a filter through which people self-regulate. Identity fundamentally shapes the type of information to which people attend, it alters the basis of people's self-esteem, and it influences basic motivational processes that guide behavior in social interactions (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Flynn, 2005; Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Markus & Wurf, 1987). For instance, when collective identity is activated, group goals are given priority over individual goals, self-worth is derived from belonging, fitting in, and maintaining social harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 242), and an individual's basic motivation is to enhance or protect collective welfare (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 2003; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001; van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

Important to note, research has demonstrated that collective identity can be chronically salient or be activated by situational factors that heighten its accessibility in working memory (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Singelis, 1994; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Indeed, research has shown consistently that collective identity can be made accessible even with subtle semantic priming manipulations such as reading text that varies the pronouns to be inclusive (“we”) vs. exclusive (“I”) (e.g., Gardner et al., 1999; for other primes, see Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008; Trafimow et al., 1991). And, as reviewed more below, leadership researchers have long argued that certain styles of leadership can raise the accessibility of follower collective identity.

A large body of research in social and personality psychology has demonstrated that collective identity is influential in shaping a wide range of perceptions, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors as noted above (for an overview, see Leary & Tangney, 2003). Of particular relevance to the present research are studies that demonstrate that when collective identity is salient among victims, they exhibit greater prosocial responses to mistreatment, and lower antisocial responses (e.g., Bobocel, 2013; Bobocel & Zdaniuk, 2010; Fu, Watkins, & Hui, 2004; Hook, Worthington, Utsey, Davis, & Burnette, 2012a, Hook et al., 2012b; Hui & Bond, 2009; Karremans, Van Lange, & Holland, 2005; Neto & Mullet, 2004; Watkins et al., 2011). For example, Bobocel and Zdaniuk (2010) found that the stronger victim's collective identity, whether situationally primed or measured, the more prosocial their responses toward an offender (e.g., forgiveness, greater helping). Likewise, Hook et al. (2012a) showed that stronger collective identity predicted greater trait forgiveness, which in turn predicted greater forgiveness of a specific transgression. Other research has demonstrated that those with a strong collectivistic mindset are motivated to forgive to enhance social harmony and stability (Fu et al., 2004). Moreover, within the context of the workplace, Bobocel (2013) found that employees with stronger other-orientation were more forgiving of specific transgressions they had experienced. Interestingly, social psychological research shows that merely thinking about one's relationships with close others (spouses, friends, coworkers) automatically triggers the inclination to forgive, which suggests that forgiveness is part of people's mental representation of close relationships (Karremans & Aarts, 2007).

Thus, there is considerable evidence that raising the accessibility of victims' interconnections with others promotes relationship-restoring responses, such as forgiveness. Fewer studies have examined the impact on responses that are harmful to one's relationship, such as revenge and avoidance. However, the evidence that does exist suggests that collective identity suppresses such negative responses. In particular, Hui and Bond (2009) found that Americans with stronger interdependent self-construal reported lower revenge motivation in response to personally experienced transgressions. In short, when collective identity is salient, individuals are motivated to act in ways that protect or enhance collective welfare, and refrain from behaviors that could pose a threat to collective good (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 2003; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001; van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

Idealized influence leadership and follower collective identity

As noted at the outset, several contemporary leadership theories argue that leaders have the capacity to inspire and influence followers by tying followers' identity to collective interests (e.g., Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Shamir et al., 1993; for reviews, see Lord & Brown, 2004; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). For example, Shamir et al. (1993) proposed that the essence of charismatic leadership is the leader's ability to transform “the needs, values, preferences, and aspirations of followers from self-interests to collective interests” (p. 577). Likewise, Burns (1978) stated that transformational leaders inspire their followers to look beyond self-interest and

work together for a collective purpose. Indeed, much of the relevant research and theorizing has been conducted within the context of charismatic and transformational leadership theories.

One way in which leaders can directly activate specific aspects of follower identity is through their behaviors (e.g., Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004; Shamir et al., 1993). As noted earlier, in the current research we focus on the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993, 1994) also commonly referred to as leader charisma (see van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013) because idealized influence leaders most clearly enact behaviors that emphasize collective interests: emphasizing a collective sense of purpose, making personal sacrifices for the benefit of the group, setting a personal example, and demonstrating ethical standards.² By focusing on behaviors that promote collective interests, idealized influence leaders should in turn activate follower collective identity.

Research supports the idea that idealized influence enhances the accessibility of follower collective identity. For example, in an experimental scenario study, Paul, Costley, Howell, Dorfman, and Trafimow (2001) exposed participants to alleged leader communications, which contained content that reflected either idealized influence or the individualized consideration aspect of transformational leadership (behavior that focuses on followers' unique abilities, needs, and aspirations; Bass, 1985). The results showed that communication content inspired by idealized influence increased the accessibility of participants' collective identities, whereas communication content inspired by individualized consideration increased the accessibility of their personal identities. Additionally, several field studies have demonstrated a positive association between leader's display of idealized influence behaviors and heightened collective identity among followers (e.g., Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000; Hobman, Jackson, Jimmieson, & Martin, 2011; Shamir, Zakay, Brainin, & Popper, 2000; Shamir, Zakay, Breinin, & Popper, 1998). It is noteworthy that several of these studies have also showed that heightened collective identity mediates the link between leader behavior and follower outcomes (e.g., Conger et al., 2000; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002, 2004; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003).

Taken together, research and theory supports the idea that leaders who display idealized influence behaviors indeed heighten the accessibility of follower collective identity. Theoretically, then, followers should be more likely to engage in behaviors that contribute to the collective good and less likely to engage in behaviors that threaten it (e.g., van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Empirical evidence bears out this prediction. For example, research has demonstrated that leaders who display idealized influence leadership promote employees' general cooperation (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002), as well as organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., Cho & Dansereau, 2010; Den Hartog, De Hoogh, & Keegan, 2007; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990), and decrease employees' general antisocial behaviors, such as interpersonal and organizational deviance (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

The current research

In the present research, we integrate the aforementioned literature on employee responses to mistreatment with the literature on leadership. More specifically, given that (a) idealized influence enhances the accessibility of follower collective identity, and (b) victim collective identity predicts forgiveness, we reasoned that leaders who display idealized influence behaviors will motivate employees to respond to workplace transgressions with greater forgiveness. Thus, we made the following hypothesis, which we tested in two studies:

Hypothesis 1. Leader idealized influence will promote forgiveness among employees in response to instances of harm or wrongdoing in the workplace.

Similarly, we reasoned that leaders who display idealized influence may suppress antisocial responses among employees because such responses undermine collective harmony. Therefore, we made the following hypothesis, which we tested in Study 2:

Hypothesis 2. Leader idealized influence will suppress revenge and avoidance among employees in response to instances of harm or wrongdoing in the workplace.

If our reasoning regarding idealized influence leadership is true, then other leader styles which are unrelated to follower collective identity should be unrelated to forgiveness, revenge, and avoidance. Transactional leadership is one such style. Transactional leaders monitor and control follower work attitudes and behaviors through contingent rewards and disciplinary actions (e.g., Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass, 1985). Thus, one component of transactional leadership is contingent reward, which refers to leaders' behaviors that focus on providing support, recognition, and resources to followers in exchange for their effort and satisfactory performance. The second component is active management by exception, which refers to behaviors that focus on setting standards for performance, monitoring to detect deviations, and taking corrective action when necessary.

Although transactional leadership is positively related to various follower outcomes such as motivation, performance, job satisfaction, and leader satisfaction (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), we are not aware of any theoretical or empirical research linking transactional leadership with follower collective identity. Rather, the major influence process underlying transactional leadership is an exchange of reward for compliance (Yukl, 1998). Given that transactional leadership is unrelated to follower collective identity, we therefore

² As recommended in a recent comprehensive review by van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013), we refer to idealized influence by this label, rather than by the broader label transformational leadership (or charismatic-transformational leadership), to avoid conceptual and methodological confusion that has resulted from the application of the broader label regardless of which dimensions are assessed.

expected that—in contrast to idealized influence—transactional leadership should be unrelated to employee forgiveness, revenge, and avoidance. Therefore, in an effort to demonstrate discriminant validity among leader styles and bolster our theorizing, we made the following null hypothesis, which we tested in Study 2:

Hypothesis 3. There will be a non-significant association between transactional leadership and employee forgiveness, revenge, and avoidance in response to instances of harm or wrongdoing in the workplace.

In addition to the specific contributions outlined earlier, the present research has three important, more general implications for the leadership literature. First, although we focus on the idealized influence component of leadership, which emerged from the transformational leadership literature, other theories of leadership also discuss the importance of evoking collective interests among followers. Thus, our research has implications for a number of leadership theories, including charismatic leadership, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and servant leadership (for reviews see, e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Shamir et al., 1993). As noted earlier, in the current research we focus on idealized influence leadership because it has been most directly linked to follower collective identity theoretically and empirically, relative to these other styles of leadership.

Second, we fill a notable gap in the type of outcomes that are typically examined in leadership research. Although numerous studies have demonstrated that leaders have extraordinary effects on their followers (for meta-analyses, see DeGroot, Kiker, & Cross, 2000; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996), most of the research has focused on *intrapyschic* consequences for employees, such as feelings of empowerment, motivation, and self-efficacy. Much less research has examined *interpersonal* consequences of leadership (with some exceptions noted earlier, e.g., Brown & Treviño, 2006; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; Den Hartog et al., 2007; Podsakoff et al., 1990). The overall lack of attention to interpersonal consequences of leadership is unfortunate, given that much of leadership theorizing concerns the ability to motivate followers to behave in ways that benefit the group and enhance intergroup harmony (for a related discussion of the types of outcomes largely omitted from the leadership literature see, Hiller, DeChurch, Murase, & Doty, 2011).

Finally, we extend the research that has examined interpersonal consequences of leadership in a novel direction. That is, we examine the relation between leadership and employee responses to *specific instances* of interpersonal conflict in the workplace. In contrast, the existing research has demonstrated the influence of leadership on employees' *generalized* tendencies to engage in prosocial and antisocial behavior, such as cooperation, organizational citizenship, and deviance. Given that employee conflicts can quickly cycle downward, it is of theoretical and practical importance to examine whether certain leader styles can shape how employees respond to specific episodes of mistreatment.

Study 1

Our goal in Study 1 was to maximize experimental control and thus internal validity (e.g., Dobbins, Lane, & Steiner, 1988) in order to make firmer conclusions regarding causality. As recommended by Mook (1983), our initial interest is in determining whether our predicted effects can occur (vs. do occur in the field); thus, internal validity was deemed of primary importance (Dobbins et al., 1988; Highhouse, 2009; Locke, 1986). Accordingly, in Study 1, we tested Hypothesis 1 using an experimental methodology in which we assessed participant forgiveness within the context of a hypothetical transgression. Prior to reading the transgression, half of the participants (experimental condition) were primed with the concept of idealized influence leadership whereas the other half of the participants (control condition) were not. We primed idealized influence leadership using a scenario priming task developed and validated by Paul et al. (2001). Participants in the priming condition read a leadership message that made references to idealized influence behaviors. We used this particular prime because, as noted earlier, Paul et al. demonstrated that exposure to the idealized influence leadership message raised the accessibility of participants' collective identities. Given this, and in line with Hypothesis 1, we expected that participants would report greater motivation to forgive the offender in the idealized influence leadership condition than in the control condition.

Method

Participants and design

Fifty undergraduate students (28 males & 22 females; $M_{age} = 21.78$, $SD = 5.77$) from a mid-sized university in North America participated for course credit in an on-line study, which utilized a two-group (idealized influence leadership prime vs. control condition) between-subjects design. Forty-six percent of the students indicated that they were currently employed part-time.

Procedure and experimental manipulation

Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to pilot test several tasks to be used in various subsequent studies, and they would be completing a number of unrelated tasks and measures. Participants were randomly assigned to condition. In the *idealized influence leadership condition* ($n = 25$), participant's first task was to read what they were told was a segment of information about a company called "National Greencare Incorporated (NGI)" from the "President, Joe Hewlett," and to indicate whether the description of NGI was clear.

The actual function of the task was to prime idealized influence leadership. The priming task was that developed by Paul et al. (2001). In the first paragraph, Joe Hewlett introduced himself and provided a brief overview of NGI. This was followed by four paragraphs in which Joe Hewlett described his leadership style. Paul et al. used the idealized influence (Behavior) dimension of the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-Form 5x-Short; Bass & Avolio, 1995) to operationalize the leader behaviors described in the four paragraphs as follows: (1) being guided by NGI's core values and beliefs, (2) having a collective mission, (3) having a common sense of purpose, and (4) making decisions based on moral principles rather than economic factors. In the *control condition* ($n = 25$), participants did not complete this "first task." It is noteworthy that experimental scenario manipulations of leadership have been used in other research with student participants (e.g., Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002).

Independent manipulation check study

Note that in their research, Paul et al. demonstrated that the idealized influence prime enhanced the accessibility of participants' collective identities, but they did not conduct a manipulation check to ascertain if participants did in fact perceive the leader in the scenario (Joe Hewlett) as having displayed idealized influence behaviors. Thus, we conducted our own manipulation check study on an independent sample of student participants ($N = 61$; 30 males & 31 females; $M_{age} = 20.57$, $SD = 1.38$; mean work experience = 33.87 months, $SD = 31.80$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the idealized influence condition ($n = 31$), participants read the leadership prime used in Study 1 and rated the leader on idealized influence. In the control condition ($n = 30$), participants were asked to rate the "typical leader" on idealized influence. We used the 4-item idealized influence (Behavior) dimension of the MLQ (Form 5x³; Avolio et al., 1999; Bass & Avolio, 2000) to assess idealized influence ($\alpha = .70$). Participants rated the frequency with which they believe President Joe Hewlett (idealized influence condition) or the typical leader (control condition) displays each of these behaviors (0 = *not at all*, 4 = *frequently, if not always*). ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of prime. As expected, participants attributed greater idealized influence leadership to the leader described in the scenario prime ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .40$) as compared to the typical leader ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .56$), $F(1, 59) = 5.96$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .09$. These results demonstrate that the idealized influence leadership prime used in Study 1 did in fact operationalize idealized influence leadership.

Returning to the main study procedures, following the priming task (in the idealized influence leadership condition) or as their first task (in the control condition), participants were asked to imagine experiencing a situation which reflects a common derogation offense (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1996):

You are an employee at Computer Graphics, Inc. You have always been a hard worker on the job. Often, you even stay late to ensure that all of your assignments are completed on time. Once a month, your boss Mr. Smith holds a staff meeting, which you attend. During one of the staff meetings, your boss singles you out, and informs you in front of all your colleagues that your job performance has been really poor lately. His speech indicates that he is quite upset with you and your performance. He also makes fun of your lack of skills and abilities, and calls you incompetent. Not once, has your boss previously informed you that he was displeased with your performance.⁴

Next, participants completed a series of measures pertaining to the offense, reported below in order of appearance (see *Measures* below). Participants then completed several additional short unrelated tasks. Finally, they were invited to offer comments about the tasks, thanked for their participation, and debriefed.

Measures

Perceived offense unfairness/severity

To ensure that participants perceived the vignette as an offense, we assessed participants' perceptions of offense unfairness and severity with the following two items, respectively: "To what extent was the offense described in the scenario unfair?" (1 = *not at all unfair*, 7 = *very unfair*); "How severe would you rate the offense described in the scenario?" (1 = *not at all severe*, 7 = *very severe*). The unfairness and severity items were significantly intercorrelated ($r = .75$, $p < .001$), thus, we created a composite.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness motivation was assessed with five items from McCullough and Hoyt's (2002) Benevolence Scale, which were adapted for the scenario context (e.g., "Following the offense, I would forgive him for what he did;" "I would have good will for my supervisor, even though his actions hurt me," $\alpha = .74$).

³ The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-Form 5X) (Copyright 1995, 2000 by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio) was purchased by the second author and used in this research (Study 1 and Study 2) with permission of Mind Garden, 1690 Woodside Road, Suite 202, Redwood City, CA 94061. All rights reserved.

⁴ Readers might wonder if students would have difficulty imagining this workplace offense, given limited work experience. Thus, we conducted a follow-up validation study to examine this possibility. Student participants ($N = 46$; 21 males & 25 females; $M_{age} = 20.09$, $SD = 1.64$; mean work experience = 29.85 months, $SD = 25.58$) read the offense scenario used in Study 1, and then responded to the following question: "How easy was it to imagine how you would feel if this event happened to you?" (1 = *not at all easy*, 5 = *extremely easy*). The mean response was high, 4.00 ($SD = .97$), indicating that it was quite easy for students to imagine experiencing the offense. It is also noteworthy that similar hypothetical situations have been used in organizational research with student participants (e.g., Aquino et al., 2006; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002).

Control variables

As noted in the [Introduction](#), past research on forgiveness has demonstrated support for a number of demographic and contextual predictors. Our goal was to demonstrate the unique, or incremental effect, of idealized influence on forgiveness over and above these known predictors. As recommended by [Aguinis and Vandenberg \(2013\)](#), we used only control variables that been linked to forgiveness both theoretically and empirically. In particular, we controlled participant gender, given prior research demonstrating that women are more forgiving than men (for a meta-analysis see, [Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008](#)). Second, we controlled age because there is evidence that older persons are more likely to forgive (e.g., [Aquino et al., 2001](#); [Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989](#); [Girard & Mullet, 1997](#); [Steiner, Allemand, & McCullough, 2011](#)). Finally, we controlled participants' perceptions of offense unfairness/severity, in light of evidence demonstrating that people are more forgiving of less unfair/severe offenses (e.g., [Aquino et al., 2006](#); [Bobocel, 2013](#); [Fehr et al., 2010](#)).⁵

Results and discussion

As shown in [Table 1](#), participants perceived the offense as quite unfair/severe. A follow-up ANOVA revealed no significant difference between participants' perceptions of offense unfairness/severity across condition. Thus, as expected, participants perceived the offense similarly—as quite unfair/severe—regardless of experimental condition.

Next, we conducted a two-group ANCOVA to examine the effect of prime on forgiveness, using gender, age, and offense unfairness/severity as covariates in the analysis. Of the three covariates, only offense unfairness/severity was significant, $F(1, 45) = 8.04, p < .01, \eta^2 = .15$. As expected, there was also a significant main effect of prime. In support of [Hypothesis 1](#), participants reported stronger forgiveness of their supervisor in the idealized influence prime condition ($M = 3.78, SD = .92$) as compared to the control condition ($M = 3.41, SD = 1.03$), $F(1, 45) = 5.16, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10$.

The results of Study 1 are consistent with the idea that idealized influence leadership increases the motivation to forgive. Although the difference in mean forgiveness between priming conditions is small, the effect size is classified as large ([Cohen, 1988](#)). Moreover, it is impressive that we detected an effect of prime on forgiveness in light of participants' perceptions of strong offense unfairness/severity across conditions.

The methodology we used in Study 1 has both strengths and limitations. As noted earlier, our primary goal was to examine “if our predicted effects can occur” ([Mook, 1983](#)). Moreover, a major strength of Study 1 is that it allows causal inference between our predictor and criterion, something that is not possible in correlational field research. At the same time, our experimental approach limits external validity (student participants, hypothetical situation). While we recognized the threats to external validity, we modeled our manipulation of leader idealized influence on prior research that also employed student participants, and derogation offenses—such as that described in our scenario—are common in the workplace (e.g., [Baron, 1993](#); [Baron & Neuman, 1996](#); [Bies & Tripp, 1996](#)). To this point, our workplace study, to follow, corroborates this. Nevertheless, it is possible that people respond differently to actual rather than hypothetical offenses, and that working adults respond differently than students. Therefore, we conducted a workplace study to examine the generalizability of our findings in Study 1.

Study 2

Study 2 was conducted in the field, using a critical incident methodology ([Flanagan, 1954](#)). This allowed us to assess the generalizability of our finding in Study 1 to an employee sample and in the context of personally-experienced workplace transgressions. We had three additional goals: First, we tested [Hypothesis 2](#), which predicted that idealized influence leadership will be negatively associated with employees' avoidance and revenge responses toward their transgressors. Second, we assessed whether the offender was employees' co-worker or supervisor in an effort to determine whether our predicted effects are moderated by offender status. If idealized influence leaders raise the accessibility of collective identity among followers, then we expected that followers would be more forgiving, less avoidant, and less vengeful following specific transgressions regardless of whether the offender was a supervisor or a coworker. Finally, we also examined [Hypothesis 3](#), which predicted non-significant relationships between our alternative leader style, transactional leadership, and employee forgiveness, avoidance and revenge responses.

Method

Participants and overview of procedures

A random sample of 1000 alumni from a mid-sized university in North America was invited by email to participate in a two-part, web-survey examining recent experiences with injustice in the workplace. At Time 1, participants completed several demographic questions, as well as the idealized influence and transactional leadership measures.⁶ At Time 2 (approximately one week later), participants described a recent workplace offense that occurred in their current organization (see details below), and completed the Time 2 measures.

⁵ None of the control variables in Studies 1 and 2 moderate the primary effects of interest (see [Howell, 1992](#)).

⁶ Study 2 was conducted as part of a larger survey. Thus, at Time 1, participants responded to a number of additional measures unrelated to the present research.

Table 1

Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations (Across Experimental Condition).

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Forgiveness	3.60	.98	-				
2. Unfairness/severity	5.94	1.23	-.36**	-			
3. Age	21.78	5.77	-.19	.14	-		
4. Participant gender	.44	.50	.07	.06	-.16	-	

Note. *N* = 50. Higher scores on the variables reflect more of the construct. Participant gender was dummy coded (males = 0, females = 1). ** $p < .01$.

One hundred and eighty-eight employees completed the Time 1 survey; of these 188 participants, 96 also completed all of the Time 2 measures (35 males and 61 females; $M_{age} = 32.81$, $SD = 8.04$).⁷ All participants had completed a Bachelor's degree and were working full-time; thirty-two percent also had completed a post-graduate or professional degree. Thirty one percent were in a management position (51% in private sector). Of those in a management position, 36% were entry-level, 46% middle-level, and 18% upper-level. It is noteworthy that no significant differences on demographic characteristics and idealized influence leadership were found when comparing employees who completed both Parts 1 and 2 and those who completed Part 1 only. This helps to rule out the possibility of a selection bias in the subsample of employees who completed both parts (but see Study 2 [Results and discussion](#) section).⁸

Time 1: Idealized influence and transactional leadership

We assessed idealized influence and transactional leadership using 16-items from the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-Form 5x; Avolio et al., 1999; Bass & Avolio, 2000). Eight items assessed idealized influence (behavior and attributed dimensions; $\alpha = .87$). Likewise, 8 items assessed transactional leadership (contingent reward and active management by exception dimensions; $\alpha = .70$). Participants were presented with the 16 statements describing the leadership behaviors, and asked to rate the frequency with which their supervisor (i.e., the person to whom they are directly responsible) displays each of the behaviors (0 = *not at all*, 4 = *frequently, if not always*).

Time 2: Offense description

Approximately one week later at Time 2, employees were asked to describe a recent incident in which they were treated unfairly by another person in their current organization. Participants' workplace transgressions were later coded in line with Bies and Tripp's (1996) typology, as follows: disrespectful or insulting treatment (16%); unfair or wrongful accusations (14%); unfair performance evaluation or questioning of intellectual capabilities (12%); personalistic and berating public criticism (10%); discriminatory comments (9%); co-worker or supervisor lying or withholding critical information (4%); co-worker or supervisor shirking or neglecting his or her job responsibilities (5%); violation of established organizational norms (3%); shirking job responsibilities (2%); unfair termination or promotion of candidate perceived to be less deserving (5%); other (7%). (Due to a technical problem, 13% of the accounts were transmitted incompletely and therefore could not be coded.)

After describing the offense, participants completed a series of measures, as reported below.

Time 2: Measures

All measures at Time 2 were assessed on 7-point scales, with higher numbers indicating more of the construct.

Perceived offense unfairness/severity

As in Study 1, we assessed participants' perceptions of offense unfairness and severity, using the following two items: "To what extent was the offense unfair?" and "How severe would you rate the offense?" As before, the unfairness and severity items were combined to form a composite ($r = .62$, $p < .001$).

Forgiveness, revenge, and avoidance

Forgiveness was assessed using McCullough and Hoyt's (2002) 7-item Benevolence Scale (e.g., "Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a relationship again"; $\alpha = .92$). Revenge and avoidance were assessed using McCullough et al.'s (1998) Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations (TRIM) Inventory. Five items assessed revenge (e.g., "I wish something bad would happen to him/her"; $\alpha = .85$), and 7 items assessed avoidance (e.g., "I keep as much distance between us as possible"; $\alpha = .94$). Consistent with past research (e.g., Aquino et al., 2006), a principal components analysis with varimax rotation confirmed a three-factor solution. The first factor was defined by the avoidance items, the second factor was defined by the forgiveness items, and the third factor was defined

⁷ It is difficult to ascertain the response rate for Study 2. The email invitation was sent to participants through the University's Alumni Office; thus, we do not have data on how many of the invitations were sent to active email addresses.

⁸ Of note, the pattern of results reported later is the same regardless of participants' education levels (Bachelor degree only vs. Bachelor and post-graduate/professional degree) and their job level (management vs. non-management position).

by the revenge items (eigenvalues = 10.02, 1.97, and 1.75, respectively; percentage of variance explained = 52.76, 10.35, and 9.20, respectively). Note that the TRIM inventory subscales demonstrate low correlations with measures of social desirability (see Aquino et al., 2006; Bobocel, 2013; McCullough et al., 1998).

Co-worker vs. supervisor offender

Participants categorized their relationship with the offender as supervisor (54%) or co-worker (46%).

Control variables

As in Study 1, we controlled participant gender, age, and perceived offense unfairness/severity. In Study 2, we also controlled relationship importance because strong evidence demonstrates that strong victim–offender relationship commitment/closeness predicts forgiveness (e.g., Fehr et al., 2010; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). We measured this variable with the item: “How important was your relationship with the offender prior to the offense.” Another control variable was time since offense occurred, given that people become more forgiving over time (e.g., Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991; McCullough et al., 2003; Wohl & McGrath, 2007).

After completing the measures, participants completed a positive mood induction to reduce possible perseverance of negative thoughts and emotions they might have experienced from recalling the event (Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard, 1975); they were then thanked for their participation and given the option of receiving a summary of the findings.

Results and discussion

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and inter-correlations among the study variables. As shown, participants indicated that, on average, the offense occurred approximately six months ago, and they rated it as quite unfair/severe. Before reviewing the primary variables, three auxiliary correlations are of interest. The greater the idealized influence leadership displayed by one's supervisor, the less unfair/severe participants perceived the offense, the more important employees' relationship with the offender prior to the offense, and the less likely it was that the offender was their supervisor. Although these relations were not predicted, they are nonetheless consistent with our theorizing regarding the effects of idealized influence leadership, and therefore will be discussed more in the General discussion.

Examining the descriptives for the criterion variables, it is noteworthy that whereas the mean ratings of forgiveness and avoidance were near the scale midpoint with good variability, revenge ratings were restricted to the low end, creating the potential for a floor effect. In line with Hypotheses 1 and 2, there was a significant positive relation between idealized influence leadership and forgiveness, and significant negative relations between idealized influence leadership, and avoidance and revenge. Of note, because we assessed the predictor and criteria separately in time, it is less likely that these correlations are inflated by common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

To provide a stronger test of Hypotheses 1 and 2, next we conducted three hierarchical regression analyses to examine the incremental effects of idealized influence leadership on the criteria. In each analysis, in Step 1 we entered the control variables: offense unfairness/severity, relationship importance, participant gender, months since offense occurred, and age. As shown in Table 3 (Step 1), perceptions of offense unfairness/severity and relationship importance were significant predictors of forgiveness, avoidance, and revenge.

In Step 2, we entered idealized influence leadership. As shown, the positive effect of idealized influence leadership on forgiveness remained significant, $\beta = .35$ $p < .01$, supporting Hypothesis 1. As well, idealized influence leadership has a unique negative effect on avoidance, $\beta = -.31$ $p < .01$. However, the significant bivariate effect of idealized influence leadership on revenge was no longer significant after accounting for overlapping variance by the control variables, $\beta = -.13$ $p = .26$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 received partial support. Given that the mean level of revenge was near the floor of the scale, it is possible that we simply did not have sufficient variability to detect an incremental effect of our predictor after controlling overlapping variance of the covariates.

To examine whether offender status moderates the effects of idealized influence leadership on employee responses, we conducted a regression analysis on each of the three criteria. Step 1 was the same as that described above; in Step 2, we entered idealized

Table 2
Study 2 (Workplace Survey): Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Idealized Influence	3.00	.98	(.87)										
2. Transactional Leadership	2.94	.72	.43**	(.70)									
3. Forgiveness	4.24	1.59	.48**	.08	(.92)								
4. Revenge	1.83	1.18	-.23*	-.09	-.52**	(.85)							
5. Avoidance	3.47	1.76	-.47**	-.16	-.74**	.55**	(.94)						
6. Unfairness/severity	4.96	1.33	-.25*	-.16	-.28*	.20*	.31**	-					
7. Age	32.81	8.04	-.05	-.08	.02	.03	-.13	.22*	-				
8. Relationship importance	3.86	1.80	.34**	.15	.35**	-.17	-.38**	.13	.17	-			
9. Offender status	.54	.50	-.27*	-.11	-.18	.21*	.18	.42**	-.03	.18	-		
10. Participant gender	.63	.48	.04	-.15	.02	-.06	-.04	-.06	.12	.09	.04	-	
11. Months since offense	6.37	10.23	-.07	-.03	-.20	.05	.18	.14	.03	-.04	.12	.03	-

Note. $N = 96$. Higher scores on the variables reflect more of the construct. Participant gender was dummy coded (males = 0, females = 1). Offender status was also dummy coded (co-worker = 0, supervisor = 1). * $p < .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

Table 3

Study 2: Standardized Coefficients for the Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Forgiveness, Avoidance, and Revenge.

Predictor	Forgiveness β	Avoidance β	Revenge β
Step 1			
Unfairness/severity	-.32**	.37**	.22*
Relationship importance	.35**	-.40**	-.21*
Participant gender	-.01	.03	-.03
Months since offense	-.14	.12	-.01
Age	.05	-.15	.02
Adjusted R^2	.19**	.27**	.03
Step 2			
Unfairness/severity	-.22*	.29*	.18
Relationship importance	.22*	-.28*	-.16
Participant gender	-.02	.03	-.03
Months since offense	-.13	.11	.01
Age	.07	-.17	.02
Idealized influence	.35**	-.31**	-.13
ΔR^2	.10**	.08**	.01
ΔF	12.61**	11.00**	1.29

Note. $N = 96$. Higher scores on the variables reflect more of the construct. Participant gender was dummy coded (males = 0, females = 1). * $p < .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

influence leadership and offender status, and Step 3 contained the two-way interaction term. As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), idealized influence leadership was mean centered before computing the interaction term. Offender status was dummy coded (co-worker = "0", supervisor = "1"). None of the interactions was significant ($ps > .20$); thus, we found no evidence to suggest that the effect of idealized influence leadership on employee responses is different for supervisor versus coworker offenders.

Finally, as shown in Table 2, transactional leadership was not significantly correlated with employee forgiveness, avoidance, or revenge. Thus, as expected in Hypothesis 3, we found no evidence to suggest that transactional leadership is related to employees' responses to unfair events. We will come back to the implications of this finding more in the General discussion.

Study 2 provided good support for our hypotheses, but there are three limitations that deserve comment. First, the data are correlational, which limits causal inference between the predictor and criteria. However, we did take steps to enhance internal validity of the findings by a) controlling several variables that would otherwise be potential confounds, and b) assessing the predictor and criteria separately in time to reduce the possible influence of common method variance as an alternative explanation (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Second, the sensitive nature of the outcome measures (forgiveness, avoidance, revenge) may make them susceptible to social desirability motivation (e.g., Aquino et al., 2006). However, note that prior research has demonstrated only weak relations between revenge and social desirability (Aquino et al., 2006; Bobocel, 2013; McCullough et al., 1998). Also, we attempted to minimize the role of social desirability bias by assuring participants of anonymity during data collection. Our sample was relatively educated and prior research has revealed less revenge among more educated samples (e.g., Kadiangandu, Mullet, & Vinsonneau, 2001), so this may explain the lower average ratings on revenge. Also of interest, participants did not appear to "over-report" forgiveness (i.e., mean was around the scale midpoint), which one might expect if participants were motivated to appear socially desirable. Still, we cannot rule out the influence of social desirability motivation because we did not assess it. Of course, researchers have long studied sensitive outcomes such as revenge, retaliation, and workplace deviance, and have found that employees are willing to self-report engaging in such socially undesirable behaviors (e.g., Bennett & Robinson, 2000; McCullough et al., 1998). Thus, overall, it is not clear how much of a role social desirability may have had, but future research is needed to examine the possibility.

Finally, given that we were unable to ascertain the response rate for the study (see Footnote 7), there is a potential that those people who responded are different from those who did not. Although it is not clear whether (and how) respondents might differ from non-respondents, at least some of the respondents may have chosen not to participate because they did not experience a recent injustice.

General discussion

Idealized influence leaders heighten follower collective identity (e.g., van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Given this, and prior research demonstrating that victim collective identity predicts forgiveness, we theorized that idealized influence leadership may facilitate forgiveness in the workplace. Consistent with our reasoning, the results from two studies revealed a positive effect of idealized influence leadership on forgiveness of workplace offenses. In Study 1, participants who were primed with idealized influence leadership behaviors reported greater motivation to forgive the perpetrator of a hypothetical workplace injustice relative to control participants. In Study 2, the more frequently employees' supervisors displayed idealized influence leadership behaviors, the more forgiving employees were in response to a workplace offense. Notably, we found a positive effect of idealized influence on forgiveness across two different methodologies and two different samples, and across different types of offenses. Moreover, employee forgiveness was similar regardless of whether the offender was a coworker or a superior. Thus, our data suggest a broad effect of idealized influence on employee forgiveness of specific workplace offenses. As a result, idealized influence leaders have the potential to create a climate of forgiveness, as we will discuss more later.

In Study 2, we replicated Study 1 and extended the findings in two key ways. First, we included two antisocial responses to mistreatment, namely avoidance and revenge. In doing so, we demonstrated that our theorizing regarding the motivational effects of idealized influence leadership on employee forgiveness generalizes to employee avoidance. As expected, we observed a negative effect of idealized influence leadership on revenge, however, this was at the bivariate level only. When predicting the *incremental* effect of idealized influence leadership beyond several other possible predictors of revenge, the effect was no longer statistically significant. As noted in Study 2, the non-significant incremental effect may be attributable to the overall lower level of revenge reported by participants, but future research is needed to pursue these findings. Second, we assessed transactional leadership in Study 2, a leader style that is theoretically (and empirically) unassociated with follower collective identity. As expected, we found that transactional leadership was not significantly related to employee forgiveness, revenge, or avoidance. This dissociation between the two leader styles we examined strengthens our theoretical argument: What is important for facilitating forgiveness and suppressing avoidance is leadership behaviors that raise the accessibility of follower collective identity, rather than any leadership behaviors.

Of course, there are several limitations to each of the studies reported in the current paper, as noted in the discussion sections of Studies 1 and 2. In particular, a key limitation of Study 1 is that our experimental approach limits external validity (student participants, hypothetical situation). Still, there is some disagreement among scholars regarding the appropriateness of student samples to investigate organizational phenomena (e.g., Gordon, Slade, & Schmitt, 1986, 1987; Greenberg, 1987; Locke, 1986; Sackett & Larson, 1990). Moreover, the methodology enables us to make causal inference. Importantly, the fact that Study 2 replicates the results of Study 1, suggests that the psychological process underlying our findings is similar for the students who imagined themselves as the victim of the workplace offense, and for the working adults who were reflecting on an experience. Although Study 2 maximized external validity, the data are correlational and do not allow causal inference. Nevertheless, we took steps to enhance internal validity in Study 2. In particular, as noted earlier, we controlled for several possible third-variable explanations; we also assessed the predictor and criteria separately in time (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In short, given the unique limitations associated with both experimental and survey research, we opted to use a multi-method approach in the present research so that limitations associated with any particular methodology were offset by the strength of others (e.g., Campbell & Stanley, 1966).

An additional limitation that is apparent in both studies is that we did not examine empirically whether collective identity mediates the effect of idealized influence leadership on employee responses. Nevertheless, in Study 1 we primed idealized influence leadership using a method previously shown to heighten the salience of people's collective identities (Paul et al., 2001). Moreover, as noted above, in Study 2 we strengthened our theorizing by demonstrating discriminant validity with transactional leadership. Finally, in Study 2 we found that employees of highly idealized influence leaders attached greater importance to their relationship with the offender prior to the transgression, which is consistent with the idea that idealized influence leaders promote a sense of interconnectedness among followers. Still, it will be of interest in future research to directly test the possible mediating role of collective identity, as well as other plausible mechanisms by which idealized influence leaders impact followers (e.g., value congruence, Brown & Treviño, 2006; emotional contagion, Johnson, 2008).

Research contributions and theoretical implications

Leadership

In the current research, we integrated research in psychology on forgiveness and employee responses to mistreatment with the leadership literature to gain an understanding of whether leadership can promote forgiveness in the workplace. In doing so, we advance the leadership literature by demonstrating novel relations between idealized influence leadership and employee forgiveness and avoidance in response to workplace mistreatment. We also extend the literature examining the intersection between leadership and follower identity. In particular, we provide additional empirical support for the idea that leaders who have the capacity to heighten follower collective identity motivate followers to engage in behaviors that contribute to collective good and to refrain from behaviors that threaten it. Moreover, as noted in the [Introduction](#), by demonstrating an effect of idealized influence leadership on employees' prosocial and antisocial responses to instances of unfairness in the workplace, we address the lack of research attention on (a) the interpersonal consequences of leadership, and (b) the effects of leadership on employees' prosocial and antisocial responses to specific events.

More generally, as noted earlier, our research has implications for a number of other leadership theories, such as charismatic leadership, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and servant leadership, which overlap with idealized influence leadership both conceptually and operationally. At the conceptual level, charismatic leaders, ethical leaders, authentic leaders, and servant leaders are theorized to also evoke collective interests among followers (for reviews see, e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Brown et al., 2005; Liden et al., 2008; Shamir et al., 1993). At the operational level, research has observed very high intercorrelations between idealized influence and ethical leadership (e.g., $r = .86$; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012) and between idealized influence and authentic leadership (r s range from .45–.58, depending on the dimension of authentic leadership assessed; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Idealized influence is also most commonly used to operationalize charismatic leadership (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

Interestingly, by extension, our theorizing also suggests that leaders who promote self-interests over collective interests may create barriers to employee forgiveness. For example, to the extent that personalized leaders make salient employees' self-interest (e.g., Howell & Avolio, 1992), we would expect reduced forgiveness and greater antisocial responses in response to episodes of mistreatment among employees. Although future research is needed to examine this idea empirically, research demonstrating that revenge is more likely among victims who exhibit self-focused and competitive tendencies supports this reasoning (e.g., Bobocel, 2013; Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012).

Finally, we extend the literature linking leadership and justice. Stemming from the relational model of procedural justice (Tyler & Lind, 1992), there has been a longstanding interest in the connection between fairness and leadership (e.g., Cho & Dansereau, 2010; Cobb & Frey, 1996; Phillips, Douthitt, & Hyland, 2001; Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999; Tyler & Caine, 1981; Tyler & De Cremer, 2005). This body of literature has predominately focused on the study of how various leader behaviors influence recipients' *perceptions of fairness* and how fair or unfair treatment influence employees' *perceptions of leaders*. We highlight another bridge between the justice and leadership literatures: the effect of leadership on employees' *responses to being treated unfairly*. Indeed, in addition to our primary findings regarding the role of idealized influence leadership on responses to unfair events, we noted two novel auxiliary correlations in Study 2. Employees of highly idealized influence leaders perceived the offense as less unfair/severe, which suggests that these leaders may influence not only how employees respond to unfair events but also how employees interpret them. We also found that employees of highly idealized influence leaders were less likely to report an offense by their supervisor, which suggests that these leaders may be less likely to treat their employees unfairly.

Employee responses to mistreatment

Our findings contribute to the sparse literature examining *organizational* factors that predict employee forgiveness (for exceptions, see Aquino et al., 2001, 2006; Bobocel, 2013). In turn, the data contribute to recent theorizing on factors that promote the emergence of a forgiveness climate in organizations. In their multilevel model of forgiveness at work, Fehr and Gelfand (2012) introduced the concept of forgiveness climate, "the shared perception that empathetic, benevolent responses to conflict from victims and offenders are rewarded, supported, and expected in organizations" (p. 665). In their model, the authors proposed that various organizational factors, such as core cultural values (e.g., restorative justice, compassion), organizational practices (e.g., restorative dispute resolution, employee support programs), and leader attributes (e.g., restorative justice orientation, self-control) facilitate forgiveness climate emergence. They further proposed that forgiveness climate, in turn, would enhance the chronic accessibility of prosocial responses to conflict among both victims and offenders. Given our finding that idealized influence leadership enhanced employees' forgiveness toward their offenders regardless of offender status, our data suggest that idealized influence leadership may be an additional leader attribute within their model, which contributes to the emergence of a forgiveness climate.

As noted earlier, research examining victims' responses to workplace mistreatment has predominately focused on predicting antisocial responses (e.g., revenge), and more specifically on factors that promote antisocial responses rather than suppress them (for some exceptions see, Aquino et al., 2001, 2003, 2006; Barclay & Skarlicki, 2008; Bobocel, 2013). Although mistreatment can certainly instigate destructive responses (e.g., Aquino et al., 2001, 2003, 2006; Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012; see Aquino & Thau, 2009, for a comprehensive review), our data reveal that people can also respond *prosocially* to perceived workplace mistreatment, an idea that has received limited theoretical and empirical attention to date (for some exceptions see, Aquino et al., 2001, 2003, 2006; Barclay & Skarlicki, 2008; Bobocel, 2013; Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012). By examining one organizational factor that enhances employees' tendencies to respond prosocially rather than antisocially to mistreatment, our research broadens investigators' understanding of the range of ways in which employees respond to workplace mistreatment. More generally, by demonstrating that employees can respond to mistreatment in ways that promote interpersonal and organizational harmony, our research connects with the literatures on positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002) and positive organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002; Nelson & Cooper, 2007).

Management implications

As noted in the *Introduction*, interpersonal conflict is inevitable in organizations. Thus, a key challenge for leaders is to manage employees' feelings of injury and betrayal arising from interpersonal offenses in ways that facilitate rather than hinder relationship repair and group functioning. Our findings suggest that managers may meet this challenge by displaying idealized influence behaviors, which in turn may promote employee forgiveness and suppress antisocial responses to interpersonal conflict. Fortunately, leadership can be developed (Avolio, 1999; Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; for a review, see Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). Therefore, it is possible for organizations to promote forgiveness and suppress antisocial responses to instances of mistreatment by providing management training in idealized influence leadership. Interestingly, our model also suggests other ways to promote benevolent responses to instances of mistreatment—any intervention that heightens employee collective identity may have similar effects as idealized influence leadership. For example, team-based work structures or organizational culture that emphasizes interdependence among employees should have similar effects.

It is also important to note that, by promoting employee forgiveness in response to specific events, idealized leaders may elicit other beneficial downstream outcomes. Research in psychology has demonstrated that the prosocial consequences of forgiveness can extend beyond the victim's relationship with the offender, by promoting more generalized prosocial orientations, such as greater levels of a "we" frame of mind, greater feelings of relatedness toward people in general, greater probability of donating to charity, and greater willingness to volunteer (Karremans et al., 2005). If idealized influence leaders promote forgiveness in response to a specific instance of unfairness (as our data indicate), and if forgiveness in turn predicts more distal prosocial motivations and behaviors, then idealized influence leaders may play an important role in creating a spiral of prosociality, which is ultimately of benefit to the organization. Likewise, by suppressing antisocial responses such as avoidance, idealized influence leaders may help to prevent a cycle of negative interpersonal behaviors, which are detrimental to organizations.

On a cautionary note, we do not suggest that forgiveness is a panacea. Although in general forgiveness has beneficial consequences, psychologists and philosophers have certainly theorized about possible negative effects. For example, it has been argued that

forgiveness might lower the victim's social status relative to the offender (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). Moreover, in some cases, for example, as with a repeat offender, forgiveness may suggest that one can be easily exploited by others, resulting in further mistreatment (e.g., Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Hargrave, 2001). Organizational scholars are beginning to examine this and other complexities concerning forgiveness (e.g., Bies, Tripp, & Barclay, 2012; Gosse & Bobocel, 2014; Gromet & Okimoto, 2014), but future research is needed. Thus, it is important for managers to recognize that forgiveness is a dynamic and ongoing process that can possibly have both intended and unintended consequences for victims, offenders, and third-party observers.

Future research

Our findings imply several avenues for future research. For one, because we did not aim to examine the myriad ways victims can respond to mistreatment, future studies should measure additional responses to better understand the complex and diverse ways in which victims respond to workplace mistreatment. Second, although we demonstrated the effects of idealized influence leadership across a number of different offenses in Study 2, prior research has suggested that different categories of offense type may elicit different responses from victims (Aquino et al., 2006); thus, it may be of interest to examine whether the effects of idealized influence leadership differ as a function of different categories of offense type. Third, it will be important to examine how forgiveness translates into reconciliatory or benevolent behavior (also see Fincham & Beach, 2002). Fourth, future research could extend our theorizing to examine the effect of idealized influence leadership on *perpetrators' responses to victims*. If idealized influence leaders indeed facilitate the emergence of a forgiveness climate, as suggested earlier, then idealized influence leaders may also facilitate relationship-restoring behaviors by perpetrators, such as apology and other repentance behaviors (see also Fehr & Gelfand, 2012).

Conclusion

Our research demonstrates that idealized influence leaders may influence followers' prosocial and antisocial responses to experiences of wrongdoing in the workplace. By facilitating employee forgiveness, and suppressing employee avoidance, idealized influence leaders may ultimately enable their followers to cope with instances of unfairness in the workplace in ways that are beneficial to themselves, to other employees, and to the organization more broadly.

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