RETAINING EMPLOYEES THROUGH ANTI–SEXUAL HARASSMENT PRACTICES: EXPLORING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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*The present study utilized sexual harassment, organizational climate, and engagement theories to articulate a process model of how perceived anti–sexual harassment practices and sexual harassment incidents relate to affective commitment and intentions to stay. The authors hypothesized that perceived anti–sexual harassment practices and sexual harassment incidents would relate to employee engagement, both directly and indirectly through psychological distress. Moreover, psychological distress and employee engagement were hypothesized to mediate the relationships of perceived anti–sexual harassment practices and sexual harassment incidents with affective commitment and intentions to stay. Study findings supported these hypotheses within two subsamples of female (*N = 3,283 and 3,207) *and male (*N = 3,460 and 3,300) *military personnel. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

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Sexual harassment (SH) continues to be an important workplace concern. SH is associated with a number of negative employee outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and work productivity, as well as increased withdrawal behaviors (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; J. H. Williams, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1999; Wright & Bean, 1993). SH incidents have negative organizational implications as well. In 2011, 11,364 SH charges were filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and plaintiffs recovered

$52.3 million from defendant companies (EEOC, 2012). Beyond these financial costs, organizations may also suffer lost business due to diminished companies' reputation (Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003). Given these negative ramifications of SH for individuals and organizations alike, these stakeholders may benefit from additional investigation into the means of mitigating its damaging effects. To meet this research need, the current study focuses on the relationships of anti-SH practices and SH incidents with employee engagement.

In addition, we explore employee engagement as a crucial variable that possibly links organizations' efforts in dealing with SH and subsequent affective commitment and intentions to stay among their personnel. Employee engagement is defined as the extent to which workers expend themselves "physically, cognitively, and emtionally" during the performance of their work (Kahn, 1990, p. 692), and the construct has been linked to meaningful organizational outcomes such as affective commitment (e.g., Demerouti, Bakker, de Jonge, Janssen, & Schaufeli, 2001; Saks, 2006), work performance (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010), and employee withdrawal (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Recent estimates from the Gallup Organization indicate that nearly 74 percent of US employees are either disengaged or affectively neutral about their work, and disengaged personnel are purported to cost US firms in excess of $300 billion per year in lost productivity (Fleming, Coffman, & Harter, 2005). Because SH incidents represent a hostile work environment among its victims, as a defensive strategy, these individuals may choose not to invest their "full selves" at work (Cogin & Fish, 2009), thereby weakening their affective commitment and intentions to stay in firms.

By integrating the SH and engagement literatures, the present study aims to contribute to these research domains in two ways. First of all, the current research extends previous work on anti-SH practices (e.g., J. H. Williams et al., 1999) by expounding the mediating role of employee engagement. We propose that worker perceptions of anti-SH practices and their experiences of SH do not directly relate to their intention to stay in organizations. Instead, the relationships might be transmitted through workers' engagement in task performance. Exploring the process mechanisms by which perceptions of anti-SH practices and SH relate to worker commitment and retention can help clarify ways to attenuate the negative influence of SH incidents. Moreover, our work also augments understanding of employee engagement. Engagement research has primarily focused upon job resources and job demands as its principal predictors (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). We examine anti-SH practices and SH incidents as potential antecedents of engagement. Specifically, anti-SH practices and SH incidents are expected to be linked with engagement through their relations with psychological distress. Exploring the influence of disparate treatment such as SH might further enrich the prediction of employee engagement in role performance.

Accordingly, the current study assessed the influence of anti-SH practices and SH incidents on individual outcomes (i.e., psychological distress, engagement, affective commitment, and intentions to stay) within a sample of US military personnel ($N = 13,182$). Although the literature on SH indicates that women are more likely than men to face harassment (Bergman & Henning, 2008; Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001), we also examine male subsamples for comparative purposes.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Sexual Harassment Incidents and Perceived Anti–Sexual Harassment Practices

SH theory and research has originated largely from Fitzgerald et al.'s (1997) comprehensive

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model of organizational influences on SH and subsequent outcomes (O'Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, & Lean, 2009). In this model, SH is conceptualized as a form of occupational stress among its victims, consisting of four dimensions—sexual coercion, crude and offensive behaviors, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment (Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999). SH incidents precipitate negative job-related, psychological, and health-related outcomes (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Identity-based threats, such as discriminatory treatment perpetrated because of a target person's gender, increase the salience of her/his group membership (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Sanders-Thompson, 1999). Because the self-concept is closely linked to mental and physical well-being (Major & O'Brien, 2005), finding that one's identity group is not affirmed (or valued) in a setting should decrease attraction to that setting (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), thereby compromising psychological health. Indeed, previous research shows that SH incidents are related to reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and psychological well-being, as well as higher levels of turnover intentions and withdrawal behaviors (Rotundo et al., 2001; Willness et al., 2007); Therefore, these findings underscore the relevance of anti-SH practices for remedying these concerns.

J. H. Williams and colleagues (1999) defined organizational practices related to SH as composed of policies (i.e., formal written guidelines regarding personnel's behavior), procedures (i.e., formal or informal steps for filing grievances), and practices (i.e., actions taken by an organization regarding SH such as prevention of SH). They examined anti-SH practices as a perceptual construct because it is individuals' perceptions rather than the actual anti-SH practices that shape their job-related outcomes and psychological conditions. Research collected from military personnel demonstrated that perceived anti-SH practices were significantly correlated with SH incidents, work attitudes, and workgroup productivity (J. H. Williams et al., 1999).

In the present research, we consider affective commitment and intentions to stay as two important job-related outcomes of perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents. Affective organizational commitment reflects "an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979, p. 226). Intentions to stay refer to workers' willingness to continue working in their organizations and have been deemed as a terminal cognitive step in the turnover decision-making process (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Both variables have been widely studied in management research due to their strong relationships with employee performance and turnover decisions (Griffeth et al., 2000; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Consistent with previous SH research (e.g., Salvaggio, Hopper, & Packell, 2011; J. H. Williams et al., 1999; Willness et al., 2007), we propose that individuals' perceptions of anti-SH practices (experiences of SH) will be positively (negatively) related to affective commitment and intentions to stay.

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Mediating Role of Employee Engagement

Given the significant negative consequences associated with SH incidents, researchers have been exploring the mediating mechanism through which anti-SH practices and SH incidents are linked to job-related outcomes (e.g., Barling et al., 1996; Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001; Bergman & Henning, 2008; Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). Extending this stream of research, we propose employee engagement as an additional mediator between perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents and two forms of work attitudes of interest in our study: affective organizational commitment and intentions to stay.

Our basic premise is that perceived anti-SH practices represent an organization's prevailing stance on SH, whereas SH incidents indicate the current situation of SH in a work context. These conditions have implications for subsequent psychological

distress and employee engagement, as well as affective commitment and intentions to stay. Our reasoning follows organizational climate research detailing the effects of human resource practices on worker attitudes and behaviors (Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011). According to these scholars, HR practices indicate to personnel the desired workplace actions as relevant to an organization's strategic mission. Symbolically, these practices communicate the perceived valuations of certain aspects of the firm, such as work activities, equity of treatment, reward structures, etc. (L. A. James & James, 1989; L. R. James et al., 2008). At the individual level of consideration, such perceptions are referred to as employees' psychological climates. A psychological climate of a given nature, in turn, relates to employees' work attitudes and behaviors, as corroborated in the extant climate literature (e.g., Avery, McKay, Wilson, & Tonidandel, 2007; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; McKay et al., 2007). Applying this logic to the present study, we will first elucidate why perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents are related to employee engagement through psychological distress. Then, we will elaborate why we expect engagement to serve as a mediator connecting these practices and incidents to affective commitment and intentions to stay.

Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as the simultaneous investment of organization members' physical, cognitive, and emotional energies into their role performance. The presence of all three components represents employees' full absorption of themselves into role performance (Rich et al., 2010). From a different approach, employee engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Although the origins of these two perspectives are different, both concur that employee engagement reflects employees' investment of energies in work and consists of a physical-energetic (vigor), an emotional (dedication), and a cognitive (absorption) component (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

Research on the antecedents of employee engagement (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Crawford et al., 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) has focused on job resources (e.g., feedback, autonomy, support, and opportunities for development) and job demands (e.g., workload, time pressure, organizational politics, and role ambiguity). Based on these findings, researchers (e.g., Macey & Schneider, 2008) have encouraged the consideration of additional antecedents beyond job resources and job demands. An important, but underexplored, antecedent of engagement is disparate treatment in organizations, which involves differential treatment of individuals on the basis of their group membership (i.e., racial and gender discrimination; Ragins, 2004). Disparate treatment differs from job demands that require workers' efforts to finish their work tasks, or job resources that individuals need to achieve work goals. Instead, such treatment reflects workers' unfavorable experiences in a hostile or intimidating work environment, which, in turn, negatively influences the targeted workers' affective, cognitive, occupational, psychological, and physical reactions (Cortina, 2008).

SH is considered as a form of disparate treatment because it reinforces and expresses the victims' inferior position in the workplace (MacKinnon, 1979). The SH experience reminds victims that they are not respected or accepted in the workplace (Parker & Griffin, 2002), and thus evokes feelings of threat and a lack of control (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009). Consequently, the target of SH feels psychological distress (e.g., anxiety and depression) as a direct affective reaction to this negative event (Barling et al., 2001; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Glomb et al., 1997). This distress can be further magnified when people feel powerless to change the situations without incurring more harm (Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002; Cortina, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 2002).

In contrast, anti-SH practices can help relieve the psychological distress that follows from SH incidents. Practices such as the enforcement of anti-SH policies and training employees about avoiding SH should aid in

curbing SH incidents. Having grievance procedures, investigating complaints, enforcing penalties, and providing counseling services also indicate the organization's endeavors to deal with SH incidents. Combined, these practices send strong signals to workers about the firm's low intolerance of SH (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2009). Accordingly, SH targets are apt to feel more secure that the organization takes SH seriously, and worry less about any personal vulnerabilities or retaliation (Bergman et al., 2002). Moreover, perceived anti-SH practices indicate organizations' concern for workers' well-being insofar that they protect workers from being harassed and establish a less hostile environment (J. H. Williams et al., 1999). Therefore, to the extent that workers infer that their organization enforces anti-SH practices, they are less likely to feel psychological distress (Willness et al., 2007).

We further propose that perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents will be related to employee engagement through psychological distress. Psychological safety, or the feeling of being able to invest oneself without fear of negative consequences from the work environment (Edmonson, 1999), is one of the three psychological conditions of employee engagement (Kahn, 1990). An SH-free environment can result in a safe work context in which workers are able to expose their real selves (Kahn, 1990; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Rich et al., 2010). Consistent with this notion, working in a setting with a declared stance against SH, personnel may feel minimal psychological distress and, thus, experience high psychological safety to engage in work performance.

In addition to the indirect effect through psychological distress, anti-SH practices and SH incidence may also be associated with employee engagement through other psychological precursors. For example, work meaningfulness is increased when work-role identity is characterized by dignity, appreciation, and value (May et al., 2004). When an organization stipulates work rules to protect workers from being victims of SH, workers are more likely to feel respected in their positions and derive meaning from their work role (Kahn, 1990). Moreover, workers in an anti-SH environment are less likely to be distracted by SH incidents. With less effort exerted to cope with the stressfulness of work, they can have more energy to concentrate on their task performance (Sonnentag, 2003).

Taken together, the above reasoning suggests employee engagement is a potential outcome of anti-SH practices and SH incidents, given their likely influences on psychological distress. In addition, because prevalent anti-SH practices and few SH incidents symbolize an organization's protection for its employees, these constructs are apt to exhibit direct effects on engagement as well. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Psychological distress will partially mediate the positive relationship between perceived anti–sexual harassment practices and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1b: Psychological distress will partially mediate the negative relationship between sexual harassment incidents and employee engagement.

Furthermore, we anticipate that employee engagement plays an important role in mediating the distal influence of anti-SH practices and incidents of SH on affective commitment and intentions to stay. Previous research has suggested that anti-SH practices and SH incidents do not directly relate to affective commitment and turnover intentions. Most studies focused on the mediators that reflect respondents' evaluations of their organizations (e.g., justice perception; Barling et al., 2001), their jobs (e.g., job satisfaction; Gettman & Gelfand, 2007), and their health conditions (e.g., health distress; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Glomb et al., 1997). Employee engagement reflects the investment of employees' energies in their work roles. Therefore, it may provide additional insight into the relationships of anti-SH practices/SH incidents with affective commitment/intentions to stay.

> *When an organization stipulates work rules to protect workers from being victims of SH, workers are more likely to feel respected in their positions and derive meaning from their work role.*

As Kahn (1990) noted, engaged workers employ and express their full selves to perform at work. They are physically involved in, cognitively focused on, and emotionally connected to their task roles. Their full (cognitive) presence at work serves not only to attach them to an organization, but also bolster their willingness to reciprocate a firm's goodwill of providing a safe, meaningful, and adequately resourced work environment (Demerouti et al., 2001). Moreover, highly engaged personnel also tend to have more connections with important others in their organizations (Kahn, 1992), perceive higher levels of value congruence with the organizations (Rich et al., 2010), and feel reluctant to lose the valued job resources provided by the organizations (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). All these factors facilitate engaged personnel developing strong commitment and a high tendency to stay in their organization (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001).

Based on the above reasons, we predict that:

> *Engaged workers employ and express their full selves to perform at work. They are physically involved in, cognitively focused on, and emotionally connected to their task roles.*

Hypothesis 2: Psychological distress and employee engagement will mediate the positive relationship between perceived anti–sexual harassment practices and (a) affective commitment and (b) intentions to stay.

Hypothesis 3: Psychological distress and employee engagement will mediate the negative relationship between sexual harassment incidents and (a) affective commitment and (b) intentions to stay.

Method

Study Overview

Our data come from a large-scale military SH survey investigation conducted by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC): *2002 Status of the Armed Forces-Workplace and Gender Relations* (*WGR2002*). Our population consists of active-duty, US Armed Forces personnel from the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and the Coast Guard with at least six months of service when the survey was administered. Single-stage, within-military branch stratified random sampling designs were utilized to administer the survey in online and paper-and-pencil formats.

Participants

Participants were deemed eligible to take part in the survey if they were listed on the May 2001 Active Duty Master File and September 2001 Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, indicating their eligibility to receive medical benefits. From this sampling frame, 53,136 active-duty, eligible respondents were identified (i.e., Reservists were excluded from the sampling frame), although sample losses due to self-reported or other ineligibility, inability to locate sample members, or refusal to participate in the survey reduced the sample to 19,960 people who completed at least 50 percent of the survey questions. The final sample of individuals who completed all items was 13,182 (response rate = 25 percent, or 13,182/53,136). The racial-ethnic composition of the sample was 57.9 percent white, 20.1 percent black, 11.6 percent Hispanic, and 10.3 percent of some other race-ethnicity, while 47.7 percent of respondents were women. Representations from the five active military branches were 25.3 percent Army, 21.2 percent Navy, 14.9 percent Marines, 30.8 percent Air Force, and 8.3 percent Coast Guard. Most survey respondents served either less than 6 years (36.7 percent) or 10–19 years in the military (37.4 percent), while remaining respondents reported 6–9 years (14 percent) and 20 or more years of service (11.9 percent). Furthermore, most of the respondents served either 12 months or less (35.4 percent) or 13 to 24 months at their current military installation (30.5 percent), whereas other personnel served 25 to 36 months (19.2 percent), 37 to 48 months (7.9 percent), and 49 months or more (6.7 percent) at their current duty stations, and 0.7 percent failed to report this information.

Elig (2003) found the sample was highly representative of the overall Armed Forces.

Nonresponse analyses that we performed revealed small effect sizes between survey-scale respondents and nonrespondents with respect to pay grade ($d = .09$), years of active military service ($d = .10$), and years of service in their current duty location ($d = −.01$). To further assess sampling bias, we conducted MANOVA analyses which included military branch as the independent variable, gender and pay grade as covariates, and perceived anti-SH practices, SH incidents, psychological distress, employee engagement, affective commitment, and intentions to stay as dependent variables. These analyses showed that although military branch had a significant effect on survey scores (due to the large sample size; $\lambda = .96$, $F = 22.47$, $p < .001$), the variance accounted by military branch across survey scores ranged from 0 percent for anti–sexual harassment practices to 1 percent for sexual harassment incidents. In sum, these results indicate virtually no variation in scores between branches of the military.

Measures

Perceived Anti–Sexual Harassment Practices

The focal construct of the study, perceived anti-SH practices, was measured using a seven-item scale adapted from the 1995 *Armed Forces Sexual Harassment Survey* (Bastian, Lancaster, & Reyst, 1996). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent on their military installation or ship there were policies and practices designed to curb SH (1 = not at all to 7 = very large extent), such as publicized policies forbidding SH, publicized complaint procedures, a specific office with authority to investigate complaints, required SH training for enlisted personnel or officers (two separate items), and the degree that leaders modeled respectful behaviors to both male and female military members.

Sexual Harassment Incidents

Sexual harassment incidents were measured with 16 items adapted from the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Recent theoretical (O'Leary-Kelly

et al., 2009) and meta-analytical reviews (Willness et al., 2007) have shown that the SEQ is psychometrically sound and is the most commonly used measure of SH experiences. The scale included four items for each SH subcomponent (i.e., gender harassment, crude/offensive behavior, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion) that asked respondents how often in the past 12 months had on- or off-duty personnel, civilian employees, and/or contractors engaged in sexually harassing behavior toward them (1 = never to 5 = very often). Sample items per subscale, respectively, include "Referred to people of your gender in insulting or offensive terms?" "Repeatedly told sexual stories or jokes that were offensive to you?" "Made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it?" and "Made you feel threatened with some sort of retaliation for not being sexually cooperative (for example, by mentioning an upcoming review)?" As in previous research (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, & Magley, 1999), scores for each of the four subscales were averaged and normalized from high positive skew via a square-root transformation. Subsequently, the four subscales were used as indicators of an overall SH factor in structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses.

Psychological Distress

Psychological distress was measured using five items adapted from the 36-item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-36; Ware & Sherbourne, 1992) designed to capture participants' experienced distress over the past month. Example items from the scale are "Felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up" and "Been a very nervous person" (1 = little or none of the time to 5 = all or most of the time).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was assessed using the 12-item Gallup Organization *Q-12®* scale (Harter et al., 2002) designed to capture respondents' sense of cognitive presence during work, and their emotional connection to

others in the work setting. The Q-12 measure has been considered to have solid conceptualization and close correspondence with Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement (Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2007). Recently, multiple studies have included the Q-12 wherein it has shown favorable reliability and validity (Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, & Avolio, 2010; Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009). The scale measured two major facets referring to work engagement (e.g., "I know what is expected of me at work") and social engagement (e.g., "My supervisor seems to care about me as a person") (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment was measured using four items adapted from Mowday et al.'s (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. The scale asked respondents to express the extent they were emotionally attached to their individual branch of the service (e.g., the Army). Example items include "Being a member of your Service inspires you to do the best job you can" and "You are willing to make sacrifices to help your Service" (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Intentions to Stay

Intentions to stay in the military (or not) was measured with two items—"If you could stay on active duty, how likely is it that you would choose to do so?" and "If you could stay on active duty as long as you want, how likely is it that you would choose to serve in the military at least 20 years?" (1 = very unlikely to 5 = very likely).

Sex

Participant sex was identified using a dummy coded variable (0 = male, 1 = female).

Pay Grade

Military pay grade was employed as a statistical control to attenuate its confounding influence on results. Pay grades are hierarchical, with higher grades denoting higher military rank and occupational prestige (coded 1 = E1–E4, 2 = E5–E9, 3 = W1–W5, 4 = O1–O3, and 5 = O4–O6). Prior SH research has shown that military rank is significantly and negatively related to SH incidents, and positively correlated with work attitudes (Fitzgerald, Drasgow et al., 1999; Fitzgerald, Magley et al., 1999). In SEM analyses, pay grade was modeled as a perfectly reliable indicator of its respective factor.

Analyses

Using LISREL 8.30 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993), we conducted SEM analyses to examine study hypotheses within two separate pairs of male and female subsamples. The subsamples were constructed by randomly splitting the male and female subsamples into two equally sized halves. We decided to run separate analyses between men and women because there are important differences in women's and men's perception and interpretation of SH (Rotundo et al., 2001). Although women tend to report higher frequency of SH, men encounter it as well (EEOC, 2012). Furthermore, analyzing two subsamples per gender allowed us to examine the replicability of our hypothesized path model. SEM has the advantage of simultaneously estimating all modeled relationships between variables, and accounting for measurement error in manifest indicators due to scale unreliability (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). To reduce the number of item parameters included in our structural equation models (total = 46 items), we constructed item parcels using Hall, Snell, and Foust's (1999) recommended procedures. Item parcels refer to subsets of survey-scale items averaged to form composites, and these can include (a) subscales of established constructs (e.g., the four subdimensions of the SEQ), (b) subsets of items from a single scale (e.g., engagement scale), or (c) individual survey items themselves (e.g., psychological distress scale). Hall and colleagues (1999) demonstrated that item parcels are less reflective of their underlying latent constructs when they are influenced by external, secondary constructs (e.g., exhibit cross-loadings with items outside of their respective scales); however, since the items employed here came from
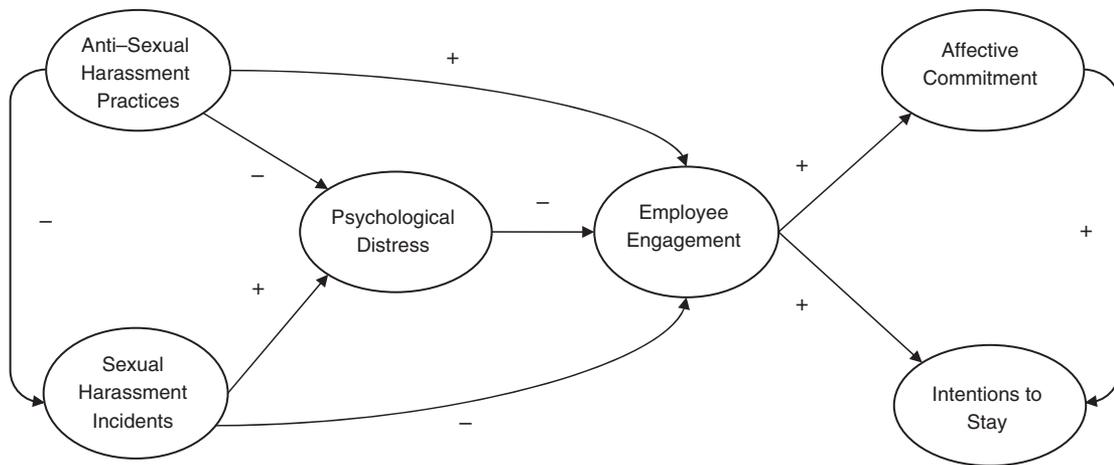
FIGURE 1. Process Model of Anti–Sexual Harassment Practices Effects on Work Attitudes and Psychological Well-Being (Model 1)

established scales, this possibility is unlikely. In addition, we formed our parcels by averaging responses to similar items, thus ensuring they included items with conceptual overlap. For example, items representing the work subcomponent of engagement were parceled, while social engagement items referring to supervisors and coworkers comprised two separate item parcels. Moreover, analyses of modification indices from our measurement models did not show that model fit increments would result from allowing items to cross-load onto other factors. Constructing item parcels resulted in 21 manifest indicators of six latent factors in our SEM analyses. In addition, diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) analyses were used to assess our measurement model because the sexual harassment incidents scores remained positively skewed despite our square-root transformation of the data. Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993) stated that χ^2 statistics and standard errors are less reliable in highly non-normal data when analyzed using maximum likelihood (ML) methods.

To examine the viability of our measurement and structural models, we consulted three established fit statistics: chi-square (χ^2; which is sensitive to large sample size), the comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Acceptable model fit is associated with nonsignificant χ^2 values, CFI > .90, and RMSEA < .08 (Kline, 2005). Hypotheses were assessed using Baron and Kenny's (1986) three conditions of mediation as applied to SEM (Brown, 1997). Partial mediation (i.e., Hypotheses 1a and 1b) is evident when, simultaneously, significant direct and indirect effects between an independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV) are obtained. To examine the mediation effects for Hypotheses 2a and 2b (3a and 3b), we estimated an additional model that fixed to zero the partially mediated pathways referred to in Hypotheses 1a and 1b (Model 2). Model 3 fixed the mediated pathways specified in Hypotheses 1a and 1b, and added additional direct paths from anti-SH practices and SH incidents to affective commitment and intentions to stay. Subsequently, chi-square differences tests ($\chi^2_{\text{Model 2}} - \chi^2_{\text{Model 1}}/df_{\text{Model 2}} - df_{\text{Model 1}}$ and $\chi^2_{\text{Model 3}} - \chi^2_{\text{Model 1}}/df_{\text{Model 3}} - df_{\text{Model 1}}$) were computed to compare the fits of Models 2 and 3 with that obtained for Model 1 (see Figure 1). Finally, we performed Sobel's (1982) tests to determine the statistical significance of derived mediation results.

Results

Means, standard deviations, correlations between variables, and internal consistencies are reported in Table I. Initial analyses of the baseline measurement model underlying our

TABLE I	Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Variables										
Variable	**Mean**	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
1. Gender (1 = female)	.48	.50	–							
2. Pay grade	2.43	1.34	−.04	–						
3. Anti–sexual harassment practices	2.63	.92	−.10	.12	(.91)					
4. Sexual harassment incidents	.23	.33	.37	−.14	−.26	(.92)				
5. Employee engagement	3.56	.72	−.05	.11	.36	−.27	(.87)			
6. Affective commitment	4.10	.75	−.09	.19	.28	−.19	.44	(.84)		
7. Intentions to stay	3.72	1.31	−.12	.25	.21	−.21	.28	.42	(.83)	
8. Psychological distress	1.74	.61	.08	−.17	−.24	.28	−.40	−.32	−.28	(.83)

All correlations are significant ($p < .001$).
Internal consistency reliabilities are listed in the diagonal.

TABLE II	Model Fit Statistics for Measurement Models				
Measurement Model and Subsample	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	**df**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**
Baseline (hypothesized) seven-factor model					
Females (Subsample 1)	1,189.32***	–	169	.99	.04
Males (Subsample 1)	2,375.23***	–	169	1.00	.06
Females (Subsample 2)	2,339.33***	–	169	.97	.06
Males (Subsample 2)	1,637.81***	–	169	1.00	.05
Uncorrelated factors model					
Females (Subsample 1)	67,777.00***	66,587.68***	190	.58	.22
Males (Subsample 1)	4,341.88***	1,966.65***	190	.73	.08
Females (Subsample 2)	67,777.60***	65,438.27***	190	.58	.22
Males (Subsample 2)	4,663.01***	3,025.20***	190	.67	.09
Five-factor model with engagement and work attitudes on same factor					
Females (Subsample 1)	4,604.11***	3,414.79***	180	.94	.09
Males (Subsample 1)	6,255.77***	3,880.54***	180	.97	.10
Females (Subsample 2)	7,280.56***	4,941.23***	180	.97	.11
Males (Subsample 2)	5,423.43***	3,785.62***	180	.97	.10
One-factor model					
Females (Subsample 1)	92,182.97***	90,993.65***	193	.69	.38
Males (Subsample 1)	144,641.86***	14,226.63***	193	.77	.16
Females (Subsample 2)	101,105.63	98,766.30***	193	.53	.40
Males (Subsample 2)	235,132.45***	233,494.64***	193	.73	.61
Eight-factor method-effects model					
Females (Subsample 1)	1,701.71***	–	149	1.00	.06
Males (Subsample 1)	515.53***	–	149	1.00	.03
Females (Subsample 2)	6,188.65***	–	149	1.00	.11
Males (Subsample 2)	3,453.85***	–	149	.99	.08

***$p < .001$.
$\Delta\chi^2$ contrasts the focal model to the hypothesized baseline model.

| TABLE III Model Fit Statistics for Structural Models					
Structural Model and Subsample	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	df	CFI	RMSEA
Model 1—Hypothesized model					
Females (Subsample 1)	3,483.67***	–	175	.92	.08
Males (Subsample 1)	5,494.10***	–	175	.85	.10
Females (Subsample 2)	3,747.00***	–	175	.92	.08
Males (Subsample 2)	2,404.06***	–	175	.93	.06
Model 2—Direct effects–only model					
Females (Subsample 1)	3,703.43***	219.76***	177	.92	.08
Males (Subsample 1)	5,925.06***	430.96***	177	.85	.10
Females (Subsample 2)	3,988.62***	241.62***	177	.91	.08
Males (Subsample 2)	2,507.65***	103.59***	177	.92	.06
Model 3—Direct effects model with additional anti–sexual harassment practices to affective commitment and intentions to stay paths					
Females (Subsample 1)	3,601.16***	117.49***	173	.92	.08
Males (Subsample 1)	5,811.07***	316.97***	173	.85	.10
Females (Subsample 2)	3,887.91***	140.91***	173	.91	.08
Males (Subsample 2)	2,421.41***	17.35*	173	.92	.06

*$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$.
$\Delta\chi^2$ contrasts the focal model to the hypothesized structural model.

hypothesized structural equation model, presented in Table II, showed acceptable model fit for each male and female subsample. Across subsamples, each set of indicators loaded significantly ($p < .001$) on its respective latent factors at .45 or higher, indicating that the manifest indicators adequately reflect their underlying factors. We contrasted our baseline, seven-factor model (i.e., six focal variables and pay grade as a control variable) to four additional models that (a) fixed factor correlations, (b) constrained engagement, affective commitment, and intentions to stay to load on the same factor (five-factor model), (c) constrained all items to load on a single factor, and (d) added an eighth method factor to our hypothesized seven-factor model. As shown in Table II, the fixed factor correlations, five-factor, and one-factor models provided much poorer fit than our hypothesized baseline measurement model. The method-effects model only slightly improved model fit relative to the baseline model, thus obviating common-method variance as a serious concern (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In similar fashion, Table III

shows that the baseline structural model (Model 1) fit the data well across the four subsamples of military personnel. Results also support the inclusion of military pay grade as a control variable as it was correlated with several of our focal variables (e.g., SH incidents, psychological distress, engagement, affective commitment, and intentions to stay).

Hypotheses 1a and 1b

Hypothesis 1a stated that the anti-SH practices–employee engagement relationship would be partially mediated by psychological distress. According to Brown (1997), partial mediation is evident when significant direct and indirect pathways link an IV with a DV. As shown in Figure 2 for Subsample 1,[1] these conditions were met as both the direct and mediated anti-SH pathways to employee engagement were strongly significant, in concert with our predictions. Perceived anti-SH practices were negatively related to psychological distress, which, in turn, displayed a similarly negative relationship with employee
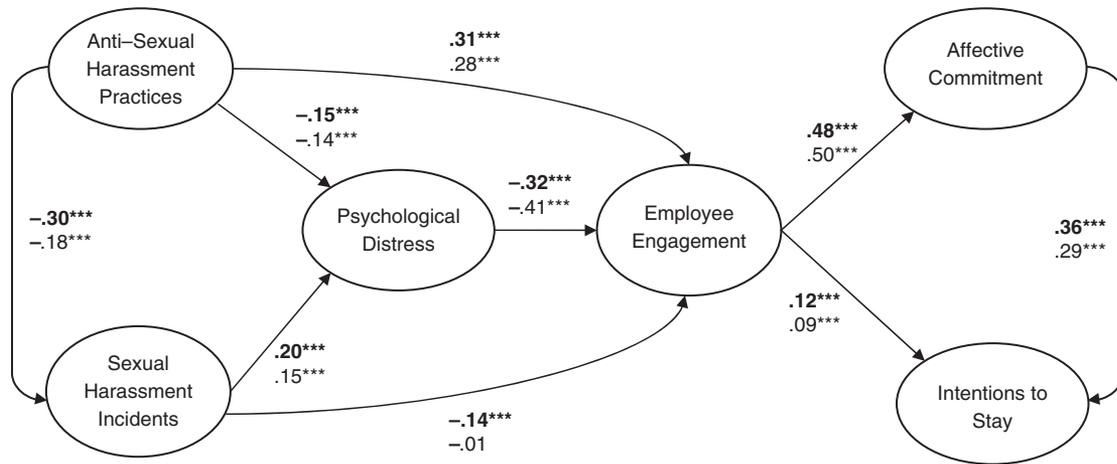
Standardized beta coefficients for female ($N = 3,282$) and male participants ($N = 3,460$) are presented in bold and plain text, respectively.
***$p < .001$.

FIGURE 2. Structural Equation Modeling Results for Subsample 1 (Model 1)

engagement. Moreover, the direct and positive anti-SH practices–engagement correlation was substantially stronger than the indirect effect, and suggests that respondents who perceived pervasive anti-SH practices on their installation/base were more engaged than those who felt their military installation/base endorsed fewer anti-SH practices. As presented in Table IV, both the direct, indirect, and total effects of perceived anti-SH practices on engagement were generally stronger for

women than men. Additional Sobel's (1982) tests established significant mediation effects for women and men in Subsample 1($z = 7.18$ and 7.02, respectively, both $ps < .001$) and Subsample 2 ($z = 7.32$ and 7.23, respectively, both $ps < .001$). This pattern of results strongly supports Hypothesis 1a.

Hypothesis 1b stated that the SH incidents–employee engagement relationship would be partially mediated by psychological distress. Results, reported in Figure 2 and Table IV, are

TABLE IV	Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Anti–Sexual Harassment Practices and Sexual Harassment Incidents on Employee Engagement			
Variable	**Direct Effects**	**Indirect Effects**	**Total Effects**	**Percent Mediation**
Anti–Sexual Harassment Practices				
Females (Subsample 1)	.31***a	.11***a	.43***a	26%
Males (Subsample 1)	.28***b	.07***b	.35***b	20%
Females (Subsample 2)	.32***c	.11***c	.43***c	26%
Males (Subsample 2)	.28***d	.08***d	.36***d	22%
Sexual Harassment Incidents				
Females (Subsample 1)	–.14***a	–.06***a	–.20***a	30%
Males (Subsample 1)	–.01b	–.06***a	–.07***b	86%
Females (Subsample 2)	–.12***c	–.06***c	–.18***c	33%
Males (Subsample 2)	–.08***c	–.05***c	–.13***c	38%

Different superscripts (a or b) denote significant differences between females and males in Subsample 1, and different superscripts (c or d) denote significant differences between females and males in Subsample 2 at $p < .05$.
***$p < .001$.

generally supportive of Hypothesis 1b. Figure 2 indicates significant direct and indirect effects of SH incidents on employee engagement, as mediated by psychological distress. SH incidents were positively related to psychological distress, which, in turn, was negatively related to employee engagement. In addition, the direct, negative SH incidents–engagement relationship was stronger than its indirect counterpart, showing that SH incidents undermined engagement; however, for males in Subsample 1, the direct effect of SH incidents on engagement was nonsignificant, indicating that psychological distress fully mediated the SH incidents–engagement relationship. Moreover, the direct effects of SH incidents on engagement were stronger among women, while indirect effects of similar magnitudes were observed (see Table IV). The total effect of SH incidents on engagement differed significantly, favoring women, only between men and women in Subsample 1. Follow-up Sobel tests showed that psychological distress significantly mediated the SH incidents–employee engagement relationship for women and men in Subsample 1 ($z = 7.63$ and 6.84, respectively, both ps < .001) and Subsample 2 ($z = 7.63$ and 5.48, respectively, both ps < .001). This pattern of results confirms Hypothesis 1b. Overall, the structural models accounted for slightly greater variance in employee engagement among women (Subsample 1 = 31 percent and Subsample 2 = 29 percent) than men (Subsample 1 = 29 percent and Subsample 2 = 27 percent).

Finally, constraining the mediated pathways between anti-SH practices and SH incidents and employee engagement led to substantially reduced fit of our structural equation models. As shown in Table III, the reductions in model fits associated with structural Model 2 ($\Delta\chi^2$ (2) ranged from 103.59 to 430.96, all ps < .001), compared to our hypothesized model, were significant across all subsamples, thus supporting the viability of Model 1 in predicting employee engagement.

Hypothesis 2a and 2b

Hypotheses 2a and 2b stated that psychological distress and employee engagement would mediate the positive relationship between perceived anti–sexual harassment practices and affective commitment and intentions to stay, respectively. Significant indirect effects of anti–sexual harassment practices, as mediated by psychological distress and employee engagement, on affective commitment were observed for women and men in Subsample 1 (.11 and .07, respectively, both ps < .001) and Subsample 2 (.10 and .07, respectively, both ps < .001). In addition, anti-SH practices also displayed significant indirect relations with intentions to stay, through psychological distress and employee engagement, for women and men in Subsample 1 (.12 and .08, respectively, both ps < .001) and Subsample 2 (.11 and .07, respectively, both ps < .001). These results strongly corroborate Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

T-tests contrasting the magnitude of indirect effects of anti-SH practices on affective commitment were significant across both subsamples, and showed that these effects were stronger for women (both effects = .21, ps < .001) than men (both effects = .17, ps < .001). By contrast, *t*-tests comparing the magnitude of indirect effects of anti-SH practices on intentions to stay were nonsignificant across subsamples, suggesting such practices have similar facilitative impact on remaining in the military across genders.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b

Hypotheses 3a and 3b stated that psychological distress and employee engagement would mediate the negative relationship between SH incidents and affective commitment and intentions to stay, respectively. Significant indirect effects of SH incidents, as mediated by psychological distress and employee engagement, on affective commitment were observed for women and men in Subsample 1 (–.05, p < .001 and –.01, p < .01, respectively) and Subsample 2 (–.04, and –.03, respectively, both ps < .001). In addition, SH incidents displayed significant indirect relations with intentions to stay, through psychological distress and employee engagement, for women and men in Subsample 1 (–.06, p < .001 and –.02, p < .01, respectively) and Subsample 2

(−.04, and −.03, respectively, both $ps < .001$). This pattern of findings strongly supports Hypotheses 3a and 3b. The structural equation models accounted for similar amounts of variance in affective commitment and intentions to stay for the female (Subsample 1: affective commitment = .31, intentions to stay = .44; Subsample 2: affective commitment = .33, intentions to stay = .44) and male subsamples (Subsample 1: affective commitment = .35, intention to stay = .44; Subsample 2: affective commitment = .34, intentions to stay = .43).

In addition, we estimated an additional structural model (Model 3), which constrained the mediated pathways (through psychological distress and engagement) between anti-SH practices and SH incidents to affective commitment and intentions to stay, and instead, specified direct pathways from anti-SH practices and SH incidents to the outcome variables of interest. As shown in Table III, Model 3 resulted in significantly reduced fit relative to our hypothesized Model 1 across subsamples ($\Delta\chi^2$ (2) ranged from 17.35 to 316.97, all $ps < .001$ except for the p value for males in Subsample 2, which was $< .05$). This confirms the superiority of Model 1 and suggests that the effects of anti-SH practices and SH incidents on affective commitment and intentions to stay are entirely indirect, as mediated by psychological distress and employee engagement.

Discussion

The present study sought to elucidate the relations between perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents and employee engagement, and how these pathways relate to subsequent affective commitment and intentions to stay. Across four subsamples, results indicate that perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents exhibited significant direct and indirect

The pattern of associations suggests that perceived anti-SH practices reduce psychological distress, thereby enhancing engagement. By contrast, SH incidents amplify psychological distress, which, in turn, diminishes engagement.

effects on engagement, as mediated by psychological distress. The pattern of associations suggests that perceived anti-SH practices reduce psychological distress, thereby enhancing engagement. By contrast, SH incidents amplify psychological distress, which, in turn, diminishes engagement. Moreover, the influences of perceived anti-SH practices and reduced SH incidents on engagement resulted in increased affective commitment and intentions to stay. These findings have a number of research and practical implications, which we elaborate upon further in the following sections.

Research Implications

A primary implication of our study findings is that both perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents are related to employee engagement, directly and indirectly, through their relations with psychological distress. In particular, we examined anti-SH practices from the employees' psychological perspective because researchers have recently suggested that when organizations implement HR practices (such as anti-SH), employees may either not perceive the practices as expected by the organization (Nishii & Wright, 2008) or hold differential interpretations of the practices based on their own experiences (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). Relatedly, other studies have found that employees perceived HR practices differently from what were intended by organizations, and that it was workers' actual perceptions of HRM practices, rather than managerial intentions, that impacted subsequent worker outcomes (e.g., Aryee, Walumbwa, Seidu, & Otaye, 2012; Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009). Therefore, examining anti-SH practices from employees' perspectives can capture effectively their reactions to anti-SH practices, and how these views influence ensuing attitudes and behavioral intentions.

A primary contribution to SH literature is that our study provides some insight into the processes through which perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents influence affective commitment and intentions to stay. Essentially, we offer evidence that perceived

anti-SH practices and SH incidents impinge upon these two outcomes not only by way of their effects on psychological distress, which has been demonstrated in previous research (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; J. H. Williams et al., 1999), but also by influencing how much employees are willing to invest of themselves in work roles. A key implication of this finding is that workers will "check out" of their work, psychologically, as a defense against SH incidents, with negative ramifications for affective commitment and intentions to stay. In contrast, anti-SH practices enhance employees' investment in their work roles, which, in turn, bolsters their affective commitment to firms and intentions to stay in their employ.

Based on the employees' perspective, our study also contributes to the engagement literature by specifying how perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents relate to engagement through psychological distress, thus answering calls for further research into the antecedents of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Interestingly, the indirect effects of perceived anti-SH practices and SH incidents on engagement were stronger for women than men, corroborating the social identity theory prediction that disparaged groups should be more attuned to experiences involving group identity threats (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Since women are more prone to SH than men, it follows that women should be more sensitive to SH incidents and efforts to mitigate it, which further affects the extent that they invest in their work. Moreover, given the partial mediating effect of psychological distress, future research can explore other mediating mechanisms through which anti-SH practices and SH incidents might be associated with employee engagement.

Practical Implications

The findings of our research also have implications for managerial practice. First of all, consistent with recent discussions distinguishing intended HR practices from perceived HR practices, we would remind organizations that it is insufficient merely to

have anti-SH practices in organizations, and assume workers will be automatically aware of them. Instead, managers must be cognizant of the need to not only implement such practices soundly, but also convey the essence of these practices to personnel in a clear manner. By doing so, organizations can underscore to their personnel the gravity of their intentions to curb SH, thereby improving worker engagement even among those who have not been harassed.

In addition, our results provide additional evidence for why managers should address SH at work. SH victims appear to experience psychological distress, which invokes them to disengage from their work. Accordingly, we encourage managers to devote efforts to formulate, widely disseminate, model, and reinforce anti-SH practices as means of mitigating the potential debilitative effects of SH on work performance. Such initiatives could be quite effective considering that perceived anti-SH practices exhibited stronger direct relations with engagement than did SH. Consequently, this finding highlights the relative strength of perceived practices in overcoming SH in the workplace, especially in work contexts where men are in the numerical majority.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that engaged workers who perceive high-level anti-SH practices and experience few SH incidents tend to reciprocate with enhanced commitment to and intentions to stay with their organizations. In order to attenuate (accentuate) the negative (positive) influence of SH incidents (anti-SH practices) on workers' affective commitment and intentions to stay, organizations might consider other initiatives that can promote workers' engagement beyond anti-SH practices. For example, providing more resources (e.g., coworker, supervisor, and organizational support) and designing jobs to be more interesting (e.g., job complexity, job autonomy, feedback, and job variety) can improve worker engagement

We encourage managers to devote efforts to formulate, widely disseminate, model, and reinforce anti-SH practices as means of mitigating the potential debilitative effects of SH on work performance.

(Crawford et al., 2010). Managers who exhibit transformational leadership and/or maintain high-quality relationships (LMX) with their subordinates are likely to bolster employees' investments in their work roles. These activities can promote employee retention by enhancing engagement at work.

Limitations and Future Research

Our findings should be understood in light of several limitations. First, the research design was cross-sectional, and hence, the statistical associations between anti-SH practices, SH incidents, psychological distress, employee engagement, and our focal outcomes (i.e., affective commitment and intentions to stay) should not be interpreted as causal in nature. Our analyses, which constrained the proposed mediating anti-SH practices (SH incidents) → psychological distress → employee engagement pathways to the two outcomes, indicated reduced model fit compared to our hypothesized mediation-effects model. While this model contrast provides some evidence supporting the theorized mediating effects in our model, we encourage truly randomized, experimental research designs to provide the firmest evidence of true mediation effects.

A second and related concern is that our measures of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement were based on employees' perceptions. This approach may be subject to common method bias; however, employees are the best informants of the SH incidents they have experienced, their psychological distress and attitudes, as well as how they viewed the anti-SH practices that were implemented. As previously discussed, even though similar anti-SH practices may be instituted across our sample, personnel may have different impressions and interpretations of these practices. Therefore, this study design, notwithstanding its limitations, allowed us to feasibly examine

We call for future research to replicate our proposed model, using multiple sources and data levels, and a longitudinal design, to better draw causal inferences of the relationships among the study variables.

the linkages between employees' experiences with SH and anti-SH practices, and other work-related, attitudinal responses.

Although it is beyond the scope of the present article, Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) work on the strength of HR systems might be applicable to anti-SH practices as studied here. These authors proposed that when (anti-SH) practices are consistently instituted and perceived by employees within a work unit, the intent underlying the practices (anti-SH) will be more salient and, thus, more likely to promote the desired outcome (i.e., reduction of SH). Our data show that there was indeed significant variation among employees' perceptions of anti-SH practices (SD = 0.92). Additional work on anti-SH practices should examine factors that influence variability in employees' practice perceptions and, perhaps, consider anti-SH practice effectiveness as a moderator of anti-SH practices–employee outcome relationships.

Accordingly, we call for future research to replicate our proposed model, using multiple sources and data levels, and a longitudinal design, to better draw causal inferences of the relationships among the study variables; however, we believe that these limitations are mitigated by three factors. First, the theory-based rationale of the model and its acceptable fit across four subsamples attest to its viability and replicability. Second, although all variables were significantly correlated with each other, the magnitudes of correlation coefficients were not inordinately high, indicating that common method bias was not severe (L. J. Williams & Brown, 1994). Third, CFA results demonstrated little evidence of method effects in our data, precluding them as an alternative explanation of results (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

In addition, the study findings were based on a large US military sample, which represents a work dynamic that may be different from civilian organizations. As such, caution is necessary in generalizing the results to other work settings. We encourage additional research to replicate our model using samples from other organizations and industries; however, previous SH studies conducted in military contexts versus nonmilitary contexts

generated very similar results (Willness et al., 2007). Therefore, our investigation may shed light on the relationships between anti-SH practices, SH incidents, psychological distress, engagement, and attitudinal outcomes irrespective of organizational setting.

Conclusion

The current study contributes to the SH and engagement literatures by identifying the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationships between anti-SH practices/SH incidents and affective commitment and intention to stay. The findings of this study provide insight into the black box linking SH and employees' intention to stay with organizations, and highlight the efficacy of anti-SH practices in attenuating SH, while improving workers' affective commitment and intentions to stay in firms.

Note

1. The results obtained from the two subsamples were virtually identical. In order to save the space, we only presented the path coefficients of one subsample in Figure 2. The full details of the other subsample are available from the authors on request.

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