

When Does Self-Esteem Relate to Deviant Behavior? The Role of Contingencies of Self-Worth

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Researchers have assumed that low self-esteem predicts deviance, but empirical results have been mixed. This article draws upon recent theoretical developments regarding contingencies of self-worth to clarify the self-esteem/deviance relation. It was predicted that self-esteem level would relate to deviance only when self-esteem was not contingent on workplace performance. In this manner, contingent self-esteem is a boundary condition for self-consistency/behavioral plasticity theory predictions. Using multisource data collected from 123 employees over 6 months, the authors examined the interaction between level (high/low) and type (contingent/noncontingent) of self-esteem in predicting workplace deviance. Results support the hypothesized moderating effects of contingent self-esteem; implications for self-esteem theories are discussed.

Keywords: self-esteem, contingent self-esteem, organizational deviance, plasticity theory, self-consistency theory

Workplace deviance remains one of the most pressing problems facing organizations today. Deviant behaviors, or behaviors initiated by employees that contravene organizational norms (e.g., showing up late, theft, abusing coworkers; Bennett & Robinson, 2000), can collectively cost organizations billions of dollars per year (Taylor, 2007; Voyles, 2007). Researchers have increasingly sought to examine what drives deviant behaviors (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007), which together with task and contextual performance (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000) are the three main components of job performance.

One argument that has been put forth suggests that self-esteem, or one's overall positive or negative evaluation of oneself (Brown, 1993), should be related to deviant behavior (Ferris, Brown, & Heller, 2009). In particular, theorists have argued that self-esteem can have either a main effect on deviant behavior or moderate potential negative reactions to environmental stressors (see Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Such predictions are commonly placed within either a self-

consistency theory framework (for main effects; Korman, 1970) or a behavioral plasticity theory framework (for moderating effects; Brockner, 1988). Yet, to date the evidence for the main and moderating effects of self-esteem with respect to deviance is, at best, inconsistent (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003).

In the present paper, we argue that one reason for the inconsistent findings regarding self-esteem and deviance lies in our incomplete conceptualization of self-esteem. In particular, researchers have tended to focus on levels of self-esteem, or whether or not one's self-esteem is high or low. However, to properly understand the effects of self-esteem, we argue, it is also critical to examine the type of self-esteem, that is, whether it is contingent or noncontingent (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). Contingent self-esteem exists when one's global sense of self-worth is staked to a particular domain (e.g., competence in the workplace), such that one's successes and failures in that domain determine one's global self-worth (Deci & Ryan, 1995). Therefore, contingent self-esteem does not indicate whether self-esteem is high or low but rather whether or not such self-esteem levels are contingent upon outcomes in a particular life domain. As we shall argue, whether one's self-esteem is contingent upon workplace competence has critical implications for understanding the relation between self-esteem and deviant behavior.

In the sections below, we examine the self-esteem/deviant behavior relation from the point of view of self-consistency and behavioral plasticity theories. We next discuss the notion of contingent self-esteem and hypothesize how it acts as a boundary condition to these theories. Finally, we present a multisource, multiwave study that tests our hypotheses.

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Theoretical Perspectives on the Self-Esteem and Deviant Behavior Relation

Workplace deviance represents intentional, potentially harmful behaviors initiated by organizational members that are contrary to prevailing organizational norms (Bennett & Robinson, 2003). Although early research on deviant work behaviors focused on behaviors such as theft or drug use as separate entities, researchers have noted that such behaviors frequently co-occur (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Thus, contemporary research has focused on broader conceptualizations of the workplace deviance construct and has used measures that assess the occurrence of a range of deviant behaviors (e.g., theft, abuse; Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Because workplace deviance represents a common and substantial cost to organizations, contemporary research has focused on identifying antecedents of deviant behavior. One frequently cited perspective is that deviant behaviors relate to low levels of self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 1996). Indeed, a state-funded task force (California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Social Responsibility, 1990) strongly suggested a link between self-esteem and deviance, stating that self-esteem “inoculates us against the lures of crime, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, chronic welfare dependency, and educational failure” (p. 4). In terms of theoretical foundations suggesting such a relation, self-consistency theory and behavioral plasticity theory are two of the most frequently used frameworks within which self-esteem hypotheses are formulated in organizational behavior research (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). The theories provide different perspectives on the relation of self-esteem to deviance (i.e., main vs. moderating effects); below, we consider each theory in turn.

Main Effects of Self-Esteem on Deviant Behavior: Self-Consistency Theory

Self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970, 1976) suggests that in order to maintain cognitive consistency between attitudes and behaviors, individuals engage in actions consistent with their overall views of themselves. Self-consistency theory draws upon cognitive consistency or balance theories (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958) and represents one of the earliest integrations of such theories into organizational research. Discussing the self-esteem/behavior relation, Korman (1970) stated that “individuals will be motivated to perform on a task or job in a manner which is consistent with [their] self-image” (p. 32). In other words, self-consistency theory predicts that individuals with high self-esteem tend to outperform individuals with low self-esteem.

Given that self-consistency theory focuses on job performance and that deviant behavior is a component of job performance (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000), the rationale of self-consistency theory also suggests a negative main effect of self-esteem on deviance. That is, individuals with high self-esteem should engage in fewer deviant behaviors, as such negative behaviors are not consistent with their positive self-views. Indeed, this perspective has often been advanced in self-esteem/deviance research (Baumeister et al., 1996). However, reviews of the literature suggest that the evidence supporting such a main effect on deviant behavior is mixed. Whereas some studies demonstrated a weak negative relation between self-esteem and deviance, many studies found no support for such a relation (Baumeister et al., 2003). Such

conflicting results have therefore failed to answer whether or not self-esteem has a negative main effect on deviance.

Moderating Effects of Self-Esteem on Deviant Behavior: Behavioral Plasticity Theory

Although the support for main effects of self-esteem on deviance remains mixed, an alternate perspective is that self-esteem may play a moderating role in its relation to deviance. In particular, behavioral plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988) focuses on how self-esteem level moderates the effects of negative contextual variables (e.g., role stressors) on various outcomes. Behavioral plasticity theory suggests that individuals with low levels of self-esteem are more reactive to contextual variables; as such, the relation between stressors and outcomes is hypothesized to be stronger for those low in self-esteem. This strengthened relation is thought to be due to the fact that individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to rely on external cues and to generalize negative feedback to their broader sense of self; such behaviors render them more susceptible to the effects of external factors (Brockner, 1988). In organizational research, behavioral plasticity theory has usually examined self-esteem as a moderator of the effects of role stressors, such as role conflict (the extent to which a role contains conflicting demands, requirements, and pressures) and role ambiguity (the extent to which a role’s goals and objectives are unclear or poorly defined). For example, studies have examined self-esteem as a moderator of the effects of these role stressors on performance and satisfaction (Pierce, Gardner, Dunham, & Cummings, 1993), strain (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999), and symptoms of distress (Jex & Elacqua, 1999).

Arguments consistent with behavioral plasticity theory have also been advanced to explain the self-esteem/deviance relation. In particular, it has been suggested that high self-esteem represents a buffer or “a kind of immunity” (Baumeister et al., 1996, p. 7) against stressful circumstances that reduces the likelihood that individuals will engage in deviant behavior as a result. However, a review of deviance studies that used this rationale (Baumeister et al., 1996), as well as studies that examined performance, satisfaction, or strain as an outcome (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Jex & Elacqua, 1999; see also Pierce et al., 1993), again revealed mixed findings.

In sum, the evidence regarding self-esteem’s main and moderating effects on deviance is inconclusive (Baumeister et al., 2003). One explanation for why results are mixed across numerous studies is that boundary conditions (or moderators) exist, such that theorized relations are observed only under certain circumstances. Consistent with this, we suggest that one reason for these inconclusive results lies in an incomplete conceptualization of the self-esteem construct. In particular, we argue that contingent self-esteem plays a crucial moderating role for self-esteem/deviance predictions. Below, we introduce the contingent self-esteem concept and incorporate it within self-consistency and behavioral plasticity theory frameworks.

Contingent Self-Esteem

Contingent self-esteem exists when one’s sense of self-worth becomes tied to success in a particular domain and promotes preoccupation with validating one’s abilities and performance in

that domain (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1995). As Crocker and Wolfe (2001) stated,

A contingency of self-worth is a domain or category of outcomes on which a person has staked his/her self-esteem, so that a person's view of his/her value or worth depends on perceived successes or failures or adherence to self-standards in that domain. (p. 594)

Contingent self-esteem develops when important others (individuals or groups) accept/value an individual only when that individual achieves certain criteria (e.g., looking pretty). As a result, the criteria become internalized standards by which the individual judges his or her worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

Contingent self-esteem differs from level of self-esteem (i.e., high/low) in that measures of self-esteem level assess one's overall positive or negative evaluation of one's self-worth, whereas contingent self-esteem measures assess the extent to which self-worth is actually invested in a domain (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).¹ High contingent self-esteem does not mean that one has high self-esteem; rather, it indicates that one's sense of self-worth is highly contingent on a particular domain. Consistent with the notion that they are independent, level (high/low) and type (contingent/noncontingent) of self-esteem often have low or no relation to each other (Crocker et al., 2003). As such, self-esteem level and contingencies each provide unique information about an individual, and researchers have been exhorted to consider self-esteem contingencies in their work (Kernis, 2003).

Contingencies of self-worth represent an important complement to self-esteem level in that contingencies provide standards for behavior in a domain; self-esteem levels rise or fall when such standards are or are not met (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Given that individuals are motivated to self-enhance and to avoid esteem threats (Crocker & Park, 2004), such potential increases or decreases in self-esteem levels can serve as powerful prescriptions and proscriptions for what behaviors are appropriate in a given domain (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). If self-esteem is not contingent on a domain, success or failure in that domain holds few implications for one's sense of self; hence, behavior in that domain is not subject to the same self-imposed regulations as is behavior in a contingent self-esteem domain.

Workplace-Contingent Self-Esteem and Self-Consistency Theory

Self-esteem can become contingent upon numerous domains (e.g., demonstrating virtue or being attractive; Crocker et al., 2003). A relevant domain for organizations is self-esteem which is contingent on demonstrating workplace competence (i.e., workplace-contingent self-esteem). When one's self-worth is contingent upon being competent in the work domain, one will seek to perform well as a means to demonstrate competence and will avoid behaviors that would suggest incompetence. As such, we proposed that workplace-contingent self-esteem represents a critical boundary condition on self-consistency predictions.

In particular, we predicted that self-consistency theory predictions would hold only for those individuals whose self-esteem is not contingent upon workplace competence. Engaging in workplace deviance represents a failure to behave according to organizational standards. As such, for individuals whose self-esteem is contingent upon workplace competence, deviant behaviors would

generate extreme feelings of shame and directly threaten the core of one's self-worth (Deci & Ryan, 1995), which one would be motivated to avoid at all costs (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Critically, this would be the case for individuals with low or high self-esteem, and, contrary to self-consistency theory, we would not expect individuals with low self-esteem to engage in deviance. However, when self-esteem is not contingent upon demonstrating workplace competence, individuals with low self-esteem can engage in deviant behaviors without consequences for their self-worth, as self-consistency theory would suggest. Contingent self-esteem should thus moderate the effect of self-esteem on deviance, such that the relation between self-esteem level and deviance would be stronger when workplace-contingent self-esteem is low.

Hypothesis 1: The negative relation between self-esteem level and workplace deviance is stronger when workplace-contingent self-esteem is low.

If true, this prediction may help explain why the literature on self-esteem and deviance is rife with contradictory results (Baumeister et al., 2003). If the participants of a given study happen to have self-esteem contingent on demonstrating competence, one would not expect to find individuals with low self-esteem engaging in deviance. Studies examining participants with noncontingent self-esteem, however, may find support for such predictions. Unfortunately, given that self-esteem level and self-esteem contingencies are unrelated, knowing an individual's self-esteem level tells us nothing about that individual's self-esteem contingencies (Kernis, 2003). Thus, the results of past studies cannot be reinterpreted as providing support for, or disproving, the notion that self-esteem contingencies moderate the effects of self-esteem level on deviance. However, the very fact that past results are mixed provides indirect support, as such mixed results suggest the presence of moderators. On the basis of our logic outlined above, we believe that workplace-contingent self-esteem represents a theoretically appropriate moderator.

Workplace-Contingent Self-Esteem and Behavioral Plasticity Theory

The logic developed above can also be integrated within behavioral plasticity theory predictions regarding self-esteem and deviance. Behavioral plasticity theory suggests that the relation between role stressors and outcomes should be stronger for those with low self-esteem; people with high self-esteem, in turn, should be less affected by role stressors. Given that role stressors have

¹ Contingent self-esteem is conceptually similar to other constructs, such as job involvement, that assess the importance of work domains (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). Indeed, it is likely that job involvement measures tap into the contingent self-esteem construct through scale items such as "I feel depressed when I fail at something connected with my job" (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965, p. 29). However, such scales also tap into other variance that is not of conceptual interest in the present study (e.g., "I'll stay overtime to finish a job, even if I'm not paid for it"; "You can measure a person pretty well by how good a job he does"; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965, p. 29). We therefore employed a measure of contingent self-esteem, as it represents a purer reflection of the construct of interest (contingent self-esteem) and hence represents a more theoretically appropriate measure.

been linked to deviant behaviors (Spector & Fox, 2005), it stands to reason that individuals with high self-esteem will be buffered against the negative effect of role stressors and will exhibit less deviant behavior as a result. Thus, on the basis of behavioral plasticity theory, a two-way interaction between self-esteem level and role stressors predicting deviant behavior was expected, with the relation between role stressors and deviance stronger for those with low self-esteem.

However, incorporation of workplace-contingent self-esteem suggests a three-way interaction instead. Consider first the case of those individuals with high levels of global self-esteem. Consistent with behavioral plasticity theory, high self-esteem should act as a buffer against the effects of role stressors; thus, regardless of workplace-contingent self-esteem levels, individuals with high self-esteem should not engage in deviant behaviors in response to role stressors. Next, consider the case of those individuals with low levels of global self-esteem. Behavioral plasticity theory suggests that such individuals would be more likely to engage in deviant behaviors in response to role stressors, as they lack the buffering resources of high global self-esteem. We suggest that this should hold true only for those individuals whose self-esteem is not contingent on workplace competence. If an individual's self-esteem is contingent on workplace competence, deviant behavior threatens that individual's broader sense of self-worth; thus, deviant behavior in response to stressors is rendered less likely, even with low global self-esteem.

On the basis of the preceding logic, one would expect a three-way interaction among role stressors, self-esteem level, and workplace-contingent self-esteem, such that role stressors relate to deviant behavior only for (a) those low in self-esteem level and (b) those whose self-esteem is not contingent on workplace competence. We tested this idea using role ambiguity and role conflict, in light of their representativeness of the role stressor construct (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964) and their previous usage in tests of behavioral plasticity theory predictions (Mossholder, Bedeian, & Armenakis, 1981, 1982; Pierce et al., 1993).² Figure 1 provides a summary of the study hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a three-way interaction among workplace-contingent self-esteem, self-esteem level, and role ambiguity in the prediction of workplace deviance, such that the relation between ambiguity and workplace deviance will be strongest for those whose self-esteem is low and is not contingent on workplace competence.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a three-way interaction among workplace-contingent self-esteem, self-esteem level, and role conflict in the prediction of workplace deviance, such that the relation between conflict and workplace deviance will be strongest for those whose self-esteem is low and is not contingent on workplace competence.

Method

Procedure

Participants completed three online surveys over a period of 6 months. The majority of studies on deviance have been cross-sectional, despite the fact that measures of employee deviance usually refer to past behaviors; thus, we chose a multiwave design

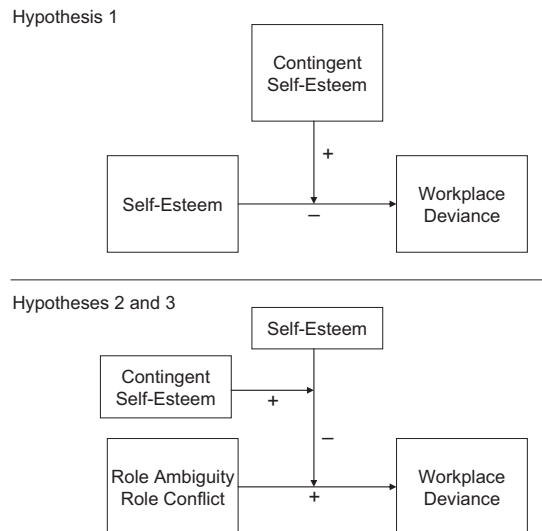


Figure 1. Summary of study hypotheses.

in which deviance was assessed in the final wave to ensure the proper temporal ordering of our dependent variable. The initial survey included measures of role conflict and ambiguity and participant demographics; participants also provided the researchers with the name and e-mail address of a significant other (e.g., spouse, work peer, close friend). The second survey, sent out 2 weeks later, assessed self-esteem. At the same time we contacted the significant other, who rated the extent to which the participant's self-esteem was contingent on the participant's workplace competence.³ Six months after the first survey, participants completed the third survey, which assessed deviant behaviors. To maximize response rates, we sent three reminder e-mails to individuals (Dillman, 2000).

² This argument presupposes that the stressors in question are hindrance stressors (or stressors that impede work-related and personal achievement) and not challenge stressors (or stressors that potentially promote work-related and personal achievement; Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Challenge stressors are less likely to carry negative connotations for the self or to require a "buffer" against their negative impacts. Role conflict and ambiguity both represent forms of hindrance stressors (Podsakoff et al., 2007).

³ We used significant other reports to assess contingent self-esteem, because the use of self-report measures of contingent self-esteem has been noted as a limitation of past contingent self-esteem research and because there are questions surrounding the potential lack of insight into self-esteem contingencies (for a detailed review, see Anthony, Holmes, & Wood, 2007). However, to ensure some level of convergent validity between self- and other reports of contingent self-esteem, we assessed the correlation between self-ratings of contingent self-esteem and ratings provided by a work peer in a separate sample of 81 employed adults. The correlation between self- and other ratings of contingent self-esteem was .44 ($p < .01$), which is similar in magnitude to other self/other ratings of constructs such as the Big 5 (see, e.g., Table 1 of McCrae et al., 2004). As well, in a separate data set we replicated our findings for Hypothesis 1 using self-rated contingent self-esteem. More details on these studies can be obtained by contacting D. Lance Ferris.

Participants

Participants were working adults recruited through newspaper advertisements and recruitment posters placed in a variety of public places (e.g., coffee shops, bus shelters). Focal participants were entered into a draw for one of fifteen \$50 cash prizes; significant others were entered into a draw for one of two \$50 cash prizes. We recruited 197 participants for the first survey; 186 participants completed the second survey. We next e-mailed a link to an online survey to the significant others of those participants who had completed the second survey; 145 responded. Finally, 6 months later, we followed up participants who had completed the second survey; 161 participants completed the third survey, representing 82% of the initial sample. Participants worked in a variety of occupations and included managers, nurses, and analysts.

Of the 161 participants who completed the third survey, 14 had changed jobs or supervisors or had retired in the intervening 6 months, and 25 participants did not have a significant other complete the second survey. This left 123 participants (66% female) for our analyses.⁴ The mean age of participants was 37.62 years, and the average organizational tenure was 7.5 years. Participants worked in industries that included financial (15%), education (14%), health care (12%), manufacturing (11%), government (9%), and sales (7%).

Measures

Role conflict and ambiguity. House, Schuler, and Levanoni's (1983) 18-item measure was used to assess role ambiguity (11 items) and role conflict (7 items). Participants responded to questions such as "I don't know what is expected of me" (ambiguity) and "I often get myself involved in situations in which there are conflicting requirements" (conflict) using a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

Self-esteem. Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item measure was used to assess self-esteem on a scale ranging from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 9 (*very strongly agree*).

Workplace-contingent self-esteem. Crocker et al.'s (2003) five-item measure of competence-contingent self-esteem was adapted for the work context. Significant others rated the extent to which participant's self-esteem was contingent on being competent in the workplace (e.g., "Doing well at work gives him/her a sense of self-respect"). Responses were made on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

Deviant behaviors. We used Bennett and Robinson's (2000) measure to assess overall workplace deviance (24 items).⁵ Participants indicated the frequency with which they had engaged in a variety of behaviors over the past 5 months (e.g., "Taken property from work without permission") on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 7 = *daily*).

Analytic Strategy

We used hierarchical multiple regression to test our hypotheses. Control variables (age, gender, and tenure) were entered in the first step, and the main effects (e.g., self-esteem, contingent self-esteem, the relevant stressor for Hypotheses 2 and 3) were entered next. Two-way interactions were entered in the third step, and for

Hypotheses 2 and 3 the relevant three-way interaction was entered in the fourth step. All lower order terms were standardized to reduce multicollinearity. For Hypotheses 2 and 3, we hypothesized that there would be a relation between stressors and deviance only when self-esteem and contingent self-esteem were low. Thus, the slope of the line for low self-esteem/low contingent self-esteem should differ significantly from the slope of the other three lines. Ascertaining whether it did entailed testing for significant differences among the four slopes. Dawson and Richter (2006) outlined the development of a significance test for slope differences in three-way interactions, which provided the appropriate test of our hypotheses; we used Dawson and Richter's formulas to test Hypotheses 2 and 3.

Results

Table 1 presents the alphas, intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations. Contingent self-esteem was uncorrelated with self-esteem ($r = .11, p > .05$), underscoring that self-esteem level provides no information about whether self-esteem is contingent or not. Table 2 presents the result of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis examining the two-way interaction between self-esteem and contingent self-esteem. We predicted that high levels of contingent self-esteem would weaken the relation between self-esteem and workplace deviance (Hypothesis 1). The interaction term in Step 3 was significant ($\beta = .32, p < .01$) and explained an additional 10% of the variance in workplace deviance ($\Delta R^2 = .10$). The interaction is depicted in Figure 2. As the figure depicts, high levels of contingent self-esteem weakened the neg-

⁴ To ensure that our final sample of 123 participants was representative of our original sample, we conducted *t* tests to ascertain whether the individuals who responded to our third survey differed from participants who had completed the first survey 6 months earlier. No significant differences between the two groups were detected on role ambiguity, $t(121) = 1.48, p > .10$; role conflict, $t(121) = 1.74, p > .08$; self-esteem, $t(121) = -0.85, p > .10$; workplace deviance, $t(121) = -0.54, p > .10$; contingent self-esteem, $t(121) = 1.01, p > .10$; age, $t(121) = -0.99, p > .10$; or gender, $t(121) = -0.67, p > .10$.

⁵ Given that most measures of workplace deviance (e.g., Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999; Bennett & Robinson, 2000) separate organizational deviance, or deviance in which the main target is the organization itself, from interpersonal deviance, or deviance in which the main target is individuals, one might wonder if this distinction between targets would affect our predictions. Self-consistency theory suggests that to maintain consistency with low self-views, both organizational and interpersonal targets would be treated similarly; to not behave consistently across targets would create an aversive state of dissonance between actions and beliefs. Moreover, workplace-contingent self-esteem should not discriminate between organizational and interpersonal targets: Both targets represent aspects of the work domain and thus hold implications for one's workplace competence, so no different predictions across deviance targets were expected.

In light of this and given that, in the present study, interpersonal and organizational deviance were highly correlated ($r = .72, p < .01$, both $\alpha s = .88$), we opted to treat workplace deviance as a single construct assessed as the mean of interpersonal and organizational deviance items. However, we also tested all of our results by treating interpersonal and organizational deviance as separate variables; results were virtually identical to those presented below and are available from D. Lance Ferris.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Zero Order Correlations, and Alphas

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age (years)	37.62	11.21	—							
2. Gender	0.66	0.47	-.03	—						
3. Tenure	90.47	110.05	.58**	.01	—					
4. Role ambiguity	2.95	1.10	-.21*	.22*	-.12	.91				
5. Role conflict	3.54	1.30	.00	.22*	.04	.49**	.88			
6. Self-esteem	6.85	1.35	.28**	-.10	.19*	-.38**	-.30**	.89		
7. Contingent self-esteem	4.84	1.04	-.01	-.22*	-.05	-.03	-.21*	.11	.76	
8. Workplace deviance	1.94	0.91	-.22*	.34**	.00	.28**	.35**	-.34**	-.24**	.92

Note. $N = 123$; alphas are on the diagonal in bold. Gender is coded 0 = male and 1 = female. Tenure is in months.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

ative relation between self-esteem and workplace deviance. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

We next examined the three-way interactions among contingent self-esteem, self-esteem, and role ambiguity and conflict. The three-way interaction involving role ambiguity was not significant (see Table 3) and thus failed to support Hypothesis 2. Table 4 presents the result of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis for role conflict. The three-way interaction involving role conflict was significant ($\beta = .34, p < .01$) and explained an additional 9% of the variance in workplace deviance ($\Delta R^2 = .09$). The interaction, depicted in Figure 3, lends preliminary support to Hypotheses 3, as the relation between role conflict and workplace deviance is strongest when both self-esteem and contingent self-esteem are low.

Table 2
Self-Esteem (SE) \times Contingent Self-Esteem (CSE) Interactions
Predicting Deviance

Variable	Workplace deviance
Step 1	
Age	-.33*
Gender	.33**
Tenure	.19
R^2	.18**
Step 2	
Age	-.26*
Gender	.27**
Tenure	.19
SE	-.26**
CSE	-.15
ΔR^2	.09**
Step 3	
Age	-.21*
Gender	.23**
Tenure	.17
SE	-.25**
CSE	-.19*
SE \times CSE	.32**
ΔR^2	.10**
Overall R^2	.37**

Note. $N = 123$. Values are standardized regression coefficients. All lower order terms used in interactions were standardized prior to analysis.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

To further probe the three-way interaction, we tested for differences among the slopes of the lines (Dawson & Richter, 2006). We had hypothesized that the plasticity effect would be evident only when low self-esteem was accompanied by low contingent self-esteem; this prediction was borne out (see Table 5), in that the slope for those with low self-esteem/low contingent self-esteem was significantly different from the three other slopes. All other comparisons between slopes were not significant. This indicated that when contingent self-esteem was high, there was no difference between the slopes of individuals with low or with high self-esteem.⁶

Discussion

Self-esteem has been argued to play a highly significant role in influencing workplace behaviors (Pierce & Gardner, 2004), yet despite theoretical perspectives arguing that self-esteem can have either a main or a moderating effect on deviant behavior, the research supporting these contentions has been unresponsive of such effects (Baumeister et al., 1996, 2003). In the present study, we considered both self-esteem level and type in the prediction of deviant behavior and used multiwave/multisource data to shed light on when self-esteem relates to deviance.

In particular, our results suggest that self-consistency and behavioral plasticity theory predictions hold only for individuals with low levels of workplace-contingent self-esteem. As such, our work presents boundary conditions on self-consistency and behavioral plasticity theories, arguably the most cited theories for organizational self-esteem predictions (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). When self-esteem is contingent upon demonstrating workplace compe-

⁶ As noted by a reviewer, a number of two-way interactions in Table 4 were also significant. The form of the interaction between self-esteem and contingent self-esteem was similar to what is presented in Figure 2, as would be expected. The form of the interaction between self-esteem and role conflict was such that the positive relation between role conflict and workplace deviance was significant only for those individuals with low levels of self-esteem (consistent with plasticity theory predictions). Finally, the form of the interaction between contingent self-esteem and role conflict was such that the positive relation between role conflict and workplace deviance was significant only for those with low workplace-contingent self-esteem (consistent with the notion that individuals will not engage in deviance when self-esteem is based on the organizational domain).

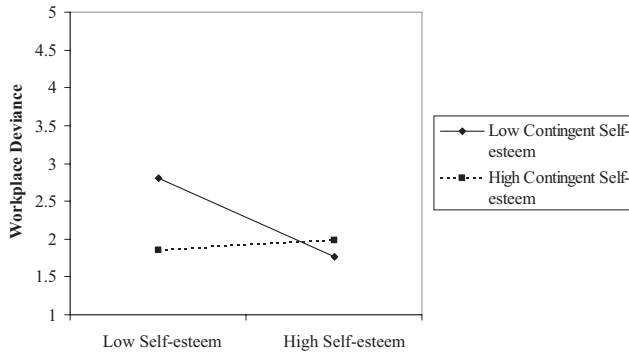


Figure 2. Two-way interaction predicting workplace deviance.

tence, engaging in deviance represents an irrational act that threatens one's self-esteem (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). It is only when one's self-esteem is not staked to workplace competence that one is "freed" to engage in self-consistent behavior or to react negatively to role stressors.

Implications and Future Directions for Self-Esteem Research

These boundary conditions may help explain contradictory results found in other self-esteem research areas. For example, the positive relation between self-esteem and job performance is highly variable and suggests moderators (Judge & Bono, 2001). Extending our results, we note that workplace-contingent self-esteem is one possible moderator, with low self-esteem being related to poor performance only when self-esteem is not contingent on workplace competence.

Another extension of our study would be to examine alternate outcomes in which contingent self-esteem may worsen rather than limit reactions in response to stressors. Although contingent self-esteem provides restrictions on how one might behave in response

Table 3
Three-Way Interaction Among Self-Esteem (SE), Contingent Self-Esteem (CSE), and Role Ambiguity (RA) Predicting Deviance

Step	1	2	3	4
	RA			
Age	-.33**	-.24*	-.20*	-.21*
Gender	.33**	.25**	.22**	.22**
Tenure	.19	.19	.17	.17
SE		-.23*	-.22*	-.20*
CSE		-.15	-.20*	-.17
RA		.10	.09	.08
SE × CSE			.29**	.27**
SE × RA			.07	.09
CSE × RA			-.10	-.11
CSE × SE × RA				.08
ΔR^2	.18**	.10**	.11**	.00

Note. N = 123. Values are standardized regression coefficients. All lower order terms used in interactions were standardized prior to analysis. * p < .05. ** p < .01.

Table 4
Three-Way Interaction Among Self-Esteem (SE), Contingent Self-Esteem (CSE), and Role Conflict (RC) Predicting Deviance

Step	1	2	3	4
	RC			
Age	-.33*	-.27**	-.21*	-.26**
Gender	.33**	.24**	.22**	.22**
Tenure	.19	.18	.16	.19*
SE		-.21*	-.21**	-.16*
CSE		-.12	-.14*	-.06
RC		.21*	.26**	.20**
SE × CSE			.23**	.27**
SE × RC			-.13	-.14*
CSE × RC			-.22**	-.21**
CSE × SE × RC				.34**
ΔR^2	.18**	.13**	.17**	.09**

Note. N = 123. Values are standardized regression coefficients. All lower order terms used in interactions were standardized prior to analysis. * p < .05. ** p < .01.

to role stressors, it also delineates domains where stressors are likely to be of particular importance to individuals. Given that role stressors impede one's productivity (Pierce & Gardner, 2004), they should be more distressing to those whose self-esteem is contingent on such productivity. Thus, although individuals whose self-esteem is contingent on workplace competence may engage in less deviance in response to stressors, it stands to reason that they will experience more distress as well. One consequence of this increased sense of distress, coupled with restrictions on potential reactions in the work domain, is that employees may experience higher rates of spillover (Heller & Watson, 2005) to domains for which self-esteem is not contingent. That is, if distress cannot be expressed at work due to self-relevant implications, it may instead be expressed at home (if one's self-esteem is not contingent on the home domain).

Implications and Future Directions for Deviance Research

Although our results suggest that contingent self-esteem acts to reduce the occurrence of workplace deviance, future research

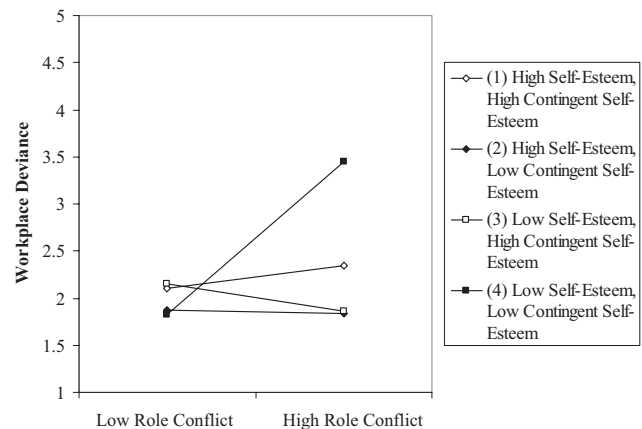


Figure 3. Three-way interaction predicting workplace deviance.

Table 5
Slope Difference Tests

Pair of slopes compared	<i>t</i>
Low SE/Low CSE vs. High SE/Low CSE	-4.72**
Low SE/Low CSE vs. High SE/High CSE	-4.12**
Low SE/Low CSE vs. Low SE/High CSE	-5.29**

Note. *N* = 123. *df* = 112 for all tests. *SE* = self-esteem; CSE = contingent self-esteem.

***p* < .01.

should examine whether this is always the case. In particular, under certain conditions, workplace-contingent self-esteem may actually increase the occurrence of workplace deviance. For example, Vardi and Wiener (1996) proposed a distinct class of deviant behaviors that are intended to benefit the organization, such as breaking federal laws (e.g., committing accounting fraud) to advance a company's interests. Similarly, given that breaks can be beneficial to job performance (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006), employees may use unauthorized breaks (a type of deviant behavior) to improve their performance. In both situations, deviance is used to help, not harm, the organization, in contrast to most definitions of deviance. Aside from deviant behavior that benefits the organization, some forms of deviance may serve impression management purposes. A reviewer noted that for employees whose self-esteem is highly contingent upon workplace competence, yet whose job performance is actually poor, deviant behavior, such as falsifying sales reports, may represent a form of impression management to cover up such poor performance.

Although the notion of organizationally benevolent deviant behavior and deviance as impression management has occasionally been discussed (Vardi & Wiener, 1996), a measure of workplace deviance that distinguishes these forms of deviance has, to our knowledge, yet to be developed. Existing measures that focus on self-serving behaviors are largely at odds with impression management (e.g., swearing at others). As the literature on workplace deviance matures, we suggest researchers should begin examining the purposes of different forms of deviance.

Practical Implications, Strengths, and Limitations

Our results suggest that when workplace-contingent self-esteem is low, global self-esteem relates to deviant behaviors. This suggests that managers have two potential options to reduce deviant behavior: increase global self-esteem or increase workplace-contingent self-esteem. The notion of increasing contingent self-esteem may be controversial. The development of contingent self-esteem has been conceptualized within a self-determination theory framework (Deci & Ryan, 2000), where it represents an extrinsic form of motivation that governs behavior by extrinsic or introjected punishments and rewards. Such motivation may reduce deviant behavior, but it also has negative consequences, on the whole, for individuals (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Yet it has also been argued that individuals invariably develop self-esteem contingencies; what is problematic is not contingent self-esteem per se but rather self-esteem that is contingent on domains over which one has little control (e.g., one's attractiveness; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Workplace-contingent self-esteem may be one area in

which one has relatively more control over one's performance (barring external factors that hinder one's performance). Moreover, contingent self-esteem may facilitate self-regulation by providing higher order goals that guide an individual (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Thus, for organizations experiencing high levels of deviance, increasing contingent self-esteem levels may represent a new method of handling workplace deviance. Overall, however, more research that examines the benefits and detriments associated with workplace-contingent self-esteem is required before any definitive applied implications can be put forth.

Our study possessed a number of strengths, including the use of multisource data collected across a 6-month time period. The use of multiple sources and multiple data collection waves allows us to be reasonably confident that common method variance did not unduly influence our results (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Moreover, the presence of interactions argues against a common method variance explanation of our results (Evans, 1985). However, one notable limitation of our study is that our predictions regarding role ambiguity (Hypothesis 2) were not supported. In this regard, our results are consistent with those of past studies that have found a lack of plasticity effects for role ambiguity on outcomes (e.g., Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Mossholder et al., 1981). Thus, it is possible that role ambiguity and role conflict differ in some way that renders role ambiguity less susceptible to plasticity effects. Mossholder et al. cited past research suggesting that ambiguity should have a stronger influence on attitudinal, not behavioral, outcomes (but see Pierce et al., 1993), which is in line with our results. However, an alternate explanation may lie in the 5-month time lag between our assessment of ambiguity and deviant behaviors. It is possible that the effects of ambiguity fade, as ambiguities are presumably clarified with time and experience. This explanation is speculative, and further research is required before drawing firm conclusions.

To summarize, self-esteem contingencies appear to play an important moderating role in the self-esteem/deviance relation. Because self-esteem levels and contingencies are typically uncorrelated, knowing an individual's self-esteem level tells us little about that individual's self-esteem contingencies (Kernis, 2003). Thus, it is impossible to reinterpret past studies to elucidate what effect self-esteem contingencies may have on results. However, given the arguments advanced herein, it is perhaps unsurprising that self-esteem's relation with outcomes tend to be mixed (Baumeister et al., 2003; Judge & Bono, 2001). Indeed, to fully understand the effects of self-esteem, researchers are encouraged to consider both level and contingencies of self-esteem in their work.

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